



Session Eleven: Bearing Faithful Witness

“In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect ...” *1 Peter 3:15*

GOAL

Welcoming, including, inviting - with gentleness and respect. How does belonging and believing relate to our practices for bearing faithful witness?

Practice Review

- Did you get a chance to *TELL* your story to someone this week?
- What did that look like?
- Was this a challenging process? Why?
- Are there some new *NOTICING, PRAYING, LISTENING* or *LOVING* stories to share?

Activity: Share a meal together

Take time to share your prepared Personal Stories around the table.

Join together in sharing the Lord's Supper [RESOURCE #1]

Explore

“BELONG, BELIEVE” BY STUART MURRAY [RESOURCE #11]

- What grabbed your attention in this article? What did you underline or highlight?

AS POST-CHRISTENDOM DEVELOPS, SOME WHO HAVE NO CONNECTION WITH ANY CHURCH WILL COME TO FAITH THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS. INCARNATIONAL FORMS OF MISSION ARE EMERGING THAT NO LONGER RELY ON ATTRACTIVE METHODS OR PEOPLE EAGER TO BELONG BEFORE THEY BELIEVE. IN THESE CREATIVE AND COURAGEOUS INITIATIVES CENTRIFUGAL MISSION IS REPLACING CENTRIPETAL MISSION. IF ‘BELONGING BEFORE BELIEVING’ IS APPLICABLE TO SUCH INITIATIVES, THE KEY IS CHRISTIANS ‘BELONGING’ WITHIN MANY NEIGHBOURHOODS AND NETWORKS, AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH WHICH ‘BELIEVING’ CAN BEGIN.

- What will the process of coming to faith in Jesus look like for the friends/family we have been praying for during these weeks?

The end of that article had these thoughts on “*conversion*.”

CHURCHES AFTER CHRISTENDOM WILL NEED A ROBUST BUT CHASTENED THEOLOGY OF CONVERSION. INVITATIONS TO FOLLOW JESUS MUST BE WINSOME RATHER THAN OVERBEARING. AND THEY MUST IMPLY AN ONGOING JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP FOR THOSE ISSUING AS WELL AS RECEIVING SUCH INVITATIONS. CONVERSION IS A PARADIGM SHIFT THAT STIMULATES NEW WAYS OF THINKING AND LIVING, NOT ARRIVAL AT A PRE-DETERMINED DESTINATION. CONVERSION IS MULTIDIRECTIONAL AND LIFELONG.

- Why is “*conversion*” important to “*bearing faithful witness*?”

We have been reflecting on 1 Peter 3:15 as our theme verse throughout these discussions. About being a certain kind of people, about preparing to share our faith, about gentleness and respect. This notion only makes sense in light of what Peter says earlier in chapter 2:9-10 – that being a follower of Jesus automatically sets us apart as part of a broader community, “the people of God.”

To be a follower of Jesus is to be something “other” than our neighbours – “so that” we can speak out on God’s behalf, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he has made in our lives. Being part of a living faith community is integral to bearing faithful witness. Perhaps inviting our friends to experience the life of our faith community is the most profound witness we can bear – then they may ask us “why?” and “what?”

Connecting Word and Deed

We want to develop habits and practices that help us to connect our desire to live as godly, loving Christians (deeds) alongside our desire to communicate to others the “good news” that we have found in Jesus (words).

These practices are spiritual discernment exercises. We need to learn how to pay attention to what God the Holy Spirit is already doing in the lives of the people within our spheres of influence. **Our task is not to “evangelize” our friends; our task is to bear faithful witness as we participate with what God is already doing in their lives.**



The Practice: Be Communion

- Finally, you will need to prepare yourself for being communion for that person. God calls us to live like him. That means becoming broken bread and poured out wine for them.
- You are the grace-radiating presence of God in their lives. You are their first impression of God, the first bible that they read, the first sermon that they hear.
- The truth about our faith is that we never really have it until we give it away.

Prayer

God of the Universe, who notices us, who draws us to yourself, who listens to us, who loves us, who gives us stories to tell, may your presence in my life encourage the birth of faith in Jesus in my friend, _____.
God, as we co-labour together in the life of my friend, will you continue to draw him/her to Jesus, and to the same renewal of spirit that I have found in relationship with You. Amen.

Consider together as a group how you will continue to practice the postures we have worked on during this study series. The Bearing Faithful Witness Practices are shared here as a stand-alone Resource (#13) to be incorporated as basic outward-oriented rhythms in our lives.