

## Are You Ready?

Scripture is clear: Believers must “*always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...*” (1 Peter 3:15). There is a difference between being *able* and being *ready*. I feel that many Watchmen are *able* (as in gifted) to teach, mentor, or witness, but not enough are *ready* to execute on a moment’s notice.

We believe God is good and actively works in His people's lives, but how many of us are *ready* to tell how God answered 10 prayer requests or extended 10 special blessings to them last year?

We believe the Bible is true, helpful, and divinely inspired, but are we able to quickly reference verses or passages on pertinent topics to powerfully witness to the lost and hurting?

Most believers have a story to tell. They know that God has helped them, forgiven them, saved them, and bettered their life – but I fear few are ready, at a moment’s notice, to share their story – their testimony – in a clear, concise, and powerful way.

Our “smart” devices promise instant but rarely Christian answers. Darkness is falling. Perhaps now more than ever, believers need to be ready to provide valid and compelling reasons for our faith—why we believe what we believe. Watchmen need to lead the way in this. Paul wrote, “*be ready [to share God’s truth] in season and out of season*” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Many in prison hold a survival of the fittest mindset, thinking that brawn trumps brain and mean trumps meek. Quiet confidence, humility, and asking questions are viewed as signs of weakness, and in prison, weakness is like blood in the water for a shark. Weakness, perceived or real, invites attack as various gang members seek to earn a reputation by fighting their way up the ranks. This sad reality makes a recent encounter especially striking.

I keep a Bible on the 2’ by 2’ shelf-desk located near the front of my cell. Bars across the front of my room allows the Bible to be highly visible. My prayer is that the good book, and a good reputation for being helpful and generous, will announce my readiness and desire to be a Watchman and witness for Christ.

In essence, I’m always *fishing*. My Bible, and I hope, my peaceful tone and countenance, serve as *a line in the water*. It’s bait, so to speak, designed to draw those who walk the corridor – peers and staff – to my cell and through me, to Christ. A few days ago, I got a nibble on my line.

A large, fierce, former Arian Brotherhood gang member stopped by my cell. He glanced at my Bible. He knew my name, though I’m not sure how. Leaning in, he cautiously asked, “What’cha been readin’?” I told him I had been reading in the Psalms.

Like a curious fish, he nibbled, then wanted more. He took a step closer and lowered his voice a bit. The excellent acoustics of the all-cement corridor means even whispers can be heard a

good distance away. He told me he was experiencing a great deal of anxiety and struggled with anger issues.

Searching for more peace, he said he recently started reading a book on Buddhism and eastern meditation. He said it like it was a statement, but I knew it was really a question.

He wanted to know what a Christian would think about his decision to look to Buddhism and meditation for help. I also knew that though he was cautious and careful, according to the unwritten prison code, he had shown weakness by seeking counsel or assistance from those “outside the car.” Outside the car means beyond your present or past gang ‘family.’ Doing so is a violation of gang code. Without notice or warning, I was put on the spot. Several ears now tuned-in to our conversation, so I knew I had to answer immediately.

I got his name (we’ll call him Jake). I began by affirming what I could, “Jake, I’m glad you stopped by to chat. Many men here are looking for peace and ways to minimize anxiety. It’s good that you’re searching for answers and truth. Eastern meditation techniques may seem to offer *some* help; they can help you focus on things that help you feel better in the moment. But Christianity offers so much more than feeling better for a moment – the teachings of Christ will help you find peace and experience joy, forever.”

Jake was on a work detail and could not talk long. He nodded in agreement and indicated some openness to come back and continue the discussion.

I began to pray for Jake to stop by again. I prayed for an open heart, the right words to share, and boldness to step beyond my comfort zone. I asked God how to say things that might offend a big man with anger management problems, here on a 13-year sentence.

