

Bearing Faithful Witness



Resources

The Free Methodist Church in Canada
www.fmcic.ca

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.

Resources

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RESOURCE #1

The Great Thanksgiving *(holy communion)*

The Invitation

You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who live in love and peace with your neighbours, and who intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking henceforth in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament for your comfort; and humbly bowing make your honest confession to Almighty God.

The General Confession

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Maker of all things, Judge of all people, who with great mercy has promised forgiveness and deliverance to all who turn to you with hearty repentance and true faith, we confess that we have sinned against you and are hopeless without your grace. Have mercy upon us, O merciful Father, have mercy upon us; pardon and deliver us from all our sins:

**from blindness of heart and lack of love;
from the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil;
from false doctrine and neglect of your Word;
from anxiety and lack of trust.**

O God, our Saviour, keep us this day without sin. Give us strength to serve and please you in newness of life, and to honour and praise your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Petition

Almighty God, you have faithfully watched over us, and graciously helped us; now hear our petitions:

**for good health and sound minds;
for strength to earn our bread;
for rest from worry and labour;
for safety in travel;
for protection from enemies;
for Christian homes; and for a just and peaceful nation.**

Out of your compassion give us those things which are good and proper for our souls, and protect us by your might in all our tribulations. Grant us in this world the peace that is from above, and bring us to everlasting life in the world to come, through Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray saying:

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

The Intercession

Almighty God, who created the world from nothing, and who sustains it by your powerful Word, support and protect us that we may serve you as intercessors in your world; and to that end hear our prayers for those in need:

**for the sick, the infirm and the aged;
for widows and orphans, the poor and oppressed;
for the lonely, discouraged, bereaved and heartbroken;
for those in bondage to sin, unmindful of God, without knowledge of the gospel of salvation.**

We pray too for all your servants who honour Christ in their work:

**for homemakers and wage earners;
for teachers and students;
for doctors, nurses, and others who serve the sick;
for labourers and executives;**

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**for farmers and city dwellers;
for the aged and the young;
for those who govern and those who are ruled.**

To each of these and to all others for whom we should pray, give wisdom, strength and the power to endure, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Great Thanksgiving

Almighty God, you created us to enjoy your fellowship; and even when we transgressed your command, you did not forsake us, but chastened us as a merciful Father; You called Abraham from the land of his fathers, and freed the children of Israel from bondage and slavery; you gave your law and sent your prophets to guide them in your ways; At the right time you gave the world your only Son, who by his birth to a virgin, and through his temptations and ministry, his suffering and death, his resurrection and ascension, opened to us the way to heaven; You sent your Holy Spirit, the Counsellor, who through the Apostles and the Church, called us to salvation; you adopted us and daily give us aid in the journey of faith by that same Spirit. Our hearts are full, O God, and in thanksgiving to you, we cry, Abba, Father. In confidence that you will bring us to our full inheritance, and give us our place at the heavenly table with your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, we offer thanksgiving, joining our voices with all the Church to confess:

**Christ has died,
Christ has risen,
Christ will come again.**

Prayer of Approach

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, send the power of your Holy Spirit upon us, that we may experience anew the suffering, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ. May your Spirit help us to know, in the breaking of this bread and the drinking of this cup, the presence of Christ who gave his body and blood for all. And may your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, united in service to the world. Amen.

Words of Consecration

In the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In like manner, after supper He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying: "Drink of this, all of you, for this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me."

Words of Distribution

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on Him in your heart, by faith with thanksgiving.

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

Benediction

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.

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RESOURCE #2

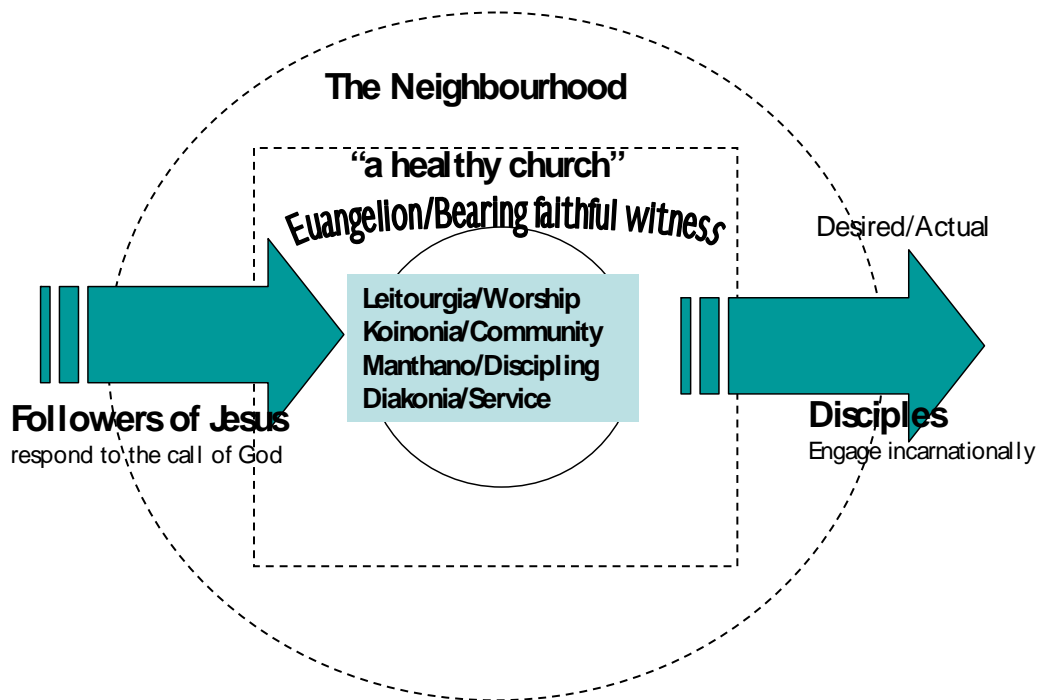
Rhythms and Practices at the Heart of Christian Community

These practices constitute the way of life (rhythms) that we are inviting people to enter into; they shape what we mean by the practical implications of the "good news" to be found in Jesus and God's reign of shalom; these practices are evangelism – they proclaim the good news story.

- **Worship/Leitourgia**; the public, welcoming, assembly of Christians where the Biblical Narrative is spoken, listened to, and discussed, where songs of adoration, celebration, and response are sung, where prayers are raised, and the Lord's Supper is entered into.
- **Community/Koinonia**; where love, dialogue, mutual care, prayer, shared life, forgiveness, and reconciliation, allow all participants to freely exercise their God-given, Spirit-empowered gifts, contributing to the life of the community for the common good
- **Disciple-making/Manthano**; incorporation through baptism and intentional formation of all who desire to enter into relationship with Jesus Christ the Master; a new people is formed, adhering to a new story shaped by Christian Scriptures; with new life, kingdom priorities, new disciplines and habits
- **Service/Diakonia**; the generous, outward, hospitable, ministering, interceding, healing orientation of Christian community -- offering sacrificial loving care wherever it is required

Bearing faithful witness (*euaggelion*); the summative testimony of the embodying and proclaiming rhythms of Christian community; to the degree that these rhythms have a robust life in our faith communities, we are automatically bearing faithful witness.

