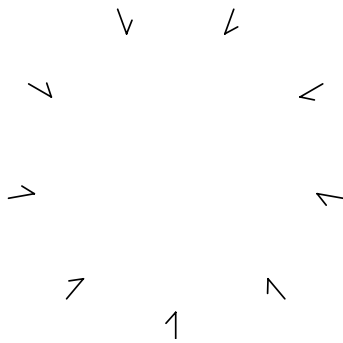




The Witness Practice

Welcome

There is an unspoken principle that we all intuitively live by: good news is meant to be shared. Consider for a moment — what is usually the very first thing we do with good news like landing a new job, getting into the college we wanted, or discovering an incredible restaurant? Naturally, we want to share it with others — *especially* those closest to us. Yet, for many of us, this isn't always our felt experience with our own faith, and for good reason.

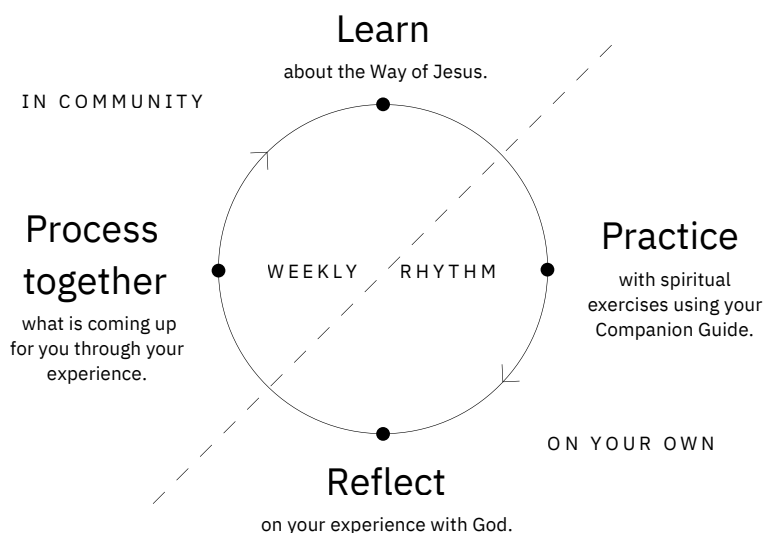
Everyday, we are being bombarded with signals from our surrounding culture to “keep our beliefs to ourselves.” There is a pronounced allergy — even hostility — in the post-Christian West toward any claims of capital T “truth.” In our time, it might be acceptable to believe a particular way of life is best for *you*, but it's problematic to suggest that way of life is best for *everyone*. This can all lead to a very private way of following Jesus that, in belief, is “good news for all people,” but in practice, just becomes “good news for *me*.” Yet, in the midst of this, Jesus' invitation to witness to him has not expired — it remains just as relevant to modern apprentices as it was to its original hearers. For the last two millennia, followers of Jesus have dared to ask the question: How do we witness to the good news of Jesus in *this* particular moment? Through this Practice, we want to explore that same question for our time.

Over the next several weeks, we will set aside time to explore how Jesus himself entered into witness — his mission, motivation, and method for sharing the good news — to see our compassion grow for the lost, to extend relationship around our tables, and to form words and a way of life in community that witness to the gospel. Now this kind of witness will not just happen — it will require risk and take practice. But if we say “yes” to this way of relating to the gospel and those around us, we can experience the deep life in Jesus that can only truly be discovered when we generously share it with others.

Welcome to the practice of witness.

The Weekly Rhythm

The four sessions of this Practice are designed to follow a four-part rhythm that is based on our model of spiritual formation.



01 Learn

Gather together as a community for an interactive experience of learning about the Way of Jesus through teaching, storytelling, and discussion. Bring your Guide to the session and follow along.

02 Practice

On your own, before the next session, go and **“put it into practice,”** as Jesus himself said.* We will provide weekly spiritual exercises to integrate this practice into your everyday life, as well as recommended resources to go deeper.

03 Reflect

Reflection is key to spiritual formation. After your practice and before the next session, set aside 10-15 minutes to reflect on your experience. Reflection questions are included in this Guide at the end of each session.

04 Process together

When you come back together, watch the introduction and then start by sharing your reflections with your group. This moment is crucial, because we need each other to process our life before God and make sense of our stories. If you are meeting in a larger group, you will need to break into smaller sub-groups for this conversation so everyone has a chance to share.

WEEK 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

At the beginning of your small group time, 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?

Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about this week's sermon. If you missed the sermon, you can find it on our YouTube channel: @journeysherwood

- 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 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?

