

Bearing Faithful Witness



Participant Handouts

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



Developed by **Dan Sheffield** and **Jared Siebert** for The Free Methodist Church in Canada

PRINTING INSTRUCTIONS

This Workbook is meant to be printed double-sided
(with this page appearing on the opposite side of the cover)



Session One: Christian Community as 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

The central practice at the heart of Christian community is the Lord's Supper – telling the Jesus story and eating together.

Telling Our Stories

- What does a “*family meal*” look like in your household, or family of origin? How often? How long?
- Do you eat quietly, eat with talking, eat with TV?
- Can you identify a time in your own experience when a meal or dinner party had a profound impact on your life?

Read

Luke 24:13-35; the story of two inquirers on the road to Emmaus

- Can you identify an Emmaus experience in your own life?
- Where you were surprised by a spiritual insight or an encounter with someone who just made sense?

Activity: Share a meal together

Introduce The Empty Chair

Have we missed someone? Someone in your life that you would like to see at this Table?

The Medium is the Message

The Eucharist; [the Great Thanksgiving] - (RESOURCE #1)

Explore

What are we doing here, with this meal, conversation and the communion ritual?

Why has this simple ritual been the central reality in Christian community for 2000 years?

Why is it framed as a meal? How do *you* explain this concrete, material action that has a subjective, heart-reality, to a watching world?

John 13:34, 35 “*A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*”

Jesus suggests that the way his followers conduct their lives together is the first tell-tale sign that the watching world will observe about “*those Christians.*”

Liturgy after the liturgy: What is our “*work*” after we have participated in The Lord’s Supper; after we have experienced joy, gratitude, love and comraderie?

Video clip: Sarah Miles, “*Bread and Wine*”

Christ Has No Body

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
with compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.
Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

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: Notice

In our world of individualism, we have a very serious attention deficit disorder. We are so busy doing our own thing we rarely take the time to notice each other. We don’t pay attention. The Kingdom practice here is to make enough time and space in our lives so that we can actually notice – pay attention – to other people.

Be generous with your attention. Give it away freely. Keep watch. Make sure that the people we come into contact with are ‘ok.’ This practice also helps us become familiar with the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Becoming sensitive to His guidance is vital!

Assignment: Who are the people in your life who probably need your generous attention? Will you take time for one person this week? Can you give them your generous attention? Observe them, pray for them, talk to them, listen to them, love them. Nothing overt is required. Be understated.

Prayer

God of the Universe, you noticed us, you sent us yourself in Jesus, you gave us your generous attention. Thank you for the beautiful feet of those who shared good news with us. Jesus, we revere you as Lord and Master of our hearts, help us to pay attention to others, as you did to us. Holy Spirit, lead us to those in our lives who need us to pay attention to them, in Jesus’ name. Amen.



Session Two: Christian Community before a Watching World

“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

It is the content of our lives together as Christian Community that serves as the summative testimony of our Christian witness – in word and deed.

Practice Review

- Who did you NOTICE over this past week?
- Who did you give Generous Attention to?
- What did you observe?
- What did you notice about yourself?

Telling Our Stories

- Can you describe a group of friends from high school, college or work life that you really enjoyed hanging out with? You spent a lot of time together, shared risky experiences, they are still your go-to, best friends?
- What made that a unique group of friends?

Read

Acts 2:40-47

- Can you describe a time when you experienced Christian community like we find here?
- If you don't have an experience like this, how do you explain that?

Acts 11:19-30

- What would it have been about these people that gave them the label “Christians?”

Athenagoras, an early Christian leader, (133-190CE) writes:

“But among us you will find uneducated persons, and artisans, and old women, who, if they are unable in words to prove the benefit of our doctrine, yet by their deeds exhibit the benefit arising from their persuasion of its truth; they do not rehearse speeches, but exhibit good works; when struck, they do not strike again; when robbed, they do not go to law; they give to those that ask of them, and love their neighbours as themselves.”

“Building healthy missional community is in fact a major focus of New Testament teaching. Note how much of the New Testament is devoted, not to exhortations or strategies for evangelism or mission, but to building community that truly is Christ’s body. Why is this? Because the biblical writers knew that covenant communities that truly incarnate the character of Jesus would in fact do Jesus’ work and fulfill God’s mission. It is that simple and that profound. The community building that Paul and other New Testament writers stress is the Spirit’s missionary strategy.” Howard Snyder, *“Holiness and the Five Calls of God,” - Yes in Christ: Wesleyan Reflections on Gospel, Mission, and Culture. Clements Academic, 2011.*

Explore

“The heart of evangelism is the Spirit’s formation of a people into a distinctive set of habits, practices, disciplines, and loyalties that together constitute a visible and recognizable pattern before a watching world.” Bryan Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom*, p.317

- What are these habits, practices, disciplines and loyalties that form us into “a visible and recognizable” witness in our spheres of influence?
- What do your friends and family see when they observe how we live, act and think? What feedback do you get from them on your involvement in our faith community?

