



URBAN CURRENT

No barrier

My run takes me through the Dragons hood. I passed a van parked at the curb, side door open. Driver seat, passenger seat, middle seats all occupied. Hats cocked, necks and arms well tattooed. One was busily texting. Two guys on the porch of the building in front of which the van was parked complete the scene. These are not kids. They are in their late 20s and early 30s. These are hardened gang members.

Twenty steps past, the Holy Spirit said, "Go back and tell them Jesus is real." Approaching the open van door, the big guy whose huge arm was dark with intricate tattoos greeted me, "Hello officer." I replied, "No, I ain't ..." and left it hanging. "Hi, my name's Charles." "What up, Charles?" "The Holy Spirit ("Oh, expletive," says the big guy) sent me back here to tell you that Jesus loves you. He died on the cross to pay for our sins and in a messed up world, it's good to know there is power that can change us from the inside out." The guys seemed to relax as I told them to stay safe and have a great day. Maybe they relaxed because they realized I was about to leave.

As I continued my run, my thoughts flowed like this: Jesus lives in me. Jesus wanted these guys to know that He was near, available. He was just that close, sidewalk to curb. But they never would have known if I didn't stop and bear witness to His presence, purpose, and power. Jesus really, really wanted them to know that He was right there. Jesus didn't want any barrier between them and Him, between them and their knowledge that He was right there.

I was the barrier.
Jesus is in me. If I don't bear witness to His presence and power, people won't know He's present, accessible, and available. This is the divine plan. Jesus can be right there in some-

one's office, someone's home, or on the bus in the seat next to the person who needs Him. These people will never know Jesus was that close if we are not Holy Spirit powered witnesses. Christ does not want any barrier between Him and the people that need Him.

Oh, what a horrible thought that I, predestined, called, justified by the blood of Jesus, would be the barrier instead of the witness. How often have I allowed my self-consciousness, my fear, my ego, my schedule to cause me to become the very opposite of what God saved me for? He calls us to be conduits, channels, connectors, ambassadors, heralds, and Good News proclaimers. His intention is that we live and bear witness in such a way that people realize personally and powerfully the nearness of God the Savior, Jesus the deliverer.

The whole miracle and mystery of the incarnation was wrapped up in the title "Emmanuel, God with us." The work of redemption, as described by Paul, claims believers are those who "sometimes were far off and are now made near by the blood of Christ." As well, Paul revels in glorification, saying to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Track the words witness and witnesses through the book of Acts. You will see that over and over it references people who knew Jesus was alive because they had seen him. They had personal knowledge that Jesus of Nazareth was the resurrected Christ. Witnesses are not people who have mastered apologetics, gotten their doctorate in theology, and have a certificate from the latest witnessing course. In the New Testament witnesses are people who tell the story they know through personal experience.

God did not unleash a tsunami of evangelical information on the world. He unleashed a

band of people who knew Jesus was real and were ready to tell their personal stories anywhere and everywhere.

Jesus' intention was to have no barriers between Him and sinners. No barrier of culture. No barrier of language. No barrier of geography, danger, religion. No government or personality or prejudice is ever to be a barrier between Jesus and sinners. No building, no style, no political system, no political ideology, no man-made traditions. Nothing is to come between Jesus in a believer and the sinners around that believer.

What did the first-century Roman Empire experience? "The guys that have turned the world upside down have come here" (Acts 17:6 paraphrased). Why are we falling behind in evangelizing America and the world? Because of the lack of gospel information? I think that's a difficult case to make. How about a lack of personal spirit-controlled witnesses? Not the lack of gospel information, but the lack of personal gospel power; the very presence of a life-giving, life-transforming Deliverer. While we thank God for all the ways the gospel is disseminated, personal witness is the New Testament plan.

Dragons need to know. Jesus comes to them. To seek. To save. Jesus comes in me.

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