

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO REACH NEW PEOPLE?

The largest and fastest growing religious group is those who answer "none" to religious preference. They are not against church, or faith, or God. They are indifferent. And overcoming indifference takes a different set of tools than most churches today are experienced with. Thankfully new church starts have been working on this issue for years and they have important things to share with every existing church.

Witness Your Why is full of inspiration and practical advice to jump start outreach and evangelism in your church.

This is the book I have been waiting for! Jeremy Scott offers insightful and practical ways for any church to develop a robust practice of evangelism - even churches that hate the "E" word! Insightful, honest, and practical.

AJ Bush - First United Methodist of Gillette, Wyoming

Writing from his broad experience as a developer and practitioner, Jeremy offers an extremely practical, accessible, and fun field guide for congregations and practitioners who are ready to take the next step into 21st century evangelism. This is a helpful resource for people across the theological spectrum who want to speak and share publicly about the gift of grace and the power of the Gospel.

Trey Hall - Ministry Coach, The Epicenter Group

The Rev. Scott's "Witness Your Why" is the book the church has needed for years. It makes the scary "e" word (evangelism) approachable by presenting it in a practical and applicable way while teaching its importance. I can't wait to walk through this book with my congregation so that we can more deeply serve and be a part of our community in the name of Jesus Christ.

Nathan Adams - Park Hill UMC of Denver, Colorado

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeremy W Scott is the Vital Congregations Developer for the Mountain Sky Area of the United Methodist Church. He supports several new church starts and many more existing congregations striving to be more vital. He has been a local church pastor in Ohio and Montana. He has a passion for technology and believes that we need to encourage entrepreneurs in our churches

to do bold things to reach new people. Scott is married to his wife a Nurse Practitioner and they have two kids ages 12 and 7.

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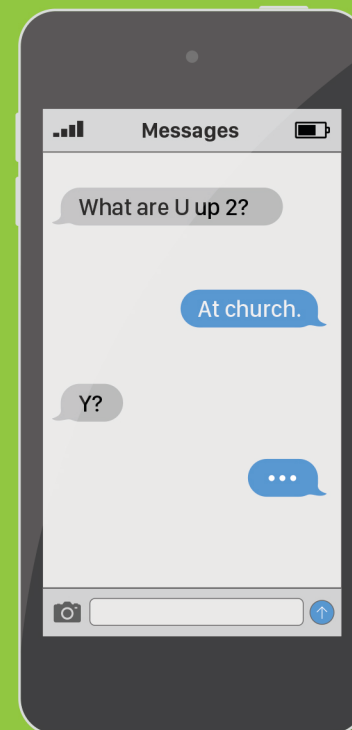


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EVANGELISM FOR EVERY CHURCH



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Evangelism for Every Church

By Jeremy W. Scott

WITNESS YOUR WHY: EVANGELISM FOR EVERY CHURCH

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For Nate, Julia, Jeff & Margaret

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Witness Your Why

Introduction

This book is about evangelism. I know many people have an issue with that word and what they assume it means. It has been co-opted by a small group who stand on street corners proclaiming a version of the good news that doesn't seem all that good. That version of evangelism is not what I am after here, as I'm certain it is not the one that Jesus and the earliest disciples practiced. We are not selling fire insurance. This isn't about convincing people to believe in some variety of hell so we can save them from it. If for no other reason, doing so would be completely ineffective in the communities most of us live in today.

However you happen to identify socially, denominationally, or politically, all Christians should care about evangelism. At its most basic level

evangelism is about recognizing we have our faith in a God of love who wants that love experienced by us and shared with others. Can anyone look around the world as it is and not say it could do with a little more love? That is the challenge we undertake when we do evangelism. It is about constantly asking ourselves, how can we make God's love and grace real to those around us? How do we turn God's grace into something people can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell? How do we make an abstract concept a real experience for those we encounter? This is the task of evangelism.

