



WITNESSES

OF

GOD'S

GRACE

Instructor Guide

Vibrant Church Renewal

USA/Canada Evangelism Ministries

Church of the Nazarene, International



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WITNESSES OF GOD'S GRACE

SECTION	TIME	PAGE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
I. Introduction	5 min.	5	Introduce objectives, outline.
II. Lecture	25 min.	7	Facilitator presents information that will help participants assess their congregation and identify areas for growth and development.
III. Listening Exercise	25 min.	13	Participants work in small groups to practice listening.
IV. Evaluation and Planning	10 min.	16	Participants use the concepts from the lecture to evaluate their own congregation and plan for the future.
V. Wrap-up	5 min.	17	Close the module with your final comments regarding the topic.

Total Time: 70 min.

The table above identifies each module section, the time allotted for each section, and a brief description of the section's objective. When you are familiar with this module, you may want to teach from this page rather than the detailed information.

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Build enthusiasm for the training module. Vibrant Church Renewal requires buy-in from people in the church. Use announcements, fliers, posters, etc. to prepare participants for the topic and build their interest. Speak to key stakeholders in person to encourage their support of this initiative.

Review the material in this guide and make notes of specific areas for special emphasis.

- This guide includes notation of corresponding slides to help you facilitate the presentation.
- Make copies of the participant handout for each person. This handout includes “fill-in-the-blanks” sections. The appropriate answers are underlined in this instructor guide.

Check the classroom for:

- Computer/projector
- Chalkboard or flip chart
- Sufficient tables and chairs for the participants
- Copies of the participant handout for each person
- Pens/pencils for participants

Arrange the room so that each church team sits around an individual table and you have ample room to move among the teams.

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I. INTRODUCTION

(5 MINUTES)

Prior to the beginning of the session, adjust the projector and show slide #1 (Witnesses of God's Grace) and #2 (Credits).

Distribute participant handouts.

Let the participants know the material is theirs to keep and encourage them to take notes. The participant material includes:

- purpose
- objectives
- "fill-in-the-blanks" for the lecture
- application exercises

Ethiopians sat on the church lawn between worship and Sunday school, smoking cigarettes and eating while they told stories and laughed. First-time visitors to the congregation drove by the building and saw the "unofficial" greeters. They drove on.

This prospective family phoned the church office later that week. "We drove by the church on Sunday morning and were surprised to see black people outside the entrance."

"We are a multicultural congregation," the pastor responded, "with services conducted in four languages. Even our English-speaking congregation has Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, African-Americans ... and even Texans!" He chuckled at his attempt to use a joke to soften the conversation.

The caller ignored the humor. "Oh. We're looking for something else."

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When the pastor recounted the story for the church board, the board members promptly confirmed that they wanted to be the kind of congregation where everyone felt accepted.

Jesus lived out the mission of God in that way. Our congregations are called to do the same.

The purpose of this module is to challenge church leadership to build witnessing congregations that reveal God's grace to the world.

The objectives for this module are to:

- Identify the Biblical imperatives for representing Christ through our congregations.
- Acknowledge the church's ability to embody God's grace.
- Learn the importance of redemptive conversations, compassionate care and inclusive community.

Review the schedule for this module:

Introduction	5 mins.
Lecture	25 mins.
Listening Exercise	25 mins.
Evaluation and Planning	10 mins.
Wrap-up	5 mins.

Slides 3-4

Slide 5

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II. LECTURE (25 MINUTES)

- I. Witnessing helps all persons choose holiness over a life of sin.
 - A. In John 3:16, Jesus declared God’s purpose of saving perishing people because of God’s love for the world.
 - B. Jesus told a story about the shepherd who left the 99 to search for the one lost sheep, and the corner of heaven was pulled back to show the great rejoicing for the lost sheep that was found.
 - C. Rather than teaching among people who already believed and welcomed him, Jesus said “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come” (Mark1:38, TNIV).
 - D. Jesus’ behavior embodied his teaching that God reached out to draw all persons into the community of faith.

- II. The witness of the church builds God’s kingdom on earth.
 - A. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, they learned that God desires complete transformation of the earth and all that is in it: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”
 - B. The good news is that God does not wait for us to make it so. He is already at work even before any individual or organization gets involved.

