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What does it mean to be a “credible witness”?

Basically, the notion of being credible is being believable. As Christians we’re supposed to be witnesses to the reality of the kingdom of God. The gospel of the kingdom is that Jesus has brought us into right relationship with God and each other. This is the testimony we’re supposed to give with our lives and with our words. In order for people to believe our testimony they must know that our lifestyle is consistent with the message we preach. Unfortunately, this is far too often not the case and many people around the world don’t believe Christians anymore, and we are now facing a credibility problem.

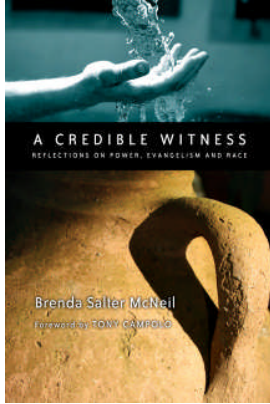
Talk about the credibility problem.

There are three indicators that point to our loss of credibility: One is the decline in church attendance, especially among young people. We know that fewer and fewer people are attracted to mainline churches, at least in the Western world. This generation seems less drawn to coming to church. Second is the portrayal of Christians in the media. A lot of times we’re the brunt of jokes, and our beliefs are seen as irrelevant to what’s happening in the world. Third is the global perception of American Christianity. Around the world we’re thought of as a Christian nation, which used to be a positive thing, a source of pride. But global events have caused people to mistrust us. We’re now seen as greedy and domineering, and those qualities are unfortunately associated with Christianity.

What do power and race have to do with evangelism?

Our world is becoming increasingly global, and our evangelism will need to take the diversity around us more seriously. When we approach evangelism from a place of power without trying to understand and collaborate with others, it limits our ability to build bridges and to have an effective witness.

Therefore, since evangelism is rooted in the ability to give a message that is believable, our witness suffers when we come into relationships wielding power because our behavior demonstrates a posture that is inconsistent with the gospel message that calls us into a community that is interdependent.



*A Credible Witness:
Reflections on Power,
Evangelism and Race*

159 pages, paper, 5 1/2 x
8 1/4 inches, 978-0-8308-
3482-2, \$13.00

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“It’s so simple: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. And yet the church today still struggles with ‘But who is my neighbor?’ Brenda Salter McNeil goes right to the heart of the problem of our faltering witness: We lack the urgency to bring down the barriers that divide us *in* the church, and we don’t know how to *live* the gospel in a multicultural society. The chapters on intentionality and needing one another are themselves worth their weight in gold. If only we will listen!”
Neta Jackson, author of The Yada Yada Prayer Group novels

Throughout the book, you use examples from the story of the woman at the well in John 4. What does this story mean to you?

I love that story! I love how Jesus interacts with her; he takes her seriously. Really it’s about two people that should not have had a conversation at all. In evangelism, we need to take others seriously, even though they may have cultures and experiences much different from our own. Everybody’s got a story! I think the woman at the well becomes a mirror for us to look at ourselves. She’s a microcosm of so many people we meet in society. It’s often frightening to delve into our own stories and look at our motivations. For me, it was scary to look at the similarities between her story and my story. It caused me to do some reexamining of my life and to look at how society and culture have impacted me and influenced some of the choices I’ve made.

How do some churches or organizations misuse power, and how can those dynamics change to include everyone equally?

I think it’s important for churches and Christian organizations to realize that oftentimes people who are different have to change who they are to fit into our culturally conditioned boxes. In many ways our religious rules force others to “go along to get along.” The truth is that the kingdom of God celebrates all of us in all of our diversity. We need to learn that everybody brings something of value to the body of Christ, and that we really need each other. There is something lacking if we don’t hear all the parts of the story, whether it be male or female, black, white, Asian, Latino, Native American, or international. We will all be diminished if we don’t get every person’s authentic participation. We need to say to everyone, “You have things to offer. We’d like your perspective and your help.”

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