My evangelism professor in seminary, Dr. Joon-Sik Park, often said, "Mission is evangelism, and evangelism is mission." Amen, brother. I couldn't agree more. In my experience most churches resonate with this idea. Yet most also struggle to live it out. We tend to more easily do the mission part, the part where we collect food for the hungry, clothing for naked, and money for the far-off missionary. But when it becomes time to relate these activities to our faith, we struggle. We tend to think our belief in a loving God will just come through these activities by osmosis. Unfortunately it won't. We also hide behind excuses about perceived barriers in our way. We may not be allowed to carpet bomb our local school with free Jesus T-shirts, but honestly that's fine. Evangelism isn't about force or coercion. It's not impersonal. It's about relationships! Nothing is stopping you from forming a relationship with a principal or teachers at the local school. Nothing is stopping you from becoming a student mentor or classroom volunteer.

Sometimes God's grace looks like helping struggling students with their math.

The other unhelpful mind-set is the idea that we have to wait for the other person to make the first move. I've heard this expressed many ways, but it generally is a variation of: if you live a good life, people will get curious and ask you about it. Experience says this rarely, if ever, happens. Evangelism isn't about just reacting when people come to us. It's not a passive thing. Evangelism is about forming new relationships, and nearly always those relationships start with an invitation. An invitation isn't valid if it can't be declined. We have to respect the right of people to say no to whatever we are offering. God is very invested in people's right to choose how they relate to God. At the same time, people can't make a choice if they are never offered one.

Evangelism is about love and invitation. So drive from you mind any idea of standing with signs on the street corner that condemn groups of people or individuals. That is not what we are doing. Instead think of the last friend you made. For some of us it might have been a long time ago; that's okay. How did you become friends with that person? Chances are you met them somewhere like work, school, or church. You started to exchange pleasantries when you saw each other. Small talk likely grew deeper over time. Eventually one of you invited the other to some kind of shared experience. Maybe it was a meal, a party, or a sporting event. Whatever it was, there was

a progression where you discovered general mutual interest in each other. Evangelism follows a similar pattern. We are working to build new relationships between people and our church communities, with the goal of ultimately connecting them to God.

Humans are built to be social animals. Some of us make friends more easily than others, but none of us lasts long totally alone. So evangelism is something everyone can do. Some may invite dozens when others invite only a few, and that's fine. But don't for a minute think this isn't for you.

This book is designed to be used by a team. It's okay if you are a church leader and you want to preview it yourself first. That's a good idea, in fact. But if you want to make a real impact, you will need a team of people committed to bringing a healthy expression of evangelism to your church, even if it is only three or four people.

Each chapter has two sections. First are some important thoughts to consider, which are rooted in the example of the early church we find in the New Testament. Second are practical exercises your team can do to put those thoughts into practice. The more you invest in the exercises, the better off you will be. All of this is informed by my work with several new church starts. New church starts are the Research and Development arm of the church, and the lessons they learned can be applied to most existing congregations.

A few years ago I had some shoulder issues and my doctor sent me to a physical therapist for some

help. It took him about twenty minutes to show me the basic stretches and exercises that he believed would help me. I went away thinking this would be pretty easy. I was wrong. The exercises were not technically difficult but in the first week I didn't see much improvement, and they took a lot of time I'd rather have spent doing something else. It was frustrating and I was tempted to quit. Later I went back for a follow-up and as I entered the therapy room I noticed the sign over the door. It read, "Physical Therapy works if you do!" Apparently I was not the only one who felt like I did. If you came to this book hoping to learn the clever low-impact solution for reaching new people with God's good news, I fear you will be disappointed. I have not yet uncovered any such thing. Instead, what working with numerous local churches and new church starts has taught me is there is no substitute for practicing the solid fundamentals of evangelism. There may be clever practices you discover along with way that will make you more efficient or effective, but they will only help if you first have the basics down.