RHYTHMS AND PRACTICES AT THE HEART OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY (RESOURCE #2)

Discussion

Connecting Word and Deed

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Be generous with your attention. Give it away freely. Keep watch. Make sure that the people we come into contact with are ‘ok.’ This practice also helps us become familiar with the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Becoming sensitive to His guidance is vital!

Assignment: You started this practice last week. Don’t go back to the same person; identify/discern another person this week for whom you will give your generous attention.

Prayer

God of the Universe, you noticed us, you sent us yourself in Jesus, you gave us your generous attention. Thank you for the beautiful feet of those who shared good news with us. Jesus, we revere you as Lord and Master of our hearts, help us to pay attention to others, as you did to us. Holy Spirit, lead us to those in our lives who need us to pay attention to them, in Jesus’ name. Amen.



Session Three: Putting the E-word on the Table!

“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

To explore good and bad evangelism approaches. What has given evangelism such a bad name? Is not proclaiming the Good News a biblical option?

Practice Review

- Who did you NOTICE over this past week?
- Who did you give Generous Attention to?
- What did you observe?
- What did you notice about yourself?

Telling Our Stories

- Share a story about a birthday party that stands out in your mind – good or bad!
- What made it good?
- What made it bad?

Read

MESSAGE OF ANTIOCH FOR TODAY (RESOURCE #3)

- How do you respond to the statements about “*a legacy of bad news*” and “*leaves a bad taste*”?
- Does that resonate with your experience; similar, or not at all?
- What words would you use to describe your feelings about sharing your faith with those who are not Christians?

Explore

Video clip: *Bad Evangelism*

- Were you able to watch all the way through that without someone yelling, “shut it off!?”
- In light of the video clip, can we share some stories about our best and worst experiences with ‘evangelism?’
- What has your experience been?

Read

RECLAIMING THE E-WORD (RESOURCE #4)

- What do you think of Stone’s question, “Is it possible nonetheless to reclaim the E-word as expressing something positive, vital and beautiful about the Christian life?”
- What would it look like to rethink and reconstruct evangelism for this era?

Romans 10:14-15

- So, “to proclaim” or not “to proclaim”? What do you think?

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The Practice: Prayer

We have begun *Noticing* – paying attention to the people around us. Do you have any inclination of needs or concerns in the life of the person(s) you have been noticing?

The Kingdom practice here is to open up a dialogue with God about the people in your life – to pray for them.

Engage in *unauthorized prayer*. Think about this sad reality... there are literally thousands of people in our city or town who face all of life’s challenges alone! They have no one taking them and their concerns to God! You may be the only one doing that. Take that responsibility seriously. Don’t wait for permission. Be faithful.

This practice promotes action. Love is a verb. And praying for someone is the first step in loving them. This practice also promotes co-labouring with God. God seems to intentionally leave certain jobs undone in order to include us in the work that God is doing in the world.

Assignment: This week. When God brings someone to your attention - pray about what you see, what you sense. Don’t make a big show of it. Take them to God.

Who are the people in your life that you have been noticing? Would you like to invite them to this table? What concerns do you need to pray about in their lives? Let’s begin to pray together for those whom we have been noticing.

Prayer

God of the Assignment: God of the Universe – who notices us – we come to you in Jesus’ name, asking on behalf of our friends. Father, I would like to see _____ in this family circle one day. 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.



Session Four: Evangelism – We’ve come a long way, baby!

“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

A conversation about the history of Christian witness. What has “Proclaiming Good News” looked like through 2000 years of Christian community around the world?

Practice Review

- Who did you PRAY FOR over this past week?
- What kind of things did you pray for? Did you have “a sense” of how you should pray for them?
- Was it just a couple times, or more often?
- Is there a connection between who you have been NOTICING and who you have been PRAYING FOR?

Telling Our Stories

- Share a story that illustrates how Christians have paid attention to you in your life? Or not?
- What is it about Christian community that attracts you? Or not?

Video clip: *Early Church Witness*

Read

BEARING FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE EARLY CHURCH (RESOURCE #5)

- Thinking of your own faith journey, which of these factors played a role in your decision to follow Jesus? How would you rank the importance of each of these factors that were crucial for people coming to Jesus in the Early Church era (*scale of 1 to 5*)?

Explore

Video clip: *Evangelism Legacies*

- Which of these approaches to evangelism concerns you, or has been how you ‘*understand*’ evangelism, for better or worse?
- With all this legacy of “*bad evangelism*” why has Christianity continued to spread around the globe? Has there really been *nothing* good?

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Session Five: The Way of Salvation

“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

Understanding Salvation and Conversion as a journey with multiple mileposts – involving both process-over-time and epiphany-like encounters.

