



Disciples in the Marketplace

Episode Five: My Work is My Witness

Quick Look Discussion Guide

Check out the *Disciples in the Marketplace* [landing page](#) to view the **streaming video interview** with photojournalist, Jack Corn. You will also find additional backstory/bonus clips, as well as links to [a full transcript of this video](#) and bonus clips. See group discussion questions for this episode about seeing grace at work below.

“My **work is a witness**, and it’s a witness **of what you see**.
And then **what you did** about it once you saw it.”
-Jack Corn

Disciples in the marketplace see grace at work – and they help others see it, too. Beyond that, they gather others to ‘meet God and share grace’ in places where Jesus’ love draws near, even when our forgetfulness and indifference might conceal what’s going on there. These witnesses help write a new story of grace at work, shedding light that illuminates God’s better life for all.

My Work is My Witness

There are witnesses in our lives who teach us to pay attention. They call us to **see and say** (bear witness) as they **show and tell** us a story with their testimony. Their witness to grace at work calls us to echo back what we’ve seen and, better, respond together to God’s love we see at work, for life.

In the category of ‘**my work is my witness**,’ take a few minutes to reflect on and/or discuss one or two of the questions below.

Opening Group Reflection/Discussion Questions:

- YouTube is filled with “fail” videos of persons having a bad day at work. Have you ever recorded something on your phone or home security camera that might make one of these reels? Ever had a day at work when you were glad there were no cameras rolling? Share a story.
- Have you or someone you know seen something that required your testimony in a legal proceeding? Share your/their story of being a witness for the defense or prosecution. Can you think of other famous witnesses in high profile trials? What made them compelling or less than convincing?
- Do you recall seeing things as a young person that you felt were wrong but everyone else seemed to turn a blind eye to or normalize? What were your community’s cultural blind spots to the lives of persons we are prone to ignore or forget?

Video Discussion Questions: What Did You See?

Cut to the chase: Watch [Episode Five: My Work is My Witness](#) video. See the video discussion questions below. See, too, the **Bonus/Backstory clip links and discussion questions** with Jack Corn's recollections of some of the 'picture stories' that his work helped amplify.

Choose one or two of the questions below as you consider what it means to be a disciple in the marketplace:

- What did you see or hear in Jack Corn's story? What will you remember?
- Do you see grace at work in Jack's photographs? Where?
- Where does Jack see life? What does he mean by life's "underside"? Who witnesses our shared troubles, traumas, and violations today? Its beauty and grace? (example: Facebook, Instagram/TikTok/other social media platforms)
- Choose a photo by Jack Corn that is an example of violation or beauty (or both). You can find photographs at Newspapers.com or by searching "images Jack Corn" online. Better, select one at [Jack Corn Photography](https://jackcornphotography.photodeck.com/) and send the link to your group or pull it up on your phone: <https://jackcornphotography.photodeck.com/> >
- What have you seen on the job (or in your zip code) that you wished would change? Do others see it, too?
- What difference does 'being there' make to our testimony to grace at work?

Another option for reflection/discussion:

Listen to one of the songs from the unofficial Disciples in the Marketplace-SATP crowdsourced Spotify playlist: ("Fast Car" – Tracy Chapman; "Ode to Billy Joe" – Bobbie Gentry; "We Shall Overcome" – The Freedom Singers; "Coo Coo Bird" – Clarence Ashely; "Single Girl, Married Girl" – The Carter Family; "Before This Time Another Year" – Bessie Jones/Georgia Sea Island Singers; "On the Wings of a Dove" – Ferlin Husky; etc.).

Play/listen to the whole song together and ask the group to **share the song's take on the shape of the 'underside' of life** in that context (including its hardships, struggles, invisibilities, but also resilience and courage to show up and be counted). Most blues or many older country & western songs will do. Then ask yourself and the group:

- Who or what is the song about? Are there **people and places we ignore today** that find their way into the photos (or songs) of 'see and say' witnesses?
- Does your work (or the work of someone you know) create opportunities to **lift up people and places** that fly **under our culture's radar** of sound-bite news cycles?
- Do you know a **forgotten or 'underside of life' group** that **needs more witnesses to shed light** on their lives (and gather others to 'see, say, and care,' too)? Do they have their own songs or platform for their stories?

Jack Corn Quotes from the My Work is My Witness video

“My **work is a witness** and it’s a witness of what you see. And then what you did about it once you saw it.”

“I wanted to photograph what I called the underside of life... **I wanted to photograph everything: the good and the bad.**”

“We’re bragging about what a great country we are. I served for four years in the military and I think it is a great country. But **we also have flaws in our caring for poor people.**”

“I’m going into areas [where] people are poor... **I’m going into areas where most people wouldn’t go.** Not that it was brave or anything, they just – nobody went. And **I went because I was curious.**”

“I mean, anybody could have taken the pictures if they’d been there. **You just got to be there.** The ‘being there’ is the thing, and taking the time to do it.”

“**I saw grace in my work when something good came out of it.** I wanted to change things that aren’t good. I wanted them to be better.”

“That’s the hardest thing to teach: to recognize what to take and what not to take...[T]hat’s what I tried to teach when I was teaching in college: **Learn to see.**” [from the ‘cutting room floor’/outtake]

“Most people would say, ‘Let’s avoid this kind of situation’ [poverty in urban areas and Appalachia]. It’s natural...but **a lot of people don’t think about people that are poor.** We don’t.