Yes, this will take time and a lot of faith on your part. Faith in a loving God who is still blessing people. Faith that your church can join in the work God is up to in your community. Faith that you as leaders can equip and inspire others to be part of God's work. The good news is that our scriptures are full of stories of God using the most unlikely people to do exactly that. Do not assume for a minute that your church is too small, too old, too anything for God to do something

with. Whatever you come up with as an excuse, there is a story in scripture to show you different.

We have been given the great privilege of investing our time doing something quite amazing: telling people that God loves them. What can be better than that!

1. Can I Get a Witness?

One Sunday in the Spring of 2002, I wandered into Central United Methodist Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico for the early worship service after several years of not attending church. Nobody invited me, I knew nobody, and I sat by myself. I'm not sure what I thought I would find there, but a Methodist church had been part of my growing up and it just felt like the place to be. Over the weeks, months, and years that followed, I would get more involved with that congregation and eventually find myself changing careers, leaving software development, and heading into pastoral ministry.

There are many stories of those who have wandered away from the organized religion of their youth only to wander back later in life. Sometimes it's after college, or when they get married, or when the first kid comes. Some watershed moments in life seem

to tip people back to the familiar places and communities of their past. In truth we, in the church, know this phenomenon well. We have counted on it for decades.

Stories like mine get repeated so often you would think it was a basic law of nature: "When our young people have kids, they'll be back." Believing this, the church continues to wait, passively, ready to receive back the sheep who have wandered away, the ninety-nine abdicating any responsibility to the one sheep who went missing. Instead we find it sufficient to have colorful brochures at the welcome table waiting for them whenever they happen to come home. The truth we don't want to face is that I am an endangered species. There are fewer and fewer people who have left organized religion who will ever return. Most who have wandered away will continue to ignore the church through marriage, children, divorce, and retirement. And if we are honest, many churches will continue to ignore them.

Those now called the "dones" have forever closed those chapters in their lives. The dones will not be lured back with contemporary music, smoothie bars, or skinny jeans. They barely notice our church buildings when they drive by and never read our clever signs. They don't care what color the carpet is or if you take communion monthly or weekly. I don't mean to sound harsh, but it is true. I also don't mean to dismiss having quality worship music, and I love a good smoothie as much as the next person. What I am saying is that if we expect people to just show up

because we've made small changes to our worship, Sunday school, or whatever, we will be waiting a long time. The dones are truly done and it will take more intentional effort than most congregations are currently doing to reach them.

While the dones are a significant group in the American religious landscape today, they are by no means the fastest growing. That honor belongs to the "nones." While the dones may still call themselves nominally Christians, the nones claim, well, nothing. They are not accurately called atheists or even agnostics. Instead they have opted out of the whole conversation about religion. Most often, nones were raised with no religion and likely very little talk of faith in their homes. They are the children of the first wave of dones and don't know who Peter, Paul, Moses, or Noah are. They may know the name Jesus but have no more connection to it than they do Buddha or Muhammad.

Nones are one of the largest segments of the population in the US (23% in 2015)¹ and the fastest growing. They present a challenge to churches and denominations that still have an expectation that most people are raised with a basic understanding of what Christianity is and what churches do. Nones are blank slates when it comes to religion and pay no more attention to our churches than I, as a cisgender male, pay attention to women's shoe stores. They are not

¹See <http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/religiously-unaffiliated>.

against us; they simply never think about us.

A few years ago, as a temporary transplant to Ohio, I always got myself in trouble in late November during the Ohio State vs. Michigan game. Not because I was a Michigan fan; I think that would have been more palatable. Instead, I was completely indifferent to the whole thing. Being indifferent and living in Columbus, the heart of Buckeye country, was an issue. Each year a noble few would try to indoctrinate me into the cause of the scarlet and gray by discussing the storied history of the rivalry, but I was often left asking the most basic of questions, like, what is a buckeye? The church finds itself in largely the same place. Our outreach practices and language all anticipate a certain level of church literacy that no longer exists. We must learn not only new skills but a new way of thinking about ourselves and, most importantly, why we do what we do.