What tasks help us do that?



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RESOURCE #3

THE MESSAGE OF ANTIOCH FOR TODAY

IN THE BOOK OF ACTS THERE IS A STORY ABOUT THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN THE CITY OF ANTIOCH (11:19-30). ANTIOCH WAS A LARGE, COSMOPOLITAN CITY IN THE NORTH-EAST CORNER OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA – AT THE CROSS-ROADS OF TRADING ROUTES ON LAND AND SEA. IT CONNECTED PEOPLE FROM LOCATIONS IN AFRICA, EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST, ASIA AND CHINA.

INTO THIS CITY CAME A STRAGGLING GROUP OF JESUS-FOLLOWERS WHO HAD BEEN SCATTERED BY THE PERSECUTION BACK IN JERUSALEM. BUT THIS STRAGGLING GROUP HAD BEEN TRANSFORMED BY THEIR ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS – AND IT SHOWED! IN FACT, IT SAYS THEY WERE "TELLING THEM THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE LORD JESUS" (11:20). AND AS A RESULT, "A GREAT NUMBER OF PEOPLE BELIEVED AND TURNED TO THE LORD."

AS WE READ THROUGH THIS STORY, WE NOTE SEVERAL FACTORS:

- THESE WERE COMMITTED FOLLOWERS OF JESUS (IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION, THEY REMAINED TRUE TO THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS) (11:19)
- THEY WERE 'SPREADING THE WORD' (SPEAKING ABOUT JESUS SEEMED TO BE A NATURAL OVERFLOW OF THEIR EXPERIENCE) (11:19)
- THEY WERE SPREADING IT TO THOSE WHO MIGHT BE RECEPTIVE (WHATEVER THEIR BACKGROUND) (11:19-20)
- THERE WAS A GOD-DYNAMIC AT WORK ("THE LORD'S HAND WAS WITH THEM" (11:21); "WHAT THE GRACE OF GOD HAD DONE (11:23)")
- OBSERVERS WERE "GLAD" FOR THE SPIRITUAL DYNAMIC IN THE CONGREGATION (11:23)
- THE NEW BELIEVERS NEEDED TEACHING (11:26)
- THIS COMMUNITY OF JESUS-FOLLOWERS WERE NOTED FOR BEING "THE CHRIST-ONES" (11:26)
- THEY WERE A GENEROUS BUNCH OF PEOPLE (11:29)

TODAY MANY CHRISTIANS HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED THE DYNAMIC OF SHARING THEIR OWN GOOD NEWS STORY AND SEEING SOMEONE 'TURN TO THE LORD' AS A RESULT. LET'S FACE IT, AT THE PRESENT MOMENT THERE IS A LEGACY OF "BAD NEWS" WHEN IT COMES TO CHRISTIANS SPEAKING OF THEIR FAITH TO FAMILY, FRIENDS, NEIGHBOURS AND WORK COLLEAGUES. MANY NON-BELIEVERS HAVE PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, AND MANY CHRISTIANS DON'T REALLY KNOW HOW TO COMMUNICATE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A JESUS-FOLLOWER. IMPASSE.

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RESOURCE #4

RECLAIMING THE E-WORD

SHORTLY AFTER I BEGAN TEACHING AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY, A COLLEAGUE PLACED IN MY HANDS A BROCHURE INTRODUCING THE WOMEN'S INTERFAITH ACTION GROUP. THE BROCHURE DESCRIBED THE GROUP AS "A WEEKLY GATHERING OF WOMEN FROM ALL FAITHS, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO FEEL DRAWN TO THE SPIRITUAL, BUT WHO DO NOT CLAIM A PARTICULAR RELIGION." THE GROUP PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE ON CAMPUS IN PROVIDING A FORUM FOR SHARING AND DISCUSSING RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL HISTORIES, COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES. AS MY COLLEAGUE POINTED OUT, WHAT WAS ESPECIALLY INTERESTING ABOUT THE BROCHURE WAS THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE, IN PARTICULAR ITS USE OF THE WORD *EVANGELIZATION*:

AN ENVIRONMENT OF MUTUAL RESPECT IS MAINTAINED IN WHICH MEMBERS MAY FREELY SHARE BELIEFS AND DIFFERENCES WITHOUT FEAR OF DISPARAGEMENT OR EVANGELIZATION.

TO EVANGELIZE MEANS LITERALLY TO OFFER "GOOD NEWS" OR A "WELCOME MESSAGE." ISAIAH 52:7 CELEBRATES THE BRINGER OF SUCH GOOD NEWS:

HOW BEAUTIFUL ON THE MOUNTAINS ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS, WHO PROCLAIM PEACE, WHO BRING GOOD TIDINGS, WHO PROCLAIM SALVATION, WHO SAY TO ZION, "YOUR GOD REIGNS!"

BUT CLEARLY, TODAY EVANGELISM DOES NOT ALWAYS MEAN GOOD NEWS, AND THE FEET OF THE EVANGELIST ARE NOT CONSIDERED SO BEAUTIFUL. FOR MANY PEOPLE IN OUR WORLD, BOTH CHRISTIAN AND NON-CHRISTIAN, EVANGELISM IS NEITHER WELCOMED NOR WARRANTED. AS THE BROCHURE MADE CLEAR, THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE, WHERE EVANGELISM IS PERCEIVED AS SOMETHING TO BE FEARED, AS A BARRIER TO MUTUAL RESPECT, CAREFUL LISTENING, OPEN SHARING, AND COOPERATION.

BUT IT IS ALSO THE CASE IN THE WIDER CONTEXT OF AN INCREASINGLY PLURALISTIC CULTURE, WHERE THE NOTION OF EVANGELIZING IS AUTOMATICALLY CONNECTED TO AN ATTITUDE OF INTOLERANCE AND SUPERIORITY TOWARD OTHERS – A BELLIGERENT AND ONE-SIDED ATTEMPT TO CONVERT OTHERS TO OUR WAY OF SEEING THINGS, WITH THE NECESSARY IMPLICATION THAT THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE AS WE DO ARE LOST OR IN ERROR. FOR SOME, THE WORD CALLS TO MIND A SHAMEFUL HISTORY OF FORCED CONVERSIONS, INQUISITIONS, FRAUDULENT TELEVISION PREACHERS, RELIGIOUS WARS, CRUSADES, GENOCIDE, COLONIZATION, AND THE RUTHLESS EXPANSION OF WESTERN POWER THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. THE E-WORD HAS BECOME A DIRTY WORD – AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE CHRISTIAN AND AN AFFRONT TO THE NON-CHRISTIAN.