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, asking 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:

- 02 Set aside some time now to ask God to speak to you, in your mind and heart, about the part he is inviting you to play in these people's lives. How might the Holy Spirit be nudging you to extend his redemptive love to them in this season? As you consider these things, ask God to give you wisdom in how to witness to them.

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. Pray over their life; for their blessing and flourishing. Ask that their hearts would be open to know and receive Christ's love, and come to believe that He is God.
- Then ask God to show you how you might participate in what he is already doing in their lives. What is one way you could witness to them through your love? 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.

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.



Read

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



Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Witness (Episode 01)

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 Week 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.

WEEK 02

Practice Hospitality

Overview

The table in first-century Israel was more than just a place to eat — it was a symbol of personal identity and social standing.

To eat and drink with someone was to identify with that person as “my people.” Sharing a table meant sharing life — and that association had a direct impact on a person’s reputation in their community.

This made the table an exclusive place in Jesus’ time — a place to mark who was in with you and who was out. For Jesus, however, the table was not a boundary line or a way to fence people out, but a way to invite people in to God’s community of love.

While our witness should take many shapes and forms, in a post-Christian culture that is often apathetic to the Gospel, confused about the gospel, or at worst hostile to it, our method for joining Jesus in his mission to “seek and save the lost” must become more about compassionate presence.

How can we bear witness to Jesus in a time like this? In a very ordinary setting — one shared meal at a time, around a table with the lost.

Reflection Questions

At the beginning of your small group time, discuss the following questions:

- 01 Share about one of the people you chose to pray for daily. Who is this person, and why have you decided to pray for them regularly?
- 02 What did you sense God speak to you about what they need to experience, and your part to play in that?
- 03 If you were to honestly share your level of hope that these people will someday follow Jesus, what would you say? What reflections do you have on your sense of hopefulness?
- 04 What new attitudes or perspectives do you hope God forms in you over time through this regular prayer?

Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about this week's sermon. If you missed the sermon, you can find it on our YouTube channel: @journeysherwood

- 01 What responses have you most often witnessed when people share the Gospel of Jesus — hostility, openness, or indifference?
- 02 Reflect on a time when you experienced “radically ordinary hospitality.” What did that look like, and what impact did it have on you?
- 03 How does the idea of being hospitable to those who don't know Jesus either complement or challenge your view of the practice of witnessing?
- 04 What do you know about your neighbors? What thoughts or emotions arise when you consider having them over for a meal around your table?

Exercise

Invite someone to share a meal

This meal can be in your home; it can be a feast you prepare for them. Or it can be a food cart down the street from your work; and a quick lunch with a co-worker.

If at all possible, we recommend sharing this meal in your home. Depending on your living situation, you might not be set up for an invitation like this — and that's okay. Remember, this is about hospitality, not entertainment. Your home doesn't need to be perfect to invite people to your table and your lives.

As you think of who to invite, aim for someone who meets three criteria:

01 They are in your life — a friend or neighbor or co-worker.

02 You've not had them over before.

03 They are not yet a follower of Jesus.

The Rule of Benedict says that “all guests are to be welcomed as Christ.” Treat them the way you would treat Christ himself — with honor, love, and service.

For now, unless an opportunity presents itself, don't focus on telling them about Jesus; focus more on listening. Ask as many questions as you can — about their story, their life, their heart, their pain. Move the conversation from the superficial to the spiritual simply through asking great questions.

Here a list of questions that you can consider asking:

- Where did you grow up, and what did you love about your upbringing? Is there anything you would change about it, or wish was done differently?
- In what ways are you different from who you were when you were young? How are you the same?
- What is one of the significant moments from your life that shaped who you are today?
- Who in your life has had a big impact on you, and the way you see the world? In what way(s)?
- Who are the people and relationships that are most important to you today?
- What are some of the goals that you are currently working towards? What dreams and aspirations do you have?
- When you think of the kind of person that you most want to emulate or become like, who comes to mind?
- What do you believe is the meaning of life?
- What are some of the values/rules that you try to live by? Where did you learn or pick those up?
- If you had to sum up this past year in a few words, what would those words be?
- What aspects of your life are you most encouraged by as of late? Is there anything you are finding especially difficult?
- Do you believe in any kind of God, or have a spirituality you live by? What do you believe and what does that look like for you?

Reach Exercise

Create a neighborhood map

Use the “Block Map” to fill out the names and details of your neighbors — as in those who live next door. You may not be able to fill as much of it out as you hoped. In which case, that’s your practice for the coming season. Practice hospitality as a way of learning your neighbors’ names and stories.

