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Editorial Office 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904
Come visit us at our website: <http://www.absg.adventist.org>.

Principal Contributor
Mark Finley

Editor
Clifford R. Goldstein

Associate Editor
Soraya Homayouni

Publication Manager
Lea Alexander Greve

Editorial Assistant
Sharon Thomas-Crews

Pacific Press® Coordinator
Tricia Wegh

Art Director and Illustrator
Lars Justinen

Design
Justinen Creative Group

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Making Friends for God: The Joy of Sharing in God's Mission



There are times when grasping a single thought makes a profound difference in our lives. A number of years ago, I sat in a ministerial meeting with some of my colleagues. The discussion turned to sharing our faith, witnessing, and evangelism. One of my friends expressed this thought: “Mission is primarily the work of God. He is employing all of the resources of heaven to save our planet. Our work is to cooperate joyfully with Him in His work of saving lost people.” It seemed as if a heavy burden was lifted off my shoulders. It was not my job to save a lost world. It was God’s. My responsibility was to cooperate with Him in what He was already doing.

The idea that mission is God’s work is clarified throughout Scripture. Solomon states it this way, “He [God] has put eternity in their hearts” (*Eccles. 3:11, NKJV*). When an individual is born into this world, God places a desire for eternity deep within the fabric of that person’s being. As Augustine once said, “Lord, we were made for thee, and our hearts will never find rest until they find rest in thee.” According to John’s Gospel, Jesus is the Light that lights every person born into this world (*John 1:9*). Not only has God placed within each one of us a longing for Himself, but He also sends His Holy Spirit to draw us to Himself.

Every desire to do right and every conviction of sin is prompted by the Holy Spirit. Every desire for goodness and inclination toward kindness and unselfishness is motivated first by the Holy Spirit. Even though we may not fully understand or realize it, the Holy Spirit is

working in our lives to draw us to Jesus (*John 16:7–15*). But Jesus Himself is the greatest gift of all.

When the human race was hopelessly lost in sin, condemned to eternal death, the love of God took the initiative. Luke writes, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’ ” (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*). The apostle Paul adds, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*). God took the initiative in our salvation. Christ left the glory and splendor of heaven and came to this sin-darkened world on a redemptive mission.

Before we ever took one baby step toward Him, He took a giant leap toward us. Before we ever gave Him our life, He provided salvation to us through His death. We were His enemies, but He was our Friend. We turned our backs on Him, but He turned His face toward us. We cared little for Him, but He cared immensely for us.

In Luke 15, He is pictured as the Good Shepherd relentlessly looking for His lost sheep, a woman frantically looking for her lost silver coin from her dowry, and an old father recklessly running to meet his lost boy. Ellen G. White makes this marvelous statement worth contemplating: “The great plan of redemption was laid before the foundation of the world. Christ did not stand alone in this wondrous undertaking for the ransom of man. In the councils of heaven, before the world was created, the Father and the Son covenanted together that if man proved disloyal to God, Christ, one with the Father, would take the place of the transgressor, and suffer the penalty of justice that must fall upon him.”—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 15, 1898.

Contemplate it for a moment. We have the incredible privilege and the awesome responsibility as well as the eternal joy of participating with Christ and cooperating with Him in His mission. That’s what these lessons are all about this quarter.

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A native of Connecticut, USA, and an internationally known evangelist, Mark Finley was a vice president at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists from 2005 to 2010. After retiring from full-time employment, he became an assistant to the president of the General Conference. Pastor Finley and his wife, Ernestine, have three children and five grandchildren.



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Why Witness?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *James 5:19, 20; Luke 15:6; Zeph. 3:17; John 7:37, 38; 1 Tim. 2:3, 4; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15.*

Memory Text: “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Timothy 2:3, 4, NKJV*).

God's great longing is for all people everywhere to respond to His love, accept His grace, be transformed by His Spirit, and be saved into His kingdom. He has no greater desire than our salvation. His love is boundless. His mercy is measureless. His compassion is endless. His forgiveness is inexhaustible. His power is infinite. In contrast to the heathen gods, which demanded sacrifices, our God has made the supreme sacrifice. No matter how much we desire to be saved, God longs to save us more. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Tim. 2:3, 4, NKJV*). His heart's longing is for your salvation and mine.

Witnessing is all about Jesus. It is about what He has done to save us, and about how He has changed our lives. It is about the marvelous truths of His Word, which tell us about who He is and the beauty of His character. Why witness? When we understand who He is and have experienced the marvels of His grace and the power of His love, we cannot be silent. Why witness? While participating with Him, we enter into His joy of seeing people redeemed by His grace and transformed by His love.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 4.

Providing Opportunities for Salvation

God provides opportunities daily for people everywhere to know Him. He moves upon their hearts through His Holy Spirit. He reveals Himself in the beauty and complexity of the natural world. The vastness, order, and symmetry of the universe speak of an infinite God with limitless wisdom and infinite power. He arranges circumstances or providences in our lives to draw us to Himself.

Although God reveals Himself through the impressions of His Spirit, the glories of nature, and acts of providence, the clearest revelation of His love is found in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. When we share Jesus with others, we provide them with their best opportunity to be saved.

Read Luke 19:10 and compare it with James 5:19, 20. What does Luke's Gospel teach about Christ's purpose in coming to earth? How do we cooperate with Christ in His work of saving the lost?

According to James, "He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death" (*James 5:20, NKJV*). The book of Romans amplifies this thought. In Romans 1 and 2, both the Gentiles who have seen God's revelation in nature and the Jews who have received God's prophetic revelation in Scripture are lost without Christ. In Romans 3–5, the apostle reveals that salvation comes by grace through faith alone. In Romans 6–8, he describes how the grace that justifies each believer also is sanctifying grace. In Romans 10, he states that " 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved' " (*Rom. 10:13, NKJV*), and he then points out that none can call if they have not believed, and they cannot believe if they have not heard, and they cannot hear unless someone tells them (*Rom. 10:14, 15*). We are God's links in the plan of salvation to reach lost people with the glory of the gospel.

We do not witness to give people their only chance to be saved. We witness to give them their *best* chance. What is our role in God's plan of redeeming the human race? Think about this, too: How many people have heard the gospel from your own lips?

Making Jesus Glad

Has anyone ever asked you, “How is your day going?” Or, “Is everything all right with you today?” What if you asked God those questions? “God, how is Your day going?” What kind of response do you think you would receive? Possibly it would be one like this: “My day has been extremely difficult. Tears filled My eyes at one thousand refugee camps filled with cold, hungry, crying children. I walked the streets of the world’s crowded cities and wept with the homeless and destitute. My heart breaks over abused women and frightened children sold into sexual slavery. I witnessed the ravages of war, the devastating effects of natural disasters, and the painful agony of debilitating, deadly diseases.” Would you respond back by asking, “But God, is there anything that makes You rejoice? Is there anything that brings joy to Your heart? Is there anything that makes You sing?”

Read Luke 15:6, 7, 9, 10, 22–24, and 32. How do these stories end, and what do these endings tell you about God?

All heaven rejoices when the lost are found. In a world filled with disease, disaster, and death, we can bring joy to the heart of God by sharing the “good news” of salvation with others. One of the greatest motivations to share Christ’s love is the knowledge that witnessing brings joy to the heart of God. Every time we reveal His love, all of heaven sings.

Read Zephaniah 3:17. What is our Lord’s response when we accept His saving grace?

Imagine this scene. As the result of your witness some man or woman or boy or girl accepts Jesus as his or her personal Savior. All of heaven bursts forth in rapturous song, and our mighty Savior rejoices over that individual with singing. What can be more rewarding, more fulfilling, than knowing your witness brings joy to the heart of God in a world of sadness?

Growing by Giving

The Dead Sea marks the earth's lowest elevation. At 1,388 feet below sea level, it ranks as the world's lowest sea. The river Jordan flows out of the Sea of Galilee and winds its way through the Jordan Valley until it dead-ends in the Dead Sea.

The hot, dry climate, with the intense sunlight and desert conditions, causes the water to evaporate quite rapidly. Since the Dead Sea's salt and mineral content is 33.7 percent, little survives in its waters. There are no fish, no plants, only some microbes and bacteria at the bottom.

In our Christian lives, if the grace of God that flows into our lives does not flow out to others, we will become stagnant and all but lifeless like the Dead Sea. As Christians, that's not how we are to live.

Read John 7:37, 38 and Luke 6:38. When believers receive the refreshing streams of living water from Christ, what is the natural result?

“God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ's, we must share in His work. In order to enter into His joy,—the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice,—we must participate in His labors for their redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 142.

“Those who would be overcomers must be drawn out of themselves; and the only thing which will accomplish this great work, is to become intensely interested in the salvation of others.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 207.

We grow as we share with others what Christ has done in our own lives. Considering all that we have been given in Christ, what but only the most abject selfishness could keep us from sharing with others what we have ourselves been given? If we fail to share our faith, our spiritual life will become as stagnant as the Dead Sea.

What have been your own experiences in witnessing to others, praying with others, and ministering to the needs of others? How have these experiences impacted your own faith and walk with the Lord?

Faithfulness to Christ's Command

Loyalty to Christ requires a commitment to do His will. It necessitates obedience to His commands. It results in a heart that beats with His heart in saving the lost. It places priority on the things that He prioritizes.

Read 1 Timothy 2:3, 4 and 2 Peter 3:9. What do these passages tell us about the heart of God? What is His priority?

God is passionate about saving people. There is nothing more important to Him. It is His earnest desire that “all” be saved and “come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4, NKJV). He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* indicates that the Greek word used for “willing” in this passage is *boulomai*, which expresses “the inclination of mind, as ‘to want’ or ‘to desire.’ ” The commentary then makes this insightful observation on the little word “but.” The Greek word for “but” is *alla*. It is used here “to emphasize the contrast between the misinterpretation of God’s nature, namely, that He might be willing for some to perish, and the truth that He wishes all to be saved.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 615. Christ’s command for each one of us to participate in His mission as witnesses of His love, grace, and truth is an outgrowth of His desire for all humanity to be saved.

Read Acts 13:47 and compare it to Isaiah 49:6. To whom did this passage initially apply? How does the apostle Paul use it?

There are times when an Old Testament prophecy has more than one application. Here the apostle Paul takes a prophecy that referred first to Israel and prophetically to the Messiah (see Isa. 41:8, Isa. 49:6, and Luke 2:32) and applies it to the New Testament church. For the church to neglect or minimize the command of Christ is to fail in the purpose of her existence and miss her prophetic calling to the world.

What are the dangers to the church, even a local church, if it becomes so inwardly focused that it forgets what its purpose is to begin with?

Motivated by Love

This week we have focused on answering the question, “Why witness?” We have discovered that as we share our faith, we have the joy of cooperating with God in His mission to the world. Our witness of His love provides people with greater opportunities for salvation, since they can see more clearly His grace and truth.

At the same time, witnessing also is one of God’s means of helping us grow spiritually. A failure to share what Christ has done for us and to minister to others strangles genuine spiritual life.

Witnessing places us in touch with the heart of the One who longs for all humanity to be saved. It is a response of obedience to His command. In today’s study, we will examine the greatest motivation of all for witnessing.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, 18–20. What motivated Paul to experience trials and tribulations for the sake of the gospel? How can this same motivation prompt our service for Christ?

The apostle Paul was motivated by love. There are things you will do for love that you will do for no other reason. When the apostle declares, “The love of Christ constrains us,” he is speaking an eternal truth. The word “constrains” means “to urge, to impel, to control, or to highly motivate.” Thus, the love of Christ controlled Paul’s actions and motivated his witness. With undaunted purpose and singleness of mind, he shared the plan of salvation throughout the Mediterranean world.

“Love must dwell in the heart. A thoroughgoing Christian draws his motives of action from his deep heart-love for his Master. Up through the roots of his affection for Christ springs an unselfish interest in his brethren.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 425.

When we truly recognize the immense sacrifice Christ has made for us, we are overwhelmed by His love and compelled to share with others what He has done for us.

The One who created all creation (the galaxies, the stars, the angelic host, the entire cosmos, and other worlds) was the One who died on the cross for us. How can this astonishing truth not create in us a love for God and a desire to share that love?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “God’s Purpose for His Church,” pp. 9–16, in *The Acts of the Apostles*, and “Go Teach All Nations,” pp. 822–828, in *The Desire of Ages*.

The New Testament church faced the danger of failing to understand the purpose for its existence. Ellen G. White describes this danger: “The persecution that came upon the church in Jerusalem resulted in giving a great impetus to the work of the gospel. Success had attended the ministry of the word in that place, and there was danger that the disciples would linger there too long, unmindful of the Saviour’s commission to go to all the world. Forgetting that strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service, they began to think that they had no work so important as that of shielding the church in Jerusalem from the attacks of the enemy. Instead of educating the new converts to carry the gospel to those who had not heard it, they were in danger of taking a course that would lead all to be satisfied with what had been accomplished.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 105.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Look carefully at the Ellen G. White quote above, especially the last line. Why must we even today be careful of that same potential danger? In the face of the missionary challenges before us, why would such an attitude be so terribly, even tragically, wrong?
- ② Why do you think each of the Gospels ends with a similar command? Read Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46–49; and John 20:21. What did this mean to these first-century believers, and what should it mean to us today?
- ③ Can witnessing and service ever become a substitute for genuine spirituality? If so, how, and how can we be careful of that trap?
- ④ In class, talk about the answer to the question at the end of Tuesday’s study, regarding how witnessing and ministering impact your own spiritual growth. What are some things you have learned that can help others? What mistakes have you made that you could help others avoid?
- ⑤ Dwell on the amazing fact that God loves each one of us individually. How do you understand what this means? How should this, perhaps the most important truth in all the universe, impact how you live?

Stopped at the Airport

By GLENN ERNFORD LIE

Only one question will be asked on Judgment Day. I heard it when my international flight landed in Portland in the U.S. state of Oregon.

The U.S. immigration officer glanced at my Norwegian passport and then looked up at me at Portland International Airport. “What are your plans?” he asked.

“I am visiting a friend,” I replied.

“What is the address?” he said.

“I don’t know,” I said. “But she is going to meet me here at the airport.”

The immigration officer didn’t look pleased that I didn’t know the address.

“So, where did you meet her?” he said.

“At a college outside London.”

“What did you study there?”

“Theology.”

The immigration officer studied my face.

“Are you a believer?” he said.

“Yes.”

He looked down at my passport in his hand and then back at me.

“So, why are you saved?” he said.

The answer tumbled out of my mouth. “Because Jesus died for me,” I said.

The immigration officer looked at me.

“Good answer,” he said. “You may enter.”

I smiled and entered the United States.

The significance of the conversation struck me as I walked to the baggage claim area. Only one question will be asked on Judgment Day: Why are you saved? The answer is found in 1 John 5:11–13, which says, “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (NKJV).



Why are you saved? With the assurance of salvation, you can reply with confidence, “Because Jesus died for me.” In return, you will hear the sweet words, “Good answer. You may enter.”

GLENN ERNFORD LIE, 55, is a teacher at Østmarka Seventh-day Adventist School in Oslo, Norway, and a member and former youth pastor of Betal Seventh-day Adventist Church, which received part of a 2017 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering to open a youth community center.

Winsome Witnesses: The Power of Personal Testimony



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 5:15–20, Mark 16:1–11, Acts 4:1–20, 1 John 1:1–3, Gal. 2:20, Acts 26:1–32.*

Memory Text: “‘For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard’ ” (*Acts 4:20, NKJV*).

There is unusual power in a personal testimony. When our hearts are warmed by Christ's love and we are changed by His grace, we have something significant to say about Him. It is one thing to share what Jesus has done for someone else. It is quite another to share what He has done for us personally.

It is difficult to argue against personal experience. People may debate your theology or your interpretation of a text or even scoff at religion in general. But when an individual can say, “I once was hopeless but now have hope; I was filled with guilt but now have peace; I was purposeless but now have purpose,” even skeptics are impacted by the power of the gospel.