IS IT POSSIBLE NONETHELESS TO RECLAIM THE E-WORD AS EXPRESSING SOMETHING POSITIVE, VITAL AND BEAUTIFUL ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN LIFE? MIGHT EVANGELISM BE A PRACTICE THAT CALLS FORTH THE HIGHEST IN THE CREATIVE ENERGIES, INTELLECT, AND IMAGINATION OF CHRISTIANS RATHER THAN A CRASS EXERCISE IN MARKETING THE CHURCH TO CONSUMERS WITHIN A WORLD OF ABUNDANT AND COMPETING OPTIONS? I THINK SO. BUT GIVEN THE WEIGHTY CULTURAL, HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BAGGAGE ATTACHED TO EVANGELISM AND GIVEN THE CHURCH'S TEMPTATION TO ACQUIESCE TO THE WORLD'S DEMAND THAT THE GOSPEL BE GOOD NEWS ON THE WORLD'S OWN TERMS, ANY SUCH RECONSTRUCTION OF EVANGELISM WILL NOT BE SIMPLE OR EASY.

RETHINKING AND RECONSTRUCTING EVANGELISM IS A TASK THAT MUST BE TAKEN UP IN EVERY ERA AND IN EVERY PART OF THE WORLD WHERE THE CHURCH TAKES SERIOUSLY IT'S CALLING TO "ANNOUNCE PEACE" AND TO BEAR FAITHFUL, PUBLIC AND EMBODIED WITNESS TO GOD'S REIGN IN ITS OWN CONTEXT.

FROM BRYAN STONE, **EVANGELISM AFTER CHRISTENDOM**, P9-10

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RESOURCE #5

BEARING FAITHFUL WITNESS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THEIR LIVES THAT WAS SO ATTRACTIVE? MICHAEL GREEN OFFERS SIX FACTORS:

THEIR EXAMPLE: "THE TRUTH OF THEIR CLAIMS MUST HAVE BEEN ASSESSED BY THE CONSISTENCY OF THEIR LIVES WITH WHAT THEY PROFESSED. THAT IS WHY THE EMPHASIS ON THE LINK BETWEEN MISSION AND HOLINESS OF LIFE IS GIVEN SUCH PROMINENCE . . . PETER HOLDS BOTH TOGETHER WHEN HE IN ONE AND THE SAME BREATH URGES HOLINESS OF LIFE SPRINGING FROM "REVERENCE FOR CHRIST AS LORD IN YOUR HEARTS", AND OUTREACH TO OTHERS, "BE READY ALWAYS TO GIVEN AN ACCOUNT OF YOUR FAITH TO ANYONE WHO ASKS YOU A REASON FOR THE HOPE YOU CHERISH."

THEIR FELLOWSHIP: THE EARLY CHRISTIANS USED THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF INFORMAL ASSOCIATIONS THAT WERE COMMON IN ROMAN SOCIETY AT THE TIME. "BUT MATERIALLY THERE WAS A DIFFERENCE – IN THE QUALITY OF THE FELLOWSHIP. HERE WERE SOCIETIES IN WHICH ARISTOCRATS AND SLAVES, ROMAN CITIZENS AND PROVINCIALS, RICH AND POOR, MIXED ON EQUAL TERMS AND WITHOUT DISTINCTION: SOCIETIES WHICH POSSESSED A QUALITY OF CARING AND LOVE THAT WAS UNIQUE. HEREIN LAY ITS ATTRACTION."

THEIR TRANSFORMED CHARACTER: JUSTIN CLAIMS "WE WHO FORMERLY DELIGHTED IN FORNICATION, NOW EMBRACE CHASTITY ALONE; WE WHO FORMERLY USED MAGIC ARTS DEDICATE OURSELVES TO THE GOOD AND THE UNBEGOTTEN GOD; WE WHO VALUED ABOVE ALL THINGS THE ACQUISITION OF WEALTH AND POSSESSIONS NOW BRING ALL WE HAVE INTO A COMMON STOCK AND SHARE IT OUT TO ALL ACCORDING TO THEIR NEED; WE WHO HATED AND DESTROYED ONE ANOTHER, AND ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR DIFFERENT MANNER OF LIFE WOULD NOT LIVE WITH PEOPLE OF ANOTHER TRIBE, NOW, SINCE THE COMING OF CHRIST, LIVE HAPPILY WITH THEM."

THEIR JOY: CONVERSION AND JOY ARE CLOSELY RELATED IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, AND IT REMAINED A CHARACTERISTIC THING ABOUT THE EARLY CHRISTIANS WHICH ATTRACTED OTHERS INTO THEIR COMPANY. THE NEW FAITH DID NOT MAKE THEM MISERABLE. OFTEN OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES WERE UNPLEASANT ENOUGH, BUT THAT COULD NOT ROB OF THE JOY WHICH WAS THEIR CHRISTIAN BIRTHRIGHT.

THEIR ENDURANCE: THIS JOY OF THE CHRISTIANS BOTH IN LIFE AND DEATH IS CLOSELY LINKED WITH THEIR PATIENT ENDURANCE OF SCOURGING, INSULTS AND MARTYRDOM WHICH HAD AN INCALCULABLE EFFECT IN BRINGING OBSERVERS TO FAITH. "THE MORE OFTEN WE ARE MOWED DOWN BY YOU, THE MORE IN NUMBER WE GROW. THE BLOOD OF CHRISTIANS IS SEED," SAID TERTULLIAN.

THEIR POWER: THE PREACHERS WERE SO FULL OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD, SO PERSUADED OF THE TRUTH AND RELEVANCE OF THEIR MESSAGE THAT IT OVERFLOWED FROM THEM AND PEOPLE RECEIVED WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY, "NOT ONLY IN WORD BUT ALSO IN POWER AND IN THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WITH FULL CONVICTION." IN A SOCIETY BORED WITH THE ENDLESS CHATTER OF PHILOSOPHERS THIS WAS, IN ITSELF, IMPRESSIVE. BUT THERE WAS ANOTHER DIMENSION TO THIS POWER. IT INVOLVED HEALINGS AND EXORCISMS, AND THIS WAS A FACTOR OF INCALCULABLE IMPORTANCE FOR THE ADVANCE OF THE GOSPEL IN A WORLD WHICH HAD INADEQUATE MEDICAL SERVICES AND WAS OPPRESSED WITH BELIEF IN DEMON FORCES OF EVERY KIND.

[EVANGELISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH, MICHAEL GREEN, P.178-193]

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RESOURCE #6

Journey to Faith in Jesus

The book, *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest?* (James Engel) introduced a tool which has become widely used and known as 'the Engel Scale'. This is our modification of that tool. The role of a Christian friend and of a Christian community can be imagined as "spiritual mid-wifery." Where we are supportive of the spiritual drawings (preventive grace) that are already happening in the lives of our friends. Where we discern and pay attention to those who are "showing signs" of response.

Journey to Faith in Jesus		Role of Christian friend	Role of Christian community
No God framework; personal search	-8	Noticing, Praying Presence	A community that practices a Christian worldview in the presence of others
Vague awareness and belief in "god"; God as an option	-7	Noticing, Praying, Listening Relationship; living by a Christian worldview	A community that makes specific, loving connections
Aware of the Jesus Story	-6	Listening, Loving Personal identification as a Jesus follower	A community that can articulate the Jesus Story both personally and corporately
Grasp Implications of the Jesus Story	-5	Listening, Loving, Telling Proclamation; tell the Story	A community that helpfully, respectfully, challenges people to respond
Positive attitude toward the Story	-4	Loving Healing/signs	
Grasp personal need; counting cost	-3	Praying, Telling, Inviting	
Decision to act	-2	Inviting	
Repentance & Faith;	-1		
REBIRTH AND RENEWAL BY THE HOLY SPIRIT			
Evaluation of decision	+1	Encouragement	Celebrates new birth
Incorporation into Christian community	+2	Personal guide into community life Help lay foundations in common rhythms of Christian life	A community that centres around public worship, healthy body life, intentional disciple-making and active service in the neighbourhood
Renovating; life in Christ (loving God & neighbour)	+3	Encouraging development of disciplines and practices that serve as	
Exercising gifts in confident service	+4	means of grace for the transforming work of the Holy Spirit	

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RESOURCE #7

Reasons Why We Don't Tell our Stories and Reasons Why We Should Tell our Stories

Loreli Cockram

A few years ago I was chatting with my friend about the idea that every believer has a story to tell. We all have a "before," our life without Jesus; a "middle," or crossroads, where we receive him; and an "after," our life with Jesus. Even if our "after" isn't yet "complete," we can still attest to the power of Jesus in our lives.

My friend nodded emphatically, "Yes, everyone has a story!" "So what's yours?" I asked her. "Oh, I don't have one!" she answered.

I laughed at the time, but in my experience of trying to help people tell their stories, I realize that many believers have the same response. When asked to tell their story of Jesus working in their lives, they are reluctant. Few people tell their story easily, many people don't tell it at all.

There are different reasons for this. Here are some:

- **We do not want to put ourselves on a pedestal.** That seems valid - a good Christian would not want to steal the glory from God. Far be it from us to flaunt the good things we have done, especially if Jesus is the one doing the work in us. At the least, it could be seen as bragging and that's just bad manners.
- **We want to keep our stories private.** Granted, some stories have sensitive information that should be revealed in an appropriate setting. But oftentimes we over-protect our stories. We tend to hold on tightly to the changes God has made in our lives. We may not want to be judged by our past or be accountable for our future. Letting others know lets them in.
- **We don't have all the answers.** Telling our stories invites questions from others. If we have had an encounter with God, then people will want to know more about it. Perhaps we don't feel confident in our Biblical knowledge or are afraid there will be questions we just can't answer, so we don't open ourselves up to embarrassment.
- **We don't think our stories are interesting enough.** Like my friend above, some of us may feel that because we weren't rescued from a down-and-out lifestyle or there wasn't a major visible transformation, then we have nothing to say. This is often true of people raised in Christian homes, who accepted Jesus at a young age, and have lived a fairly wholesome life, as compared to someone who was saved off the streets or has "juicy details." The latter attracts an attentive audience.

But most Christians would agree that if God is doing a redeeming, transformative work in our lives, this is something wonderful, which ought to be shared.

One of my favourite verses is Philemon 1:6: I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. (NIV)

When we "share our faith" with each other, we become partners in the gospel. It increases our awareness of the good things we have in Christ. If this is so, to keep our stories to ourselves would be a disservice to the Christian community.

What actually happens when we tell our stories?

- **We give God the glory.** When we recount the wonderful ways God has worked in our lives, the changes he's made in us, the ways we want to serve him, and the fruit we see because of it, it gives opportunity for others to praise Him.
- **It encourages and inspires others to action.** Paul commends Philemon for "refreshing the saints." I think of the stories I've been privileged to share on my blog - each interview I've carried out and each story I've written had the surprising effect of giving me joy in my own ministry. To know that there are

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others out there, in the trenches, using their gifts, working for the kingdom, is rejuvenating. We're in this together.

- **It broadens our perspective and knowledge of God.** God did not intend for one of us to have all the answers, he intended that we glean the answers and understanding from each other, as a body, united in Christ. When we hear how God responds uniquely to each person, we receive an education about the one who made us. The specifics of those stories reveal the depths of his love.
- **In a world full of bad news, it brings redemption to the forefront.** We have access to the news 24/7. Most of it is bad news, and often skewed to push a worldview that doesn't align with the believer's. But there are redemptive stories happening all around us that, if told, could put these sensationalistic pieces into perspective. The world pushes fear, but God presents love.

Recently I tuned in to [Focus on the Family](#), where the host, Jim Daly, told the listening audience that day, after a particularly moving interview, "We don't own our testimonies; they are bought at a price, the blood of Jesus Christ."

Perhaps if we believed that our stories, along with our lives, belong to Christ, we would be open to sharing them freely.

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RESOURCE #8

What Kind of Witness Are You?

Dan Sheffield

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.

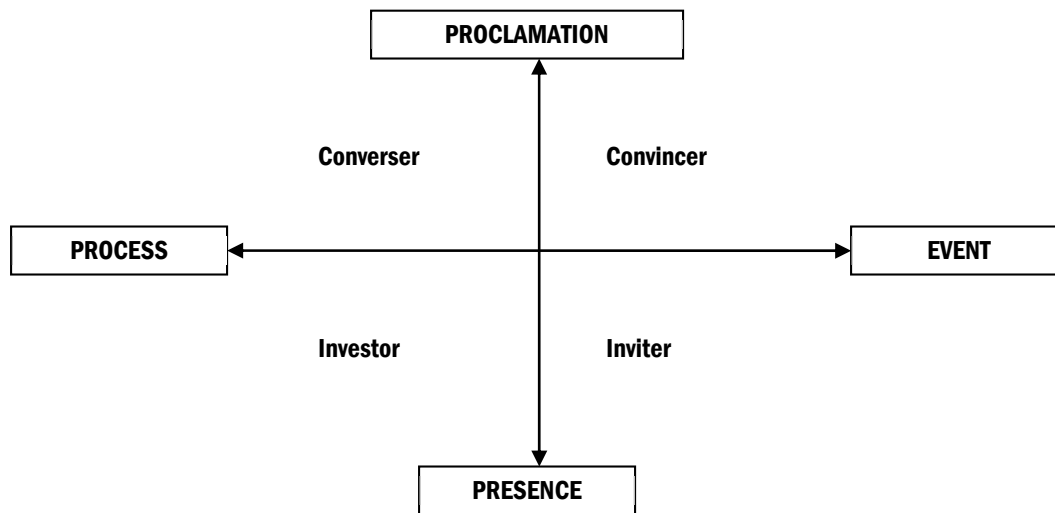
We need to recover the process-oriented way of thinking about conversion as a way of understanding how people come to Jesus. We need to recover images of journey, pilgrimage, quest; along the lines of "the Emmaus Road" experience (Luke 24:13-35).

