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## **Encouragement for Today**

### **“Soul Condition”**

Van Walton, Director of Hispanic Ministries, Proverbs 31 Speaker Team Member

### **Key Verse:**

1 Peter 3:15b “...always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence...” (NASB)

### **Devotion:**

Many women suffer in silence, agonizing over and praying for the “soul condition” of their loved ones. Often after I speak, a lady in the audience will approach me with a broken heart. Someone she loves deeply - either her husband or a child, a parent or loved one - does not have a relationship with Jesus. “What can I do? Nothing I say seems to make a difference,” I am told.

I can empathize because I have been there. I love many people whose “soul conditions” are shaky. Consequently, I’ve gone through various phases in my life, trying to push the gospel on those whose lives I cherish. The different stages in my spiritual walk can be marked by a strong drive to preach and promote. If I ever drew a loved one closer to God by my words, I don’t know about it!

On the other hand, neighbors and friends approach me with the following questions: “Can I come to your Bible study? Where is that church with all those great children’s programs? What’s the name of that Christian book you mentioned? Did that movie really capture the truth about the life of Jesus?”

There are two ways to share God’s Good News of salvation. Preach it or live it. There is absolutely nothing wrong with preaching the gospel. I came to Christ because I heard God’s Word. I do believe, though, that the way I live my life is a far more effective tool for evangelizing than preaching and pushing. I like to share the gospel by showing. Too often my sharing gets a bit out of control. I become zealous, excited, and lose sight of God’s gentle reminder, “...Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless--that’s your job, to bless. You’ll be a blessing and also get a blessing.” (1 Peter 3:8-9 MSG)

I believe there are four areas that need our concentration if we are concerned about the “soul condition” of our friends and loved ones:

1) Instead of preaching at them, prepare and be ready to answer any questions they may ask about Christianity. This is accomplished by studying the Bible and becoming more deeply acquainted with the Lord.

2) Instead of preaching at them, turn your “sermons” into actions filled with love, kindness, and respect for them.

3) Instead of preaching at them, concentrate on memorizing portions of Scripture that encourage godly growth and develop your own personal walk with the Heavenly Father.

4) Instead of preaching at them, pray. Nothing substitutes for an abiding relationship with Christ. You lean on Jesus while you pray and let the Holy Spirit press in on your loved one.

Imagine the agony Jesus suffered when He went to the cross for all of us whose “soul conditions” were questionable. We can learn from Him. He knew the path His followers would take, and rather than use the time and circumstance to preach one last sermon, He made provisions for His mother (John 19:26); He forgave (Luke 23:34); He saved (Luke 23:43); He admitted His humanity (John 19:28); He spoke to His Father (Mark 15:34); He gave Himself up to His Father (Matthew 23:46); He announced his death (John 19:30).

Jesus’ work on the cross convinces me that I can do more for the sake of the gospel when I pursue a truly Christian lifestyle - one that offers blessings, grace, loving kindness, and sympathy.

When agonizing over what to say to win your loved one to Christ, remember these words by Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary, use words.”

### **My Prayer for Today:**

Loving Father, I come to you with a broken heart, hopeless, and agonizing over the spiritual condition of many people whom I love. I admit to wanting to scream, “Don’t you get it? Jesus loves you! He is the only perfect way to the Father. Can’t you see how much sense being a Christian makes?” God, forgive me for getting ahead of You. Help me to develop my relationship with You, while You work Your miracles in others’ lives. I ask You to save the ones I love, in the Name of Jesus, Amen.

### **Application Steps:**

Read Ephesians 4:17- 5:2. Outline the verses you read, making a list of those areas where you can grow in godliness.

Most of the New Testament letters are filled with large portions of Scripture which guide the believer in godly living. Read and outline these passages, determining to work on your own character instead of issues in others' lives.

**Reflection Points:**

When am I most prone to agonize over a loved one's "soul condition"?

Which action glorifies God most – trusting God to work a salvation miracle or attempting to manipulate someone's steps toward salvation?

How can I honor God and show my trust that He is going to perfect the work He started in my family?

**Power Verses:**

Philippians 2:1-2, "Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and sympathetic? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one heart and purpose." (NLT)

1 Peter 1:1b; 2b,"... Your godly lives will speak to them better than any words. They will be won over by watching your pure, godly behavior." (NIV)

James 1:22, "But prove yourselves doers of the word..." (NASB)

**Additional Resources:**

*Who Holds the Key to Your Heart?* by Lysa TerKeurst

[http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources\\_whoHoldsKey.htm](http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources_whoHoldsKey.htm)

*Becoming a Woman who Listens to God* by Sharon Jaynes

[http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources\\_becomingAWoman.htm](http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources_becomingAWoman.htm)

*What Happens when Women Walk in Faith* by Lysa TerKeurst

[http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources\\_whatHappens.htm](http://proverbs31.gospelcom.net/newresources_whatHappens.htm)