Although some people may experience sudden, dramatic conversions like the apostle Paul's on the Damascus road, more often conversion occurs as a person has a growing recognition of the preciousness of Jesus, a deep appreciation for His amazing grace, and a supreme sense of gratitude for the salvation He freely offers. Christ radically refocuses our lives. It is this witness that the world so desperately needs and longs for.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 11.

Unlikely Witnesses

Read Mark 5:15–20. Why do you think Jesus sent the man into Decapolis to witness to his family and friends rather than nurturing him in his newfound faith by keeping him with Himself?

The word *Decapolis* comes from two words: *deca*, meaning ten, and *polis*, meaning city. The region of Decapolis was an area of ten cities along the shores of the Sea of Galilee in the first century. These cities were bound together by a common language and culture. The demoniac was known by many people in that region. He had struck fear into their hearts through his unpredictable, violent behavior. Jesus saw in him one who longed for something better, and so He miraculously delivered the man from the demons that tormented him.

When the townspeople heard that Jesus had permitted the demons to possess their herd of swine, and that the swine had run over a cliff into the sea, they came out to see what was taking place. Mark's Gospel records, "Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid" (*Mark 5:15, NKJV*). The man was whole again—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The essence of the gospel is to restore people broken by sin to the wholeness for which Christ has created them.

What better person to reach these ten cities of Decapolis than a transformed demoniac who could share his testimony with the entire region? Ellen G. White states it well: "As witnesses for Christ, we are to tell what we know, what we ourselves have seen and heard and felt. If we have been following Jesus step by step, we shall have something right to the point to tell concerning the way in which He has led us. We can tell how we have tested His promise, and found the promise true. We can bear witness to what we have known of the grace of Christ. This is the witness for which our Lord calls, and for want of which the world is perishing."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 340. God often uses unlikely witnesses who are changed by His grace to make a difference in our world.

What's your own story—that is, your own conversion story? What do you tell others about how you came to faith? What can you offer someone unconverted, who could benefit from the experience you can share?

Proclaiming the Risen Christ

It was early Sunday morning, and the two Marys hastily made their way to the tomb of Christ. They were not going to ask Him for anything. What could a dead man possibly give them? The last time they saw Him, His body was bloodied, bruised, and broken. The scenes of the Cross were deeply etched in their minds. Now they were simply doing their duty. Sorrowfully, they made their way to the tomb to embalm His body. The gloomy shadows of despondency engulfed their lives in the darkness of despair. The future was uncertain and offered little hope.

When they arrived at the tomb, they were startled to find it empty. Matthew records the events of that Resurrection morning in these words: “But the angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen’ ” (*Matt. 28:5, 6, NKJV*).

The women were now overwhelmed with joy. Their dark clouds of sadness faded into the sunlight of the dawning of Resurrection morning. Their night of sadness was over. Gladness graced their countenances, and songs of rejoicing replaced their tears of lament.

Read Mark 16:1–11. What was Mary’s response when she discovered Christ had risen from the dead?

After Mary met the resurrected Christ, she ran to tell the story. Good news is for sharing, and she could not be silent. Christ was alive! His tomb was empty, and the world must know it. After we, too, meet the resurrected Christ along the highway of life, we, too, must run to tell the story, for good news is for sharing.

How fascinating, too, that despite all the times Jesus had told them what would happen, that He would be killed and then resurrected, the disciples—those ones Jesus specifically chose—refused to believe Mary’s testimony. “And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe” (*Mark 16:11, NKJV*). Thus, if even Jesus’ own disciples didn’t immediately believe, we shouldn’t be surprised if others don’t immediately accept our words either.

When was the last time you were rebuffed in your witness? How did you respond, and what have you learned from that experience?

Changed Lives Make a Difference

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NKJV).

The New Testament church exploded in growth. There were 3,000 baptized on the Day of Pentecost (*Acts 2:41*). Thousands more were added to the church a few weeks later (*Acts 4:4*). Soon the authorities recognized what was happening. These New Testament believers had been with Christ. Their lives were changed. They were transformed by His grace, and they could not keep silent.

Read Acts 4:1–20. What happened here? What happened when the authorities tried to silence Peter and John? What was their response?

These believers were new in Christ, and they had to tell their story. Peter, a loudmouthed fisherman, was transformed by the grace of God. James and John, the sons of thunder who had difficulty controlling their tempers, were transformed by the grace of God. Thomas the skeptic was transformed by the grace of God. The disciples and members of the early church each had their own stories to tell, and they could not keep silent. Notice this powerful statement by Ellen G. White in the book *Steps to Christ*: “No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart.”—Page 78.

Notice, too, what the religious leaders said in Acts 4:16. They openly acknowledged the reality of the miracle that had been performed—the healed man was standing right before them. Even with all this, they refused to change their attitude. And yet, despite this open defiance, Peter and John were not going to back down from their witness.

What relationship is there between knowing Christ and sharing Christ? Why is knowing Christ personally so essential to our being able to witness about Him?

Sharing Our Experience

In Acts 26, we find the apostle Paul standing as a prisoner before King Agrippa. Here, speaking directly to the king, Paul gave his own personal testimony. He talked about his life, not only as a persecutor of Jesus' followers but also, after his conversion, of his life as a witness to Jesus and about the promise of the resurrection of the dead (*Acts 26:8*).

When Paul was converted on the Damascus road, our Lord spoke to him and said, “‘I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you’” (*Acts 26:16, NKJV*). Sharing our faith is always a dynamic experience. It is telling the story of what Christ has done for us in the past, what He is doing in our lives today, and what He will accomplish for us in the future.

Witnessing is never about us. It is always about Him. He is the God who forgives our iniquities, heals our diseases, crowns us with loving kindness, and satisfies us with good things (*Ps. 103:3–5*). Witnessing is simply sharing our story of His amazing grace. It is a testimony of our personal encounter with this God of amazing grace.

Read 1 John 1:1–3 and compare it with Galatians 2:20. What similarities do you see? How is John's experience similar to Paul's?

Although John and Paul had different life experiences, they both had a personal encounter with Jesus. Their experiences with Jesus were not ones that occurred at a particular point in the past and was then over. It was an ongoing, daily experience of rejoicing in His love and walking in the light of His truth.

Is conversion ever a thing of the past alone? Look at Ellen White's statement about those who thought their past conversion experience is all that matters: “As if, if they knew something about religion once, they did not need to be converted daily; but we ought every day, every one of us, to be converted.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 46.

Regardless of whatever your past experiences have been, even if they were powerful and dramatic, why is it important to have a relationship with the Lord day by day, to sense His reality and His goodness and power day by day? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

The Power of a Personal Testimony

Let's look again at Paul before Agrippa. The apostle Paul stands before this man, the last in the line of Jewish kings, the Maccabees, and of the house of Herod. Agrippa professed to be a Jew, but at heart he was a Roman. (See *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 436.) The aged apostle, weary from his missionary journeys and battle-scarred in the conflict between good and evil, stands there, his heart filled with God's love and his face radiant with God's goodness. Whatever has happened in his life, whatever persecutions and difficulties he has experienced, he can declare that God is good.

Agrippa is cynical, skeptical, hardened, and really indifferent to any genuine value system. In contrast, Paul is filled with faith, committed to the truth, and stalwart in defense of righteousness. The contrast between the two men could not be much more evident. At his trial, Paul requests to speak and receives permission from Agrippa.

Read Acts 26:1–32. How does Paul witness to Agrippa? What can we learn from his words?

Kindness opens hearts where abrasiveness closes them. Paul is incredibly gracious to Agrippa here. He calls him an “expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews” (*Acts 26:3, NKJV*). He then launches into a discussion of his conversion.

Read Paul's conversion story in Acts 26:12–18 and then carefully notice its effect on Agrippa in Acts 26:26–28. Why do you think Agrippa reacted the way he did? What impressed him about Paul's testimony?

Paul's testimony of how Jesus changed his life had a powerful impact on a godless king. There is no witness as effective as a changed life. The witness of a life genuinely converted has an amazing influence on others. Even godless kings are moved by lives transformed by grace. Even if we don't have as dramatic a story as Paul, we all should be able to tell others about what it means to know Jesus and to be redeemed by His blood.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘Almost Thou Persuadest Me,’ ” pp. 433–438, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

The essence of the Christian life is a relationship with Jesus that is so rich and full that we long to share it. As important as correct doctrine is, it cannot substitute for a life transformed by grace and changed by love. Ellen G. White makes it plain when she states: “The Saviour knew that no argument, however logical, would melt hard hearts or break through the crust of worldliness and selfishness. He knew that His disciples must receive the heavenly endowment; that the gospel would be effective only as it was proclaimed by hearts made warm and lips made eloquent by a living knowledge of Him who is the way, the truth, and the life.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 31. In the book *The Desire of Ages*, she adds this powerful thought: “The wonderful love of Christ will melt and subdue hearts, when the mere reiteration of doctrines would accomplish nothing.”—Page 826.

There are those who have the idea that giving their personal testimony is about trying to convince others of the truths they have discovered in the Word of God. Although it is important at the appropriate time to share the truths of God’s Word, our personal testimony has much more to do with the freedom from guilt, the peace, the mercy, the forgiveness, and the strength, hope, and joy we have found in the gift of eternal life Jesus so freely offers.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why do you think our personal testimony is so powerful in influencing others? How have the testimonies of others impacted you and your own experience?
- ❷ In class, talk about your answer to Wednesday’s final question. Why is a daily experience with the Lord so important, not just to our witness but to our own personal faith, as well?
- ❸ Of course, a powerful testimony can be an effective witness. At the same time, why is a godly life such an important part of our witness?
- ❹ Share your personal testimony with the class. Remember that you are sharing what Christ has done for you and what He means to you. What difference does Jesus make in your life?

Reviving an Ohio Church

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Financial planner Vince Waln credits the Holy Spirit and a pipe organ for transforming a declining church of 15 people into a vibrant congregation of about 85 in three years in the U.S. state of Ohio.

The miracles started when Vince preached at various small churches, including at the Hamilton Seventh-day Adventist Church, where he had worshiped as a child. “Attendance had really fallen off,” Vince said. “There was no one to play the piano. My wife sang special music with a CD.”

One evening, his wife, Darla, returned from a bridal shower at the Hamilton church and announced that the church pastor was leaving.

“You could be their pastor,” she said, jokingly.

For the next two weeks, Vince couldn’t forget the church. He awoke at night with his wife’s words ringing in his ears, “You could be the pastor.”

Finally, Vince volunteered to assist the Hamilton church for six months. The next thing he knew, the Hamilton church’s six board members told him that they had been praying for him to be their lay pastor.

“Those prayers had gone on for the two weeks that I had been waking up in the middle of the night,” Vince said. “It was definitely the Holy Spirit working.”

In the new role, Vince invited a retired professional organist, Jerry Taylor, to assist as music director. One day, Jerry excitedly called Vince to say an upscale retirement community in Cincinnati was selling a pipe organ for \$75,000.

“We can’t afford that!” Vince said. “Even \$5,000 would be too much.”

“Let’s go look at it anyway,” Jerry said.

The retirement community’s chaplain was fascinated to hear about the Hamilton church. He excused himself for a moment and, returning, said, “I spoke with the director just now. We have been looking for a church to donate this pipe organ to. The only requirement is to open the doors to the community.”

The Hamilton church received the pipe organ for free.

The miracles continued. Construction workers remodeled the sanctuary for the pipe organ at cost. Engineers helped the church, whose cistern-drawn water was undrinkable, connect to the city water supply. Christians from many denominations joined the church’s new choir.



A thrilling moment came when two women walked into the church on a Sabbath morning and announced that they wanted to keep the biblical Sabbath after studying the Bible on their own. One woman and her husband were later baptized.

The pipe organ, however, appears to be the main instrument that God has used to attract people to church, said Vince Waln, 65. “We are just drawing in the people,” he said.

Seeing People Through Jesus' Eyes



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 8:22–26; John 4:3–34; John 1:40, 41; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 23:39–43; Acts 8:26–38.*

Memory Text: “Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’ ” (*Matthew 4:19, NKJV*).

Jesus is the Master Soul Winner. By watching the way Jesus worked with people, we learn how to lead others to a knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ. Journeying with Him through the crowded streets of Jerusalem, the dusty paths of Judea, and the grassy hillsides of Galilee, we discover how He revealed the principles of the kingdom to seeking souls.

Jesus saw all men and women as winnable for His kingdom. He saw each one through the eyes of divine compassion. He saw Peter not as a rough, loudmouthed fisherman but as a mighty preacher of the gospel. He saw James and John not as quick-tempered, fiery radicals but as enthusiastic proclaimers of His grace. He saw the deep yearning for genuine love and acceptance in the hearts of Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan woman, and the woman with the issue of blood. He saw Thomas not as a cynical doubter but as one with sincere questions. Whether they were Jew or Gentile, male or female, a thief on the cross, a centurion, or a demon-possessed madman, Jesus saw their God-given potential and viewed them through salvation's eyes.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 18.*

The Second Touch

There is only one miracle in the entire Bible that Jesus worked in two stages. It is the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida. This story provides timeless lessons for Christ's church today. It illustrates God's plan of using each believer to bring someone else to Jesus. Scripture declares, "Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him" (*Mark 8:22, NKJV*). The two key words here are "brought" and "begged." The blind man did not come on his own. His friends saw his need and brought him. He may not have had much faith, but they did. They believed that Jesus would heal this man's blindness.

There are approximately 25 distinct healing miracles in the New Testament performed by Jesus. In more than half, a relative or friend brings the individual to Jesus for healing. Many people will never come to Jesus unless someone who has faith brings them. Our role is to become an "introducer" and bring people to Jesus.

The second word that is worthy of our consideration in Mark 8:22 is the word "begged." It can mean "beseech, implore, or exhort." It implies a softer, kinder, gentler appeal than a loud, boisterous demand. The friends of this man kindly appealed to Jesus, believing that He had both the desire and the power to help this man. The man may not have had faith that Jesus could heal him, but his friends did. Sometimes we must carry others to Jesus on the wings of our faith.

Read Mark 8:22–26. Why do you think He healed the blind man in two stages? What lessons does this story have for us today as witnesses for Jesus?

Is it possible that we, too, do not see people clearly? Do we sometimes see them more like "trees walking" in vague shadowy forms rather than as candidates for the kingdom of God? What do you think leads us at times not to see people clearly?

Besides the obvious lesson that God uses us to reach people, what else can we learn from this story? What might it teach us, for instance, about how both the medical and the spiritual can have a part in healing and in ministry to the lost?

A Lesson in Acceptance

By modeling for them what it meant to see each individual from a new perspective, Jesus taught His disciples how to see people through heaven's eyes. His view of people was radical. He saw them not as they were but as they might become. In all of His interactions with people, He treated them with dignity and respect. Often He surprised His disciples by the way He treated people. This is especially true in His interaction with the Samaritan woman.

The Archaeological Study Bible makes this interesting observation about the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans: "The rift between the Samaritans and the Judeans dates from an early period. According to 2 Kings 17 the Samaritans were descendants of Mesopotamian peoples who were forcibly settled in the lands of northern Israel by the king of Assyria in the wake of the exile of 722 B.C. They combined the worship of Yahweh with idolatrous practices."—*The Archaeological Study Bible* (Zondervan Publishing, 2005), p. 1727. In addition to these idolatrous practices, they established a rival priesthood and a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. Considering such theological differences with the Samaritans, the disciples must have been perplexed when Jesus chose the Samaritan route to Galilee. They were surprised that Jesus did not allow Himself to be drawn into a religious debate. He appealed directly to the Samaritan woman's longing for acceptance, love, and forgiveness.

Read John 4:3–34. How did Jesus approach the Samaritan woman? What was the woman's response to Christ's conversation with her? What was the disciples' response to this experience, and how did Jesus broaden their vision?

The eternal lesson that Jesus longed to teach His disciples and each one of us is simply this: "Those who have the Spirit of Christ will see all men through the eyes of divine compassion."—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, June 20, 1892.