Slides 6-10

ILLUSTRATION: THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

In Jesus’ time women were pushed to the margins of society. One day in Samaria Jesus met a woman who had come to draw water from the town well. He engaged the woman in conversation by asking her if she would supply him with a drink. She appeared shocked that a man—a Jewish man at that—would even speak to her. Intrigued by his willingness to reach across the social divide and tantalized with the idea that this stranger would ask her for a favor, the woman began to debate with Jesus. Before long Jesus offered the woman water that would fully satisfy. The more she listened to Jesus the more evidence she saw that he was the Messiah. She could not contain the good news and ran into town to announce the arrival of Jesus, the one anointed by God. Many people believed in the Savior because of her testimony.

Slide 11-16

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- C. God graciously draws all persons into relationship.
- D. When the Church participates in what God has already started, the Church becomes a means of God's grace.
- E. The church's witness of God's grace includes:
 - an incarnational presence,
 - redemptive conversations,
 - compassionate care, and
 - inclusive community.

III. God has called the Church to embody the Gospel and to witness to God's reign through an incarnational presence. (An incarnational presence means God, working in a human or bodily form.)

A. In the Church immediately after Pentecost, people took notice when they saw how the Christians fellowshipped with each other, and they liked what they saw.

B. The early Church lived their witness in a 24/7 lifestyle just as Jesus did.

1. The Great Commission (Matt 28:19) literally reads, "...in your going—during the daily things you do—make disciples."
2. Sometimes that witness is serendipitous as God brings surprises into the day.
3. Effective witnesses also move intentionally into situations where people need God's grace. (One woman volunteers at a hospice. A congregation adopted an elementary school in the neighborhood. Regular mall walkers get to know each other.)

Slides 17-20

THE CHURCH AFTER PENTECOST

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
Acts 2:42-47.

NOTES

C. We can allow our very presence to witness to the beauty of living under the reign of God.

IV. Both as individuals and as a community, Christian witnesses engage in redemptive conversations.

A. Christian witnesses know that prevenient grace is already at work, so they seek first to recognize God's nudges in another person's life.

B. The effective witness begins a redemptive conversation by listening with interest, discernment, and sensitivity.

1. The first thing some people must do to listen well is to stop talking.

2. Listen with your ears, but also with your eyes and heart.

C. A missional congregation listens well in the community in which they live.

1. Initiate conversations with the mayor and city leaders, public safety personnel like police officers and fire responders, educators, social workers, and medical personnel.

2. Read the newspaper with an eye toward discerning the people and places where God's grace is needed.

3. Pay attention to the conversations you hear in coffee shops and health clubs.

D. In listening to others, look for evidence of broken trust.

E. Listen to the stories of others to find a place where you can use shared hardships to connect with others.

Slides 21-26

ILLUSTRATION: BETTY and FRENCHY

Betty, a woman in her 60s with leathery skin and a ready grin, visited our church. I asked if I could call on her and her husband. Betty and Frenchy, her husband, greeted me warmly when I entered their home. Before long Frenchy started telling me of the mistreatment he suffered through the years at the hands of professed Christians. He cited a handful of incidences where Christians had lied to him, taken advantage of him in business dealings, or were sexually immoral. He gathered his anger into a sharpened statement: “The church is full of hypocrites!”

Prompted by the Spirit, I asked, “Have you ever known anyone who lived the Christian life?”

Frenchy had a ready answer. “My dad really lived the godly life!” he said emphatically. “My dad was a Methodist minister, but the congregation he pastored was full of hypocrites. They mistreated him.”

With that the tears began to flow down Frenchy’s cheeks. He waved me away with the back of his hand. I stood to my feet, thanked them for letting me visit, and started for the door. Betty put her arm in my arm and walked me to my car. She apologized for her husband’s anger. I assured her it was a privilege to share his pain.

A couple of months later Frenchy showed up at church. His spiritual journey toward Jesus started because I listened to his story.

V. The compassionate manner in which Jesus ministered to people must be the manner in which Jesus’ followers—and his Church—witness to God’s grace.