Practice Review

- Who did you PRAY FOR over this past week?
- What kind of things did you pray for? Did you have “a sense” of how you should pray for them?
- Was it just a couple times, or more often?
- Is there a connection between who you have been NOTICING and who you have been PRAYING FOR?

Telling Our Stories

- Our theme verse has this phrase: “*give the reason for the hope that you have.*” Can you identify one of the factors that led you into relationship with Jesus?
- What were you looking for, hoping for, in turning to Jesus?

Discover

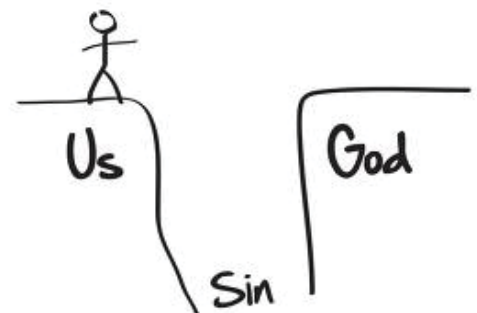
Video clip: *Francis Collins’ journey to faith in Jesus*

- Can you identify some of the factors that Collins mentions regarding his own journey to faith in Jesus Christ?

Read

JOURNEY TO FAITH IN JESUS (RESOURCE #6)

- Can you identify where Francis Collins was at on this continuum in those video clips?
- Can you “more or less” describe your own journey to faith using these markers? Share your story about how long it took for you to progress along this continuum. (Some of us, raised in Christian homes, may only start at -6, already aware of the Jesus Story)
- Think of the people you have been “noticing” – can you locate their movement along this scale? Does this help you understand where they have come from and how you might be able help them take one step more?



Reflect on this statement:

“...a high degree of formation is required before we even begin to know what we need to be saved from, much less for.” [Stone: 266]

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The Practice: Listen

We often forget the fact that God gave us two ears and only one mouth for a reason. We are often more eager to talk to someone about Jesus rather than the equally important art of listening to them, in Jesus.

Move in close, lean in and say “*How are you?*” and actually mean it, and actually wait for a response, and then go as deep as they want to go. This practice promotes other-centred-ness. By listening to their story, by entering in on their terms you are learning that this life is not all about you.

When you listen, try this, listen for the contours of the journey -- which we have been discussing -- in their story.

- o What would good and whole, and “as it should be,” look like according to them?
- o What do you hear of their aching heart? What are they yearning for?
- o How do they describe why they aren’t realizing that? What is broken in them?
- o How are they seeking to solve their discontentment?
- o Does God-language ever show up in their story-telling?

The goal here isn’t to find the weakness in their argument and worldview, it’s to genuinely seek to understand your friend at their deepest levels.

You might want to try creating environments where you as a group create space where you can hear other people’s stories. Groups can host dinner parties and BBQs and invite their small group friends and their friends from other social circles. **We call this *friend-smashing*.** It’s a good practice. The goal is to listen. To host. To open up space in your life to include these others.

Assignment: This week. Move in close with a friend you have been noticing and praying for – lean in and say “*How are you?*” and wait for a response, and then go as deep as they want to go.

Could we have a discussion about hosting a “*friend-mashing*” house party?

Prayer

God of the Universe, who notices us, who draws us to yourself, who listens to us; please give me ears to truly hear the stories of my friends. Father, prompt me this week to listen to 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.



Session Six: Making Sense of Our Story

“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

Situating story-telling and witness. Asking, “Why are you a follower of Jesus?”

Practice Review

- Did you get a chance to move in close this week, and LISTEN to a friend or acquaintance?
- Was this someone whom you have already been NOTICING and PRAYING FOR?
- Was this a challenging process? Why?
- What were you hearing from your friend?

Telling Our Stories

Most of us enjoy hearing a good story – or even a bad one, if it draws us in. Just think of an average TV newscast.

- Share, or share about, a recent “*story*” that you heard from a friend, neighbor, or work colleague. What motivated them to tell you that story?

Read/Discover

REASONS WHY WE DON'T TELL OUR STORIES... [RESOURCE #7]

Do you resonate with “the reasons” in this article?

- What about your story would Jesus think is worth telling?
- What has your relationship with Jesus affected in your life?
- What makes you reluctant to tell that story?

Explore

Read through Ephesians 2:1-10

What if telling our stories of God's gift of saving grace in our lives, is part of the “*good works*” that God has prepared in advance for us to do?

Thinking back to Francis Collins from last week. How would Collins answer the question, “*Why are you a follower of Jesus.*”

Activity: Telling your personal story

Let's take a bit of time to reflect on God's work in us...

Working with a partner, write down in point-form notes your own story... (take about 15-20 min)

- In a world of multiple options, what does “good and whole” and “as it should be” look like to you?
- What was preventing that from happening in your life?
- How does following Jesus affect what you believe about the world? About who God is?
- How does the Jesus Story put your world “right?”
- What happened when you began to connect the dots with Jesus?
- What does that look like for you this week?

