

## **Embodied**

### **[Deeper Sheet 5.17.09]**

Page after page of the New Testament reveals that one of the primary functions of the Spirit is to empower followers of Jesus to bear witness to the life giving, life restoring, and life creating work of God. John writes that “the Spirit will testify” concerning Jesus, but he adds that “you must also testify”. The book of Acts talks of Jesus’ followers being “witnesses” in “Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”. The Greek grammar of Acts 1 is profound. It talks of Judea and Samaria in the same breath. This is interesting because the Jews and the Samaritans were fiercely opposed to one another. Yet the writer of Acts 1 insists that this witnessing must happen not only in Judea but also in Samaria. All of this begs the question, “What does it mean to bear witness to Jesus?”

In the Greek, “bearing witness” is accounting for something for which you have personal experience. It’s often used to describe how a witness would give testimony in a court—perhaps this is why for many Christians, the idea of being a witness has come to mean something that you say. Many of us have come to understand witnessing as a series of questions or propositions aimed at “winning” someone to new life in Christ. Such an understanding, while often dismissed as simplistic or trivial, can be a true picture of how God works in the world. Yet when the Scriptures talk of bearing witness to Jesus, ultimately the point is something much deeper than words.

Some of Jesus’ most enduring words spoke of his *way*. In John 14, Jesus said “I am the way and the truth and the life.” The Jewish understanding of *way* comes from “*halakah*”. *Halakah* has to do with the way in which we order our lives according to God. It’s connected to the Hebrew word *holek* meaning “to walk”. We’re meant to walk in the way that Jesus walked—so to bear witness to Jesus is to walk like Jesus walked. This means embodying the kind of life Jesus himself lived, in our relationships, our work, and our communities. Gandhi perceptively noticed a gap between saying and living when he said, “I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” When we fail to walk as Jesus walked, we shut the ears of the people around us to the love of Jesus.

Jesus didn’t simply lay down a blueprint for how to live. He was truth itself, and because no one can ever pin God down or get God figured out, no one has the inside track on truth. Because truth is not an idea, it’s a person. And when Pilate asks Jesus, “What is truth?” Jesus simply stares back at him without saying a word because to look at Jesus is to behold truth. We walk as Jesus walked so that the truth of Jesus would be embodied in our lives, and there is nothing more compelling than the truth lived out. As we live and embody the life of Jesus, Peter reminds us to tell of what we’ve experienced with gentleness and respect.

What has been your understanding of “bearing witness” in the Christian life?

Who have you known that has walked in the way of Jesus in a deeply compelling way?

How has watching that person’s life caused you to see the truth of God?

Think for a moment on the way you live your life. Where are the gaps between what you say and how you live?

What specifically would be different about how you lived if you were to walk the way Jesus walked?

What do you think it means to share your experience of God with gentleness and respect?

Why might it be so significant to bear witness to Jesus with gentleness and respect?