A. James, in the discussion about the integral linkage between faith and deeds, said, “I will show you my faith by what I do” (James 2:18b, TNIV).

Slides 27-30

B. Compassionate care which demonstrates the Gospel is a powerful witness.

ILLUSTRATION: Shannon

I received an email from a gay couple who wanted to worship with our congregation. The subject line read “Questions” and the message got right to the point.

Hello. I just have a couple of questions. I believe what the Bible says in regards to homosexuality, yet, I have lived with my partner for almost 8 years and we desperately want to find a Church home. I'd like to know how comfortable we would be attending your Church. Do you have other gay people or gay couples in your congregation? Please respond when you can. One of us is ill and we both need to find peace.

*Kindly yours,
Shannon*

I replied to the email with this message:

I regret you are ill. I am glad you desire peace. I do not know how comfortable you will be at our church, but I can assure you that you will be accepted. People will offer friendship and treat you with kindness. I do not know of other gay people. We care for all who want to fellowship with us. I look forward to meeting you.

Shannon attended a worship service shortly after the email exchange and a few Sundays after that he brought his partner to church. That began a journey toward God that led Shannon to rededicate himself to Christ. The compassionate care the congregation showed Shannon made it easier for him to hear the Holy Spirit call him to repentance. What started as a fear of rejection came to the place where Shannon declared “I have found my ‘church home.’”

C. The message of God’s love is to be seen in our love for people.

VI. A witnessing church community eagerly receives any seeker of God into an inclusive community.

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Slides 31-35

- A. In the past, many churches have expected newcomers to believe in God and conform to church norms prior to beginning fellowship and belonging in the congregation.
- B. What happens if this is reversed? The Celtic model of Christianity welcomes all persons and expects that the experience of fellowship and belonging to the faith community will help the individual commit to Christ.
- C. Welcoming pre-Christians into the life of a congregation could happen beyond the church facility.
 1. Unchurched people are also moved by human need.
 2. Habitat for Humanity engages Christians and non-Christians in service to others and non-Christians see the grace of God at work.
 3. Many hospitals were started by church groups or Christians.
- D. Paul urges Christians to be active in “making room” for others, to intentionally seek opportunities to invite people into the fellowship of the saints.

Conclusion:

In recent years the process of evangelism has typically approached an unsaved person on the basis of preparation for life after physical death, for getting ready for heaven. Obviously the Gospel endorses such a message, but the goal of evangelism cannot be reduced to that one thing. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer we invite God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. A tension exists between these viewpoints: the one point preaches “Get ready to die,” while the other proclaims “Hurry, start a love relationship with God and really live now.”

While our tendency might be to select one over the other, as Christians with a high view of Scripture we embrace both. God is the God of eternal life. Eternal life is not relegated to the future, but can be known in abundance right now. Such an understanding motivates the follower of Jesus to live in both faithfulness and fruitfulness. We do not sit passively waiting for the future life to arrive, but join in the divine effort to bring God’s kingdom into this present world. We want others to experience the fullness of God’s

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life here and now.

Jesus is Lord. We don't have to usher in the reign of God or keep the King on the throne. Our role is to witness to the goodness and holiness of God as we embody the Gospel in a life that participates in God's transforming work among us. The Church is witness to and participant in God's redemptive mission.

III. LISTENING EXERCISE (25 MINUTES)

This exercise provides an opportunity for participants to reflect on the information presented and begin to apply it to their lives.

Participants should break into pairs. Invite them to work with an individual who they do not know very well, possibly someone from another age group or a different congregation. Instruct them to introduce themselves to each other and to spend a few minutes sharing their reactions to the lecture portion. What was surprising, challenging, or interesting to them in the presentation?

Next, invite pairs to spend a few minutes in thought, answering the Listening Exercise prompt on the participant handout.

Tell participants:

Starting redemptive conversations within the community is one way congregations embody God's grace. The first step to starting these conversations is listening. Sometimes, this seems counter-intuitive. In order to share God's grace in our community, we begin by not talking at all! This activity will give us each an opportunity to practice our listening skills.