Back together, reflect for a moment; what was going through your mind as you worked on this?

Hang onto these notes, we're going to come back to them over the next few weeks.

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Could we have a discussion about hosting a “*friend-mashing*” house party?

Prayer

God of the Universe, who notices us, who draws us to yourself, who listens to us; please give me ears to truly hear the stories of my friends. Father, prompt me this week to listen to 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.

Homework: article, Sheffield/Hirsch, “*What Kind of Witness are you?*” [RESOURCE #8]



Session Seven: Making Sense of His Story (1)

“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

Understanding His story and my witness. The Good News in a nutshell. What do you believe about Jesus?

Practice Review

- Did you get a chance to move in close this week, and LISTEN to a friend or acquaintance?
- Was this someone whom you have already been NOTICING and PRAYING FOR?
- Was this a challenging process? Why?
- What were you hearing from your friend?

Telling Our Stories

- If a child asked you, “*how does the rain come from the sky?*” – how would you answer?
- If the child was 4 years old? If the child was 10? If the child was 15?
- Would some of us do a better job with the 4 yr old, and some with the 15 yr old?
- What if it was a 19 yr old in second year university, doing a physical sciences degree (obviously testing to prove to us that we know nothing!)?

Read/Discover

RECAP – WHAT KIND OF WITNESS ARE YOU? [RESOURCE #8]

Think about the shape of your own faith sharing through this matrix, keeping in mind what is unique to your gifting, personality, skills and relationships.

- Do you pull more in one direction than another?
- Are there aspects of “preparedness” that you still need to develop?
- How might your approach actually work together with other persons in your faith community, strengthening your collective witness?

Explore

“Christians do not know what they really believe until they publicly witness to their faith. In other words, faith is not something we possess and then hope we can express it, if and when the time comes to speak out. Faith is embodied when the confidence required to be a witness is experienced as a gift from God.” *Stephen Webb (2004:17)*

Activity: What's the Good News in a nutshell?

Divide out the following Scripture texts to pairs or groups. These are texts which give us insight into how early Christians tried to communicate what they understood about the Jesus story. In your group, identify key insights that you would include when asked "What do you believe about Jesus?"

- John 1:1-18: *"he came as a witness to testify"*
- Romans 10:8-10: *"the message concerning faith that we proclaim"*
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-11: *"I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand"*
- Philippians 2:5-11: *"have the same mindset as Christ Jesus"*
- Colossians 1:15-23: *"This is the gospel that you heard"*
- 1 John 1:1-7: *"we have seen it and testify to it"*

Back together, on a whiteboard:

- If we were to summarize the Good News "in a nutshell" what would that look like, sound like?
- As a group, compose a paragraph (3-4 sentences) in your own words that summarizes "What do you believe about Jesus?"

Connecting Word and Deed

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The Practice: Love

Now if you are out there noticing people, engaging in unauthorized prayer, listening to people and their stories, something is going to happen to your heart. Look out. The fact that you have the God of love living his life in you, and now you are bringing your life into dangerously close contact with other people - you might find yourself loving people deeply. Don't be alarmed. Let it happen.

Love them with all you got and of course be deliberate about looking for opportunities to put this feeling into action.

You'll want to consider how you can be of benefit to them in their life. Find ways to serve them. Find ways to let them know you care about them. Practice real and deep loving, as an intentional, active thing.

Assignment: Move in close with a friend you have been noticing, praying for, and listening to. Can you identify a practical way to "love on" them? Will you act on that this week? Is there a way other members of this group could help you with that?

How's it going with the idea of hosting a "*friend-mashing*" house party?

Prayer

God of the Universe, who notices us, who draws us to yourself, who listens to us; please give me ears to truly hear the stories of my friends. Father, help me to find a practical way to love 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.



Session Eight: Making Sense of His Story (2)

“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

Telling the Jesus Story simply and clearly – answering “What do you believe about Jesus?” in a way that connects with the concerns of my friends.

Practice Review

- Did you get a chance to LOVE on someone that you have been LISTENING to?
- What did that look like?
- Was this a challenging process?
- Why? Did you do this yourself, or with another friend?

Telling Our Stories

- From our work last week, can we recap (without notes) what we settled on as the basics of what someone needs to know about the Jesus Story?
- Have you thought more about your own journey to faith in Jesus? Was understanding the basic Jesus story an important stage in your own process? How long was it between when you understood the basic story, and when you made a decision to act and become a follower of Jesus?

Activity: Telling the Jesus Story

Much of the content of this session comes from the innovative work of James Choung in *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing*. IVP, 2008. In essence, Choung took the Good News in a Nutshell framework and crafted a story line that made sense to his friends and colleagues. We want to work our way through his story-crafting as an example of how we might “rethink and reconstruct” our sharing of the Jesus Story.

