

# DISCOVER

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

# 17



## The Secret of Growth Through Sharing



**LARRY WAS ENJOYING** pleasant conversation, Japanese tea, and rice crackers at Mr. Komori's house when the other guests began taking out their Bibles. They all looked at him expectantly. "Could you please give us our study now?" Mr. Komori asked politely.

Larry almost choked on his tea. He'd thought this was just a social get-together. He hadn't known the group was expecting him to lead out in a study of the Bible. And now he couldn't think of a thing to say.

Larry had actually taught many Bible classes at the Christian English-language school in Japan where he worked, however, those lessons had all been planned well in advance. But to just talk about God spontaneously? That was different!

Larry had heard all the Bible stories since childhood, but they meant very little to him on a personal level. He had been doing things he knew were wrong in God's eyes, so he kept his distance. How could he talk to others about a God he himself didn't really know?

Now, sitting on the sofa, surrounded by expectant people, Larry's charade was about to collapse. In that moment of fear, a Bible verse flashed into his mind—something about the Holy Spirit giving us words to say when we are brought before people to give witness (Luke 12:11, 12). He uttered a desperate prayer for help and latched on to the most familiar story he could think of—the Prodigal Son.

As Larry described how much God loves even those who wander away from Him, he found himself speaking straight from the heart. His words were sinking in among the others and within himself. For the first time in his life, Larry realized how much God loved him.

That night, Larry knelt by his bed and committed his life to a God who had finally become real. Sharing God's love had made it much more than just a familiar abstraction.

## 1 | Jesus Challenges Us to Grow by Sharing

When Jesus was about to return to heaven, He commissioned the disciples to be His personal representatives:

“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me . . . to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The disciples had spent three-and-a-half years listening to Christ's words and observing His actions, including His death and resurrection.

“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32).

When Christ's followers gave their hearts unreservedly to Him at Pentecost, the risen Christ transformed their lives through

the power of the Holy Spirit. They became witnesses not only to Christ's bodily resurrection and ascension, but also to His resurrection power, which had changed their lives.

As Christians, we are also witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus, because we have experienced His renewing power in our own lives.

"God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that . . . He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-7).

We have been made alive with Christ, so we can demonstrate the riches of His grace. Jesus asks His followers to take the good news of what He can do in a human life to all the world, and He promises to go with us as we share.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them . . . [and] teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

It is a privilege to share the power of the gospel. H. M. S. Richards, the Voice of Prophecy's founder, once wrote:

"I have seen the change in the hearts of people who have heard the gospel of Christ. I have traveled in lands where the name of God and of Christ was never known until His church took the gospel there. I have seen these people changed from filth to cleanliness, from disease to health, from constant fear of evil spirits to joy in Christian living. I have seen the change in the status of womanhood. I have

seen true Christian homes emerge from pagan darkness. In every land that I have visited I have seen lives changed. I know that ‘the gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God to salvation’ (Romans 1:16). I know that when the church proclaims the gospel message, changes take place in human hearts and in human homes, and they are visible in the lives of those who respond to its appeal.”

We all have a part to play in this exciting work. God has given us weak human beings a special role, because sharing is a vital part of our growth. In order for faith to remain healthy, it must be expressed. Talking about God helps make Him real for us, too. The act of expressing our faith helps us experience it more fully. *Witnessing helps us grow.*

Besides sharing the good news about Jesus verbally with people, here are some other ways we can witness.

## 2 | We Share Christ by the Way We Live

A young man who had grown up in an abusive home once observed: “I looked at my parents, who by their example gave me a distorted image of God. I never had the example of someone truly loving me.”

People around us desperately need someone who will give them a healthy picture of God. They need someone who will demonstrate godly qualities.

Our most powerful sermon is often the way we live. Before a person cares how much you know, they must know how much you care. Peter urges us:

“[Live] honorabl[y] among the Gentiles [non-Christians], that when they speak against you as evildoers, they

may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. . . . For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:12, 21).

Since Christ “suffered” for us at Calvary, we have an example of sacrificial love very close at hand. That love, reproduced in us as loving acts to others, can become a powerful force drawing unbelievers into the arms of Christ.

## 3 | We Share Christ Because of the Way We Think

It often seems so easy for us to fall prey to the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Jesus was “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Why did He succeed where so many fail?