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.

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INVESTORS walk with people through the entire process of conversion, from the beginning of their friendship all the way through conversion and beyond. They gravitate toward a more extended process of exposing people to Jesus. They typically go deep with a few people rather than spreading themselves around with a lot of people. Think of Jesus with his disciples.

INVITERS woo friends to accompany them into strategic environments that allow them greater exposure to Jesus. They mediate the good news primarily through a relationship. They are catalytic in bringing people together with settings where the good news will be communicated in meaningful ways. Think of Andrew bringing his brother Peter.

CONVINCERS make persuasive and compelling presentations of the good news. They gravitate toward situations that require explaining and even defending the gospel. They communicate clearly within a limited, focused, period of time while inviting a considered response from the person with whom they are sharing. Think of Philip speaking with the Ethiopian eunuch.

CONVERSERS help their friends discover the meaning of the gospel in an incremental fashion, allowing time for processing and internalizing the implications of the message. They comfortably talk about Jesus in a way that is shaped by the other person’s interests and situation – more in sound-bites, rather than the entire album. Think of Jesus with the woman at the well.

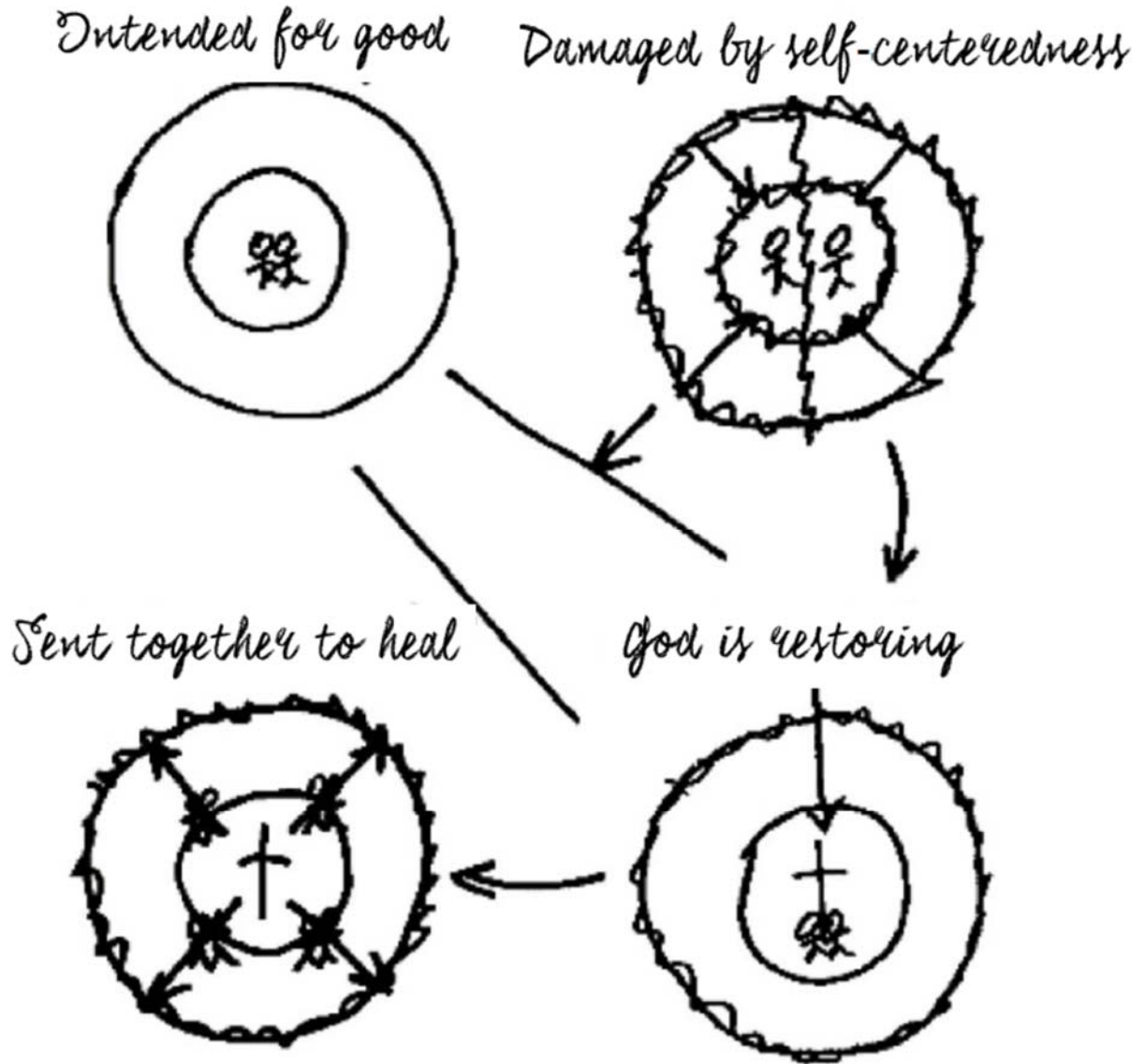
With insights from Alan Hirsch & Tim Catchim, **The Permanent Revolution**, Jossey-Bass, 2012.

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RESOURCE #9

True Story



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RESOURCE #10

Fox News' Highly Reluctant Jesus Follower

Of all people surprised that I became an evangelical Christian, I'm the most surprised.

Kirsten Powers

Just seven years ago, if someone had told me that I'd be writing for *Christianity Today* magazine about how I came to believe in God, I would have laughed out loud. If there was one thing in which I was completely secure, it was that I would never adhere to any religion—especially to evangelical Christianity, which I held in particular contempt.

I grew up in the Episcopal Church in Alaska, but my belief was superficial and flimsy. It was borrowed from my archaeologist father, who was so brilliant he taught himself to speak and read Russian. When I encountered doubt, I would fall back on the fact that he believed.