TRUE STORY DIAGRAM [RESOURCE #9]

INTRODUCTION: WE ARE ACHING FOR SOMETHING BETTER: TAKING STOCK OF OUR WORLD, NEIGHBOURHOOD, SELVES

- WHAT’S OUR WORLD LIKE? WHAT DO YOU SEE ON THE NEWS? [IDENTIFY A CURRENT ISSUE]
- HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS KIND OF WORLD?

NO NORMAL PERSON THINKS SUFFERING, VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION ARE GOOD THINGS. WE ALL ACHE FOR SOMETHING BETTER – A UNIVERSAL ACHE. HUNGER POINTS TO FOOD; THIRST TO WATER – SURVIVAL ADAPTATION. WHAT IF OUR ACHING FOR A BETTER WORLD MEANS THAT SUCH A THING ONCE EXISTED OR WILL ONE DAY EXIST?

PART 1: GOD INTENDED FOR GOOD: GOD’S GOOD INTENTION (A KINGDOM OF SHALOM, UNDER HIS REIGN)

IN THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES, GOD CREATED A GOOD, WONDERFUL WORLD. IN THE BEGINNING, EVERYTHING WAS RIGHT WITH EVERYTHING ELSE. CREATION WAS INTENDED TO TAKE CARE OF US, AND WE WERE INTENDED TO TAKE CARE OF CREATION – AN INTERDEPENDENT ENVIRONMENT. [GENDER, FOOD SECURITY, ETC.]

ON A RELATIONAL LEVEL, HUMANS WERE INTENDED FOR COMMUNITY; MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY. WHOLE INTEGRATED PEOPLE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER WHOLE INTEGRATED PEOPLE.

ON A PERSONAL LEVEL WE WERE EACH INTENDED TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, A RELATIONSHIP OF LOVE AND INTIMACY. GOD HUNG OUT WITH US, AND WE LIKED BEING WITH HIM. WE WERE MEANT TO LOVE AND BLESS EACH OTHER AS WELL.

THE WORLD AND ALL THAT WAS IN IT REALLY WAS INTENDED FOR GOOD.

- BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THIS GOOD WORLD? HOW DID WE GET TO WHERE WE ARE TODAY?

PART 2: WE ARE DAMAGED BY SELF-CENTEREDNESS: FALLING SHORT OF GOD'S INTENTIONS

WHEN GOD WAS IN CHARGE, WE HAD A GOOD WORLD, AS GOD INTENDED. BUT WE WANTED TO BE IN CHARGE, SO THAT ALL OF IT – CREATION AND EVERYONE IN IT – COULD BE USED FOR OUR OWN BENEFIT INSTEAD OF THE INTENDED PURPOSE OF SERVING EACH OTHER. IT BECAME ALL ABOUT US – ME – SELF-FOCUSED, SELF-CENTERED.

ON A BIGGER LEVEL, WE DAMAGED CREATION AS IT WAS INTENDED. THE PLANET – OIL, POLLUTANTS – IT FIGHTS BACK – HURRICANES, TSUNAMIS. THOSE BIG, GLOBAL FACTORS OF EXPLOITATION FACTOR INTO RACISM, SEXISM, SLAVERY, CORRUPTION, INJUSTICE – ALL ISSUES THAT DAMAGE THE WORLD BUT ALSO INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES.

ON A RELATIONAL LEVEL WE DAMAGE EACH OTHER AND OTHERS HURT US – WHETHER WE MEAN TO OR NOT. WHEN WE LIVE FOR OURSELVES IT'S EASY TO TAKE AND GAIN, WITHOUT REGARD FOR OTHER PEOPLE. OUR INTENDED INTERDEPENDENCE AS HUMANS IS DISTORTED, BROKEN.

ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, THIS SELF-CENTEREDNESS DAMAGES OUR SOULS AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH GOD NOW, MAYBE WE ARE EVEN AFRAID; AT THE LEAST WE IGNORE GOD AND LIVE FOR OURSELVES. AT THE SAME TIME WE RECOGNIZE THAT WE ARE HURTING OURSELVES WITH THIS SELF-CENTEREDNESS – AND THAT WE WILL LIKELY NEVER BE THE KIND OF PEOPLE WE WANT TO BE.

ALL OF IT/US – WE ARE DAMAGED/DISTORTED BY THIS FUNDAMENTAL SELF-CENTEREDNESS.

- CAN YOU IDENTIFY WHERE YOU HAVE SEEN DAMAGE IN YOUR OWN LIFE OR THE LIVES OF OTHERS AROUND YOU?