“As a photographer **I thought that I would boost the thing a little bit by showing them.** And I’m not bragging...I’m just saying that’s what I thought I was doing.”

Bonus/Backstory Video Discussion Questions: Better Stories of Grace in this Place

Check out additional Jack Corn clips where he looks at some of his photographs and speaks to the context of these images. Listen for ways that his attention, curiosity, and humility earned the trust of his photo subjects.

Stories Behind the Photographs – 01 Diane Nash March, Standing for What’s Right (01:25)

Bonus/Backstory Questions

- What examples have you seen of persons speaking truth to power? In your own life/home town? What about in scripture (for example, Daniel 3:16-18 or Acts 5:27-32)? The featured photograph Jack discusses in this clip of Diane Nash* is found in the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Jack says these young college students who confronted Nashville Mayor Ben West about the injustice of segregated lunch counters had “a lot of intestinal fortitude.” How is courage evidence of grace at work in situations that violate the law of love?
- Jack says that the struggle of college students and others to desegregate lunch counters and other public spaces during the Civil Rights Movement changed how we “look at who we are and what we’re about.” Are there other examples of protest today that hold a mirror up to the majority culture’s indifference to suffering in our midst?

* For more on Diane Nash and the sit-ins/student march to confront city officials and Mayor Ben West, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRPOaz82S8Y>. On her work with “intestinal fortitude” organizing the freedom riders, see John Siegenthaler’s description of a phone call from Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy and then with Nash as freedom riders headed to Birmingham, Alabama in 1961: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIffL6KplzQ>.

Stories Behind the Photographs – 02 Appalachian Miners, Acceptance and Impact (02:25)

Bonus/Backstory Questions

- How can we build trust with persons who need our witness and care? Jack says that ‘word went around [in rural Appalachian mining country] that this guy is OK.’ What does your faith community do (or *not* do) that builds trust with those in some of the ‘underside places’ of your zip code? Share a story about someone in your family or a friend/colleague who impressed you with the way they earned respect in the places and situations where people struggle.
- Have you ever seen a group rapidly respond with crowd-sourced help for persons in need once they knew the story/situation? Who are the witnesses that amplify these stories in your community today?

Stories Behind the Photographs – 03 Boy in Doorway, Seeing Before ‘Shooting’ [taking photos] (00:41)

Bonus/Backstory Questions:

- Jack says, “If you can’t see it, you’re not going to think to photograph it ... You’re making the picture in your head at first, you see.” Can “seeing” or imagining what’s going on in another person’s life make it easier to hear/share their story? How does this work when we need to make corrections to our assumptions about who people are and how they live?
- Think of a time when what you ‘saw’ or imagined was spot on (or dead wrong)? How does the work of witnesses include seeing beyond appearances to something more (grace at work in every life)?

Stories Behind the Photographs – 04 Crowded Jails, Networks of Good (01:30)

Bonus/Backstory Questions

- Do you know someone who has been arrested or whose family members have lived through incarceration? Did you/they visit them in jail? What did you learn/see? At the time the photograph Jack references in this clip was taken, adults were being housed with minors in many city/county jails. Beyond overcrowding and poverty, questions about the ethics of incarcerating children/youth with adult offenders were raised by Jack’s photograph in his home state of Tennessee. Why do we have a difficult time ‘seeing’ – let alone, caring about – incarcerated persons?
- Like Jack says in the main episode, “We have flaws in our caring for poor people.” Is there a connection between the invisibility of many poor communities and our failure to see those incarcerated?
- John and Charles Wesley and the rest of the ‘holy club’ that gathered during their college years took seriously Jesus’ call in Matthew 25:35-36 to visit the incarcerated, by making regular visits to the Oxford Castle and also the Bocardo prison where many indebted persons were confined. What are some ways we could follow in their footsteps today? For example, challenging mass incarceration of non-violent offenders, visiting persons in our own local jails/prisons, or supporting families of incarcerated persons. What might be some obstacles to doing this in your church?†

† See Kenneth L. Carder, “Recovering Our Methodist Heritage in Prisons,” [UM Men’s Magazine, vol. 15, no. 1](#). See too, The Upper Room’s [Congregational Tool Box for Prison Ministry](#), and Bryan Stevenson’s best-selling book/motion picture, *Just Mercy* and the restorative justice work of the [Equal Justice Initiative](#).

Stories Behind the Photographs – 05 Choctaw Native Americans, Being There (01:14)

Bonus/Backstory Questions:

- What role does humility play in building relationships with people in your community? Do you know any examples of humble (or ‘bossy’/arrogant) community engagement in your city?
- “A good picture shows how people live” (Jack Corn).‡ How is our reliable witness to the lives of others important for recognizing both their troubles and the grace already at work there?
- What are some ways your church can amplify the stories of life in the community, countering harmful stereotypes? Hint: tell better stories of what people are up against (in their own words) and how their lives are filled with not only struggle but joy and beauty, too.§

‡ Jack Corn was invited to photograph the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians by tribal historian, anthropologist, and editor of Chata Anumpa (‘Choctaw Times’), Robert Bruce Ferguson. Before devoting his life to advocating for the Choctaw people and other tribal communities, Ferguson was a successful songwriter and musician (“On the Wings of a Dove”). See more of Jack’s photographs of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw people here: <https://jackcornphotography.photodeck.com/-/galleries/choctaw-native-americans>.

§ Finding examples of how different communities depict their own lives can help. For example, see blackarchives.co on Instagram to view photographs taken by families, friends, and allies that bring a loving eye and spotlight to the Black experience.