

Witness Teaching 04:

Share the Good News

Intro:

- My friend Pradeepan became a follower of Jesus in his late teens.
- I was listening to his story recently: He grew up in a Hindu family that came to the US as refugees from Sri Lanka.
- In high school, he was invited to an event where he was exposed to the message of Jesus.
- He experienced the message as such good news, that the next day, when he saw his Christian friends at school, his first response was, Why did you not tell me this sooner?!
- I love Pradeepan's story because it's a good reminder: yes, begin with love and practice hospitality and partner with the Holy Spirit, but there comes a time when we need to share the good news of Jesus.
- That's what's up on the docket for our final session.
- The truth is: People may be far more open to the gospel than we realize.
- But: not all people are like Pradeepan.
- In fact, the gospel seems to have an equal and opposite reaction:
 - Some people it draws in ... they hear the message and their heart wants to believe it ...
 - Others it *repels* or *repulses* ... their heart is hostile ...
- *Especially* in our post-Christian culture, where the dominant cultural atmosphere at times feels hostile to the message of Jesus.
- But this dynamic is nothing new; It goes all the way back to the New Testament itself.

Turn: Turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2 ...

- I want to show you a simple paradigm from the Apostle Peter for how we comfort ourselves

in a culture that can attempt to stifle the message of Jesus.

- Look at verse 11 ...

1 Peter 2v11-12

- Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles ...
 - Notice his metaphor for the felt-experience of being a Christian; he likens it to being an exile ...
 - Or in today's language, a refugee, or the legal term in America is a "resident alien."
 - This is what it *feels* like to be a follower of Jesus in the post-Christian West, where the dominant values run counter to our own.
 - It *feels* like being an outsider in your own culture; a stranger in your own home.
 - We don't need to be angry or afraid; we can accept that our hearts will always yearn for our true home — not in California or Canada or Scotland or Norway or Brazil or wherever you're watching this from — but in the kingdom of God ...
 - Peter goes on ...
- ... to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.
 - Don't give into your base desires to just live like *all* the people around you, who are worshipping pleasure, not God. Instead ...
- Live such good lives ...
 - The word "good" is *kalos* in Greek — it can be translated "beautiful" or "fair" or even "shapely."
 - It's a life that is shaped by the way of Jesus, that embodies his person and teachings.
 - Live a beautiful life ...
- ... among the pagans ...
 - Pagans was not a derogatory term in the first century; it was how people self-identified; the overall religious landscape was called "paganism."
 - Peter is calling the church to live a beautiful life, not off grid on a Christian compound in the desert, but right in the scrub of the culture's pressures.
- ... that, though they accuse you of doing wrong ...

- The early Christians were accused of all sorts of things:
 - Cannibalism because of language about eating and drinking the body and blood of Jesus
 - Incest because of calling each other brother and sister
 - Atheism because they denied the pantheon
 - Today followers of Jesus are accused of being on the wrong side of history on sexuality and gender; of being anti-science and much more.
- Nothing new under the sun ... but Peter goes on ...
- ... they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
 - Peter here is channeling a line from the Sermon on the Mount; and he's saying that living a beautiful, counter-cultural life points beyond itself to God and brings people to him.

Seam: Turn the page and look down at chapter three verse fourteen ...

1 Peter 3v14-16

- But even if you should suffer for what is right ...
 - Referring to suffering because of the gospel.
- ... you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” But 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 ...
 - When we live a beautiful, compelling life in the imitation of Jesus, it can spark conversations with people about Jesus.
 - In fact, our life can become a kind of proof of the faith itself, what Lesslie Newbigin called “gospel hermeneutics.”
 - The word “answer” in verse is *apologeia* in Greek, which is where we get the word “apologetics.”
 - Apologetics, at its best, is about removing the intellectual barriers that keep people from Jesus.
 - It's about answering people's questions.

- After all, faith isn't a blind leap into the dark; it's trust based on evidence.
- In our skeptical age, people have a *lot* of questions about Scripture and theology and church history; and they often need a safe place to explore.
- But in the original context, the question isn't so much an intellectual one, but a *life* one — why do you live the way you do?
 - Why do you not have sex until you're married, and then only with your spouse?
 - Why do you give away your money to the poor?
 - Why do you gather with people from other classes and ethnic groups?
- Be ready to answer questions like these!
- But [verse 15-16] do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

The early church:

- In Peter's paradigm, we see two essential components of Witness.
 - Living a beautiful life in proximity to others.
 - And sharing the good news of Jesus.
- First ...