PART 3: GOD IS RESTORING GOD'S GOOD INTENTION: THE INCARNATION

BUT THE CHRISTIAN STORY TELLS US THAT GOD LOVES THE WORLD/US TOO MUCH TO LEAVE IT THAT WAY. GOD CAME TO THE PLANET AS JESUS 2000 YEARS AGO AND STARTED SOMETHING NEW. HE STARTED A RESISTANCE MOVEMENT AGAINST THIS SELF-CENTEREDNESS. HE LIVED AND TAUGHT A BETTER WAY, BUT HE ALSO OFFERED HIS OWN LIFE AS THE ULTIMATE OTHER-ORIENTATION.

IN ESSENCE JESUS BREAKS INTO THE MIDST OF OUR SELF-CENTEREDNESS (OUR OWN INFECTIOUS DISEASE) AND TAKES IT UPON HIMSELF IN HIS DEATH – AN ACT PERPETRATED BY THE SELFISHNESS OF THOSE IN POWER AT THAT TIME. BUT HE COMES BACK TO LIFE – IS RESURRECTED BY GOD – OVERCOMING THE DISEASE AND, IN ESSENCE, OFFERS HIS IMMUNITY TO US. AS WE ENTER INTO LIFE WITH HIM, JESUS' GOODNESS OVERCOMES THE SELFISHNESS AND DAMAGE IN US AND IN OUR WORLD AROUND US.

HIS GOAL WAS/IS TO RESTORE GOD'S ORIGINAL GOOD INTENTIONS FOR US AND THE WORLD GOD INTENDED. THIS PROFOUND RESTORATION OF OUR SOULS GIVES US THE POSSIBILITY OF NEW WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT THE EARTH AND OUR RELATIONSHIP TO IT.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS, WHETHER FAMILY, FRIENDS, NEIGHBOURS OR WORK COLLEAGUES CAN HAPPEN ON A NEW LEVEL AS WELL. THE KEY IS OUR WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE AND RECONCILE, KNOWING THAT JESUS HAS FORGIVEN US FOR THE WAYS WE'VE HURT EACH OTHER AND, ULTIMATELY HIM.

FINALLY, GOD RESTORED OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIMSELF. WE DON'T HAVE TO LIVE SELF-CENTERED LIVES OR BE AFRAID OF GOD ANYMORE. WE DON'T HAVE TO LIVE CONTINUALLY IN CONFLICT WITH OURSELVES AND GOD'S INTENTIONS FOR US. THAT OLD SELF DIES WITH JESUS AND A NEW SELF RISES WITH JESUS. WE START TO LIVE IN A NEW WAY AS JESUS DID, LETTING HIM TAKE CHARGE.

THE REVOLUTION, THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT, AGAINST SELF-INTEREST HAS BEGUN AND WE ARE ALL INVITED.

PART FOUR: WE ARE SENT TOGETHER TO HEAL

SO JESUS WANTS US TO JOIN THIS RESISTANCE MOVEMENT AGAINST SELFISHNESS/SELF-CENTEREDNESS, AND TO ACTIVELY ENGAGE IN HEALING HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS, MAYBE EVEN THE PLANET!

ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, WE'RE CALLED TO GIVE OURSELVES OVER TO JESUS' LEADERSHIP AND BECOME MORE LIKE HIM. IF WE WANT TO BECOME THE KIND OF GOOD WE WANT TO SEE IN THE WORLD, WE NEED TO ADMIT TO OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE DAMAGE WE SEE AROUND US. WE LET JESUS TAKE CHARGE OF OUR LIVES; WE PUT OUR TRUST IN HIM. OUR 'SELVES' ARE REMOVED FROM THE CENTRE AND JESUS IS PLACED AT THE CENTRE.

ENTERING INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS REQUIRES ENTERING INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS WHO HAVE ALSO PUT JESUS AT THE CENTRE OF THEIR LIVES. IN THIS INTERPLAY WITH OTHER PEOPLE WE ARE SEEKING TO DISPLACE SELF AND THAT WILL REQUIRE ONGOING HEALING AND RESTORATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRACTICES THAT AID FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION.

OUR INVOLVEMENT TOGETHER AS COMMUNITIES OF PEOPLE WHO ARE BEING RESTORED BY GOD WILL INVOLVE PARTICIPATING IN THE HEALING OF SYSTEMS OF INJUSTICE IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND THE WORLD BEYOND.

Explore

It may be true then, that words do not always express the fullness of what we know; they may even at times betray, reduce, or distort what we know. But it is also the case that words reveal what we might otherwise prefer to hide or neglect in a world that has taught us to fear our own convictions. Proclamation is one of the most important ways we become *"witnesses."* (Bryan Stone 2007, 250)

Video clip: *James Choung*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCVcSiUUMhY>

Let's join James in diagramming for ourselves, as we watch again.

- Does this story do justice to your understanding of the Christian faith? Of your relationship with Jesus?
- Is it worth taking the time to be able to tell this story, given an inquiry from a friend?