Leaning on my father's faith got me through high school. But by college it wasn't enough, especially because as I grew older he began to confide in me his own doubts. What little faith I had couldn't withstand this revelation. From my early 20s on, I would waver between atheism and agnosticism, never coming close to considering that God could be real.

After college I worked as an appointee in the Clinton administration from 1992 to 1998. The White House surrounded me with intellectual people who, if they had any deep faith in God, never expressed it. Later, when I moved to New York, where I worked in Democratic politics, my world became aggressively secular. Everyone I knew was politically left-leaning, and my group of friends was overwhelmingly atheist.

I sometimes hear Christians talk about how terrible life must be for atheists. But our lives were not terrible. Life actually seemed pretty wonderful, filled with opportunity and good conversation and privilege. I know now that it was not as wonderful as it could have been. But you don't know what you don't know. How could I have missed something I didn't think existed?

Very Open-Minded

To the extent that I encountered Christians, it was in the news cycle. And inevitably they were saying something about gay people or feminists. I didn't feel I was missing much. So when I began dating a man who was into Jesus, I was not looking for God. In fact, the week before I met him, a friend had asked me if I had any deal breakers in dating. My response: "Just nobody who is religious."

A few months into our relationship, my boyfriend called to say he had something important to talk to me about. I remember exactly where I was sitting in my West Village apartment when he said, "Do you believe Jesus is your Savior?" My stomach sank. I started to panic. *Oh no*, was my first thought. *He's crazy*.

When I answered no, he asked, "Do you think you could ever believe it?" He explained that he was at a point in life when he wanted to get married and felt that I could be that person, but he couldn't marry a non-Christian. I said I didn't want to mislead him—that I would never believe in Jesus.

Then he said the magic words for a liberal: "Do you think you could keep an open mind about it?" Well, of course. "I'm very open-minded!"

Even though I wasn't at all. I derided Christians as anti-intellectual bigots who were too weak to face the reality that there is no rhyme or reason to the world. I had found this man's church attendance an oddity to overlook, not a point in his favor.

As he talked, I grew conflicted. On the one hand, I was creeped out. On the other hand, I had enormous respect for him. He is smart, educated, and intellectually curious. I remember thinking, *What if this is true, and I'm not even willing to consider it?*

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A few weeks later I went to church with him. I was so clueless about Christianity that I didn't know that some Presbyterians were evangelicals. So when we arrived at the Upper East Side service of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, I was shocked and repelled by what I saw. I was used to the high-church liturgy of my youth. We were meeting in an auditorium with a band playing what I later learned was "praise music." I thought, *How am I going to tell him I can never come back?*

But then the pastor preached. I was fascinated. I had never heard a pastor talk about the things he did. Tim Keller's sermon was intellectually rigorous, weaving in art and history and philosophy. I decided to come back to hear him again. Soon, hearing Keller speak on Sunday became the highlight of my week. I thought of it as just an interesting lecture—not really church. I just tolerated the rest of it in order to hear him. Any person who is familiar with Keller's preaching knows that he usually brings Jesus in at the end of the sermon to tie his points together. For the first few months, I left feeling frustrated: *Why did he have to ruin a perfectly good talk with this Jesus nonsense?*

Each week, Keller made the case for Christianity. He also made the case against atheism and agnosticism. He expertly exposed the intellectual weaknesses of a purely secular worldview. I came to realize that even if Christianity wasn't the real thing, neither was atheism.

I began to read the Bible. My boyfriend would pray with me for God to reveal himself to me. After about eight months of going to hear Keller, I concluded that the weight of evidence was on the side of Christianity. But I didn't feel any connection to God, and frankly, I was fine with that. I continued to think that people who talked of hearing from God or experiencing God were either delusional or lying. In my most generous moments, I allowed that they were just imagining things that made them feel good.

Then one night in 2006, on a trip to Taiwan, I woke up in what felt like a strange cross between a dream and reality. Jesus came to me and said, "Here I am." It felt so real. I didn't know what to make of it. I called my boyfriend, but before I had time to tell him about it, he told me he had been praying the night before and felt we were supposed to break up. So we did. Honestly, while I was upset, I was more traumatized by Jesus visiting me.

Completely True

I tried to write off the experience as misfiring synapses, but I couldn't shake it. When I returned to New York a few days later, I was lost. I suddenly felt God everywhere and it was terrifying. More important, it was unwelcome. It felt like an invasion. I started to fear I was going crazy.

I didn't know what to do, so I spoke with writer Eric Metaxas, whom I had met through my boyfriend and who had talked with me quite a bit about God. "You need to be in a Bible study," he said. "And Kathy Keller's Bible study is the one you need to be in." I didn't like the sound of that, but I was desperate. My whole world was imploding. How was I going to tell my family or friends about what had happened?

Nobody would understand. I didn't understand. (It says a lot about the family in which I grew up that one of my most pressing concerns was that Christians would try to turn me into a Republican.)

I remember walking into the Bible study. I had a knot in my stomach. In my mind, only weirdoes and zealots went to Bible studies. I don't remember what was said that day. All I know is that when I left, everything had changed. I'll never forget standing outside that apartment on the Upper East Side and saying to myself, "It's true. It's completely true." The world looked entirely different, like a veil had been lifted off it. I had not an iota of doubt. I was filled with indescribable joy.

The horror of the prospect of being a devout Christian crept back in almost immediately. I spent the next few months doing my best to wrestle away from God. It was pointless. Everywhere I turned, there he was. Slowly there was less fear and more joy. The Hound of Heaven had pursued me and caught me—whether I liked it or not.

Kirsten Powers is a contributor to USA Today and a columnist for Newsweek /The Daily Beast. She is a Democratic commentator at Fox News .

This article is located at: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/november/fox-news-highly-reluctant-jesus-follower-kirstenpowers.html> - [posted 10/22/2013]

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RESOURCE #11

Belonging and Believing

Stuart Murray, excerpts from chapter 1 of **Church After Christendom**

The language of 'belonging' and 'believing' (and less often 'behaving') has become familiar in discussions about faith, church and mission. It offers helpful perspectives on issues facing churches after Christendom.

Researchers and sociologists, examining the relationship between what people believe and their participation in religious institutions, have identified two common positions – 'believing without belonging' and 'belonging before believing'. Some people do not belong to a church but identify themselves as Christians and hold beliefs that are more or less consistent with those who do belong. Others participate in church before they identify themselves as Christians or decide what they believe.