I feel like I know a bit about the nones because, for several years now, I've been married to one. Those years I was slowly returning to church through the early morning service at Central UMC, she was home sleeping in. In fact, she liked that I went to church because it let her sleep in more. She was never against me going nor did she ask me many questions about it. She was happy to see it as that thing I did. Sure, we'd talk about God and faith from time to time, but, like many nones, she felt she had a handle on her own basic form of spirituality and felt no real draw to anything additional, least of all something that got in the way of sleeping in on the weekends.

Nones and dones aren't bad people, and for the most part they don't feel like they are missing out on much by not being part of a religious community. So for us, on the inside of churches we love, we have a big task in front of us. Evangelism today cannot take the form it did before. It is no longer about demonstrating that you have a better Sunday school than the church down the block, and we can no longer expect a gifted preacher to pack the pews. It simply won't work. Further, this isn't an excuse to slack off when it comes to worship or other discipleship practices in your church. They still have to be done at a high level of quality to continue to deepen the discipleship of those who are there. We all, through God's grace, are called to deepen our commitment to live in the ways Jesus demonstrated.

All of this can feel very discouraging. I totally understand that. It can also feel impossible. I understand that, too. But here is the good news: It doesn't have to. When done right, jumping into the work of modern evangelism is life giving, not draining. The Holy Spirit moves when we choose to go on an adventure for God and that feels amazing to be a part of. We also have a very good guide to help us with our impossible-feeling task. The earliest church lived in a time more similar to now than the environment the church lived in for most of the twentieth century. Those early followers were surrounded by indifferent people who had no clue who Jesus was. This can be our guide. Let's look at a couple of stories to show you what I mean.

Luke 10:1-11,17-20

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'"

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

This story happens during the ministry of Jesus, which is remarkable. Much of what we associate as the most powerful parts of his ministry haven't happened yet, obviously including his death and resurrection. In addition, many of the followers sent out in this passage had only just become aware of Jesus and who he was. These folks were not raised in Sunday school and taught to name the books of the Bible. They couldn't have; none of the New Testament had been written! Jesus sends out these very new followers with a general message of "God's kingdom coming near" and that's about it. Too often we fall into the trap that evangelism must lead with a deep theological understanding of God's grace or our understanding of Christ's atonement for our sins. But why? Not to say these things are not important, but it is a poor starting place that kills conversation before it can even start.

Those first followers of Jesus we find in Luke's writing brought a personal and relevant message into communities that had never heard of Jesus. We today, with our modern sensibilities, may scoff at the language of demons and Satan falling from heaven, but we should be careful not to judge too harshly a cultural context none of us has experienced. In a time before modern medicine, people still got sick and struggled with mental health issues just like today. These communities had no frame of reference for these things but the supernatural. So we must have some grace for our first-century counterparts. We also must look under the surface of the celebration found in this passage to understand it. What they are really

celebrating is that they were able to make a real and positive impact on people by stepping out on faith, trusting God, and building relationships with new people in new places.

Our primary challenge now is to reclaim our faith in God's ability to touch and transform lives through us as followers of Jesus. There's still plenty of hurt and pain in the world and thus plenty of work for God to do. I doubt many people in our pews on Sunday morning have had the opportunity to witness the kind of healing in others these first followers did. Not because it is no longer possible, but because we rarely put ourselves in the position to be part of it. Those early followers weren't allowed to take so much as a change of clothes or spending money, yet we struggle to even speak about God outside our safe and comfortable church buildings.

This story should be powerfully convicting to anyone who takes the Christian faith seriously. As followers of Christ we can't ignore the call he puts on us to be proclaim "the kingdom of God is near." Meaning, God's love is around us, available to all, and inviting all into a transformational experience. As the cliché goes, God loves you just the way you are, and God loves you too much to leave you that way. So true. But if we aren't willing to step out and do the things necessary to bring that message to the wider world, who is going to do it?