Who are the people whom, due to the influence of your own culture and society, you tend to view disdainfully or with a lack of respect? Why *must* you change your attitude, and how can that change come?

Begin Where You Are

Someone has rightly said, “In life the only place to start from is where you are, for there is no other place to begin.” Jesus emphasized this principle in Acts 1:8, in which He declared, “ ‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ ” (*NKJV*).

Jesus’ message to His disciples was too plain to be misunderstood: begin where you are. Witness where God has planted you. Rather than dreaming of better opportunities, start with those around you. See with divine eyes the possibilities closest to you!

You don’t need to be the most educated person in the world, the most eloquent, the most gifted. However helpful some of those gifts could be if rightly used, in the end all you need is your own love of God and your love for souls. If you are willing to witness, God will open the way for you to do so.

Read John 1:40, 41; John 6:5–11; and John 12:20–26. What do these passages tell you about both Andrew’s spiritual eyesight and his approach to witnessing?

Andrew’s experience speaks volumes to us. He began in his own family. He first shared Christ with his brother Peter. He developed a cordial relationship with a little boy who then provided Jesus with the material for a miracle, and Andrew also knew just what to do with the Greeks. Rather than debate theology, he sensed their need and introduced them to Jesus.

The art of effective soul winning is the art of building positive, caring relationships. Think about the people closest to you who may not know Jesus. Do they sense in your life someone who is compassionate and caring? Do they see in you a peace and purpose that they long for? Is your life an advertisement for the gospel? We make friends for God by sharing Jesus. They become Christian friends, and eventually, as we share God’s end-time message of biblical truth, they may become Seventh-day Adventist Christians, as well.

Why can it be so difficult at times to lead our family members and relatives to Christ? Have you been successful in sharing Jesus with any of your family members or close friends? Share any principles that the class might find helpful.

Dealing With Difficult People

Jesus was a master at dealing with difficult people. By both His words and actions, He demonstrated acceptance. He listened sensitively to their concerns, raised questions, and gradually revealed divine truths. He recognized the inner longing in the most hardened hearts and saw potential in the vilest sinners. For Jesus, no one was beyond the reach of the gospel. Jesus certainly believed that “none have fallen so low, none are so vile, but that they can find deliverance in Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 258. Jesus looked at people through a different set of lenses than the rest of us do. He saw in each human being a reflection of the glory of the original Creation. He raised their thinking to grasp the possibility of what they might become, and many rose to meet His expectations for their lives.

Read Matthew 4:18, 19; Mark 12:28–34; and Luke 23:39–43. What do you find similar in Christ’s appeals to Peter and John, an unnamed questioning scribe, and the thief on the cross? Study Christ’s approach to each of these carefully. What stands out to you?

Everywhere Jesus went He saw spiritual possibilities; He saw potential candidates for the kingdom of God in the most unlikely circumstances. We call this ability “church growth eyes.” Church growth eyes are a cultivated sensitivity to see people as Jesus saw them, as winnable for the kingdom of God. This also involves “church growth ears,” which has to do with listening to the unspoken needs of those around us. It has to do with listening to their hearts’ longing for something they do not have, even if they have not openly expressed it.

Ask the Lord to make you sensitive to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others. Pray that God will give you the second touch and open your eyes to the spiritual opportunities He brings before you each day to share your faith with others. Seek God for a seeing eye, a listening, sensitive heart, and a willingness to share the Christ you know and love with others, and you will be on your way to an exciting journey of a lifetime. Life will take on a whole new meaning. You will have a sense of satisfaction and joy that you have never experienced before. Only those who work for souls can know the satisfaction it can bring.

Sensing Providential Opportunities

The book of Acts is filled with stories of how the disciples took advantage of providential opportunities for the advancement of God's kingdom. From one end of the book to the other, we read fascinating accounts of the early church and how it grew, even despite the challenges it faced both internally and externally.

In 2 Corinthians 2:12, 13, for example, the apostle Paul tells his experience at Troas: "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia" (*NKJV*). God miraculously opened a door for Paul to preach the gospel on the European continent, and he knew that the doors God opens today might be shut tomorrow. Seizing the opportunity and seeing the possibilities, he immediately sailed for Macedonia.

The God of the New Testament is the God of the open door—the God who provides providential opportunities for us to share our faith. Throughout the book of Acts, God is at work. There are open doors in cities, in provinces, in countries, and most of all, in individual hearts.

Read Acts 8:26–38. What do these verses teach about Philip's openness to God's leading and his responsiveness to divine opportunities?

"An angel guided Philip to the one who was seeking for light and who was ready to receive the gospel, and today angels will guide the footsteps of those workers who will allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify their tongues and refine and ennoble their hearts. The angel sent to Philip could himself have done the work for the Ethiopian, but this is not God's way of working. It is His plan that men are to work for their fellow men."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.

If we have ears to hear and eyes to see, we, too, will be guided by unseen angels to reach truth seekers with the truths of the kingdom.

Notice how central the Scriptures were in this story. Also, notice how at this point it was so important for someone who knew the Scriptures to expound on them. What lessons are here for us?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Gospel in Samaria,” pp. 103–111, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

All around us people are seeking for the things of eternity. As Jesus so aptly put it, “ ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few’ ” (*Matt. 9:37, NKJV*). The problem, therefore, was not with the harvest. With eyes divinely anointed, Jesus saw a plentiful harvest where the disciples saw only opposition. What was Christ’s solution to the problem? “ ‘Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’ ” (*Matt. 9:38, NKJV*). The solution is to pray that God will send you out into His harvest.

Why not pray this prayer? “Lord, I am willing to be used for the advancement of Your kingdom. Open my eyes so that I can see the providential opportunities You are opening before me each day. Teach me to be sensitive to the people around me. Help me to speak words of hope and encouragement and share Your love and truth with those I come in contact with each day.” If you will pray this prayer, God will do some extraordinary things with your life.

Discussion Questions:

- ① If you have worked to bring souls to Jesus, there is one thing you know: it is not always easy, is it? Yes, of course, only God can convert hearts, but in His wisdom He has chosen to use us to be part of that process. To work for even one soul takes time, effort, patience, and a love born from above. What choices can you make that will help you have the death to self that you need in order to be an effective witness for Christ?
- ② Who are some of the people you come in contact with who don’t know the Lord? What have you done, or are doing, or should do, to witness to them?
- ③ Think about Saul of Tarsus. Here is someone who appeared to be about as unlikely a convert as one could imagine! And yet, we know what happened to him. What should this tell us about the danger of too quickly judging others by outward appearances?
- ④ Keeping in mind the story of Saul, how should we interpret a text like Matthew 7:6: “ ‘Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces’ ” (*NKJV*)?

Filipino Family Transformed

By STEVEN DRAGOO

A lonely literature evangelist walked the dusty hot streets of Butuan City, Philippines. All day he toiled, yet he sold nothing. This was his only source of income, so he was a little discouraged. But he determined to knock on one more door. As he approached, he prayed. Then he knocked.

A slight woman with keen eyes greeted the tired man with a smile. He made his heavenly pitch, and she could see the sincerity in his eyes and hear it in his voice. It was as if the Holy Spirit Himself was pleading with the woman.

She was a Christian, but she had squandered years with no deep interest in pursuing Christ. When the family's financial situation became grave, the woman began to hunger to learn more about Jesus. But her pockets were always empty. She had 10 children, and three more would be on the way.

How could she afford the literature evangelist's book, which she knew she just had to read and share? The book was called *The Great Controversy* and was written by Ellen White.

Without hesitation, she bought that book with resources that she did not have.

More than 50 years have passed since that day, but the fruit of that singular book is still being felt. The woman, Epefania Ty, led every single one of her children to Christ. She surely believed, as Ellen White wrote in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, page 429, that "our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home. . . . There is no missionary field more important than this."

One of her sons, Florente Ty, became a pastor and now is the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Philippine Publishing House in Manila. Others became deacons, elders, deaconesses, and teachers in Adventist churches and academies. Nearly all graduated from Mountain View College, and each one who did helped the next one go to that college.

I know this woman as "Mom." I married one of her daughters, Dorcas, who has taught at Adventist academies all her life.

Mom had a stroke before I met her. She was mute, blind, and bedridden. She tried with all her heart to talk to me at our first meeting but could not. That does not really matter. She already has spoken to my heart many times

because she responded to the Holy Spirit many years earlier. Mom died in August 2013 at the age of 89.

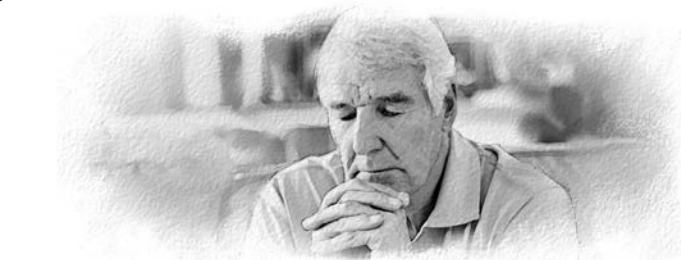
Dozens of people have come to Christ because of a lonely literature evangelist, a powerful book, and a woman receptive to the Holy Spirit.

I'll see Mom on that appointed day.



STEVEN DRAGOO, pictured with Dorcas, is a Bible worker and evangelist in Christiansburg, Virginia.

Prayer Power: Interceding for Others



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 12:7–9, Eph. 6:12, Heb. 7:25, Eph. 1:15–21, Dan. 10:10–14, 1 John 5:14–16.*

Memory Text: “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (*James 5:16, NKJV*).

The New Testament church members felt their need of prayer. “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (*Acts 4:31, NKJV*). Notice the disciples prayed. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and then they spoke the Word of God with boldness, or confidence.

There was a direct relationship between their prayers, the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and powerfully proclaiming God's Word. “The disciples . . . did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37.

When we seek God and intercede for others, God works in our own hearts to draw us closer to Him and gives us divine wisdom to reach them for His kingdom (*James 1:5*). He also works powerfully in their lives in ways we cannot see or even fully understand to draw them to Himself (*1 John 5:14–17*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 25.

A Cosmic Struggle

Compare Revelation 12:7–9, Ephesians 6:12, and 2 Corinthians 10:4. How do these passages influence our understanding of intercessory prayer?

The Bible lifts the veil between the seen and the unseen world. There is a struggle between good and evil, between the forces of righteousness and the forces of darkness, between Christ and Satan. In this cosmic conflict, God respects human freedom. He will never manipulate the will or coerce the conscience. He sends His Holy Spirit to convict men and women of divine truth (*John 16:7, 8*). Heavenly angels enter the battle to influence people for eternity (*Heb. 1:14*). God also arranges providential events in people's lives to lead them to Himself.

What God will not do is coerce the conscience. Force is contrary to the kingdom of God. Coercion is alien to the principle of love, which is the foundation of His government. Here is where prayer is so significant. Although God is doing everything He can to reach people before we pray, our prayers unleash the mighty power of God. He respects our freedom of choice in praying for another, but He can do more in behalf of others when we pray for them than if we did not.

Consider this statement carefully: "It is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 525. In the great controversy between good and evil, prayer makes a difference. When we pray for someone who does not know Christ, it opens channels of divine blessing to flow into their lives. God honors our choice to pray for them and works even more powerfully in their behalf.

In dealing with the subject of intercessory prayer, we should humbly acknowledge that we do not understand God's workings fully, but this should not keep us from continually entering into the blessings prayer offers for ourselves and for others.

Why do you think God works more powerfully when we pray than when we neglect prayer? Even if we don't fully understand how it all works, why should the Bible's admonition to pray for others impel us to do just that?

Jesus: The Mighty Intercessor

Read Luke 3:21, Luke 5:16, and Luke 9:18. What do these texts tell you about the relationship between Jesus' prayer life and His effectiveness in ministry?

Jesus' life was one of constant divine communion with His Father. At the time of His baptism, when He launched His Messianic ministry, Jesus prayed for divine power to accomplish heaven's purpose. The Holy Spirit empowered Him to do the Father's will and accomplish the task before Him. Whether it was at the feeding of the five thousand, the healing of the leper, or the deliverance of the demoniacs, Jesus recognized that, in the battle between good and evil, prayer is a mighty weapon to beat back the forces of hell. Prayer is a heaven-ordained way of combining our helplessness and weaknesses with God's omnipotent power. It's a means of having ourselves lifted up toward God, who alone can touch the hearts of those for whom we pray.

Read Luke 22:31–34 and Hebrews 7:25. What assurance did Jesus give to Peter to prepare him for the temptations he would face in the near future? What assurance does He give to each one of us as we face temptations?

Effective soul winners are men and women of prayer. Jesus prayed for Peter by name. He reassured Peter that at the time of his greatest temptation, He would be praying for him. Satan understood quite well Peter's potential for the advancement of the kingdom of God. He planned to do everything possible to destroy Peter's positive influence in the Christian church. But through all of these temptations, Jesus was praying for Peter, and the Master's prayers were answered. What a thrilling reality to recognize that the Savior is praying for us too. He invites us to join Him in this work of intercessory prayer and lift up others by name before His throne.

Our persistence in prayer acknowledges that we recognize our total, absolute dependence on God to reach the individual for whom we are praying.

Whom are you praying for now? Why is it so important never to give up, no matter how difficult the situation appears?

Paul's Intercessory Prayers

Intercessory prayer is biblical. Throughout his ministry, Paul prayed for the new converts in the churches that he established through his evangelistic ministry. Paul believed that something happened when he prayed that would not happen if he did not pray. Although he was separated from those he loved, he recognized that they could be united in heart as they prayed for each other.

Read Ephesians 1:15–21. On the lines below, list the different requests Paul made to God for the Ephesians. What did he specifically ask God to give them?

Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers is remarkable. He prayed that God would give them wisdom and spiritual discernment, that He would enlighten their minds with divine truth, and give them the hope of eternal life. He also prayed that they would experience the mighty working of God's power in their lives. This God is so powerful, so mighty, that He raised Jesus from the dead, an event that forms the foundation of their hope of eternal life in Him. His prayer concludes by reminding the believers of the "riches of Christ's glory" and "His inheritance." The Ephesian Christians must have been filled with encouragement, knowing that Paul was praying for them and knowing what he was praying about.

Read Philippians 1:3–11 and note the tone of Paul's prayer. If you were a Philippian church member and received a letter like this from Paul, sharing with you not only that he was praying for you but also the content of his prayer, how would you feel, and why? What promises are found in its words? At the same time, what admonitions are there, as well?

These are some of the most uplifting and encouraging words in the Bible. They are filled with promises, as well as calls to be filled with love, knowledge, and discernment that come from knowing Jesus so that we can be all that God intends us to be in Him.

Unseen Powers at Work

Intercessory prayer is a mighty weapon in this battle between good and evil that we call “the great controversy.” One of the clearest revelations of this struggle is in Daniel 10.

You will recall that the prophet Jeremiah predicted that the Jews would be in bondage to the Babylonians for 70 years. At the end of Daniel’s life, this prophetic period of the Jewish captivity was coming to an end. Daniel was concerned. He saw little evidence of the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s words. His people were still in bondage.

Babylon was overcome by the Medes and Persians, but the Jews still remained in bondage. Daniel fasted and prayed for three weeks. He earnestly interceded for his people. At the end of the three weeks, a glorious angelic being appeared to him.

Read Daniel 10:10–14. When were Daniel’s prayers heard, and what temporarily hindered them?

This is a fascinating passage. To understand it fully, let’s identify some of the characters. Who is the prince of the kingdom of Persia? Certainly not Cyrus. He is the king of the Persian Empire. It is most likely that the expression “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” represents Satan. Jesus called him “the prince of this world” or “the ruler of this world” (*John 12:31, John 14:30*). Paul labeled him “the prince of the power of the air” (*Eph. 2:2*). If the prince of Persia represents Satan, then who is Michael? The name “Michael” is used five times in the Bible (*Rev. 12:7; Jude 9; Dan. 10:13, 21; and Dan. 12:1*). A careful study of these passages reveals that Michael (which means “Who is like God?”) is another term to describe Jesus as the Commander of all the angels in direct combat with Satan. Christ is the eternal, preexistent, all-powerful, divine Son of God. One of His functions as Commander of all of the angels is to defeat and eventually destroy Satan.