When the devil ambushed Jesus in the wilderness with his appeals to appetite, pride, and presumption, Jesus fought back successfully by quoting from Scripture (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Christ was prepared ahead of time, because He had filled His mind with Bible truths. That’s where the battle is won or lost—in our minds. Many times, we think of resisting temptation only after it has already saturated our thoughts and all but overwhelmed us. We’ll lose most of those battles, but we can be successful if we attack habits at their point of origin—in our thought patterns.

“For as [a person] thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

Growing Christians think in spiritual terms. They concentrate on the good qualities they are trying to develop rather than on the bad things they’re trying to avoid.



**Whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, praiseworthy—meditate on these things**

“Rejoice in the Lord always. . . . [and] in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. . . . These do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:4, 6-9).

What we feed our minds makes all the difference. Garbage in, garbage out. God’s Word in, God’s life out.

## 4 | We Share Christ by the Way We Look

As a representative of Christ, the Christian will be modest even in how he or she looks, avoiding all kinds of extremes. God says of the Christian:

“Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times . . . [those] who trusted in God also adorned themselves” (1 Peter 3:3-5).

“Adorn [yourself] in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for [those] professing godliness, with good works” (1 Timothy 2:9, 10).

Simplicity in dress and adornment has always marked genuine Christ-likeness. Simple, balanced good taste goes a long way. Ideally, others should be attracted to you not by the statement you make about fashion, but by the statement your life makes about Jesus.

“Blessed are the meek [humble], for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

## 5 | We Share Christ by the Way We Act

The historian Edward Gibbon tells us that when Galerius sacked the camp of the Persians, a beautiful leather bag filled with

pearls fell into the hands of a looting soldier. This man carefully preserved the useful bag, but threw away the precious pearls.

People who cling to whatever superficial thrills the world can offer—while discarding Jesus, the Pearl of Great Price, and the eternal kingdom which He offers—are in even worse shape than the looting soldier. It’s not just a fortune that can slip through our fingers, but eternal salvation. So Scripture warns us:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17).

Satan works hard to gold-plate the most destructive sins and make the worst habits appear attractive. You would think that sin has the world’s greatest public relations agency behind it. Why are prostitutes, alcoholics, and those suffering from drug use or online pornography addiction often made to appear intensely happy, beautiful, and satisfied with life? We seldom see the suffering families, the lost jobs, and the homelessness caused by an abusive lifestyle. Where are the images of the abused, scarred, and discouraged humans who walk the streets at night? If it really “doesn’t get any better than this,” then what are they trying to get from their abusive habits?



The most destructive pleasures seem to have acquired the loudest voices and the most graphic images these days. We can't simply buy whatever the world is selling. Christ asks us to be discriminating, and "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

We also have to be careful of associations that compromise our Christian principles:

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14).



Of course, this text does *not* mean that we are to have nothing to do with those who are not Christians. Jesus wants us to keep reaching out to our non-Christian friends. Personal relationships are the primary means through which we share our faith. But we must be careful that our friends and those we associate with are not dragging us back into old habits. If you feel you need to hide your faith in certain situations or relationships, then something is wrong.

What we take in through our senses and invite into our lives—even the entertainment we choose—does have an impact on our spiritual life. We need to be conscious of what we're feeding our minds.

"I will set nothing wicked before my eyes" (Psalm 101:3).

More and more of the entertainment around us seems bent toward the graphically violent and the sexually explicit. We live

in an X-rated, on-demand world, but there is still an enormous amount of excellent material out there that remains almost untouched. There is plenty in art, literature and music that explores profound truths and touches our deepest emotions. If we remain in a vacuum, the worst will flood in to fill it. This is especially true of our children. But if we feed our souls on the best, the worst won't be able to drag us down to its level.

Holding to higher standards in the things we let into our homes and minds won't narrow our lives. We'll be greatly broadened if we focus on all that is true, noble, and praiseworthy.

*"You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).*

## 6 | We Share Christ by the Way We Give

A pastor was about to baptize a new believer in Christ when he noticed the man still had his wallet in his pocket. "Did you forget to leave your wallet in the dressing room?" he asked.