This first followers had their eyes open to something we must never forget. They were successful in new places and among new people

because God was already at work in those communities. They might have been introducing people to the name of Jesus, but what they were really doing was providing a proper noun to something already at work. Part of being a Christian is to believe that God is at work in the world, the entire world, even in places ignorant of, or indifferent to, the Christian faith. It is not our job to bring God to people. The Holy Spirit is already there. It is our job to see where God is already working and join in that work. We should not be afraid of evangelism because God is already doing the hardest part. Our job is to simply join in.

Acts 1:4-9

While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

This passage obviously comes from the very end of Jesus' ministry on earth. He is giving his final instructions to the disciples and is turning over the ministry he began to them. From this point on people would have the responsibility to share the message that Jesus had shared for the last three years. Many point to the next chapter and the coming of the Holy Spirit in the upper room as the birth of the church. But for me, this part is equally as important because this is where we find our purpose: we are to be *witnesses*.

What starts this exchange is a question from an unnamed disciple, asking about the restoring of the kingdom of Israel. This is important because, while the Jews may be living in Israel and worshiping in the temple in Jerusalem, they are not actually in charge of their own land. They have been conquered by the Romans, who remind them constantly with shows of military force that they are a subservient people. Most people in this time when they thought about a messiah would think about Moses. What they are looking for in a new messiah is a modern Moses with a bit of a twist. They didn't want to be led out of Israel the way the original Moses led them out of Egypt. Instead, they want a new Moses who would force the Romans out of the land they were already living in. They were looking for a political change and Jesus refuses to commit to that. Instead he gives them a different mission altogether: They will be witnesses.

I believe Jesus chose his words here carefully. A witness is someone who has seen or experienced something and then relates the experience to others.

To be a witness you must have both parts. Someone who experiences something but does not share about it is simply a participant. Those who share with others something they did not personally see or experience is at best a storyteller and at worst a liar. To be a witness we must first become skilled at seeing and experiencing where God is at work. For the first disciples, fresh off three years following Jesus around, this is pretty straightforward. While it may not feel as straightforward today, we cannot believe it is impossible. If God is still at work in our lives, our churches, and our communities, surely as people of faith we are seeing and experiencing it, right?

In my experience, when even longtime church participants are asked to be witnesses they struggle first with coming up with experiences to share. Not because they don't have them, but because they are inexperienced at recognizing them. This is the first skill we must learn. Let me tell you a short story to illustrate the point.

I served a declining, just-off-downtown church as my first appointment out of seminary. In my second year there a small group of people decided they wanted to do something to bless the neighborhood, so they opened a free store that focused on clothing and household items in some unused Sunday school rooms. This was a place where anyone could come and take what they needed, no questions asked. A few months in, I was milling around when I observed something interesting but not uncommon. A mother was in the waiting area, sharing with a volunteer. She

was a single mother with a son who was well over six feet tall. He had been invited to a statewide choir event but needed some black dress pants to attend, which were proving very difficult to find at a reasonable price. She had never been to the free store before but driving by she thought she would just give it a try. The volunteer heard her story and headed upstairs to the sorting room to see what she could find.

In the upstairs room were over a dozen boxes labeled "men's pants," and she started digging. Somewhere in the bottom of box five or six, she came across a stash of pants that must have been previously owned by an NBA player. They were well within the size range she was looking for, so she grabbed the stack and headed back to the waiting room. There she found the mother and handed her the stack that included two pairs of black pants, a few pairs of like-new jeans, and a few random other pairs. As I looked through the door I saw our guest and the deep look of surprise she had on her face. And then the tears came from both the mother and the volunteer.