Daniel 10 draws the curtain aside and reveals this struggle between good and evil. As Daniel prays, Michael, the almighty Jesus, descends from heaven to beat back the forces of hell. Although we may not see it, Jesus is at work to answer our prayers of intercession, as well. He is a mighty Savior. Not one of our prayers goes unnoticed.

How do you see the reality of the great controversy playing out in your own life? What should the reality of this battle tell you about the kind of choices you need to make?

Prayer Focus

Throughout the Bible, there is an emphasis on specificity in prayer. Prayer is not some vague longing of the soul. It presents God with specific requests. Jesus prayed specifically for His disciples. The apostle Paul prayed very specifically for the Ephesian, Philippian, and Colossian Christians. He prayed for his young colleagues, such as Timothy, Titus, and John Mark.

Read 1 Samuel 12:22–24 and Job 16:21. What do these two passages have in common? What do they tell us about intercessory prayer?

Both Samuel and Job emphasize the need for earnest, heartfelt, specific intercession. Samuel's words are quite strong. He cries out, " 'Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you' " (*1 Sam. 12:23, NKJV*). We can almost hear the echo of Samuel's prayer in Job's words, " 'Oh, that one might plead for a man with God' " (*Job 16:21, NKJV*). Pleading with God for men and women who do not know Christ is our work.

Read 1 John 5:14–16. What happens when we intercede for others?

When we pray for others, we become a channel of God's blessing to them. He pours out the river of the water of life from heaven's throne through us to them. Satan's whole host trembles at the sound of earnest intercession. Ellen G. White describes the power of prayer in these significant words: "Satan cannot endure to have his powerful rival appealed to, for he fears and trembles before His strength and majesty. At the sound of fervent prayer, Satan's whole host trembles."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 346. Prayer connects us with the Source of divine power in the battle for the souls of lost men and women.

Read Matthew 18:18, 19. What relationship does this passage have to intercessory prayer, and how is this passage an encouragement to pray with others for the salvation of those who don't know the Lord?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Privilege of Prayer,” pp. 93–104, in *Steps to Christ*; “Work for Church Members,” pp. 19–24, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7.

When we pray for others, God honors our commitment to Him and our dependence on His power by employing all of the resources of heaven to transform human lives. As our prayers ascend to His throne, angelic beings spring into action at His command. “Ministering angels are waiting about the throne to instantly obey the mandate of Jesus Christ to answer every prayer offered in earnest, living faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 377. We have the assurance that not one prayer is lost, not one is forgotten by God. They are stored up in heaven to be answered at the time and place that He knows best. “The prayer of faith is never lost; but to claim that it will be always answered in the very way and for the particular thing we have expected, is presumption.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 231. What encouragement this gives us as we intercede for our spouses, our sons and daughters, relatives, friends, and work associates who do not know Christ. Not one sincere prayer is ever lost. We may not always see immediate answers in those we pray for, but God is moving upon their hearts in ways we will know only in eternity.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Read Philippians 1:19; Colossians 4:2, 3; and 2 Thessalonians 3:1, 2. During his imprisonment, what assurance did Paul have because of the Philippians’ prayers? What did he ask the Colossians and Thessalonians to pray for in his behalf? What relationship do these intercessory prayer requests have to soul winning?
- ② Dwell on the reality of the great controversy and the fact that it forms the grand narrative behind the world that we live in. How does your knowledge of this controversy help you realize the importance of prayer? Yes, Jesus won the war, and we know that His side wins in the end. But in the meantime, why is it so important that we be praying and seeking to do all that we can to stay faithful to Him and to work for the salvation of others?
- ③ What are some of the hindrances to a more effective life of intercessory prayer? What kind of excuses do you use (if you do) to get out of praying more for others who need it?

Faithful Soldier in Poland

By SLAWOMIR PACEK

When the Polish military phased out MiG-21s for newer jets, I had the opportunity to leave my job as a mechanic for a new career.

I chose to work as an air traffic controller and took intensive classes for six months. But when I graduated, an eye doctor disqualified me, saying my vision wasn't good enough.

Sadness overwhelmed me, and I prayed, "Why, God?"

I ended up doing odd jobs around the military base. The work left me with plenty of downtime, and I spent hours reading the Bible. A desire to know God grew within me.

At home, my wife, Aneta, joined me in reading the Bible. We noticed that several passages didn't agree with what we had learned in our church. We read that the dead sleep in the ground, not in heaven or hell, and that the seventh day is the Sabbath.

One Saturday, Aneta and I decided to visit an Adventist church. We resolved to walk out immediately if we heard anything that disagreed with the Bible. We have never left.

A pastor gave us Bible studies, and I knew it was only a matter of time until I left the military. I could not keep the Sabbath and serve at the same time. But no Sabbath trouble arose. It was easy to trade Sabbath work shifts with other soldiers.

After several years, an opportunity came to be promoted to the position of leader of a mobile radar unit. I spoke openly with my commander about my faith and how I had been keeping the Sabbath.

The commander was surprised. "Why didn't you tell me that you were trading shifts with your friends?" he asked. "As long as I'm in charge, you will be free every Saturday."

Word about my faith spread, and soldiers came to me with spiritual questions. But the impact of my faith only became clear when I prepared to retire after 29 years in the military.

A commander called me to his office for a private talk.

"I've started to read the Bible," he said. "I have some questions for you."



Looking back, I understand why God shut the door to the job of air traffic controller. If I had taken it, I would not have had time to study the Bible. I would not have been able to trade shifts to take off the Sabbath. I would not have been able to share my faith with so many soldiers.

Not everything went according to my plans, but God's plans are the best.

Spirit-Empowered Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 15:26, 27; Acts 2:41, 42; Acts 8:4; Heb. 4:12; Acts 17:33, 34; Acts 18:8.*

Memory Text: “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (*Acts 4:31, NKJV*).

When Jesus commanded the early believers to “ ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel,’ ” it must have seemed like an impossible mission (*Mark 16:15, NKJV*). How could they ever accomplish such a huge challenge? Their numbers were so small. Their resources were limited. They were a largely uneducated band of ordinary believers. But they had an extraordinary God who would empower them for their extraordinary mission.

But Jesus declared, “ ‘You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*). The empowering of the Holy Spirit would enable the believers to share the message of the Cross with life-changing, world-changing power. The Holy Spirit made their witness effective. In a few short decades, the gospel impacted the entire world. Acts declares that these early believers “turned the world upside down” (*Acts 17:6, NKJV*). The apostle Paul adds that the gospel was “preached to every creature under heaven” (*Col. 1:23, NKJV*). In this week’s lesson, we will especially focus on the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering our witness for Christ.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 1.

Jesus and the Promise of the Holy Spirit

With the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus met the disciples' concern about His leaving them and returning to heaven. " 'It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you' " (*John 16:7, NKJV*). The Greek word for "helper" is *parakletos*. It refers to "one who comes alongside of" for the purpose of helping. One of the prime functions of the Holy Spirit is to come alongside of all believers to empower and to guide them in their witnessing activities. When we witness for Jesus, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit is beside us to guide us to those honest-hearted seekers. He prepares their hearts before we ever meet them. He guides our words, brings conviction to the seekers' minds, and strengthens them to respond to His promptings.

Read John 15:26, 27 and John 16:8. What do these verses tell us about the Holy Spirit's role in witnessing?

The Holy Spirit testifies, or witnesses, of Jesus. His ultimate goal is to lead as many people to Jesus as possible. His mission is to glorify Jesus. In this role, He convicts all believers of their responsibility to witness. He opens our eyes to see the possibilities in people all around us and works behind the scenes to create a receptivity to the gospel message.

The Gospel of John states it clearly. He " 'will convict the world of sin' " (*John 16:8, NKJV*). In other words, He moves upon hearts to bring a deepening sense of alienation from God and the need of repentance. He also convicts the world "of righteousness." Not only does the Holy Spirit reveal sin, but He also instructs us in righteousness. He reveals the magnificence of Jesus' righteousness in contrast to our own filthiness. The Holy Spirit's role is not merely to point out how bad we are; it is to reveal how good, how kind, how compassionate, and how loving Jesus is and to mold us into His image.

Witnessing is simply cooperating with the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus. In the Spirit's power and under His guidance, we testify of this amazing Christ who has transformed our lives.

In our desire to work for souls, why must we always remember that only the Holy Spirit, not us, can do the converting?

An Empowered Church

The book of Acts rightly has been called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” It is an exciting adventure in witnessing, evangelistic proclamation, and church growth. Acts is the story of consecrated believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, impacting the world for Christ. They were totally dependent on the Holy Spirit to accomplish miraculous results. Theirs is an example of what the Holy Spirit can accomplish through men and women who are totally consecrated to Him.

Read Acts 2:41, 42; Acts 4:4, 31; Acts 5:14, 42; Acts 6:7; and Acts 16:5. What impresses you most about these passages? What is the message that Luke, the author of Acts, desires to share by recording such rapid growth?

Luke’s intent in writing the book of Acts is to share with each reader the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the early church.

Notice, too, that he is not hesitant to use numbers to measure the movement of the Spirit in the first century. That is, he was counting baptisms. In Acts 2:41, he highlights the fact that 3,000 were baptized in a single day at a single place. In Acts 4:4, he speaks of 5,000 men who were baptized. In Acts 5:14, multitudes come to the Lord and are baptized.

Whether it is a single individual such as Lydia, the Philippian jailer, a demon-possessed slave girl, or the Ethiopian eunuch, Luke takes notice and records the moving of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of these people. The important point here is that behind each of the large numbers are individual human beings, each one a child of God for whom Jesus Christ died. Yes, we like the big numbers, but in the end, witnessing is often a one-to-one endeavor.

To facilitate the rapid growth of the New Testament church, new churches were planted. One of the reasons that the early church grew so rapidly is because the church was constantly renewed through planting new churches. What an important message for us today.

The prime focus of the New Testament church was mission. How can we make sure that at the core of all that we do in our local church, mission is always at the center?

The Holy Spirit and Witnessing

Throughout the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit was powerfully present. He ministered to and through the believers as they witnessed for their Lord in a variety of ways. He strengthened them to face the trials and challenges of witnessing in a hostile culture. He led them to honest-hearted truth seekers. He prepared the hearts of people in whole cities before the believers ever came to those cities. He opened doors of opportunity that they never dreamed of and empowered their words and actions.

Read Acts 7:55; Acts 8:29; Acts 11:15; Acts 15:28, 29; and Acts 16:6–10. How did the Holy Spirit minister to the witnessing disciples in each of the experiences listed in these Bible verses? In other words, what were some of the various things the Holy Spirit did in these situations?

The Holy Spirit's varied ministry in the first century was truly amazing. The experiences above are just a sampling of His activity. He strengthened Stephen to witness for his Lord in the face of a ruthless and out-of-control mob stoning him to death. He miraculously guided Philip to an influential, truth-seeking Ethiopian to open up the continent of Africa for the gospel. He gave Peter a confirmatory sign when the Gentile believers also received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He brought the church together in unity at a time when it could easily have split over the issue of circumcision, and He opened up the entire continent of Europe to the preaching of the gospel through the apostle Paul. The Holy Spirit was active in the New Testament church and is active in the life of the church today. He longs to empower us, strengthen us, teach us, guide us, unify us, and send us out on the most important mission in the world, which is leading men and women to Jesus and His truth. The point we have to remember is that He is still active and working today, just as He was in the time of the apostles and the early church.

What can we do, day by day, to make ourselves more open and amenable to the power of the Holy Spirit in our own lives? What are the right kinds of choices that will enable Him to work in and through us?

The Holy Spirit, the Word, and Witnessing

The Word of God was at the very heart of the witness of the New Testament church. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost drew largely from the Old Testament to prove that Christ was the Messiah. Stephen's dying testimony reviewed Israel's history in the Old Testament. Peter referred to the "word which God sent to the children of Israel" (*Acts 10:36, NKJV*) and then shared the Resurrection story with Cornelius. The apostle Paul referred again and again to the great Old Testament predictions regarding the coming of the Messiah, and Philip carefully explained to a seeking Ethiopian the significance of the Messianic prediction in Isaiah 53. In each instance, the disciples proclaimed God's Word, not their own. The Spirit-inspired Word was the basis of their authority.

Read Acts 4:4, 31; Acts 8:4; Acts 13:48, 49; Acts 17:2; and Acts 18:24, 25. What do these passages teach us about the relationship between the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the witness of the New Testament church?

The same Holy Spirit who inspired the Word of God works through the Word to change lives. There is life-giving power in the Word of God because, through the Spirit, it is Christ's living Word.

Read 2 Peter 1:21 and Hebrews 4:12. Why is the Word of God so powerful in changing lives?

"The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature and re-creates the soul in the image of God."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 126.

The reason the Bible has such power to transform lives is because the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible in the first place inspires and changes us as we read it. As we share God's Word with others, the Holy Spirit works to change their lives through the Word He inspired. God has promised to bless His Word, not our words. The power is in the Word of God, not human speculation.

The Life-Transforming Power of the Holy Spirit

A careful study of the book of Acts reveals God, through His Spirit, working miracles in human lives. Acts is a case study on the gospel's triumphing over cultural biases, transforming lifelong, deeply ingrained habits, and teaching all humanity Christ's grace and truth. The Holy Spirit meets people where they are, but He does not leave them there. In His presence, they are changed. Their lives are transformed.

Read Acts 16:11–15, 23–34; Acts 17:33, 34; and Acts 18:8. These are just a few of the conversion stories in the Bible. What do the various accounts teach us about the power of God to change the lives of all sorts of people from various backgrounds?

What an amazing variety of people. Lydia was a prosperous Jewish businesswoman, and the Philippian jailer was a middle-class Roman civil servant. The Holy Spirit can reach all spectrums of society. His power to transform reaches both men and women, rich and poor, educated and uneducated.

The last two characters on our list are equally as remarkable. Acts 17:34 refers to the conversion of Dionysius the Areopagite. In Bible times, the Athenian Areopagites were part of the legal counsel of judges who tried court cases. They were prominent, well-respected members of Greek society.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the apostle Paul reached even the upper echelon of society. Crispus (*Acts 18:8*) was a ruler of the Jewish synagogue. He was a religious leader steeped in Jewish Old Testament thought, and the Holy Spirit broke through and changed his life. These case histories reveal that as we witness for Christ and share His Word with others, the Holy Spirit will do remarkable things in the lives of all sorts of people from all sorts of backgrounds, cultures, education, and beliefs. We cannot and must not make assumptions about who can or cannot be reached. Our job is to witness to anyone and everyone brought into our lives. The Lord will do the rest.

Christ's death was universal; that is, it was for every human being, ever. What should this crucial truth teach us about how we should never assume that anyone is beyond the hope of salvation?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Gift of the Spirit,” pp. 47–56, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’” pp. 667–672, in *The Desire of Ages*.

The Holy Spirit cooperates with the Father and the Son in the redemptive process. In all of our witnessing activities, we are joining Him in His work of saving people. He convicts hearts. He opens doors of opportunity. Through His Word, He enlightens minds and reveals truth. He breaks the bonds of prejudice that enslave us, triumphs over cultural biases that obscure our vision of truth, and delivers us from the chains of evil habits that shackle us.

As we witness for Jesus, it is crucial to remember that we are cooperating with the Holy Spirit. He is there before us, preparing hearts to receive the message of the gospel. He is there with us, moving upon minds as we perform an act of random kindness, share our testimony, conduct a Bible study, give away a piece of truth-filled literature, or participate in an evangelistic outreach. He will continue working upon the heart of the individual long after we leave, doing whatever it takes to lead that person to a knowledge of salvation.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Share with the members of your Sabbath School group a time when you sensed the Holy Spirit’s working powerfully through your witness.
- ② Have you ever felt apprehensive or fearful about sharing your faith? How does a knowledge of the ministry of the Holy Spirit reduce that fear and give you assurance as you witness?
- ③ In this week’s lesson, we talked about the “activity” of the Holy Spirit in our witnessing. Discuss some different ways the Holy Spirit works with us in our witnessing endeavors. How does the Holy Spirit equip us to witness and work in the lives of others as we witness?
- ④ The lesson talked about the centrality of the Bible in witnessing. Why is the Bible such a crucial component of our faith and witness? How can we avoid the traps of those who, even while claiming to believe in the Bible, subtly diminish its authority and witness?