[The goal is not to memorize in this session, but to give a basic operational connection to this form of story-telling. Individuals can do more work on it themselves, personally, or, the group can decide to actually work deeper on practicing this story form as an appropriate aid for their own faith-sharing.]

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: Love

Now if you are out there noticing people, engaging in unauthorized prayer, listening to people and their stories, something is going to happen to your heart. Look out. The fact that you have the God of love living his life in you, and now you are bringing your life into dangerously close contact with other people - you might find yourself loving people deeply. Don't be alarmed. Let it happen.

- **Love them with all you got** and of course be deliberate about looking for opportunities to put this feeling into action.
- You'll want to consider how you can be of benefit to them in their life. Find ways to serve them. Find ways to let them know you care about them. Practice real and deep loving, as an intentional, active thing.

Assignment: Move in close with a friend you have been noticing, praying for, and listening to. Can you identify a practical way to “love on” them? Will you act on that this week? Is there a way other members of this group could help you with that?

How's it going with the idea of hosting a “*friend-mashing*” dinner/house party?

Prayer

God of the Universe, who notices us, who draws us to yourself, who listens to us; please give me ears to truly hear the stories of my friends. Father, help me to find a practical way to love 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.

Homework: READ THE ARTICLE FROM CT ABOUT KIRSTEN POWER'S JOURNEY TO FAITH IN JESUS. [RESOURCE #10]



Session Nine: Making Sense of Their Story

“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

Connecting their story to His story. The Jesus story is not an abstract religious myth, but a real story intended to connect with our real stories.

Practice Review

- Did you get a chance to LOVE on someone that you have been LISTENING to?
- What did that look like?
- Was this a challenging process? Why?
- Did you work on this yourself, or with another friend?

Telling Our Stories

We have now been intentionally Noticing, Praying for and Listening in with our friends and acquaintances for a couple months.

- Can you identify some of the themes in their lives and stories that keep coming up?
- Is anyone asking you about your life, your contentment, your joy? What do you say?
- If no one's asking, what's that about? Their self-centeredness? Me, not “being” hopeful, content, joy-filled?

Discover

We read Kirsten Power's story of her faith journey.

- Thinking of the Engel Scale; can you place Kirsten's story at different points along that progression?
- Going back to the True Story outline; can you identify where Kirsten mentions parts of the Story she had to come to terms with?
- Do some of her pre-conversion concerns resonate with things you hear from your friends, or in the stories you have been LISTENING in to during these weeks?

Kirsten's story was published in a Christian magazine. Let's listen to how she talks to her peers and work colleagues.

Video clip: *Kirsten Power interview on Media Buzz*

What strikes you about Kirsten's responses to the interviewer?

“Listening is a rare happening among human beings. You cannot listen to the word another is speaking if you are preoccupied with your appearance or impressing the other; or if you are trying to decide what you are going to say when the other stops talking, or if you are debating about whether the word being spoken is true or relevant or agreeable. Such matters may have their place, but only after listening to the word as the word is being uttered. Listening, in other words, is a primitive act of love, in which a person gives self to another's word, making self accessible and vulnerable to that word.” *William Stringfellow*

Explore

Read Acts 10:23b-48, Peter in the home of Cornelius

- Why did Peter go to Cornelius' house?
- In verse 29, Peter says "May I ask why you sent for me?" and then he listens to Cornelius talk. How does Peter respond after listening to Cornelius?
- How is Peter's version of the Jesus Story different, here, compared to his message in Acts 2?

What are you hearing from the people God has connected you with?

- #1 what would good and whole, and "as it should be," look like, according to your friends?
- #2 What do you hear of their aching heart? What are they yearning for?
How do they describe why they aren't realizing that? What is broken in them?
How are they seeking to solve their discontentment?
- #3 Does God-language ever show up in their story-telling? What do they know about the Jesus Story?
- #4 Do they have a community of healing in their lives?

Often people are falling short of their best intentions or desires, and that comes out in various ways in our conversations with people. What if we had a simple inquiry question in our back pocket: "*What is it that you are looking for, hoping for?*" Then, "*Why? Why does that matter so much to you?*"

Common Refrains

These are some common refrains from people about their situations, in response to a question like that. Can you imagine a Good News/Jesus Story response to these statements? [group exercise]

1. I am just trying to keep it all together; if I don't it's all going to fall apart. (I need to figure out how to get control) I feel anxious and fearful about my life situation, about the future
2. I'm afraid of what people will think; I'm looking for approval; I always feel like I have to match up to other people, or reach a certain standard
3. I keep being disappointed by people (spouse, family, friends, boss, politicians, even Christians); are there any good people out there?
4. I feel ashamed of things that I have done, that I can never get past them; they keep dragging me down.
5. Well, there's got to be more than this, right? Life's good, in many ways, but there's always this feeling of emptiness in the pit of my stomach.

