

SESSION 01

Begin With Love



Overview

Have you ever thought about what needed to happen for you to begin following a Jewish Rabbi who lived almost two millennia ago?

Well, somebody *needed* to tell somebody, who *needed* to tell somebody, who *needed* to tell somebody who at some point in your life, *decided* to tell you about the good news of Jesus.

Our lives in Christ hinge on the practice of witness: where we as apprentices of Jesus open up our lives to others in love, testifying to the good news of Jesus through our words and way of life in community.

And while it's true that we all would not be following Jesus the way we are today without this practice — many of us may also admittedly experience a certain allergic response to the idea of “evangelism.”

It brings up images of uncompassionate preaching on street corners, unsolicited conversations, or perhaps more painfully, well-meaning invitations and interactions that are met with hostility.

But what if our witness to the person of Jesus could be more ordinary and less forced than what we may initially imagine?

And what if the starting place for this practice was not pressure, fear, or obligation, but love?

Opening Questions

When instructed, circle up in triads (smaller groups of 3-5 people) and discuss the following questions:

- 01 What brought you to the Witness Practice? What are you hoping to see God do in your life through it?

- 02 What's your primary feeling about growing as a witness of the life you have found in Jesus? Excitement? Fear? Inadequacy?

- 03 When you think of what it looks like to share the good news of Jesus to others, what do you initially imagine?

- 04 Share a moment when you saw or heard someone beautifully share the good news of Jesus through words or deeds with someone who wasn't following Him. What made that story memorable for you?

Teaching

Key Scripture

Acts 1v8

Session Summary

- Jesus envisions the gospel going out to every corner of the world, *through* our witness.
- Witness is the practice of intentionally opening up our lives to others in love and testifying to the good news of Jesus through our words, and our way of life in community.
- There are five thresholds that Western people cross to become followers of Jesus:

01 Trusting a Christian

02 Becoming curious

03 Opening up to change

04 Seeking after God

05 Living in the Kingdom

- The invitation to witness is about loving people wherever they are on this journey.
- Step one is to allow the Spirit of Jesus to grow his compassion for others within our hearts.

Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about the teaching. Pause the video for a few minutes to discuss in small groups:

- 01 Consider one person who had to be told about Jesus so you could come to know and follow Him. What reflections do you have on that story?

- 02 What fears or concerns do you have about sharing your faith in our culture?

- 03 Of the five thresholds Western people typically cross to become followers of Jesus (see Session Summary), which most stands out to you, and why?

- 04 If you were to share your faith today, do you think you would be motivated more by obligation, ambition, or love? How do you hope that motivation will change or be refined throughout this Practice?

IN COMMUNITY — LEARN

Closing Prayer

Take a few deep breaths, become aware of God's presence, and pray this prayer slowly, leaving short silence between each line.

Father, you have given us your
Son, who so willingly came to us
from your heart, entering our
struggle, and laying down his life,
Help us know what it means to
love like you, and to faithfully offer
your life, through ours, to the world
around us.

Amen.



Exercise

Identify three to five people you care about who are not followers of Jesus and begin praying for them daily.

We encourage you to write down their names on a small piece of paper, put it in your pocket or somewhere prominent in your home, and then pray for them daily from now to the end of this Practice.

As a part of this exercise, we invite you to plot those three to five people in the different thresholds shared in this session's teaching. Once you have placed them, ask God to speak to you about the part he is inviting you to play for each particular person.

01 Write down the names of three to five people who are not currently following Jesus that you want to pray for daily throughout this Practice.

Person 01:

Person 02:

Person 03:

Person 04:

Person 05:

ON YOUR OWN — PRACTICE

02 Place each of those three to five people in the below category that you think best represents where they are in their spiritual journey.

Trusting a Christian

Becoming curious

Opening up to change

Seeking after God

Living in the Kingdom

Begin With Love

ON YOUR OWN — PRACTICE

03 Lastly, set aside some time now to ask God to speak to you, in your mind and heart, about what they need to experience next, and what part you play in it. What do you sense needs to happen next in their spiritual journey to move toward God?

In order to do this, find a quiet space to spend the next 10-15 minutes in prayer:

- To begin, posture yourself how you like to pray and take a few slow, deep breaths, becoming aware of God's loving presence in and around you.
- Bring one of the individuals to your mind, and invite God to speak to you about them. Ask God to reveal where they are at and what they might need to experience next. Listen and note any words or impressions that come to mind.
- Then ask God to show you how you might participate in what he is already doing in their lives. If nothing specific comes to your mind or heart in this step or the one previous, don't worry. Just ask that God would give you more of his compassion for this person, and eyes to see how you can join him in their life.

Repeat the above until you have finished praying for your list of three to five people.

ON YOUR OWN — PRACTICE

04 Write below what you sensed God speaking and inviting you towards in each person's life. Consider uniquely marking this page with a bookmark or dogeared page, so you can return to your notes below to guide your prayer for these people throughout the Practice.

Person 01:

Person 02:

Person 03:

Person 04:

Person 05:

Reach Exercise

Go on a prayer walk

Pick an environment you regularly find yourself in; this could be your neighborhood, or a part of town you hang out in, or the area where you work.

As you walk and pray, focus on two things:

- 01 Imagining with God:** Try to imagine the spiritual state of people behind the windows and doors and walls. Imagine living without God. Going through divorce or unemployment or bankruptcy or illness, without God or community. Trying to make sense of the universe. Imagine what it would be like to not have a community around you.
- 02 Asking of God:** Ask the Spirit of Jesus to give you his heart of compassion for the lost. Invite him to reveal to you how he feels towards the people and scenarios that you imagined throughout your walk.

Our goal with this exercise is just to begin to let God's heart of love arise in our hearts.



ON YOUR OWN — REFLECT

Practice Reflection

Reflection is a key component in our spiritual formation.

Millenia ago, King David prayed in Psalm 139v23-24:

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

The South African writer Trevor Hudson has said, “We don’t change from our experience, we change when we reflect on our experience.”*

If you want to get the most out of this practice, you need to do it and then reflect on it.

* Trevor Hudson, *A Mile in My Shoes: Cultivating Compassion* (Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room Books, 2005), 57.

Before your next time together with the group for Session 02, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions:

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel joy?

03 Where did I most experience God’s nearness?

Note: As you write, be as specific as possible. While bullet points are just fine, if you write it out in narrative form, your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.

Keep Growing (Optional)

The following resources were created to enhance your experience of this Practice, but they are entirely optional.

Read

The Gospel Comes with a House Key by Rosaria Butterfield
(Chapters 01-02)

Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Witness (Episode 01)

Continue the discussion

If you would like to slow down this four-week Practice to give your community more time to sit in each week's teaching and spiritual exercise, you can pause and meet for an optional conversation in the Appendix.