1. Living a beautiful life in community:

- One of the most striking things about the collection of writings we call the New Testament is what's *not* in it.
- As a modern Christian, especially if you come from the Protestant evangelical stream of the church, you would expect every page to be peppered with staccato commands to get out there and tell all your friends about Jesus.
- And while there's all sorts of examples of the *apostles* preaching the gospel and planting churches, the overwhelming majority of commands to ordinary Christians are about how to live together as a community; how to just get *along*, and how not to get sucked into the way of Rome, but to live the way of love.
- It turns out, this *is* the primary example of witness.

- “Actions speak louder than words,” is a time-tested truism.
- And nowhere is this more true than in the practice of witness.
- Our first and most important task is to live as a sign of the coming kingdom of God.
- To live in a way that *begs* the question: Why do you do life in community? Why do you call people “family” who aren’t like you? Why do you give so much of your money away? Why do you stay married, you two are so different? Etc.
- Here’s Dallas Willard:
 - There is a special evangelistic work to be done, of course, and there are special callings to it. But if those in the churches really are enjoying fullness of life, evangelism will be unstoppable and largely automatic. The local assembly, for its part, can then become an academy where people throng from the surrounding community to learn how to live. It will be a school of life (for a disciple is but a pupil, a student) where all aspects of that life seen in the New Testament records are practiced and mastered under those who have themselves mastered them through practice. Only by taking this as our immediate goal can we intend to carry out the Great Commission.”¹
- He makes a crucial point: this call to live as a sign of the coming kingdom is on us as a *community* ...

Many: 1:

- One thing that’s lost in our English translations of the Bible, is that this command to live a beautiful life is in the plural.
- As in “Y’all live a beautiful life.”
- When many of us think of “evangelism,” we think of 1:many — Billy Graham or Luis Palau preaching to a stadium of thousands ...
- Or we think of 1:1 — of sharing our faith with our family or friends.
- And both serve a very important function in the church.
- But.
- Arguably, the dominant mode in the New Testament and the early church was many:1.
- It was the *church* bearing witness to the gospel of Jesus by living a beautiful life.
- You may not feel like your life is all that beautiful ... we all have issues ... but when I think

about my community, we're not perfect either, but we live in a very compelling way that is unique in Los Angeles ... we live *differently* from our host culture, and we love each other.

- This is our *witness*.
- And this is exactly what the early church did! And it exploded from a hundred and twenty people hiding in the upper room to the most powerful spiritual movement in human history.
- All this happened without church buildings or social media or legal status; just ordinary people bearing witness to Jesus through a different way of life.
- The scholar Michael Green from Oxford wrote the seminal book *Evangelism in the Early Church*, where he argues that 80% or more of “evangelism” in the early church was done by ordinary Christians — not apostles or pastors — just explaining their way of life to their family and friends.

Seam: This brings us to the second thing we need to see in Peter:

2. Sharing the good news of Jesus.

- There comes a time when we must *tell people about Jesus*.
- Romans 10: “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10v14)
- There’s a quote that’s often attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.”
- But it’s unlikely he ever said that.
- That’s a false dichotomy. It’s not a beautiful life in community *or* words, but *and* words.
- We need to hold the two together.
- We can’t just be really kind and cook good food and hope people figure it out: *Wow, they’re so nice, there must be a loving God who ordered the universe and I need to apprentice under his Son Jesus ...*
- We can’t just mow our neighbor's lawn every Saturday and hope they piece together the doctrine of the Trinity.
- We have to share the good news.
- And the good news is *news*, as in, a verbal announcement.

- We've been socially conditioned by our culture to stay silent ...
- But we've been called by God to go and preach the gospel.
- Now, when I hear "preach the gospel" I picture a preacher on a stage; but remember, that's not what the word meant in the first century; it just meant a herald or messenger who brought good news to the Empire.
- For you and I, it's likely more of a *dialogue* than a *monologue*.
- Like Peter says, Be ready to respond ... in a back and forth conversation.
- But use words: to tell people who Jesus is, what he's done in human history, what he's done in your life, your healing and freedom, the life that is possible under his rule ... that he's made our world, and he's coming again to make it new ...
- This is what all people do: they talk about what they love — a TV show or new restaurant or sports team or book.
- We love Jesus, so we talk about Jesus.