Start by responding to the Listening Exercise prompt on your participant handout. It asks you to recall an experience in your life where you experienced God's presence. Pay attention to the

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Slide 36

Slides 37-39

criteria for your story; it should be something you are comfortable sharing with your partner, and you should be able to share the story in three minutes time.

After the participants have had five to seven minutes to write their stories, instruct them in the next phase of the activity.

Take a moment now to determine who in your group will share first and who will share second. (Give them a moment to do so.) When the activity begins, the first person in your pair will have three minutes to tell their story. Remember, this is an exercise in listening, so the second person is the one who will be practicing listening skills. For the entire three minute story, the listener should be focused on the speaker. Here are some keys to listening successfully:

- 1. The listener should not talk during the story.*
- 2. The listener should use eye contact, body language and "human listening sounds" like "hm," "yes" and "uh huh" to indicate their attention and interest in the story.*
- 3. If the speaker stalls before time is up, the listener may ask a follow up question to get the speaker to share more.*

Ask if there are any questions, and when participants understand the assignment, invite them to begin. Time the activity carefully, and tell groups when three minutes have passed. For some participants, talking for three entire minutes will be a challenge. For some listeners, refraining from interrupting will be very difficult. Walk among the groups and help by encouraging pairs to follow the directions in the activity.

When three minutes have passed, use some of the following questions to lead a discussion for the group:

LISTENING EXERCISE PROMPT:

Take the next five to seven minutes to recall a time when you experienced God's presence in your life. Select an experience that you will be comfortable sharing with your partner for the activity. Additionally, be sure you will be able to tell your partner about this experience in the three minute time frame allocated to the activity. Use this space to make notes about the experience and plan how you will share this story with your teammate.

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Questions for the Speakers:

What did it feel like to tell your story, uninterrupted, for three minutes?

What did your listener do that made your job as a speaker easier?

How did your listener show you that they were, indeed, listening?

Did you know what your listener thought about your story? How did you get this information?

What could a listener have done that would have had a negative impact on your experience?

Questions for the Listeners:

What was the experience of listening for three minutes like?

What was difficult about it? What was easy?

How did you encourage your speaker?

What ways did you show the speaker you were actively listening?

How did you listen with not just your ears, but with your eyes and heart?

What did you learn from this experience that you will use as a witness of God's grace?

After a brief discussion, switch roles—speakers become listeners and listeners become speakers—and repeat the activity.

Remember to time groups for three minutes. Follow up with a brief discussion of how the flip side of the experience was different for participants.

End the activity by reminding participants of the following key points from the lecture:

1. The Spirit proceeds us in our conversations, guiding our listening and helping us know when it is time to speak and time to be quiet.
2. Our life, 24/7, and our love for others is how God's grace finds form in our world.

IV. Evaluation and Planning (10 Minutes)

Now that the small groups have spent some time working with the information presented in the lecture, individuals should be prepared to identify ways their congregation and their individual lives bring God's grace to their community.

Use the remaining time to work in groups from the same congregation (or as individuals) to start planning how to apply what has been learned in this module. The chart in the participant guide directs groups/individuals to identify current strengths, areas for improvement, and plans for increasing our witness in each of four categories.

The instructions from the participant guide follow:
Use the table below to evaluate your congregation's witness in the community and plan ways to increase your witness.

Document your congregation's strengths in the first row and areas for improvement in the second. In the third row, brainstorm ideas about how your church can increase your witness of God's grace in your community.

The questions in the table may help you get started with your evaluation.

Slide 40

WITNESSES OF GOD'S GRACE	STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	IDEAS FOR FUTURE PLANNING
An incarnational presence: How does your very presence witness to the beauty of living under the reign of God?			
Redemptive conversations: How are you listening in your community and engaging in redemptive conversations with those beyond your congregation?			
Compassionate care: How is your congregation showing compassionate care to those who are new to your church and to those beyond your church?			
Inclusive community: What is the experience of a person from a different racial, ethnic, economic, political, or religious group when they interact with your congregation?			

VI. WRAP-UP (5 MINUTES)

This section provides an opportunity to close the module.

- Ask participants to share their thoughts about the module.
- If time allows, they may share the results of their evaluation and planning activity with other groups.
- Answer any questions and provide encouragement for the plans groups have identified.

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Slide 41