"No," the man replied, smiling, "my wallet and I will be baptized together!"

This man had caught the true spirit of Christianity—giving to help others. Christians grow by giving, and that is why Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Jesus tells us to invest in the bank of heaven.

*"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).*

Some people work a lifetime to accumulate a fortune—only to see it disappear in a plummeting stock market or a business failure. But what we give to advance God’s kingdom retains eternal value. How much of what we own really belongs to God?

“The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it” (Psalm 24:1, 2).

“‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Haggai 2:8).

We belong to God both because He created us and because He rescued us from our sins with His blood.

“Do you not know that . . . you are not your own? For you were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

How much of our possessions did God give us?

“He [God] gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25).

“Remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:18).

The crucified and risen Lord invites us to share with Him in extending the gospel to others. How much does He ask us to give to support that divine mission?

“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. . . . Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this . . . [see] if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:8, 10).

The tithe is a tenth of our “increase” (Genesis 28:22; Deuteronomy 14:22). For the farmer or business owner, the



“Try Me now in this . . .  
[see] if I will not  
pour out such blessing  
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increase is income after deducting business expenses. For the employee, it is the total wage.

The principle of tithing is a moral principle, because it involves character. By failing to tithe, we “rob” God. It is vitally important for us to be honest in returning our tithe to God—just as it’s important for us to pay taxes to the government, and keep up with our mortgage or car payments.

When Jesus came to live among us, He found the Pharisees counting and tithing even tiny garden seeds. Although He did not approve of their legalistic religion, He gave approval to tithing:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Matthew 23:23).

The tithe belongs to God and is to be used exclusively for supporting Christ’s ministry and finishing His work on earth so He can return.

“The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14).

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

How much should we give in “offerings”?

“Prepare your generous gift beforehand . . . as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation. . . . He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:5-7).

Offerings are a matter of individual decision. They are used for financing the spread of the gospel in addition to the tithe, which is used exclusively to support the gospel ministry.

God’s plan for systematic giving aids both the spread of the gospel and our own Christian growth. Jesus promises you:

“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom” (Luke 6:38).

Believers have proven over and over that you can’t out-give God. Pastor H. M. S. Richards once related this experience:

“A lifelong gambler attended my meetings in Los Angeles, and I shall never forget the time I talked with him alone in the rear of the auditorium. He took a roll of bills from his pocket—\$500—and gave them all to me, saying, ‘This is my first tithe.’

“The man was not well, and he had done nothing but gamble for 30 or 40 years, so I asked, ‘How are you going to live?’

“He replied, ‘I have only five or six dollars left, but this other belongs to God.’

“Then I asked, ‘What will you do?’

*Continued on page 16*

# WordSearch

If you want to go deeper into this study topic, complete this section.

1. When Jesus healed a demon-possessed man, what did the Savior tell him to do? Is this something that you can do as a witness for Jesus? (Luke 8:38, 39)

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2. As a representative of Jesus, how careful should you be about your behavior? (1 Thessalonians 5:22; Romans 12:1, 2)

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3. What does the Bible say about the importance of choosing godly friends and associates? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

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4. Did Jesus condemn the religious leaders in His day for tithing even the value of small seeds? What do you think this says about Jesus' attitude toward tithing? (Matthew 23:23)

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5. When you share Jesus Christ with someone who doesn't know Him, what important goal are you helping to accomplish? (Matthew 24:14)

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“I don’t know,’ he answered, ‘but I know that I must pay my tithe to God, and He will take care of me.’

“And God certainly did. The man’s repentance was sincere. He went all the way in his consecration and was happy in his Christian life. And God provided for him until the day of his death.”

God does not promise that all faithful believers will become rich, but we have the assurance that our Maker will supply life’s necessities. Christ gave everything for us. Let’s give our hearts completely to Him now. Discover the joy of sharing Christ with others and of growing in His wonderful grace.

## My Decision

- I choose to share Jesus with others through my words and actions. I want to grow spiritually by being a witness for Him.
- Please pray for me as I continue to study the Bible and determine God’s plan for my life.

## My Prayer

*Dear Father, thank You for Your grace and Your love, which enable me to grow. Help me share You in the way I live, give, and act. May I always let Jesus live His perfect life in me. In the name of Jesus, Amen.*

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