What factors have prompted 'belonging before believing' even in churches that previously required that belief precede participation? ... The most obvious are the cultural shifts signaled by the terms 'postmodernity' and 'post-Christendom':

- In postmodernity, people are suspicious of institutions and more interested in whether beliefs work in practice than whether they are theoretically true. So belonging before believing is necessary to test whether Christians live out in their communities what they claim to be true.
- In post-Christendom, knowledge of Christianity is limited; people need longer to understand and respond to the gospel. Furthermore, church culture is alien, so exploratory participation is safer than making a definite commitment.

Many emerging churches practice 'belonging before believing', considering this vital for engaging with a postmodern constituency. This approach attracts refugees from churches with firm boundaries that have resisted this paradigm shift. A 'centered-set' model of community is also popular, in contradistinction to the 'bounded-set' model operating in many inherited churches. Centered-set communities represent a dynamic and flexible approach, allowing people to journey towards or away from a church without encountering fixed entry or exit points.

Discussions about the relationship between belonging and believing have highlighted significant missional and pastoral issues:

- The inadequacy of equating Christians exclusively with those who belong to churches.
- The importance of affirming the faith journeys of those whose conversion is gradual.
- The limitations of institutional membership models in contemporary culture.
- The challenge of building churches that faithfully and attractively incarnate the gospel they proclaim.
- The implications of prioritizing core values over boundary maintenance.

Believing and belonging

In pre-Christendom (roughly the first three centuries before the Christendom shift), believing and belonging were well-integrated. Belonging was vital for believers as a deviant minority in an alien environment; and only believers would dare belong to an illegal organization subject to persecution.

Although Christians shared their faith freely with friends and neighbours, church meetings were not open to outsiders: the danger of spies infiltrating the community precluded this. Those who expressed interest in Christianity explored this through a lengthy and demanding process known as catechesis. This explained what Christians believed and how they behaved. It also assessed whether enquirers were ready to take further steps towards belonging. Catechists assumed no familiarity with the Christian story or its values; and, since belonging meant participating in a counter-cultural community, learning what to believe and how to behave were both necessary. Neither belonging before believing nor believing without belonging was feasible. Growth in believing and belonging (and behaving) went hand in hand...

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Belonging but not yet believing

We will need hospitable post-Christendom churches in which those who do not yet believe can participate as they explore faith. But 'belonging before believing' is actually the classic Christendom model. If we work with it in post-Christendom, we must beware Christendom temptations – waiting for people to come to us rather than going to them, downplaying conversion (whether through crisis or process) and underestimating the necessary induction process.

Believing but not yet belonging

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 attractional 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.

Those who become believers may not assume 'belonging' is an important expression of 'believing'. They may not be averse to belonging, but church participation will not be automatic for them. But those who believe before they belong – even more than those who belong before they believe – will need more thorough discipling than most churches thought necessary in the last decades of Christendom. Post-Christendom converts, like pre-Christendom converts, will be joining counter-cultural communities with deviant values and beliefs rooted in an unfamiliar story.

Neither belonging nor believing

One category remains. In post-Christendom the vast majority of people will probably neither belong nor believe. Projections based on a continuation of current patterns of church decline suggest the Christian community will be much smaller by 2030 than it is today. Projections based on measurements of what people believe indicate believing without belonging will also diminish. There is nothing deterministic about this, but honesty and realism are important if we are to respond faithfully and creatively to the challenges ahead.

What is less clear is the relationship between ceasing to believe and ceasing to belong. Stephen Green writes: 'Conventional wisdom and common sense suggest that people stopped going to church because they no longer believed what the churches taught them. Perhaps the causal mechanism was really closer to the opposite: they stopped believing because they stopped going.'

At the heart of our response must be recalibration of the church as a cross-cultural missionary movement. Believing and belonging may be more integrally connected in post-Christendom than they have been since pre-Christendom. Belonging before believing may persist, but belonging without believing will surely disappear; and believing without belonging will be unsustainable in post-Christendom, where both believing and belonging will be minority pursuits of 'resident aliens' in a strange new world...

Churches with healthy centers are secure enough to welcome those who are exploring faith and searching for authenticity. They are relaxed, non-judgmental communities where questions, doubts, dissent and fears can be expressed, and where ethical issues do not preclude acceptance. They are inclusive without compromising, communities with deep convictions that are nevertheless open to fresh insights, churches that allow and encourage critical engagement with beliefs and behaviour but test everything by its congruence with their founding story.

Is this model a legitimate way of describing the community that travelled with Jesus? He invited people to follow him, to become disciples and commit themselves to the vision and values of God's kingdom, but to remain open to others and to fresh insights rather than thinking they had arrived. Is it the model operating in Acts 11 as Peter and the Jerusalem church assess his experience in light of their core convictions and the life and teaching of Jesus? This principled flexibility allows them to weigh up Peter's report, welcome Cornelius and debate what counter-cultural discipleship might mean for Gentiles. Will post-Christendom churches find the centered-set model liberating and sustaining?

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Conversion

Acts 11 records a double conversion – not only Cornelius and his household, but also Peter and the Jerusalem church. This conversion was transformational for Cornelius and for the mission of a hitherto Jewish church. Conversion involves a paradigm shift, a new way of seeing the world. Whenever mission involves evangelism rather than proselytism (imposing our norms), double conversions like this will occur.

Conversion is another biblical dynamic the Christendom shift has distorted. Sensitive Christians shy away from this terminology, aware that it connotes pressure to conform to particular beliefs and behaviour and implies submission to the superior wisdom and righteousness of those already 'converted'. Conversion historically has often meant an imperialistic (and sometimes coercive) demand for obedience to the institutions, creed and ethical norms of a dominant church.

...

But the understandable aversion of Christians and others to conversion language must not preclude the recovery in post-Christendom churches of an authentic biblical emphasis on conversion. There are dangers here. Does 'belonging before believing' delay indefinitely questions of ultimate allegiance? Do process evangelism courses downplay the crisis of decisive commitment to Jesus Christ as lord? Do centered-set churches imply no paradigm shift is necessary for those who would follow Jesus?

...

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.

This understanding of conversion changes the tone and content of evangelism. Peter's vision, the shock to his theology it represented and his encounter with Cornelius affected his message. His opening words – 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts those from every nation who fear him and do what is right' – are humble, grateful and directed as much to himself as to Cornelius.

The testimony of the New Testament, pre-Christendom churches and later dissenting groups is consistent: conversion is crucial for building Christian communities. Post-Christendom churches will disavow the Christendom distortions and welcome the opportunity to recover a gracious but radical understanding of conversion.