Block Map

The center square is your home or apartment. The eight squares around it are your eight closest neighbors. Do the following for each neighbor:

- 01 On line A,** fill in their name. Ideally first and last, but just put down what you know. If you don’t know their name yet, just put down a question mark, or leave it blank. Do the same for the next two lines.
- 02 On line B,** fill in any details about their lives you know that you couldn’t get from waving across the street: where they work, where they are from, how long they’ve lived there, what they do for fun, etc.
- 03 On line C,** see if you can fill in any in-depth information: their dreams for the future, relationship status, their faith (or lack of it), experience with God or church, their childhood story, any pain, etc.

ON YOUR OWN — PRACTICE

a. b. c.	a. b. c.	a. b. c.
a. b. c.		a. b. c.
a. b. c.	a. b. c.	a. b. c.

As a general rule, only 10% of people can fill in line A, only 3% can fill in line B, and less than 1% can fill in line C. The point here isn't guilt and shame; it's simply to plot out just how well you know (or don't know) your neighbors, to get you started on the journey to loving them.

This exercise from the book *The Art of Neighboring*, by Vineyard pastor Jay Pathak. Discover more at artofneighboring.com.

Practice Reflection

Before your next time together with the group for Session 03, 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?

Read

The Gospel Comes with a House Key by Rosaria Butterfield
(Chapters 04-06)

Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Witness (Episode 02)

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.

WEEK 03

Partner with the Holy Spirit

Overview

The invitation to witness to the good news of Jesus can give rise to many different emotions — excitement and expectation, but also anxiety and, at times, overwhelm.

Often, that particular feeling of overwhelm can come from feeling like: “It is *my* job to bring God *to* people.”

Now, if that were true, we would have good reason to feel overwhelmed. But what if the practice of witness isn’t about bringing God to people, but about joining Him where He’s already at work in a person’s life? What if it’s about growing in our ability to hear and listen to the Holy Spirit’s nudges in our everyday interactions with others?

The most faithful witnesses to Jesus are those who see witness primarily as joining *with* God; they are the ones who regularly pay attention to how he might be gently moving those he loves toward him, and who take the next step in partnership with him.

It’s in this kind of partnership that we are able to move beyond reliance on the power of our own capabilities, and into a way of relating to God and others that is filled to the brim with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection Questions

At the beginning of your small group time, discuss the following questions:

- 01 Who did you invite over for a meal this week, and how did they respond? If they said yes and already came over, share what that experience was like.

- 02 What emotions did you experience before or during the invitation? How about during the meal?

- 03 What drew you to invite the person you did? What are or were you hoping would happen through this meal?

- 04 What reflections do you have on ordinary hospitality as a way to share your life in Jesus?

Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about this week's sermon. If you missed the sermon, you can find it on our YouTube channel: [@journeysherwood](#)

- 01 How does reframing witness as joining God in what He is already doing, rather than bringing people to Him, shift your perspective or approach to sharing Jesus with others?
- 02 Which of the four movements from the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch do you most want God to strengthen in your life — listening, looking, asking, or risking? Why?
- 03 What has your experience been like in learning to discern and pay attention to the Holy Spirit's promptings? What are you learning through that process?
- 04 When was the last time you found yourself in a position where you needed God to show up in power? How did He show up, or how do you wish He had?

Exercise

Active listening

This week, get together with someone who is not a follower of Jesus, and practice listening to them as deeply as you can.

This can be a coffee or a lunch break or a conversation on the porch; it can be scheduled or impromptu, but find at least one time this week to listen.

Follow the SLANT method:

01 Sit up: Lean toward them, and be fully engaged.

02 Look and listen: Put your phone away, and be fully present.

03 Ask and answer questions: You can say things like, “Tell me more about ...” and “How did ... make you feel?”

04 Nod your head: Show them you are engaged through non-verbal communication.

05 Track the speaker: Eye contact is very important, track with them for the whole time.

As you listen to them, also listen for where God is already at work in their life.

As they talk, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what he is up to.

But the main goal is just for them to feel loved. As the Mennonite educator David Augsburger put it, “Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable.”

Reach Exercise

Ask to pray for someone who is not a Christian

This too could be scheduled or impromptu, but it will likely be unplanned. When you see someone who is sick, or has a need, just gently ask if you could pray for them. Then pause, go slowly, and pray what God puts on your heart ...

We put a liturgy in your guide for you to pray daily this week, just asking the Holy Spirit to lead you, and empower you when the moment comes.

As you prepare this week to pray for someone who is not a follower of Jesus, we invite you to pray the following liturgy daily — ideally in the morning before you go into your day.

Find a place quiet and hidden away for 3 minutes each day to prepare your heart for witness through this reflective prayer meditation. To begin, posture yourself how you like for prayer and take a few slow, deep breaths, becoming aware of God's loving presence in and around you.