When you encounter stories like this you have a choice in how you see them. You can see it as simply happenstance or the free store doing what it was designed to do. Or, you can choose to see the Holy Spirit moving all around it. I choose the latter. I choose to see the Holy Spirit working through the volunteer who invested time in hearing the story of the single mom. I also see the Holy Spirit moving in the mother in her willingness to make herself vulnerable and

share her struggles with a stranger. I see the Holy Spirit inspiring a church to open its doors in a new way and to recognize the abundance in the community around them and organize that abundance.

I find our greatest challenge is not that God isn't moving in our communities but that we fail to see it. Pastors and other leaders have not done a good job training their folks to recognize the signs of God's work. In truth, we seem to have pretty low expectations of God in our daily lives. That will not serve us well. To be the witnesses Jesus challenges us to be we must first recognize when we are seeing and experiencing God's handiwork.

So take a minute and think through the last few days. It may not be as exciting as pants (ha!), but is there a place God showed up? How did God work through you to be a blessing to you or others? What is coming to mind may seem small and that's fine. God does not part the Red Sea often. And don't forget the person God might be trying to reach is you! I find it altogether too common that church people are quick to help others and slow to ask for and receive the help they need.

So the first part of being a witness is to see and experience God at work. The second part is to share the experience with others. While our skill at the first part may be atrophied, the second part tends to scare us to death. This is a fear we must conquer, and soon. Sharing Jesus is not about standing on street corners shouting into microphones or handing out cards with

clever sayings. These are unhelpful and ineffective strategies. Instead, sharing in the way Jesus intends is about cultivating relationships. Real relationships, that are about mutual respect and not weighed down by ulterior motives.

A fundamental belief in the Christian tradition is that we follow a God who loves all of us. All of us. ALL OF US. Nobody is excluded. And this love is the thing we are witnesses to. Our motivation to share with others is to share this love. We do this because we recognize a life lived with more love is better than one lived with less. In the end, this is not about growing our church to have more people to serve on committees and put money in the plate. That may happen, but it's not the primary aim. People will know immediately if you have the wrong motives.

The rest of this book will show you how to build a relationship-cultivating system in your church. This does not mean everyone will become your best friend, but if you want to reach new people with God's love, somebody in your faith community needs to know their name. Names, as it turns out, are very important. One of the first things I learned about the Bible in seminary was to pay attention to people who are named because it signals they are an important character in the story. We cherish people's names because we want people to feel important and because we know they are important to God.

Get to Work

Learning to see God at work in your life, church, and community is critical. This can only be learned through practice. Sometimes God in our lives comes in the form of unexpected blessings. Sometimes it's about having our eyes opened to a new experience or truth. And sometimes, quite simply, it breaks our heart. Sometimes the work God needs to do is to wake us up to the injustice happening around us.

Reflect back over the last week or so and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Where were you blessed?
2. Where did you learn something new?
3. Where was your heart broken?

Then ponder what God might be trying to tell you through these experiences.

Teamwork

As a team, think about your church. God acts on us as individuals and as groups. For your church community, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Where has your church been blessed?
2. Where has your church blessed others?
3. Where has your church encountered something new?

Then discuss together what God might be trying to tell you.

Finally, as a team, think about the community around you. God is at work in your community even among those who do not know who God is. For the community around your church, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Where is your community in pain?
2. Where is your community being blessed?
3. Who or what is new in your community?

Then discuss together what God might be trying to tell you.

People will learn to see God at work most effectively when it is modeled for them. The ancient practice of testimony is an amazing tool to teach with. As you cultivate stories of God's work in your personal life, the life of your church, and the life of your community, what are three places you could share those stories:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Some churches make testimony part of worship during Lent, Advent, or special sermon

series. Others may do it at church-wide events, recorded on Facebook, or in the newsletter. The key to success with any testimony is to make sure that people prepare. You don't want folks winging it in front of the congregation on Sunday morning. Have people write down what they are going to say and make sure it is reviewed ahead of time. With that caveat, some practice of regular testimony can be transformational for any church. It allows people to see what being a witness truly is and the inspirational effect it can have. To be witnesses we must, well, be witnesses.

Can I get a witness!?