But is there an earlier starting point in our everyday conversations?

Can we turn confirmation into reinterpretation? Often people are looking for their interpretations to be confirmed. They make a statement about some situation, and invite a response: "you know what I mean?" or "isn't that right?" Do we have a good news response that might allow for a moment of reflection, or "Oh I hadn't thought about it that way."

Can we turn advice into influence? We all look for input from others, for advice. The advice of others is most people's primary source of ideas and influence. A decision or choice has to be made, and they ask: "What would you do?" or "What do you think?" Do we have a good news response that asks the "What?" and "Why?" questions?

Can we turn complaint into lament? A common conversation form is moaning, complaining. Rather than viewing complaint as negative and to be avoided, what if complaint is just recognition of a broken world? Lament is acknowledgment of the broken circumstances, while trusting, imagining something better. Could we find a good news response that accepts complaint and imagines an alternative?

Can we turn anecdotes into good news stories? When people get together they tell snippets of their day, week as a way of filling conversation space. Not grand narratives, just a short incident, with an expression of how it impacted them. Could we tell a short story that starts, “wow, I had a similar situation the other day, and...” we just insert how our perspective might take us in a different direction.

Video clip: *Jared Siebert’s Making Sense Story*

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: Tell your story

The goal here is to not to intellectually tear them a new one. It’s NOT to find just the right arguments to pound them into the dirt. It’s NOT even to tell the Big Story of the universe and everything. The goal is to talk about you. To tell your story. (Look back at Session 6)

- Talk about how God made peace with you. Nothing fancy.
- Some of us have never thought much about our own story. Now is the time to start giving it some thought. This practice promotes gratitude in you by becoming aware of the many ways God has been present in your life.

Assignment: In the course of LISTENING to your friends and LOVING them, an opportunity may emerge to share your personal story of coming to faith (like Kirsten shared hers). You don’t have to “tell the Gospel in a nutshell” – leave that for another day – just TELL your story.

Prayer

God of the Universe, who notices us, who draws us to yourself, who listens to us; please give me ears to truly hear the stories of my friends. Father, help me to find the space to share my story with 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.

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

Go back to your Personal Story. Reflect on the connection points between your friend’s story and your own. Continue to develop your Personal Story for sharing with the group in Session 11.



Session Ten: Sharing “*truth*” in a pluralistic society

“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

Pause and look at the larger landscape of religion in Canada. How do we situate the Jesus Story among many other stories?

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?

Telling Our Stories

- How has your motivation for bearing witness been shifting during these weeks?
- Why would you want to share your faith story with a friend or family member? What would motivate you to do that?
- Were you part of a faith community before you believed in Jesus? Or did you come to belief, then found a church? (Belong, Believe)

Discover

Discuss “PLAUSIBILITY STRUCTURES / RELIGION IN CANADA [RESOURCE #12]

- What plausibility structures would Francis Collins and Kirsten Powers say they were starting with?
- What plausibility structures were you starting with in your journey to faith?

Video clip: *Religious landscape in Canada*

Video clip: *Shawna/Christine*

- What plausibility structure would you say Shawna and Christine are working with?

Explore

“Christians do not meet their partners in dialogue as those who possess the truth and the holiness of God but as those who bear witness to a truth and holiness that are God’s judgment on them and who are ready to hear the judgment spoken through the lips and life of their partner of another faith.” (Lesslie Newbigin, 1995: 181-182)

- Do we POSSESS/HOLD the truth and holiness of God? Are we offended or angered when people don’t believe what we believe? Should we try to PERSUADE/CONVINCE people to believe what we believe?
- What does it mean to BEAR WITNESS to truth?

Connecting Word and Deed

The habits or 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: Tell Your Story

The goal here is to not to intellectually tear them a new one. It's NOT to find just the right arguments to pound them into the dirt. It's NOT even to tell the Big Story of the universe and everything. The goal is to talk about you. To tell your story. (Look back at Session 6)

- Talk about how God made peace with you. Nothing fancy.
- Some of us have never thought much about our own story. Now is the time to start giving it some thought. This practice promotes gratitude in you by becoming aware of the many ways God has been present in your life.
- **How will you adjust your story for your friend given their starting point?**

Assignment: In the course of LISTENING to your friends and LOVING them, an opportunity may emerge to share your personal story of coming to faith (like Kirsten shared hers). You don't have to “tell the Gospel in a nutshell” – leave that for another day – just TELL your story.

Prayer

God of the Universe, who notices us, who draws us to yourself, who listens to us; please give me ears to truly hear the stories of my friends. Father, help me to find the space to share my story with 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.

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

Go back to your Personal Story. Reflect on the connection points between your friend's story and your own. Continue to develop your Personal Story for sharing with the group in Session 11.



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.