Then pray:

Father, help me to see every need
around me as a holy opportunity,
to reveal your love, to be
hospitable, to speak your word, to
pray for miracles. In the name of
Christ, the hope of the world.

Amen.

Then, taking just a few minutes, walk through in your mind some of the small but holy opportunities that might present themselves in your day — a conversation with a co-worker, a friend, someone at the shops, at the gym, or your neighborhood where you live.

As you imagine, think about your heart being postured toward witness in God's love. What would that feel like? How would you be listening to God? How might you be bold in introducing them to Him or inviting them more into your world?

As you're looking ahead, ask the Spirit for wisdom, love, courage, and compassion to follow him if and when those moments arise.

At the end of this time, you may like to finish with this simple prayer:

Holy Spirit, I am willing,
help me to see, and act,
in love toward my
neighbor.

Amen.

Practice Reflection

Before your next time together with the group for Session 04, 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?

Read

The Gospel Comes with a House Key by Rosaria Butterfield
(Chapters 07-09)

Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Witness (Episode 03)

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.

SESSION 04

Share the Good News

Overview

Among the words the New Testament writers used to describe followers of Jesus, perhaps none hit quite so close to home as the Apostle Peter's description: "foreigners and exiles."

Walk the streets of most cities in the post-Christian West as a follower of Jesus, and you're likely to feel the force of those words — this sense that you don't quite "belong" in the surrounding culture; you're a kind of spiritual refugee.

For many of us, that feeling can turn our faith into, at best, an awkward conversation, and at worst, a personal hobby we would rather hide away.

In the midst of that very real experience, it can be helpful to remember that the gospel is *good news*. And while there are those who will be turned off by it, others' hearts might leap to believe it. They might even say, "Why didn't you tell me this sooner?"

Because, after all, it's "*good news ... for all people.*" (Luke 2v10)

Jesus invites us to both show *and* tell this good news — for our deeds and our words to testify to the beauty of the life we have in him.

Reflection Questions

At the beginning of your small group time, discuss the following questions:

- 01 Share about what you did for this week's exercise — listening actively to someone who is not a follower of Jesus — and what that experience was like.
- 02 Where did you encounter resistance in yourself as you asked questions and listened?
- 03 What did you learn about the person that fostered empathy or compassion in you? What reflections do you have on the power of curiosity and listening?
- 04 What was your experience like in trying to attune yourself to both the person and to God? What did you sense God saying or inviting you toward throughout the conversation?

Discussion Questions

Now it's time for a conversation about this week's sermon. If you missed the sermon, you can find it on our YouTube channel: @journeysherwood

- 01 In what ways has following Jesus in our culture felt like being a “foreigner” or “exile” to you?
- 02 What aspects of your life in Jesus do you consider beautiful and worth inviting others into?
- 03 Do you tend to want to share the good news of Jesus more through your life or words? Why do you think that is?
- 04 Consider one of the people you have been praying for daily throughout this Practice. What is God forming in you through prayer? What outcomes are you needing to surrender to Him for that person?

Exercise

Practice articulating the gospel in your own words

We're not going to ask you to share the gospel with a non-Christian, unless the right opportunity presents itself; but we are going to ask you to get together with another person from your community, just get coffee or meet up somewhere easy, and practice verbally speaking the good news of Jesus to each other.

You can role-play a little, but the main goal is to be prepared to share your faith when the right time comes.

Reach Exercise

Identify two to three of the main objections people have against the gospel in your cultural context or relational world

This is more of an apologetics exercise. But we're not asking you to become an intellectual expert, though that may be God's call on a few of you. We're just asking you to love others by really thinking deeply and well about the major questions people have about God or the Christian Way, and that work as barriers to their coming to faith.

You won't be able to do this in one week; for this week, just identify a few of the main questions people have, and start to hunt for a few good resources to learn more. Then, in the coming season, prepare yourself to "give an answer."

Take these questions to a trusted pastor or leader in your community, and have them recommend resources to help you form a thoughtful response. You may also go to page 100 to see our Recommended Reading for this Practice. Write the resources below:

Practice Reflection

As you come to the end of this Practice, 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?



Read

The Gospel Comes with a House Key by Rosaria Butterfield
(Chapter 10 and Conclusion)



Listen

Rule of Life Podcast on Witness (Episode 04)

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.

As you go, may you receive the
power of the Holy Spirit.

May the Spirit of Christ cause you
to be his witnesses — in your
neighborhoods, and communities,
and to the ends of the earth.

And may the beauty of your words,
and your lives, serve as a sign of the
Kingdom of God.