Four Dreams in a Row

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The first dream occurred after Abraham Keita got up at 3:00 A.M. for customary prayers on his prayer mat in Bufa, a village in Guinea in West Africa.

"I am more than 40, and I don't have a wife or children or work or money," Abraham prayed. "Please help me. I want You to turn me into a prophet who can talk to other people through You."

As he prayed, a wind began to blow. He felt weak and fell asleep on the mat. Suddenly, someone nudged him and said, "My son, go inside and sleep in your bed."

Minutes later, he was sleeping in his bed, and he had a dream. In the dream, Someone with eyes that looked like fire approached him. Abraham thought he was about to be attacked. Terrified, Abraham asked, "Who are you?"

"I am Jesus Christ," the Man said.

In the morning, Abraham wondered what would happen next.

The next night, he had another dream. He saw the Man again. This time, the two walked along the trail of a tall mountain.

On the third night, Abraham dreamed that he was looking for work, and Jesus was hiring workers. Abraham saw Jesus sitting at a table, taking people's names and writing them down.

On the fourth night, Abraham saw Jesus chest-deep in the water of the Atlantic Ocean. Jesus looked at him, and he looked at Jesus.

Three years passed. Abraham moved to Guinea's capital, Conakry, and was hired as a construction worker. Walking home from work, he met a Global Mission pioneer, Tranquille Fassinadouno, on the road.

"How are you?" Tranquille asked. "I'm a Christian. Would you like to visit my church?"

"How can I?" Abraham replied. "I belong to another religion. I don't even understand what you are talking about."

At home, however, he remembered his dreams about Jesus. He decided to go to the Global Mission pioneer's church to see what it was about.

At the church, he was welcomed warmly, and he liked what he heard.

He returned every Sabbath after that and gave his heart to Jesus.



Today, ABRAHAM KEITA, 48, is the watchman for the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Guinea and custodian for the adjacent school. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help expand an affiliated school in Conakry. "My dreams led me to Jesus," ABRAHAM said. "I am walking with Him now, just like in one of my dreams. I am on a journey with Jesus."

Unlimited Possibilities



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Cor. 12:12, Matt. 3:16–18, 1 Cor. 12:7, 1 Cor. 1:4–9, Matt. 25:14–30.*

Memory Text: “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (*1 Corinthians 12:11, NKJV*).

God calls us to witness for Him (*Acts 1:8, Isa. 43:10*). Witnessing is not a special spiritual gift that only a select few possess. Witnessing is the divine calling of each Christian.

The Bible uses different expressions to describe our calling before God. We are to be “the light of the world,” “ambassadors for Christ,” and a “royal priesthood” (*Matt. 5:14, 2 Cor. 5:20, 1 Pet. 2:9*). This same God who calls us to witness and for service equips us for the task. He imparts spiritual gifts to each believer. God does not call the qualified. He qualifies those whom He has called. Just as He gives salvation freely to all who believe, He gives His gifts to them freely, as well.

As we consecrate ourselves to God and dedicate our lives to His service, our possibilities to serve are endless. “There is no limit to the usefulness of one who, putting aside self, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 159.

In this week's lesson, we will study our unlimited possibilities for service through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 8.

Differing Gifts: United in Service

Have you ever considered how different from each other the disciples were? Their backgrounds, personalities, temperaments, and gifts greatly varied. But this was not a liability for the church. It was a strength. Matthew, a tax collector, was precise, exact, accurate. In contrast, Peter often spoke quickly and was enthusiastic and impulsive, but he also had natural leadership qualities. John was tenderhearted but outspoken. Andrew was a people person, extremely aware of his surroundings, and sensitive to others. Thomas had the natural inclination to question, and he often doubted. Each of these disciples, though having different personalities and gifts, was powerfully used by God in witnessing for Him.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13, 18–22. What do we discover in these verses about the need for people of different gifts in the body of Christ, the church?

God delights in taking people of different backgrounds with different talents and abilities and imparting to them gifts for service. The body of Christ is not a homogenous group of people who are all alike. It is not a country club with people of the same backgrounds who all think the same. It is a dynamic movement of people of different gifts, united in their love for Christ and for Scripture, and who are committed to sharing His love and truth with the world (*Rom. 12:4, 1 Cor. 12:12*). The members of the body of Christ have different gifts, but each one is valuable; each one is critical to the healthy functioning of the body of Christ. Just as the eyes, ears, and nose have different functions but are necessary to the body, all gifts are necessary, as well (*1 Cor. 12:21, 22*).

If you carefully consider the human body, even the smallest parts have a crucial role. Consider our eyelashes. What if we did not have something as apparently insignificant as eyelashes? Dust particles would blur our vision, and the resulting consequences could potentially cause irreparable damage. In the same way, the member of the church who seems the most “insignificant” is an essential part of the body of Christ and has been gifted by the Holy Spirit. When we dedicate these gifts totally to God, each one of us can make an eternal difference.

No matter how talented you might be, what are the things that you are *not* very good at but that others in the church are? How should this help keep you in your proper place?

God: The Giver of All Good Gifts

According to 1 Corinthians 12:11, 18; Ephesians 4:7, 8; and James 1:17, God is the originator of all gifts, and “every perfect gift” comes from Him. Thus, we can rest assured that He will impart to us the very gifts of the Holy Spirit that are best suited to our personalities, and He will best use our skills to serve His cause and glorify His name.

Read Mark 13:34 and 1 Corinthians 12:11. To whom does God give spiritual gifts?

The Bible is clear. God has a special assignment for each one of us in sharing the gospel with others. In Jesus’ parable of the householder who leaves his house to his servants and asks them to care for it, the master of the house gives his servants their appointed work (*Mark 13:34*). There is an assignment for every individual, and God gives spiritual gifts to all to accomplish the divine task or ministry that they are called to. When we surrender our lives to Christ, and through baptism become members of His body, the church, the Holy Spirit imparts gifts so that we can serve the body and witness to the world.

In 1903, Ellen G. White wrote a letter to a certain man to encourage him to use the gifts God had given him in service. “We are all members of God’s family, all in a greater or less degree entrusted with God-given talents, for the use of which we are held responsible. Whether our talent be great or small, we are to use it in God’s service, and we are to recognize the right of every one else to use the gifts entrusted to them.

“Never should we disparage the smallest physical, intellectual, or spiritual capital.”—Letter 260, December 2, 1903.

Read Acts 10:36–38, Matthew 3:16–18, and Acts 2:38–42. What do these texts teach us about the promise of the Holy Spirit at baptism?

Just as Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism to prepare and fully equip Him for His ministry to the world, each one of us is promised the Holy Spirit at our baptism. God longs for us to have the positive assurance that He has fulfilled His Word and imparted spiritual gifts to us to bless His church and the world.

The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

Read 1 Corinthians 12:7 and Ephesians 4:11–16. Why does God impart spiritual gifts to each believer? What are the purposes of those gifts?

Spiritual gifts serve several purposes. God gives them to people so they can nurture and strengthen His church to accomplish His ministry. They are designed to develop a unified church ready to accomplish His mission in the world. The Bible writers give us examples of the spiritual gifts that God imparts to His church, such as ministering, serving, proclaiming, teaching, encouraging, and giving. They also speak about the gifts of hospitality, mercy, helpfulness, and cheerfulness, to mention only a few. For a more complete list, read Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

You may be wondering about the relationship between spiritual gifts and natural talents. Spiritual gifts are divinely imparted qualities that are given by the Holy Spirit to each believer to equip them for their special ministry in the church and service to the world. They also may include natural talents that are sanctified by the Holy Spirit and used in service for Christ. All natural talents are God given, but not all are used in the service of Christ.

“The special gifts of the Spirit are not the only talents represented in the parable. It includes all gifts and endowments, whether original or acquired, natural or spiritual. All are to be employed in Christ’s service. In becoming His disciples, we surrender ourselves to Him with all that we are and have. These gifts He returns to us purified and ennobled, to be used for His glory in blessing our fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 328.

Also, God has established such special gifts as the gift of prophecy and specific offices in the church, including pastors, elders, and teachers, who are teachers within the body of Christ to nurture and equip each member for service (*see Eph. 4:11, 12*). The function of all church leadership is to assist each member in discovering their spiritual gifts and teach them to use these gifts to build up the body of Christ.

What are some natural talents that you have that, however useful and beneficial in a secular environment, also can be a blessing to the church?

Discovering Your Gifts

Compare 1 Corinthians 1:4–9 with 2 Corinthians 1:20–22. What do these passages tell us about the promises of God, especially spiritual gifts prior to the second coming of Christ?

God promises that His church will manifest all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit just before the return of our Lord. His promises are sure. He has given us the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to guide each of us to an understanding of the gifts He has given to us. It is God who gives the gifts and God, through His Spirit, who reveals them to us.

Read Luke 11:13, James 1:5, and Matthew 7:7. If we desire to discover the gifts that God has given to each one of us, what does He invite us to do?

We receive the gifts of the Spirit as we consecrate ourselves to God, and ask Him to reveal to us the gifts He has given us. When our hearts are emptied of self-glory and our priority is to serve Jesus, His Spirit will impress us with the spiritual gifts He has for us. “Not until through faith and prayer the disciples had surrendered themselves fully for His working was the outpouring of the Spirit received. Then in a special sense the goods of heaven were committed to the followers of Christ. . . . The gifts are already ours in Christ, but their actual possession depends upon our reception of the Spirit of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 327.

Spiritual gifts (*see 1 Cor. 12:4–6*) are qualities that God imparts so we can serve Him effectively. Ministries are the general areas we can express our gifts in, and activities are the specific events that allow us to use our gifts. Spiritual gifts do not come fully developed. As the Holy Spirit impresses you with some area of service, pray that He will lead you to a specific ministry to exercise your gift through an outreach activity.

What are your specific gifts and, more important, how can you improve those gifts for the Lord’s service?

Growing Our Gifts

Read the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30. What is the most significant thought that stands out to you in this story? Why were the first two servants commended by God and the last servant condemned? What does this parable tell us about the use of our talents? Particularly notice Matthew 25:29.

The master gave to each servant talents according to their “own ability” (*Matt. 25:15, NKJV*). Each individual received a different amount. One received five talents, another two, and another one. Each servant had a choice of how to invest or use the talents that they were given. A crucial point here is that what they were given wasn’t their own. It belonged to someone else who gave them charge over it.

The concern of the master was not who had superior or who had inferior talents. It was not how many talents each was given. The concern was what each one did with what he had been given.

Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 8:12 (*NKJV*): “For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.” For God, what matters isn’t so much what you have but, rather, what you do with what you have.

God commended the first two servants because they were faithful in using their talents. Their talents increased with use. The “wicked” servant did not use the talent the master had given him, and it did not increase. It is an eternal truth that “the law of service becomes the connecting link which binds us to God and to our fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 326. The unfaithful servant squandered his opportunity to serve and ultimately lost the ability to serve.

When we use the gifts that God has given us for the glory of His name, they will increase, expand, and grow. How can you discover the gifts God has given you? Humbly ask God to reveal to you the areas He desires you to serve in for ministry. As He impresses you, get involved. Your gifts will grow as you use them, and you will find satisfaction in His service.

Think about this parable and apply it to your own life. What, if anything, does it say to you about what you are doing with what you have been given by God? (Remember, anything that you have is a gift from God too.)

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Talents,” pp. 325–365, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

The correct understanding of the biblical teaching of spiritual gifts brings unity to the church. The recognition that each one of us is valuable and a needed member of the body of Christ is a unifying thought. Every member of the church is necessary for the accomplishment of Christ’s mission. Every member is gifted for service.

“To everyone there is given a work to do for the Master. To each of His servants are committed special gifts, or talents. ‘Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability.’ Every servant has some trust for which he is responsible; and the varied trusts are proportioned to our varied capabilities. In dispensing His gifts, God has not dealt with partiality. He has distributed the talents according to the known powers of His servants, and He expects corresponding returns.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 282.

Remember also that the gifts of the Spirit are given for God’s glory and not our own. God gave them to us to exalt His name and advance His cause.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Dwell more on the thought that each one of us has received gifts from God. What practical implications does this have for your local church? What difference can this thought make in the involvement of each member in service?
- ② Share with the members of your Sabbath School class how the gifts of another member have blessed you. Share with the class how you discovered your own spiritual gifts. What do you think your gifts are, and how are you using them to bless others?
- ③ This lesson pointed out that our gifts grow as we use them. Look back over your own life. Can you think of gifts God has given you that have expanded as you have used them to the glory of His name? At the same time, ask yourself again the question, first broached at the end of Thursday’s study, about how faithful you are with what God has given you.

He's Simply "Carlos"

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

If J. Carlos Sanchez Ruiz were president of a Seventh-day Adventist union office in his native Peru, church members would courteously address him as "Pastor-President." But in Uruguay, where Carlos is president of the Uruguay Union of Churches Mission, he is known simply as "Carlos."

Men call him "Carlos." Women call him "Carlos." Even small children call him "Carlos."

No one addresses him as president. No one uses the word *pastor*. He is just "Carlos."

Coming from Peru, a country where people are very conscientious about hierarchy, it took Carlos about a year to adjust to Uruguay when he first was elected president in 2011.

"Uruguay is a country unlike any other in South America," Carlos said. "Even though Uruguayans recognize and respect leadership, they do not accept the hierarchical model. A leader is equal to everyone else."

The Uruguayan mind-set, which Carlos linked to a strong European influence, makes the country a promising mission field, church leaders said. The Adventist Church has only 7,358 members in the country of 3.5 million people, or one Adventist for every 470 people, one of the smallest ratios in South America. About half of Uruguay's population lives in the capital, Montevideo.

"How will we reach Montevideo and other cities around the world?" Adventist Church president Ted N. C. Wilson asked pastors during a 2019 visit.

Opening his Bible, he read Jeremiah 32:27, which says, "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?" (NKJV).

"God responds to His own question in a powerful way," Wilson said. Then he turned to Jeremiah 33:3 and read, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."

"Claim this promise for Uruguay and for your work in the cities," Wilson said. "You face challenges of secularism and materialism very much like Europe. But nothing is too hard for the Lord."



In an indication that nothing is too hard for the Lord, people are being baptized in Uruguay after attending programs at community centers, or "urban centers of influence," operated by the church. Among the new members is a young man, Fernando Aguirre, who gave his heart to Jesus in 2019 after taking stress-management courses at an urban center of influence in Montevideo. Please pray for Uruguay and the other promising mission fields in secular societies around the world.



TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT TIME

What is Total Member Involvement?

- ▶ Total Member Involvement (TMI) is a full-scale, world-church evangelistic thrust that involves every member, every church, every administrative entity, every type of public outreach ministry, as well as personal and institutional outreach.
- ▶ It is a calendar-driven, intentional soul-winning plan that discovers the needs of families, friends, and neighbors. Then it shares how God fulfills every need, resulting in church planting and church growth, with a focus on retaining, preaching, sharing, and discipling.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT TMI TIME IN SABBATH SCHOOL

Dedicate the first 15 minutes of each lesson to plan, pray and share:*

- ▶ **TMI IN-REACH:** Plan to visit, pray, care for missing or hurting members, and distribute territory assignments. Pray and discuss ways to minister to the needs of church families, inactive members, youth, women and men, and various ways to get the church family involved.
- ▶ **TMI OUT-REACH:** Pray and discuss ways of reaching your community, city, and world, fulfilling the Gospel Commission by sowing, reaping, and keeping. Involve all ministries in the church as you plan short-term and long-term soul-winning projects. TMI is about intentional acts of kindness. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved: 1. Develop the habit of finding needs in your community. 2. Make plans to address those needs. 3. Pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ **TMI UP-REACH:** Lesson Study. Encourage members to engage in individual Bible study—make study of the Bible in Sabbath School participatory. Study for transformation, not information.

