

Prayer and Collect

Spend some time in prayer together, thanking God for the people you have spoken to this week and the ways God is at work in their lives. Pray for anybody with whom a group member has had a particularly good conversation. Pray for new opportunities to bear witness to God's love for all in the week ahead. Pray that you might become more aware of that connection in the future.

*Lord Jesus,
you send us out into your world
to be your witnesses
in the things we say and do.
Grant us the help of the Holy Spirit
that we may point people to your love,
and so bring glory to you. Amen.*

Looking ahead

The God who loves us loves everyone and wants each person to come to know him. The stories we tell are part of the way that God is revealed to others. Over the coming week, ask people you know to share something of their stories of faith with you. It doesn't matter whether they are Christians or something else. Why do they believe what they do? Why does it matter to them? If they ask, be prepared to respond by telling your own faith story.

Reflections for individuals

Readings for this week

Monday = *Isaiah 49.5-6*

Tuesday = *Acts 8.26-38*

Wednesday = *Acts 11.17-18*

Thursday = *Acts 13.46-49*

Friday = *John 3.16-17*

EVERYDAY WITNESS

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2: God's Witnessing Love for All

Icebreaker

Can you think of a time when you went somewhere expecting it to be open, but only to find it closed?

Collect

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Introducing the theme *(read aloud)*

Stephen Hance, the main author of *Everyday Witness*, tells this story: *“Several years ago, I was at a Christian conference in a very non-touristy town on the West coast of the USA. One evening, after the conference session was over, a friend and I dropped into a nearby bar for some pizza and beer. The place was busy, so we sat up at the counter and ordered. Our English accents gave us away, of course, and so we found ourselves being quizzed by other people who were propping up the bar: mainly younger, alternative types with tattoos and piercings. They wondered what we were doing in a place like this. So we told them. We were in town for the Christian conference at the convention centre. Our new friends were stunned. Christians? Drinking beer and chatting with them in their run-down bar? Surely Christians didn’t want to hang around in places like that, with people like them? As the conversation went on, it turned out that, for them, Christians were on a long list of people whom they didn’t like, whom they wouldn’t associate with and whom they would even judge and condemn. I left feeling sad that Christians had left such an impression.”*

There are key moments in our own stories – how we came to faith, and how our stories became part of God’s story. This week, our subject is about God’s witnessing love for all.

Reading

Acts 10:1-48

Discussion

Before Acts 10 almost all Christians had previously been Jews.

Cornelius was a gentile.

1 How does God supernaturally intervene in this chapter?

2 What was Peter’s attitudes to gentiles before Acts 10? (v28, 29)

3 What was Peter’s attitude to gentiles after Acts 10?

To read aloud

At different times and in different places, religious people can begin to think of themselves as the ‘in-crowd’: those who have been chosen by

God for special status in his kingdom is open to everyone. Even when God does call a particular group of people and who can therefore look down on others, the ‘outsiders’. Those US friends had no doubt experienced some of this from certain Christians. However, this view is misplaced. God’s love is for everyone; and his family – Israel in the Old Testament, and the Church in the New – that calling is for the sake of others, so that God’s goodness and glory might be reflected in the world. So we are Christians not only for ourselves but also for others, to bear witness to God’s love and longing for everyone.

Activity #1 *(home groups can do either or both activities)*

In this course, we are invited to think about the people around us: those we find it harder to imagine becoming Christians, as well as those we can easily imagine coming to faith. We have been invited to engage in faith conversations with some of those people. If you feel comfortable doing so, take some time now in your group to share how that has gone for you this week.

What have you done? What has happened? What have you learned? *It might be sensible to agree a time limit, say 3 minutes each, and appoint someone to signal when there are 3 minutes left.*

When everyone who wishes to has done this, talk about what you have heard.

Are there encouraging stories here?

How do they help you to think about being a witness in your own life?

Where can you celebrate that God has been at work?

What has surprised you about that?

Have some of the people in the group found this particularly challenging or had negative experiences?

Activity #2

Each of us has a story, and God is part of that story. During the week, you were invited to write down briefly the story of how your faith came alive and what a difference that has made to you, in such a way that you could share it with somebody else. Now, give an opportunity, for those who would like to, to read what they have written.