

session five

Living examples become witnesses

FOCUS Disciples who are living transformed lives are equipped to be powerful witnesses. They reach out to others in their community and support the outreach of the church to the world. Disciples of Jesus understand the heart of Jesus for reaching those who have not been touched, healed or transformed by the power of his love and salvation.

PRAYER Join in a prayer in which all take a part. Participants might give thanks for one way in which they have grown as disciples. They might also ask for the one thing they believe they need most for continued growth as a disciple. Take time to remember unreached people in your own family, among your friends, in your neighborhood, city, state, nation and world. Be bold enough to ask the Spirit for a heart transplant: ask that Jesus' heart for reaching people would be planted in yours.

OPENING DISCUSSION *Talk about one or more of the following:*

- Share your written statements about the Good News of Jesus. What does each add? How can your statements be used to witness?
- What is a witness? In the New Testament, the word translated as witness is *martyros*. What does witnessing have to do with being a martyr? Is it easier to be a witness today than it was in biblical times? Why or why not?
- How do you build a relationship with another person? What steps can you identify? What does relationship-building have to do with witnessing?

SEARCHING SCRIPTURE *Read Luke 24:44-49 and Acts 1:8, 2:1-6; 22-47*

1. *Tell about some examples of Jesus' passionate concern for reaching people — people like the disciples, like those who were ill, others. The most important indication of Jesus' passionate concern for reaching people is his death on the cross. Why is that death the most profound statement of the value Jesus places on each person's life?*
2. *Every person is of infinite worth and value. Jesus' death marks that value, and his resurrection marks his unswerving purpose to reach the world. Nothing is able to stop his passion to reach every person in the world, nothing in life and nothing in death. What does it mean to you to say that Jesus has offered himself for you? What Good News does that give you to tell?*
3. *Jesus' instructions to the first disciples occurred after the resurrection. Notice the process he recommends. The disciples were to begin right where they were. Then they were to move into more difficult surroundings. He calls them to move farther and farther away from their starting point. The ultimate goal is clear. They are to reach the entire world. How might Jesus give that command to us today?*
4. *However, the disciples are not to make the first move until they have received more power. Jesus instructs them to stay together in the city until the one he promised to send, the Holy Spirit, had come. In the first chapter of Acts (the continuation of the Gospel of Luke), Jesus repeats his instructions just prior to his ascension. What did the disciples need before they would be ready to witness? How did Pentecost equip them for that mission?*

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5. Once the people heard, they began to ask an important question, “What does this mean?” The disciples witnessed, they told the truth about Jesus. By the power of the Spirit, the people responded. They were ready to take the next step. Read Acts 2:37-41 again. *What was the next step? What does Peter’s response mean for our witnessing? How is that response different from “inviting people to church?” What does it mean to be “ready” to witness in this way?*
6. Peter’s sermon is effective because it answers key questions: Who is Jesus? What has he done? Why do you need what only he can give? How can people receive what he offers? *What can we learn about effective witness from Peter’s approach?*
7. God’s free gift of salvation is already complete and offered to all. The steps in that offering were clearly marked by the disciples: Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Then the second gift — the Holy Spirit. In this way the disciples followed Jesus’ example. They gave away what they had just received. *Again, what can we learn about sharing the Gospel from the example of the disciples?*
8. The disciples held onto the new followers by taking them to the next step. They began to teach them. They included them in fellowship events so they could model the lifestyle and values of disciples. They kept them close enough so they could observe the power of Jesus at work through his disciples as they loved and cared for people. The disciples prayed for them. *What does their example mean for how we do evangelism in our congregation?*

K E Y C O M P O N E N T S O F D I S C I P L E S H I P

Disciples are committed to local and world evangelization.

1. Each disciple has a personal testimony to offer as a result of knowing and following Jesus. Each disciple has a story to tell of his/her relationship with Jesus. Each story is similar and unique at the same time. Each one is a witness to the love Jesus offered. Each disciple’s life is a witness to the difference that relationship with Jesus has made. *What is your story to tell? How can you share your story?*
2. Now or at home, take time to put into words the experience of knowing Jesus and what it means to follow him. Think through or write out a personal way to share the Gospel — a way that includes the essential ingredients of the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Then seek to spend some time with nonbelievers. Look for ways to tell your story. *Bring your experiences back to the next session with you.*
3. Evangelism is based on developing a relationship with a person in the name of Jesus. Those who witness don’t simply offer an idea about Jesus and then leave hearers alone. An ongoing relationship helps to insure that the new believer becomes a mature disciple, capable of evangelizing others. *How can your congregation be more effective in reaching others and staying with them as they grow in the faith?*
4. Local evangelism is important, but it is also to be coupled with the rest of Jesus’ command. Jesus’ concern was for every person in the entire world. The mission he gave us was to reach the world. *How do you and your congregation reach the world? What more can you do to make that outreach effective?*



M O V I N G T O W A R D A C T I O N *Do or discuss one or more of the following:*

- Tell about an experience when you talked openly with someone else about your faith. What was the result of that sharing? What did you learn?
- What training in evangelism have you received? What was helpful about that training? How can training be offered to more members of your congregation?
- Do you know any missionaries currently serving in other countries? Share some stories of those missionaries. Contact the Division for Global Mission-ELCA for more information about specific missionaries and how you and your congregation can support them (www.elca.org).
- What are the next steps you need to take as a disciple to become a more effective witness? How can you work together to take those steps? What are the next steps your congregation needs to take to become more effective in witnessing? How can you be a part of those steps?

C L O S I N G T H I S S E S S I O N

Offer thanks for specific learnings that seem to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. Ask for gifts from the Spirit that you need to be more effective evangelists. Pray for the congregation and ask the Holy Spirit to ignite a flame in the heart of each person for reaching those who have not heard or have not come to follow Jesus. Ask for the conviction and the strength to accomplish that mission in name of Jesus.

P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E N E X T S E S S I O N

Read Acts 3 through the end of the book of Acts. Examine these chapters with a focus on the disciples and what they were doing. How would you describe their actions?

“Behold I send you.’ For this is no way to have chosen themselves, no undertaking of their own. It is, in the strict sense of the word, a mission. With this the Lord promises them his abiding presence, even when they find themselves as sheep among wolves, defenseless, powerless, sore pressed and beset with great danger. Nothing can happen to them without Jesus knowing it.” (The Cost of Discipleship, p. 214)