TMI	Time	Explanation
Fellowship Outreach World Mission	15 min.*	Pray, plan, organize for action. Care for missing members. Schedule outreach.
Lesson Study	45 min.*	Involve everyone in the study of the lesson. Ask questions. Highlight key texts.
Lunch		Plan lunch for the class after worship. THEN GO OUT AND REACH SOMEONE!

**Adjust times as necessary.*

UNITED BY MISSION



Bonte Medou



Maimouna Bangoura



B. Darlington Teah

A 14-year-old boy leads two people to Christ by singing in Gabon. A 29-year-old mother is beaten daily after she accepts Jesus in Guinea. A 59-year-old former politician opens an Adventist university in Liberia. What do they have in common? They are united by mission in the West-Central Africa Division, which will receive this quarter's Thirteen Sabbath Offering.

Read more in the youth and adult Mission magazine (bit.ly/adultmission) and the Children's Mission magazine (bit.ly/childrensmission).

Thank you for supporting Adventist Mission with your prayers and Sabbath School mission offerings.

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Sharing *the* Word



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 119:105, Jer. 23:29, Heb. 1:1–3, 2 Tim. 3:14–17, 1 John 1:7–9, Eccles. 3:1, 2 Tim. 4:2.*

Memory Text: “ ‘So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it’ ” (*Isaiah 55:11, NKJV*).

When we witness, we speak of Jesus. But what would we know about Jesus without the Bible? In fact, how much would we know about the great controversy, the love of God, and the birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and return of our Lord if we did not have the Scriptures?

Although nature reveals the majesty and power of God, it doesn't reveal the plan of salvation. Jesus, through the Person of the Holy Spirit, is the “true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (*John 1:9, NKJV*). Still, without the Word of God to explain divine truth fully, the Holy Spirit's revelation to our hearts is limited. The Written Word of God is the clearest and fullest revelation of Jesus, the Living Word.

Although the religious leaders studied the Word of God, many missed its primary message. Jesus said: “ ‘You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me’ ” (*John 5:39, NKJV*). Rightly understood, every teaching of the Bible reflects the beauty of Jesus' character. When we share the Word of God, our primary goal is not to prove that we are right and that the other person is wrong; it is to reveal Jesus in each facet of the truth we share.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 15.

Symbols of God's Word

Read Psalm 119:105, Jeremiah 23:29, Luke 8:11, and Matthew 4:4. What five symbols are used to describe the Word of God in these passages? Why do you think these five symbols were chosen to represent the Word of God?

The varied symbols used in these passages describe some of the primary functions of the Word of God. When we share the Scriptures with others, it is like a light that illuminates life. Jesus, “the light of the world,” breaks through the darkness of their misunderstanding about who God is and the nature of His character. Minds darkened with a misunderstanding of God are illuminated by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God.

According to Jeremiah, the Word of God is like a fire and a hammer. It consumes the dross of sin in our lives and breaks our hard hearts. When we help people see in Scripture the glory of Jesus, their hard hearts are broken, and the fire of His love consumes the dross of selfishness, greed, lust, and self-centeredness.

The Word of God also is likened to seed. The key characteristic of seed is that it is life-giving. Seed takes time to grow. Not all seeds germinate at the same time. Not all plants grow at the same rate. But under the right conditions, the life in the seed bursts forth through the soil into new life. When we plant the seed of the Word of God in the hearts and minds of others, we will not always see immediate results; but silently the seed is growing, and in God's own time, if they respond to the Holy Spirit's promptings, it will produce a harvest for God's kingdom.

Jesus likens His Word to nourishing bread. As many of us know, there are few things as satisfying as a good loaf of bread. The Word of God satisfies the hunger of the soul and nourishes our inner spiritual longings. As you share the promises of the Word with others and help them discover that Jesus is the Word, their lives will be transformed by His goodness, charmed by His love, amazed at His grace, and satisfied in His presence.

Again, think about the truths that we know only from the Bible. What should this tell us about how much we should treasure what it teaches us?

The Creative Power of God's Word

Compare Hebrews 1:1–3; Hebrews 4:12; and Psalm 33:6, 9. What do these passages tell us about the power of the Word of God?

The Word of God is the Living Word. It carries with it the power to accomplish the things that it declares. Human words can speak of what is, but God speaks of things that are not yet done and then creates them by the power of His Word. The Word of God is a creative Word. The audible word that proceeds from His mouth has the power to create everything that it proclaims.

In the Creation story of Genesis 1, the expression “God said” is used repeatedly (*Gen. 1:3, 6, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29*). God’s declarative words had such power that when He spoke, dry land appeared, plants sprouted, flowers blossomed, fruit trees flourished, and animals sprang forth.

There is a fascinating Hebrew word used in Genesis 1 for the creative activity of God. It is the word *bara*. In this particular form, it is used of God’s activity to create something from nothing. The verb is used only when God is the subject. That is, God alone can *bara*, and He does so through the power of His spoken word.

God not only created this world through the power of His Word, but He also sustains and upholds it through His Word. The same power that is in the spoken word of God is in the Written Word of God. The same Holy Spirit that was active in Creation was active in inspiring Scripture. He is present when we read the Bible or share it with others. There is life-giving, life-changing, creative power in the Word of God. “The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature and re-creates the soul in the image of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 126.

As we personally grasp the promises found in the Word of God, our lives are changed, and as we help others to grasp these amazing promises, the Holy Spirit will change their lives too.

Imagine: *God spoke and it was.* How can we grasp what this means? What does this amazing reality tell us about His power? Why should this truth about God’s creative power be comforting to us?

The Benefits of Studying God's Word

There are multiple benefits to studying the Word of God. The apostle Peter tells us that through the promises of Scripture we become “partakers of the divine nature” (*2 Pet. 1:4*). James speaks of the “implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (*James 1:21, NKJV*). Paul adds that “‘the word of His grace . . . is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified’ ” (*Acts 20:32, NKJV*). The Bible has a redemptive purpose. Seeing Jesus in all of Scripture, we are changed. By beholding Him in His Word, we become like Him (*2 Cor. 3:18*). “It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 555.

Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17 and John 17:14–17. What additional benefits come from studying the Word of God?

Writing to his young companion Timothy, the apostle Paul urges him to be faithful to Scripture and shares the benefits of studying the inspired Word. According to Paul, the Bible is “profitable for doctrine.” It reveals truth and exposes error. It outlines God’s plan for the human race. It reproves our sins, corrects our erroneous thinking, and instructs us in righteousness. The Scriptures reveal the righteousness of Christ. They lead us from the folly of our own sinfulness to the beauty of His righteousness. When we see Jesus’ unselfish love in contrast to our self-centeredness, we stand amazed. As we behold in Scripture the depth of His compassion and caring, our lives are changed. When we share His Word with others, they, too, are radically transformed. Beholding Jesus in His Word, we become more like Him. Witnessing is not about sharing what we think or even what we believe. It is all about sharing the eternal truths found in the Word of God. When the Word of God has incredibly blessed our lives, we have the credibility to tell others how it can bless their lives too.

Think about a time of difficulty that you personally faced and how the Word of God proved to be a strength to you. What did you learn from that experience?

Applying God's Word

Someone has counted more than three thousand promises in the Word of God. Each of these promises comes from the heart of a loving God who “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (*Eph. 3:20, NKJV*). The promises of God are commitments that He makes to each one of us. As we claim these promises by faith and teach other people to claim them, the blessings of heaven flow into our lives. The apostle Paul emphasizes this divine reality in Romans 8: “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (*Rom. 8:32, NKJV*). The apostle Peter clarifies this promise, declaring that “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (*2 Pet. 1:3, NKJV*). Through Christ’s death on the cross, and His victory over Satan and the principalities and powers of hell, He has provided everything necessary for us to live a godly, spiritual life. He also promises to provide for our basic physical needs.

Compare 1 John 1:7–9 and Philippians 4:13, 19. Although these promises are quite different, what do they teach us about the character of God? How have these promises impacted your life?

The promises that we have read in these passages each speak of something different, but the picture of God they give us is very similar. They reveal a God of loving forgiveness, infinite power, and full of care for our basic needs. They give us the assurance that God cares deeply for us.

Read Hebrews 3:19, Hebrews 4:1–3, and Matthew 13:58. What do these verses tell us about the need for faith?

There are so many wonderful promises of God in the Bible, and when by faith we claim the promises of the Word of God and believe them because Christ has promised, the blessings of those promises become ours. It is a lack of faith in God’s ability to do what He has promised in His Word that limits the fulfillment of God’s promises in our lives. Pray that God will lead you this week to someone who needs the hopeful promises found in the Word of God.

Sharing the Word

Good news is for sharing. Think about the times in your life that you have been delighted with good news. It may have been the day you were engaged to be married, the birth of a child, a new job, or the purchase of a new car or home. You were so excited that you could not wait to share it.

It is wonderful to share our joy with others, but the best news in the entire universe is the story of Jesus. When we discover new insights in His Word about the salvation that there is in Christ, our hearts overflow with joy, and we long to tell someone else. When the religious authorities tried to stop the preaching of the apostles, Peter declared, “ ‘For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard’ ” (*Acts 4:20*).

“No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. If we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and are filled with the joy of His indwelling Spirit, we shall not be able to hold our peace.” —Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 78.

In Romans 1:14–16, Paul wrote: “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

The apostle Paul never tired of telling his conversion story. His heart overflowed with joy in Jesus. For him, good news was for sharing, and he could not be quiet.

What vital principles about sharing the Word of God do Isaiah 50:4, Ecclesiastes 3:1, and 2 Timothy 4:2 give us?

As we surrender our lives to Christ and His service, He will open doors of opportunity for us to “speak a word in season,” or at the right time to those whose hearts He has opened. In all of our witnessing, we must keep three biblical principles in mind: *what we say*, *how we say it*, and *when we say it*.

Who are some people with whom you are in contact, and how can you be a better witness to them?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “A Knowledge of God,” pp. 87–91, in *Steps to Christ*; “Bible Readings With Families,” pp. 192, 193, in *Gospel Workers*; and “Bible Work Techniques,” pp. 481–486, in *Evangelism*.

God is working on hearts all around us. If we have the spiritual discernment to see where God is already working, we will regularly observe opportunities to share His Word with others. As God prepares the soil of the heart, we have the opportunity to sow the seed of the gospel. The Holy Spirit prepared the hearts of Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the woman with the issue of blood, the thief on the cross, the Roman centurion, and many others to receive His Word before Jesus ever met them. Through the circumstances of their lives and the impressions of the Holy Spirit, they were prepared to receive Christ’s message.

We may have a natural hesitancy to ask people if we can pray with them, share a Bible promise, or give them a piece of literature. More often than not, when we feel impressed to share our faith with someone else, it is because the Holy Spirit who has impressed us has already impressed that person to receive our witness.

Discussion Questions:

- ① If someone should come to you feeling terribly guilty over something and needed forgiveness from God, what counsel would you give, and what Bible texts would you share? What has been your own experience with guilt and the power of God’s forgiveness in your own life?
- ② Sometimes God brings people into our lives because He longs for them to know His truth. How can we be sensitive to God’s leading?
- ③ Dwell more on the power of God and the Word of God as revealed in the Creation story and in creation itself. We can barely grasp the concept of the universe itself because it is so big and so vast. *To think that the God who created it must be even greater than what He created.* How can we draw comfort from knowing that the God we serve is so powerful? And not only is He powerful, but He also loves us. What great hope can we take from knowing these things about God? How can this knowledge help us be better witnesses to others about Him?

New Heart for Alex

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Alex was diagnosed with congenital heart disease, or a hole in the heart, as a baby in Finland. Doctors hoped that the heart would heal itself, but it didn't. So when he was eight, doctors performed open-heart surgery. Afterward, Mother looked at the small boy lying in the recovery ward and thought, *For some reason God allowed this to happen. He has a purpose for our lives.*

Mother wrote about the experience on Facebook. Many Finns began to follow her Facebook page, allowing her to speak about God with people who otherwise would not listen. Alex was becoming a missionary.

The boy recuperated quickly from the operation and returned home after only five days. It was a miracle. The devil had tried to snatch away Alex, but Jesus had given him a new heart.

The summer, however, turned out to be hot. One evening, Alex complained about a pain in his chest. At the hospital, doctors saw that his heart had swelled to double its normal size (see photo below). Alex was rushed into emergency surgery. Hours later, doctors called the operation a success. The devil had tried to snatch away Alex, but Jesus had given him a new heart.

Alex acted unusual when he returned home. Usually kind and quiet, he became aggressive and loud, especially toward Father. One evening, Alex was particularly angry, yelling unkind words and tossing his eyeglasses on the floor.

"Why are you acting this way?" Father asked, placing a hand on Alex's head to pray. This was something Father had done many times to pray.

But this time Alex refused prayer. "Take your hand away!" he yelled.

He turned to Father with a look of pure hatred in his eyes. Father had never seen such an expression on his face before. He went to the kitchen, where Mother was preparing supper.

"This is not normal," he said. "This is not our Alex. We need to pray."

Father and Mother walked over to Alex. Without saying a word, Father placed a hand on Alex's head. Mother placed her hand on the boy's forehead.

"In the name of Jesus, we command you, evil spirit, to leave Alex," Father said. "We have given Alex to God, and you have no place in his life."

After the prayer, Alex returned to his normal self. He smiled and laughed like nothing had happened.



The devil had tried to snatch away Alex, but Jesus had given him a new heart. Mother hopes that Alex grows up to have a heart for mission and that his story will change hearts.

"I have given his life to God," Mother said. "We feel that Alex has a special relationship with God. His life has been difficult, but we believe that God will do something wonderful with him."

Ministering Like Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 5:13, 14; Phil. 2:15; Mark 12:34; Eph. 4:15; Matt. 4:23–25; Matt. 25:31–46.*

Memory Text: “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (*Matthew 9:36, NKJV*).

Jesus genuinely cared for people. He was more interested in their concerns and needs than in His own. His life was totally centered on other people. His was a ministry of loving compassion. He met the physical, mental, and emotional needs of the people around Him, and thus, their hearts were opened to the spiritual truths He taught. As He healed lepers, opened blind eyes, unstopped deaf ears, delivered demoniacs, fed the hungry, and cared for the needy, hearts were touched and lives changed.

That's because as people saw His genuine concern, they were open to the spiritual truths that He taught. “Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143. Jesus recognized that the world needed a demonstration of the gospel as much as it needed its proclamation. The living witness of a Christlike life committed to ministering to others is a powerful testimony to the words we speak and gives credibility to our witness.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 22.

Jesus' Attitude Toward People

Jesus always looked for the good in others. He drew out the best in them. One of the criticisms the religious leaders of His day had with Jesus was that He “ ‘receives sinners and eats with them’ ” (*Luke 15:2, NKJV*). They were concerned because He fellowshiped with “the ungodly.” Their view of religion was one of estrangement rather than engagement. They were surprised when Jesus said of Himself, “ ‘For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance’ ” (*Matt. 9:13, NKJV*).

The scribes', Pharisees', and Sadducees' religion was one of avoidance. They thought, *Do everything you can to avoid becoming contaminated with sin*. Though uncontaminated by sin, Jesus plunged into this snake pit of a world to redeem it, not to avoid it. He is “ ‘the light of the world’ ” (*John 8:12*).

Read Matthew 5:13, 14. What two illustrations did Jesus use to describe His followers? Why do you think He used those specific illustrations? See also John 1:9, John 12:46, Phil. 2:15.

Salt was one of the most important resources in the ancient world. It was extremely valuable, and at times the Roman legions used it as currency. It was a symbol of great wealth. It also was used to preserve and flavor food. When Jesus used the illustration of salt to symbolize His followers, He was really saying that the true wealth of the world is not the world's most powerful and richest people. The true wealth of the world is committed Christians who are making a difference for the kingdom of God. Their loving acts of unselfish service preserve the world's goodness and flavor its atmosphere.