I looked through my bag of personal belongings and found some coffee (a valuable commodity here) and an excellent spiritual book titled *More Than A Carpenter* by Josh McDowell. Ready with these two small gifts and a firm foundation of prayer, I waited for Jake to return.

Several days later, I saw Jake in my corridor again on another work detail. When he looked at me, I called him over and asked, “Do you like coffee?” His eyes opened wide. “Yes!”

I handed him the bag of coffee and said, “I enjoyed our brief talk a few days ago and wanted to give you a book that can help you find what you’re looking for.”

For a moment, there was silence. My “gifts” were humble but acts of kindness here are rare. He flashed a big smile, put his arm through the bars across the front of my cell, and shook my hand warmly and enthusiastically. He told me how much he appreciated everything. I fully expect another encounter soon.

Please understand I do not share the story to spotlight my exceptional acts, deep teaching, or witnessing. I share this particular story because there was NO teaching or extensive witnessing, and yet a meaningful connection was made for the cause of Christ.

The key to success in this story is not years of formal theological training – it is simply *readiness*. I anticipated someone stopping by. I anticipated receiving a question or two. I do not drink coffee here but ordered some to have on hand as a good-will builder and gesture of friendship. I was on the look-out for good, easy to read Christian literature to serve as follow-up material to initial discussions. I prayed for Jake to return to talk again. I was *ready* for his second (albeit quick) visit.

Anyone can do what I did. The key to readiness is prayer, anticipation, and preparation. Follow these suggestions so you can be ready too.

- **Prayer:** James 4:3 reads, “*You have not because you ask not.*” If you desire opportunities to witness, pray that God will put people in your path. Ask God to speak to your heart and guide you in what and how to share. After you talk to someone, pray for the individual, and ask God for additional opportunities to connect and witness to them.
- **Anticipation:** Anticipate that God will grant your prayer. Do not keep your schedule so tight that you cannot give sufficient time when the opportunity to witness arises. Live with eyes open – that is, look for and anticipate that God will entrust people to you. He will give you the privilege of sharing His truth and love. Expect it. Anticipate.
- **Preparation:** The best musicians and athletes spend many hours practicing and rehearsing. The best leave little to chance. For athletes and musicians, muscle memory and repeated execution make the live performance more like a reflex than a dreaded encounter. There is a spiritual parallel. Use the following techniques to strengthen your witness and be prepared for every opportunity:
  - Practice your testimony. Tell what Jesus has done for you and what He is about to do (the Rapture). Prepare a short summary of your story (30-60 seconds) and a more detailed testimony for those opportunities when time permits.
  - Purchase give-away materials. You may not be able to express all that is on your heart during that first encounter. Consider purchasing tracts or booklets, or create a document detailing key scriptures, websites, and resources you believe will be helpful follow-up material.
  - Be familiar with Scripture verses and passages on the following subjects:
    - God’s love (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8, 8:37-39; 1 John 3:1-3)
    - Forgiveness (1 John 1:9; Psa. 103:3)
    - Salvation (John 1:12; Rom. 10:9-10)
    - Why Jesus came to earth and died on the cross (John 10:10b; Rom. 8:1-11; Isa. 53)
    - The mission of every believer (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:18-20)
    - The Calling of a Watchman (Ezekiel 33:1-9)
    - What the future holds:
      - The birth pains/last days (Matt. 24)
      - The Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-52)

- The rise of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:1-12; Rev. 13)
- The Tribulation (Summary in Rev. 6, more detailed in Rev. 7-19)
- The mark of the Beast (Rev. 13:11-18, 14:9-11, 16:2)
- The Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-18, 19:17-21)
- The Second Coming or Glorious Appearing (Rev. 19:11-16)
- The Millennium (Rev. 20:1-6)
- The final Great White Throne Judgment and eternity in heaven (Rev. 20:7-Rev. 22)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the day of the Lord's return draws near. Watchmen should stand *ready* to warn and witness. May God bless you as you serve him in "such a time as this," wherever you may be.