



Essence Week Four

Opening Prayer

God, open us up to what you have for us today. We want to encounter you today.

Talk It Over

- Share a time someone tried to convince you to think like them, be like them, or agree with them in a meaningful and life-giving way.
- Share a time someone tried to convince you to think like them, be like them, or agree with them in such a way that caused hurt, anger, and maybe even further separation or rejection.

Read Colossians 4:5-6 (New Living Translation)

Paul is giving the people of Colossae the basic how-to of interacting with people who don't necessarily believe the same things as the Jesus followers do. In doing so, he's giving us a fourth essential element of our identity in Christ — if we are in Christ, we are a witness. What Paul is saying is that we have a responsibility to live wisely around people who don't believe the same things as we do so that we can be witnesses on behalf of Jesus. It's not our job to convince people to think like us, be like us, or agree with us, but as a witness we simply share what we've experienced.

- If you are a follower of God, what is your natural style of sharing about Jesus? How has this style changed or how is it currently changing? What caused the evolution?
- Can you think of someone who does a good job at being a witness for Jesus? Describe their style and then the impact their witnessing style has made on you or others.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:15 (New International Version)

Wisdom encourages us to be thoughtful in all that we do — including how we share Jesus with others. And while we cannot control what people think or be consumed by others thoughts about us, we are called to give consideration to the message we are sending others and to be aware of the fact that our life, response to life, and attitude about life is sending a message to others about Jesus.

- Sometimes followers of Christ take the idea of being a witness as a mandate to always appear to be good, okay, and positive. On the other side of the spectrum, sometimes followers of Christ take the idea of being a witness as a mandate to ensure everyone knows the world is broken, dark, and evil. What unintended shameful or fear based messages do we send to others when we insist life is either extreme?
- Have you ever met a follower of God who is good at being honest about life while still appearing as a "pleasing aroma of Christ"? Or a Christ follower who is good about being who they really are and not pretending they have it all together in a life giving way? How do they pull off of being honest in a life giving way? Describe how that person communicates, understands the world, and connects with others. **(Continued on next page.)**

Read 1 Peter 3:15-16 (New International Version)

This verse suggests that there's a welcomed conversation and a real human interaction between people when we share about our hope with people. This isn't about winning an argument and making someone feel like a loser or feeling this need to know all the answers about life. This is about humbly connecting with others and sharing our personal story of hope. Going even one step further, regardless of the details, we all need to remember that disagreement doesn't need to equal hatred or disrespect.

- Think of a time you either saw someone or you yourself shared about God in a disrespectful way?
- While it's important we find places and relationships that encourage us to grow our faith, it's not healthy for us to only connect with people who are like us. By nature is it hard or easy for you to connect with people who are different than you? Where do you find yourself mostly connecting with people who think and process differently than you?
- Typically is it easy or hard for you to disagree with people? Does it rattle you up, leave you stressed, make you angry, cause you to get defensive, or respond negatively in any way when someone has different thoughts, needs, feelings, or desires than you? Regardless of your answer, why do you think this is the case? Where does this difficulty or skill come from?

Read Colossians 4:5 (Voice)

As witnesses, you and I are only responsible for sharing our story — we only have to tell people what we've seen and experienced. Our story doesn't need to be extravagant or feel remarkable either. In fact, regardless of how exciting or simple our story may be, a significant part of a story is found in the opportunity it creates for others to say "me too". By intentionally sharing our story with the right people we can help others know they aren't alone.

- Tell about a time someone shared their story and you experienced a "me too" moment. How did it feel to know you are not alone? How did this person share their story with you?
- Tell about a time you shared your story and were able to help someone else see they are not alone. What was that experience like? What led to that experience?

Closing Prayer

God, you know our stories, our hearts, our desires, and the people you have placed in our life. Help us to reflect you well to the world around us. Help us to be honest witnesses who bring love and hope to the world in a refreshing way. God, you have permission to change us.

A Possible Next Right Step for This Week:

Take some time this week to quietly reflect on these questions. Ask God to speak and lead to you.

- Who are you in a relationship with where you're tempted to disengage? Why are you feeling the temptation to disengage? Is the lead coming from God or from your own issues? This isn't about an unhealthy, emotionally damaging relationship. Can you call that person this week to connect? Can you email them? What one small thing can you do to be a friend?
- Who is a person that you're not necessarily in a relationship with, but you need to reach out to? What can you do to just be a friend to that person this week?
- Honestly evaluate this question: Can you be a friend with someone without the pressure of them needing to believe the exact same things you believe?