The second illustration Jesus used (*in Matthew 5:14*) was that of “ ‘the light of the world.’ ” Light does not avoid the darkness. It shines in the darkness. It does not separate from the darkness. It penetrates the darkness, making the darkness light. Jesus' followers are to penetrate the darkness of this world in their neighborhoods, villages, towns, and cities to lighten them with the glory of God.

After considering Jesus' words in John 17:15–18, how are we to understand the idea of separation from the world and avoidance of the world? Are they the same thing? What did Jesus mean when He prayed that His followers would be in the world but not of the world? How do we do that?

Jesus' Treatment of People

Jesus' goal was to bring out the best in people. Even when the circumstances were unusually challenging, He responded with grace. Luke's gospel records that the crowds "marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (*Luke 4:22, NKJV*), and John's gospel adds that "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (*John 1:17, NKJV*). His approach to people was disarming. His gracious words touched a responsive chord in their hearts.

Read Matthew 8:5–10 and Mark 12:34. What hope-filled words did Jesus speak to two unlikely people—a Roman centurion and a Jewish scribe?

Jesus' statement to a Roman military commander was revolutionary. Think of how this career army officer must have felt when Jesus claimed that He had not found this degree of faith even in Israel. Also, think about the Jewish scribe's thoughts when Jesus said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Jesus had the ability to bring out the best in people. There are few things that go as far as a compliment to open hearts for the gospel. Look for the good in people around you and let them know you appreciate them.

Compare Isaiah 42:3; Colossians 4:5, 6; and Ephesians 4:15. What vital principles do these texts teach us about sharing our faith with others and about our relationship with them?

When our words are encouraging and filled with grace, they have a positive influence on the lives of others. Isaiah's prophetic words reveal that Jesus would not "break a bruised reed" or "quench a smoking flax." In other words, Jesus was so compassionate that He was careful not to bruise unnecessarily someone who was just coming to faith or to quench the slightest embers of faith in their hearts.

Why is *how* we say something as important as, or even more important than, *what* we say? How do you react to this statement: "Truth is truth, and people need to take it or leave it"? What's wrong with this statement?

Jesus' Healing Ministry: Part 1

Our Lord's method of evangelism goes beyond memorized speeches and canned presentations; it is as rich and dynamic as life itself. Every day we rub shoulders with people who have all kinds of needs: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Christ is eager to meet those needs through us as we show concern for people's loneliness, sorrow, and heartache, and as we show an interest in their joys, hopes, and dreams.

Jesus ministered to people's felt needs so that He could ultimately meet their deepest needs. A felt need is an area of life in which people already sense that they cannot solve an issue by themselves. It may be a need to quit smoking, reduce weight, get on a better diet, or reduce stress. It may be a need for food, housing, or medical care. It may be the need for counseling for the marriage or family.

An ultimate need, however, is what human beings need most—the need for a personal relationship with God and the realization that their life has eternal significance. Reconciliation with God in a broken world is our ultimate need.

Read the stories of the paralytic in Matthew 9:1–7 and the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5:25–34. What indications do we have in both of these stories that Jesus linked physical healing with meeting the ultimate need for reconciliation with God?

The healing ministry of Christ included much more than physical and emotional healing. Jesus longed for people to experience the wholeness that sin's brokenness had shattered. For Christ, physical healing without spiritual healing was incomplete. If God's love motivates us to desire an individual's physical and emotional well-being, it also will motivate us much more to desire that person's spiritual well-being so that he or she can live life to the fullest here and through all eternity. After all, every person whom Jesus healed eventually died. Hence, their real need, above everything else, was spiritual, was it not?

What kinds of initiatives can our church take in our community to meet people's needs and demonstrate that we really care for them? Think about the people in your community. What is your church doing to make a difference in people's lives?

Jesus' Healing Ministry: Part 2

Read Matthew 4:23–25 and Matthew 9:35. What threefold approach formed the basis for Christ's ministry? How did He meet people's needs, and what impact did it have on their lives?

Jesus combined the threefold ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing. He shared eternal principles so that all of us could live lives of meaning and purpose. He said, “ ‘I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ ” (*John 10:10, NKJV*). His ministry revealed a superabundance of grace. And Jesus came to enable us to live lives of “superabundance” now and forever.

Read Mark 1:32–39. Jesus spent all day healing the sick and casting out demons. After spending time in prayer the next morning when multitudes more were seeking even more healing, He left for another city. Why didn't He heal them? Notice His own reason in Mark 1:38, 39.

This story is insightful. After healing multitudes the day before, the next day Jesus leaves the crowds, who are seeking Him and who are still in need of healing. His explanation is that the purpose for which He came into the world was to preach the gospel. Jesus was not merely some spectacular miracle worker. He was the divine Son of God who came on a redemptive mission. He was not content merely to heal physical diseases. He longed for people to receive the gift of eternal life that He had to offer. He clearly stated the purpose for His coming to earth in these words: “ ‘For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’ ” (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*). Thus, each act of healing was an opportunity to reveal God's character, relieve suffering, and provide an opportunity for eternal life.

Is it possible to live the abundant life Jesus offers if you are poverty-stricken or sick? Did Jesus offer people something deeper than physical healing? In what practical ways can we lead people to spiritual truths when we minister to their physical and emotional needs?

What Matters to Jesus

Jesus' message to His disciples in Matthew 24 that blends events regarding the destruction of Jerusalem and the days before His return is followed by three end-time parables in Matthew 25. These parables outline the character qualities that really matter to Jesus for a people waiting for His second coming. The parable of the ten virgins emphasizes the importance of a genuine, authentic, Spirit-filled life. The parable of the ten talents underlines the importance of faithfully using the gifts that God has given to each one of us. The parable of the sheep and goats reveals that genuine Christianity truly ministers to the needs of those God brings into our lives each day.

Read Matthew 25:31–46. How does Jesus describe genuine Christianity? List the areas of ministry this passage speaks about.

Although this parable speaks of meeting people's genuine physical needs—an aspect of the story we should not neglect—is it possible that there is something more here? There is a hidden hunger and thirst for Jesus in the souls of human beings that longs to be satisfied (*John 6:35; John 4:13, 14*). We are all strangers longing for home until we discover our true identity in Christ (*Eph. 2:12, 13, 19*). We are naked spiritually until clothed with His righteousness (*Rev. 3:18; Rev. 19:7, 8*).

The Old Testament prophets often described the human condition as one that was hopelessly sick (*Isa. 1:5, Jer. 30:12–15*). The disease of sin is fatal, but the prophet points us to the remedy. “ ‘For I will restore health to you and heal your wounds,’ says the LORD’ ” (*Jer. 30:17, NKJV*). Jesus is the remedy for the life-threatening disease of our souls.

The parable of the sheep and goats admonishes us to meet the physical needs of those around us, but it does much more. It is the story of a Christ who meets the deepest needs of the soul, and it is His invitation to partner with Him in ministering to those around us. To live self-centered lives and neglect the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of others is to risk eternal loss. In the parable, those who give their lives for something more than themselves are commended by their Lord and welcomed into eternity, while those who selfishly pursue their own agenda and neglect the needs of others are condemned by their Lord.

Further Thought: “Many have no faith in God and have lost confidence in man. But they appreciate acts of sympathy and helpfulness. As they see one with no inducement of earthly praise or compensation coming to their homes, ministering to the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the sad, and tenderly pointing all to Him of whose love and pity the human worker is but the messenger—as they see this, their hearts are touched. Gratitude springs up. Faith is kindled. They see that God cares for them, and they are prepared to listen as His Word is opened.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 145.

The unselfish ministry of Jesus opens hearts, breaks down prejudice, and creates a receptivity for the gospel. The church is the body of Christ meeting needs in love everywhere. Christ sends us out into our communities to make a difference in His name. Though we certainly need to be careful about being contaminated by the world (and that is a very real and dangerous threat to our church), we still must learn to reach the people where they are and to be used by God, who wants to take them from where they are and bring them to where they should be.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Why is the compassionate ministry of Christ so powerful in breaking down prejudice and opening people up to hear spiritual truths? Try to imagine how much more effective our witness as a people would be were we to reflect the same selfless concern for others as Jesus did.
- ② Think about a time when you said something that might have been true, correct, or even needed, but you said it wrong; that is, you said it with a bad tone or attitude. What did you learn from that experience that could help you not to do it again, such as waiting until you calm down before speaking?
- ③ Dwell more on the idea that all the people healed or even raised from the dead would eventually die. What should that tell us about how we ought to be conducting our outreach and ministry to those around us?
- ④ What types of ministries can your church launch in your community that you are not currently doing?
- ⑤ How can we create spiritual opportunities for seekers through our felt-need ministries?

Surprise Treat in Sudan

By GLENN MITCHELL

Living in Sudan was a challenge for a Seventh-day Adventist couple working for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency. Daily temperatures hovered at 102–108 degrees Fahrenheit (39–42 degrees Celsius) from May to September. A cold drink was a treat after a day of work for my wife, Suzanne, and me.

Returning home one day, I followed Suzanne into the kitchen and hopped up onto the counter to chat while she prepared a meal. As I sat on the counter, swinging my feet as a boy does, Suzanne asked me what I wanted to drink.

“What do you have?” I asked.

Placing her hands on her hips, she informed me in a haute voice, “I have Orange Fanta, root beer, or Sprite.”

“Hmm, I want Squirt,” I said, referring to a favorite cold drink that I hadn’t seen since leaving our home in the United States.

“I don’t have any Squirt,” Suzanne said, maintaining the same haute voice.

I jumped off the kitchen counter, threw myself on the floor and, in the manner of a child, began to throw a tantrum. Kicking my feet and pounding my fist, I demanded the beverage. “I want Squirt! I want Squirt!” I cried.

It was to no avail. There was no Squirt. Suzanne and I laughed and laughed about our silliness. Moments like these made hard days easier to bear.

Two hours later, a friend pulled into our driveway. She worked with the U.S. Agency for International Development in Sudan’s capital, Khartoum, and acted as our liaison officer for several ADRA projects funded by USAID. She allowed us to receive mail at her official address, and on this day she was delivering a box with much-awaited hair products from the United States. I tore open the box, knowing our American friends would have included a bag of chocolate-covered raisins for her. Sure enough, the coveted bag of raisins lay right on top. Underneath the raisins were nestled two bottles of hair conditioner. But wait. Something more seemed to be in the box. Digging under the packing paper, I found, waiting in all its green glory, a big bottle of Squirt!

I had never requested the beverage from anyone in the United States. But on a hot day in Sudan, God provided a special treat. Weeks before I had asked Suzanne for the drink, the bottle was on its way to Khartoum. God cares about even the smallest details of our lives, and He loves to give. “To give is to live” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 623). God promises, “Those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing” (*Psalms 34:10, NKJV*). When God saw me being silly and throwing my tantrum, He must have smiled and thought, “Wait and see what I have in store for you.”



Developing a Winning Attitude



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 4:27–30, 39–42; Matt. 15:21–28; 2 Thess. 1:1–4; Rom. 15:7; Eph. 4:32; 1 Pet. 3:15.*

Memory Text: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (*1 Peter 3:15, NKJV*).

The more we study Jesus' life, the more we marvel at His ability to accept and affirm people. Although He issued scathing rebukes to the religious leaders of His day, He gladly received those who were struggling with sin, plagued with guilt, and hopelessly condemned. His grace was for them. His mercy extended to even the vilest sinners. The depth of His forgiveness was infinitely deeper than the depths of their sin. His love knew no bounds.

Jesus never exhibited a tinge of pride or superiority. He saw in every human being one created in the image of God, yet fallen by sin, and one whom He came to save. No one was beyond His love. None had fallen so low that His grace could not reach them. He showed respect to all He came in contact with and treated them with the dignity they deserved. He influenced people for the kingdom because He believed in people. Their lives were changed in His presence because He cared for them so deeply. They rose to become what He believed they could be.

In this week's lesson, we will explore more deeply Jesus' attitude toward people and discover how to apply these principles in our own lives.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 29.

Receptivity to the Gospel

Read John 4:27–30, 39–42. How does Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman demonstrate the truth that all sorts of people are open to the gospel, even in unexpected places?

The last place the disciples expected to find hearts receptive to the gospel was in Samaria. The Samaritans were in constant conflict with the Jews over doctrine and worship. This animosity was decades old. The Samaritans had wanted to participate in building the temple in Jerusalem but were refused that opportunity because of their intermarriage with the heathen culture around them and their unorthodox views. As a result, the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim. The disciples would readily skip by Samaria as an unfertile ground for the proclamation of the gospel.

Jesus saw what the disciples did not see: receptive hearts. John's account of the story of the woman at the well begins with these words: "He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria" (*John 4:3, 4, NKJV*). Jesus "needed" to go through Samaria because the Holy Spirit convinced Him that there would be receptive hearts in this unlikely place. When our eyes are divinely anointed by the Holy Spirit, we see possibilities where others see only difficulties. We see a rich harvest of souls for the kingdom of God where others see only barren fields.

Read Acts 8:4, 5, 14. What was the ultimate result of Jesus' ministry in Samaria?

The disciples would have passed by Samaria without ever providing an opportunity for the Samaritans to hear the truth of the Word of God. Jesus saw what they did not see. He recognized that the Holy Spirit had created a receptivity in one woman's heart. Her dramatic conversion impacted scores of people in that city. We will not always see immediate results from our witnessing activities, but as we sow seeds in receptive hearts, they will one day bring a harvest for the glory of God.

We never know for sure the impact of our words and actions on others, either for good or for bad. Hence, why must we always be careful about what we say and do in the presence of others?

An Attitude Adjustment

Our attitudes often determine our ability to influence others. A harsh, critical, and unfriendly attitude is going to drive people away from you. Even if you are able to witness, your words, no matter how truthful, are much less likely to be received.

In contrast, a positive attitude and a belief in others draws them to us. It creates a bond of friendship. Jesus stated this principle beautifully when He said, “ ‘No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things I heard from My Father I have made known to you’ ” (*John 15:15, NKJV*). Friends accept one another in spite of their weaknesses and mistakes and freely share their joys and sorrows.

Read Matthew 15:21–28 and Mark 14:6–9. These texts describe two women of widely differing circumstances. Jesus appears to be harsh with one and gentle with the other. What indications do you have in these passages that Jesus was reaching out with His saving grace to each one and building trust?

The woman in Matthew 15 is a Canaanite. Jesus intentionally refuses her request initially so that, as she persists, her faith will grow. He eventually grants her desire and then makes an amazing statement that no religious leader in Judea at that time would ever make to a poor Canaanite woman. He publicly says, “ ‘O woman, great is your faith!’ ” (*Matt. 15:28, NKJV*). He gives her one of the greatest compliments any religious teacher could ever give. Can you imagine how her heart rejoiced and her life was changed?

The woman who anoints Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume is a Jew—a woman of ill repute, a woman who has failed badly and sinned often—but one who was forgiven, transformed, and made new again. When others criticize her, Jesus compliments her and approves of her actions. He declares, “ ‘Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her’ ” (*Mark 14:9, NKJV*).

In view of the two stories we have read above, what are the essentials of a positive winning attitude? What kind of attitude adjustments do you need, not just for witnessing but for life in general?

Presenting the Truth in Love

Friendship alone does not win people to Christ. We might have many friends, people we enjoy being with and who enjoy being with us, but if we never tell them what Jesus means to us and how He changed our lives, our friendship may make little eternal difference. Sure, we might be fun to be around, but God calls us to be more than just fun to be around. Friendship alone will not bring people to Christ, but unfriendly attitudes may drive people from Christ.

The apostle Paul reminds us to speak “the truth in love” (*Eph. 4:15*). The bonds of friendship are built when we agree with people as much as possible, demonstrate acceptance, and compliment them where it is appropriate. How important that we make a habit of looking for the good in people as opposed to the bad.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1–4. List some of the specific things for which Paul compliments the Thessalonians.

