

Bearing Faithful Witness - Resources

Exploring what it means to become a community that responds to "our people" by living and communicating a good news story.

RESOURCE #8

What Kind of Witness Are You?

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In Acts 1:8 Jesus says to the disciples, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses..." He makes a direct connection between the life-changing activity of the Holy Spirit and the assignment to be a 'truth-teller.' The implication is that all believers receive the Holy Spirit and all believers are empowered to be Jesus 'truth-tellers.'

Let's dig a bit deeper into this basic combination of Spirit-empowered living and truthful communication.

Presence and Proclamation

"Presence" is about participating in situations and relationships with the intent of provoking interest in God, spirituality and the good news. It's about being with people in tangible ways so they can get an idea of what it would be like to hang out with God and Jesus.

"Proclamation" is a biblical word that suggests bringing something (ideas, stories, metaphors) out into the open with our words. Basically any kind of verbal communication; whether a thoughtful, organized presentation or a casual, mindful, conversation.

Our theme text 1 Peter 3:15 makes the connection between presence and proclamation.

One thought. Being present with people can nurture openness to Jesus, but it cannot by itself communicate the particulars of the founding story of Christianity. Without proclamation, the soil that was cultivated, tilled, and weeded through presence is left fallow, with no seed to produce fruit.

Process and Event

In the Gospels we have the story of the slow, developmental process that Jesus took with his disciples before asking them, "who do you say that I am?"(Matt 16:16) We might say that this occasion, where they identify him as Messiah and Son of God, is their "believe/receive" moment (John 1:12, Romans 10:9, 10) – after many months, perhaps years, of day to day interaction with Jesus himself.

That slow development of belief in Jesus on the part of the original disciples is often contrasted with Paul's Damascus Road – "bolt from the blue" – conversion event (Acts 9). That critical moment of persuasion and conviction that moves people beyond their current spiritual location into a decisive, re-orienting, encounter with Jesus. Today many Christians think of this as the quintessential evangelism/conversion story. The problem is that in Scripture that is a rare example.

We need to recover the process-oriented way of thinking about conversion as a way of understanding how people come to Jesus. We need to recover images of journey, pilgrimage, quest; along the lines of "the Emmaus Road" experience (Luke 24:13-35).

Different People, Different Gifts, Different Approaches

We are all called to be witnesses, and to be prepared to give the reasons for the hope we have in Jesus. But God has created and gifted each of us differently. The people in our lives who haven't met Jesus are likewise at different points in their spiritual journey. This combination suggests that different approaches will be taken, depending on who we are and who the people are that God has placed in our paths. Perhaps this matrix will help deepen our understanding.