Hinge: Now, as we come to the end of our Practice, our goal for this final Session is to put it all together ...

Six best practices:

- By way of summary, let me offer you.
- First ...
 1. **Live a beautiful life in community**
 - Just follow Jesus, together.
 - *Love* one another deeply, from the heart. So deeply, and genuinely, that people are drawn into your community.
 - Who doesn't want to be a part of love?
 - This is the first and *most* important step.
 - Secondly ...
 2. **Be authentic**
 - Don't hide who you are. You love Jesus.

- Celebrate your life in Jesus the way your secular friends celebrate a new restaurant or sound bath or yoga studio ... just be yourself ...
- Danielle Strickland tells this great story about when she was a new Christian and was training for a marathon with her non-Christian friend.
 - Her friend asked her, “Am I a person or a project to you?”
 - Danielle was taken aback: “A person.”
 - Her friend said, “Well then, I don’t want you to try to convert me; I want you to keep your new faith to yourself.”
 - I would have dropped it right there, but Danielle said, “Okay, but am I a person or a project to you?”
 - Her friend said, “A person.”
 - And Danielle said, “Then why should I have to hide the most important thing in my life.”
- By the end of the marathon her friend had become a follower of Jesus.
- This just comes down to being yourself ... when people ask what you did that weekend, don’t hide that you went to church ... just be authentic ...
- Don’t be inauthentic by pretending to be a better Christian than you are, or by hiding that you *are* a Christian.
- Just live relationally and be who you *are*.
- Third ...

3. Pray

- We’ve been praying every week for a short list of people we love to come to trust Jesus.
- That’s because, whenever anyone comes to follow Jesus, it’s a work of the Spirit.
- Not of clever marketing or winning an intellectual debate.
- But of the Spirit.
- Then ...

4. Practice hospitality

- Intentionally make room at your table and in your schedule and your heart for those far from God.
- Live an invitational life.
- You may invite people to:
 - Your table for dinner
 - Or to church on Sunday
 - Or an event like Alpha
 - Or just to a conversation.
- But like the Apostle Philip, in that great story in John 1, who said to Nathaniel, “Come and see.”
- Just invite people to “come and see” Jesus.

5. Tell your story

- The word we Christians use is “testimony,” and it’s a beautiful word. We just “testify”, we tell people what we have seen or heard or know to be true.
- No one can argue with your story.
- Do not underestimate the power of telling your story with God.
- Finally ...

6. Share the good news of Jesus

- When the time is right, talk about Jesus.
- Let the good news of Jesus be on your lips.
- We can’t force these moments ...
- But we can live intentionally, offering hospitality, loving people, listening to people, asking good, deep questions, and being prepared at a moment’s notice to articulate the message about Jesus.

Outcomes:

- And remember: we can’t control the outcomes.
- Once in my life I was a witness to a car crash; and the police interviewed me after the fact.

- All I had to do was tell them what I saw. I didn't have to convince or cajole. Just tell my story.
- So too with the gospel.
- We're not salespeople with a monthly quota; We're witnesses.
- Our job isn't to "seal the deal"; it's just to tell people what we have seen and heard and know to be true of Jesus.
 - Some people come to faith quickly and early in life ...
 - Others resist for decades and come to faith on their deathbed; I just heard another one of those stories; an atheist parent whose kids thought would never trust Jesus, softened just a few days before she breathed her last ...
 - Others never trust Jesus. A sad but true reality.
- But we're not responsible for outcomes.
- Salvation is a mystery — some kind of strange mix of human freedom and divine action ...
- Our job is to bear witness, in love, to people wherever they are in the spiritual journey.

Ending:

- And our prayer for you is ...
- Not only will you see others' lives turned around, but your own life will be infused with joy.
- We need this practice as much as the world.
- So, my friends ...
 - May you live a beautiful, compelling, counter-cultural life in imitation of Jesus ... in community ...
 - May you be authentic: just be yourself, everywhere you go.
 - And as you pray for your friends; I encourage you to keep praying for your list of names ...
 - And practice hospitality, welcoming people to the table, and the heart of God.
 - And tell your story ...
 - May God give you opportunities to share the good news of Jesus.

Notes

1. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

Cutting Room Floor Research

For each Practice, we commission freelance researchers to explore key questions related to the Practice content. Their findings help shape our resources and ensure they are accurate and informative. However, due to video length constraints, we often have to omit some great material. [This document](#) features some of the omitted research related to the Witness Practice.