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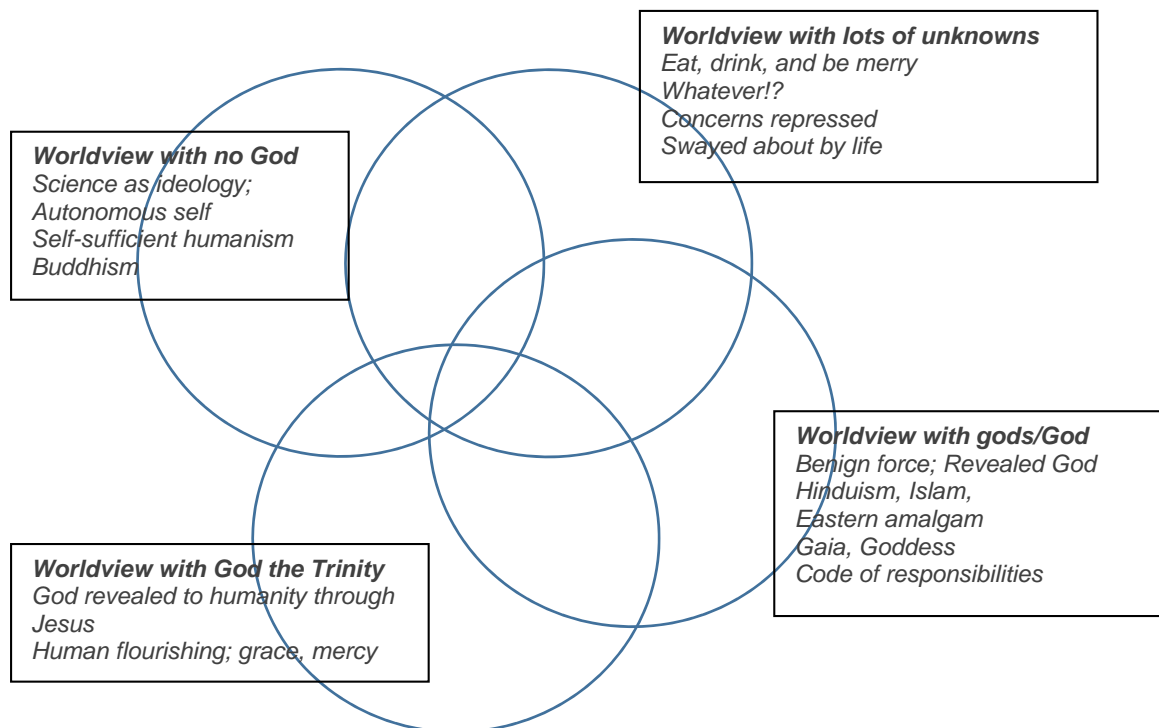
RESOURCE #12

Plausibility Structures

Everything that we believe is filtered through our plausibility structures — belief-forming apparatus that acts as a gatekeeper, letting in evidence that is matched against what we already consider to be possible. Plausibility structures filter out claims that we believe cannot be reasonable or potentially true. They don't necessarily tell us if a claim is true, only that the truth of the claim appears plausible enough for us to accept and that we are not wholly unwarranted in thinking it could be true. Whether we are gullible or skeptical, the beliefs we accumulate are those that have been filtered through plausibility structures at the individual and cultural level. These eventually form our worldview, which itself becomes a broad strainer that filters out beliefs that we won't even consider to be possibly true.

For example, if I were to find a box of cookies in my kitchen cabinet I would assume that my wife had bought them at the store and placed them there herself. If someone were to argue that tree-dwelling elves baked the cookies, packaged them for their corporate employer, and stashed them in my pantry, I would have a difficult time believing their claim; the existence of unionized tree-dwelling elves is simply not a part of my plausibility structure. (Joe Carter)

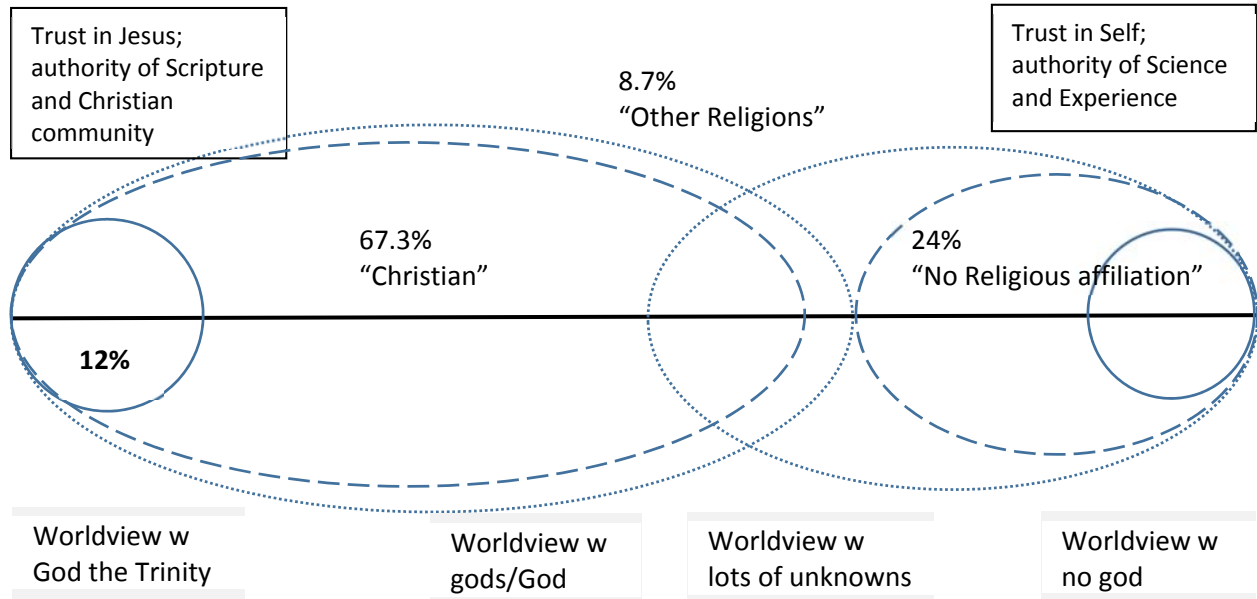
"Conversion cannot be a matter of being 'convinced' of the truth, credibility or utility of Christian claims within a non-Christian plausibility structure." [Bryan Stone, 2007: 269]



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Religion: Situating our Canadian Context



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RESOURCE #13

Practices for Bearing Faithful Witness

Connecting Word and Deed

Developing 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.



The Practice: Pray

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.

Prayer: 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.

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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-centered-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.

- What would good and whole, and "as it should be," look like according to them?
- 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?
- 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.

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.



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?

Prayer: God of the Universe, who notices us, who draws us to yourself, who listens to us, who loves us unconditionally, please reveal to me a way to demonstrate your love flowing through me 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.

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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, who loves us, please open up an opportunity to tell my own faith story 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.



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.

We are the grace-radiating presence of God in the lives of our friends. We are their first impression of God incarnate, the first text that they read, the first Word 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.