There are those who seem to delight in looking for things that are wrong with others if for no other reason than that it makes them feel better about themselves.

The apostle Paul was the opposite. He looked for the positive in the churches he ministered to. Certainly, he reproved error and did not condone sin, but his focus was to build up the churches that he established. One way he did this was by highlighting what they did right.

Ellen G. White’s statement on the importance of positive relationships is remarkable. “If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful [full of pity], there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 189.

Reflect on the statement above for a moment. What would it mean for your church if kindness, courtesy, tenderheartedness, and pity (mercy) overflowed from each member’s heart? What would a church like this look like? Look into your own heart and ask yourself about a way in which you could improve in this area.

The Foundation of Acceptance

Read Romans 15:7 and Ephesians 4:32. How would you describe the foundation of all acceptance? What is the essence of an accepting attitude?

In these two passages, the apostle Paul presents the principles underlying our acceptance of one another. Because Christ has forgiven and accepted each one of us, how can we possibly refuse to forgive and accept one another? In fact, it is precisely because Jesus has received us that we can receive one another, even despite the other's flaws.

Think hard about what this means. Think about yourself and about some of the things you have done and might still be struggling with—things that, perhaps, you alone know about, things that you'd be terrified if others knew about too.

And yet, what? By faith, you are accepted in Christ, who knows all about the things that others might not know anything about. Yes, He knows all of that, and, yet, He accepts you anyway, not because of your own goodness but because of His.

What, then, should be your attitude toward others?

Here is a difficult concept for some to understand. Genuine acceptance means that we accept people as they are, with all their sinful habits, because they are human beings created in the image of God. Because Christ died for us “while we were yet sinners” and “reconciled [us] to God” when we were His enemies, we can forgive and accept others. His love toward us becomes the very foundation of our acceptance and forgiveness toward others (*Rom. 5:6–10*).

But once an accepting, caring relationship has been established, it is often necessary to confront another individual lovingly with the truths of Scripture. To fail to do this is to neglect to love. We must care enough to share life-changing, eternal truths with our friends.

Jesus' attitude was not, “Do whatever you please. It's all right. I still accept you.” His attitude was, rather, “No matter what you have done, I am willing to forgive you and provide you with power to change.” Biblical truth presented humbly in Christ's Spirit with a loving attitude wins hearts and changes lives.

How is it possible to accept an individual without accepting that person's sinful behavior? How can we be accepting while at the same time not condoning or tolerating sin?

Truth Lovingly Presented

Jesus did not neglect presenting truth for “love’s sake,” because that would not have been love. Love always seeks the best for another. There is no conflict between love and truth. Truth presented humbly and kindly is a statement of love. Jesus said, “ ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’ ” (*John 14:6*). Jesus is the only way of salvation (*Acts 4:12*). His grace saves us so that we can know His truth and live His life. Truth without love leads to stifling legalism, which strangles spiritual life. So-called love without truth leads to tolerant sentimentalism with no substance, leaving an individual adrift on a sea of uncertainty. Truth presented in love leads to an authentic Christian experience that provides clear direction, purpose, and certainty.

Read 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Timothy 4:2; and Titus 3:4, 5. What expressions in these verses present the balance between presenting Bible truth and having a humble, accepting spirit?

The New Testament writers never emphasize love over truth. They beautifully blend love and truth, grace and law, compassion and honesty. Peter admonishes fellow believers to “give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (*1 Pet. 3:15, NKJV*). In other words, you need to know what you believe, why you believe it, and be able to explain what you believe and why. This doesn’t mean you must have all the answers or be able to convince others of your beliefs. It means only that with “meekness and fear”—that is, with humility and a sense of the greatness of the issues at stake—you can explain and defend your faith.

Paul counsels his young protégé Timothy, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (*2 Tim. 4:2, NKJV*). He reminds Titus that it is the kindness and love of God that saved those who have been reborn in Him (*Titus 3:5*).

We, too, are called to present the truth in love with all meekness and humility. Our Lord invites us to join Him in lovingly sharing with accepting attitudes His last-day message for a world dying without Christ.

If someone were to ask you, “Why are you a Christian?” how would you respond, and why?

Further Thought: “In Christ is the tenderness of the shepherd, the affection of the parent, and the matchless grace of the compassionate Saviour. His blessings He presents in the most alluring terms. He is not content merely to announce these blessings; He presents them in the most attractive way, to excite a desire to possess them. So His servants are to present the riches of the glory of the unspeakable Gift. The wonderful love of Christ will melt and subdue hearts, when the mere reiteration of doctrines would accomplish nothing. ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God.’ ‘O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! . . . He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom.’ Isaiah 40:1, 9–11.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 826, 827.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ It’s unfortunate, but some people can make themselves feel better by pointing out the faults of others. How can we be sure that we don’t fall into that same mind frame?
- ❷ Consider this scenario: A friend has just returned from a funeral and makes this comment: “I am so glad my aunt is up in heaven looking down at me. It makes me feel so good.” Based on the principles we studied in our lesson this week, how would you respond? That is, however important the state of the dead is, why might this not be the best time to give that person a Bible study on this topic?
- ❸ Discuss the following statement in the light of our witness to others: “The very act of looking for evil in others develops evil in those who look. By dwelling upon the faults of others, we are changed into the same image. But by beholding Jesus, talking of His love and perfection of character, we become changed into His image. By contemplating the lofty ideal He has placed before us, we shall be uplifted into a pure and holy atmosphere, even the presence of God. When we abide here, there goes forth from us a light that irradiates all who are connected with us.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 479.

Speaking Boldly in Finland

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Nineteen-year-old Simo Vehkavuori began to rethink his life while visiting a Seventh-day Adventist uncle and aunt in Sweden. The Finnish teen remembered failing to fulfill a promise to follow God at a summer camp three years earlier, and he anxiously wondered, *Have I lost God's grace?*

One night, he went to the back garden and, weeping, knelt by a large lilac bush. "Jesus, if You still accept me, if tonight is the right time to give my heart to You, please show me," he cried. "Perhaps allow a star to fall in the sky?"

As he stood up, an enormous star fell in the night sky.

When Simo returned home to the family dairy farm in Finland, the farming community heard about his decision to follow God. Some people snickered, and Simo wondered whether he should be so open about his faith. One evening, a government inspector showed up for a regular check as Simo milked the cows in his father's brick barn. She had heard about his conversion, and she spoke mockingly. "Listen, a little bird is spreading a rumor," she said as Simo milked a cow by hand. "I hope that you did not become a Christian in Sweden. Wouldn't it be better for you to go to dances and movies with other young people and to squeeze all the joy out of the world that is possible?"

Looking up at the woman, Simo said, "My dear friend, this evening I can tell you that I met Jesus as my personal Savior in Sweden, and I want to follow Him wherever He leads." He had scarcely finished speaking when a loud explosion rocked the barn. The cow that he was milking dropped to the ground dead. The other cows collapsed on their knees. Silence filled the barn for a moment. Then the cows began to moo madly, their mooing sounding like barking dogs.

Ball lightning, the size of a golf ball, had fallen to the ground and exploded between Simo and the cow. Simo's rubber boots protected him from the shock. The inspector stood frozen on the concrete floor. Her face was pale. Her instruments had tumbled into a gutter filled with cow dung. Finally she spoke.

"Simo, can you forgive my careless words?" she said. The mocking tone was gone. "We are like dust when nature manifests its power. Stay on your chosen path." After a pause, she asked, "How can I get on the same path as you?"



Simo resolved at that moment never to be shy about sharing his faith. In his room that night, he prayed, "Take my whole heart and life, and let me follow wherever You lead me."

SIMO VEHKAVUORI, now 84 and retired, served as a pastor and church leader for many years in Finland.

An Exciting Way to Get Involved



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:1, 2, 26; Exod. 18:21–25; 1 Cor. 12:12–25; Acts 16:11–15, 40; Acts 4:31; Acts 12:12.*

Memory Text: “Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’ ” (*Matthew 9:37, 38, NKJV*).

Someone has said, “There is strength in numbers.” In a sense, that is true. Have you ever noticed that you are far more motivated to exercise if you are doing it with a group of people than if you have to exercise alone each day? Many people join health clubs, gyms, and exercise facilities because they believe that they will exercise more and enjoy it better if they are exercising with other people. In a similar way, God has created us for fellowship. We are social beings, and as with exercise it is true with many things in life: we do better if we have a social support system. This is especially true in spiritual matters.

Throughout the Bible, small groups are highlighted as one of God's methods of strengthening our faith, increasing our knowledge of His Word, deepening our prayer life, and equipping us to witness. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit participated in a small group ministry. Jesus established His small group of disciples, and the apostle Paul traveled the Roman world with his small group of evangelistic companions.

During this week's study, we will focus on the biblical basis for small groups, and you will discover an exciting way to get involved.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 5.

Small Groups—God’s Idea First

Read Genesis 1:1, 2, 26; Hebrews 1:1, 2; and Ephesians 3:8, 9. How do these verses reveal the unity of the Godhead?

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit participated in Creation together. They each had different tasks but worked together in an indivisible union. The Father was the Master Designer, the Great Architect. He carried out His plans through Jesus, as the active agent in Creation in unison with the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a powerful supernatural act is way beyond our comprehension. What we can clearly comprehend is not only the reality of the created world and the cosmos but also that God Himself made it all (*see Rom. 1:18–20*).

Small groups were God’s idea first. Though one has to be careful when using analogies in regard to many of the mysterious aspects of God, let’s use one loosely and say that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit composed the first “small group” in salvation history. They participated together in the creation of the human race and then in its redemption after the Fall.

Compare John 10:17, 18 with Romans 8:11 and 1 Corinthians 15:15. How does the resurrection of Christ demonstrate the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the plan of salvation?

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are united in a “small group” with the express purpose of redeeming the human race. “The plan of salvation had its place in the counsels of the Infinite from all eternity.” —Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 186. There is nothing more important to God than saving as many people as possible (*1 Tim. 2:4, 2 Pet. 3:9*). Small groups may have multiple purposes that we will study in this week’s lesson, but their overriding purpose is to focus on winning lost people to Jesus. That is, by working in small groups we can help not ourselves alone but others, as well. That is, the ultimate goal of our small groups should be soul winning.

Dwell on the mystery of the unity of our God. It’s hard to grasp, isn’t it? Yet, we can still believe in, and trust, what we don’t fully understand, right? Why is this such an important principle for Christians to follow when it comes to faith?

Small Groups in Scripture

The Bible provides numerous examples of small groups praying, fellowshiping, encouraging one another, and laboring together for Christ. These groups give God's people the opportunity to share responsibilities and fully utilize their varied gifts. That is, small groups also can provide the opportunity for the Lord to use each of us more fully.

Read Exodus 18:21–25. What providential counsel did Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, provide that made a significant difference for Moses? Why was this plan so vitally important?

Every individual in the camp of Israel became part of a group of ten, led by a godly official. These small groups were a place for problem solving, but they also were much more. They were places of fellowship where problems could be prevented and spiritual life nurtured. They were places of vision, where God's plans for Israel could be shared. In groups like this, people could form tight and caring relationships that could help all involved work through whatever the issues were that they were facing. No question—then, as well as now, people struggled with things that others could help them with. Small groups provide opportunities for warm, caring fellowship, spiritual growth, and problem solving. It is fascinating that small group specialists tell us that the ideal size for group interaction is between 6 and 12 people. This is the exact size that both Moses and Jesus employed in forming their groups.

Read Luke 6:12, 13; Matthew 10:1; and Mark 3:13–15. What was Jesus' twofold purpose in calling the disciples and selecting them to be part of His small group ministry?

Jesus' purpose in calling the disciples was to prepare them both spiritually and practically for their mission to the world. In fellowship with Him, they would grow in grace. In the context of their small group meetings, they would learn how to minister more effectively. Day by day, as they observed Jesus ministering to the needs of people around Him, they would learn by observation how to use their gifts. The purpose of Jesus' small groups was both spiritual nurture and outreach.

Think about a time when you were involved with a small group of people, whatever the circumstances, who cared about each other and who were working for a common goal. What did you learn from that experience that could help you understand the value of small groups in the context of our faith?

Organized for Service

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–25. How does the human body provide an excellent illustration of working together harmoniously in small groups?

Paul not only reveals the importance of spiritual gifts in the life of the church, but he also suggests a model of how they can be organized. He discusses spiritual gifts in the context of the body of Christ and how it can work.

A study of anatomy and physiology reveals that the organs of the body are organized into different interrelated systems. For example, the digestive, cardiovascular, respiratory, and skeletal are just a few of the body's complex organ systems. Spiritual gifts are like the different parts of the body. They function best when organized into systems or groups. In fact, in most cases they cannot function alone. Our bodies are not just a lump of separate organs freelancing away at whatever they do. Each bodily function is organized into a tightly knit system that works together toward a common goal.

All this tells us something about the environment in which we can best use our spiritual gifts. It is so easy to get discouraged when we function alone, but when we are part of a small group of people with similar interests and goals, we find that our efforts can be much better focused and greatly magnified. So, small groups provide the best environment to exercise our spiritual gifts and can become the heart of a local congregation's outreach ministry.

Ellen G. White underlines the value of small groups in these words: "The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers. If in one place there are only two or three who know the truth, let them form themselves into a band of workers. Let them keep their bond of union unbroken, pressing together in love and unity, encouraging one another to advance, each gaining courage and strength from the assistance of the others."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 21, 22.

Small group ministry is ordained by God to enable each church member to grow spiritually, experience warm fellowship, and utilize his or her God-given gifts in service.

Reflect on Ellen G. White's statement above. Analyze it phrase by phrase. How can this divine counsel be implemented in your church?

New Testament Small Groups

The New Testament church exploded in growth. In a few short years it grew from a small group of believers to tens of thousands of worshippers. There were many factors that contributed to this influx of believers and this rapid growth phenomenon. Jesus' ministry sowed the seed of the gospel and prepared the multitudes to accept the preaching of the disciples. After Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit descended mightily on the day of Pentecost on the praying, believing disciples. One of the contributing factors for the rapid growth of the New Testament church was its small group organizational structure. Small groups made a difference.

Read Acts 18:1–5 and Acts 20:1–4. Why do you think Luke listed some of the names of those with whom Paul worked closely?

It is fascinating that Luke mentions some of the names of those with whom Paul worked. To him each one was important. He knew them by name. They mutually supported one another in their outreach ministry. Though the number of names he mentioned was small, that helps prove the point about the importance of working closely with each other, even in small numbers.

Each one of these people surely had gifts that were different from those that others possessed. They came from different backgrounds and cultures. Their ways of looking at things were not always the same, but each one had a valuable contribution to make to the cause of Christ. Their diversities of gifts, backgrounds, and experiences contributed to the growth of the church. They each contributed to the mission of Christ from the richness of their own background and personal experience with Jesus.

Compare Acts 16:11–15, 40 and Acts 12:11, 12. What invitation did Lydia give to Paul immediately after her conversion? Where did both Paul and Peter go after being delivered from prison?

The New Testament believers regularly met in homes. Christian homes became centers of influence and the heart of small group ministry.

Have you thought about beginning a small group ministry in your home or joining with a friend to begin a small group ministry in that person's home? If you are already part of a small group ministry, think about what you can share with your Sabbath School class this week about its benefits.

Small Group Dynamics

Small groups are a vehicle that God uses to grow His church. They are “safe havens” for people to express their problems and discuss mutual concerns. They provide opportunities for spiritual growth in the context of caring relationships. Many non-Christians will initially feel more comfortable in participating in a small group meeting in a home than in attending a traditional church service for the first time.

Read Acts 4:31, Acts 12:12, and Acts 20:17–19, 27–32. List all of the different elements in these New Testament groups. What activities were these groups involved in?

Early Christians met together to intercede for others, pray about mutual concerns, share in warm fellowship, study the Word of God, be equipped for service, help protect each other against false teachers, and participate together in outreach activities.

Small groups make a difference. People uniting their gifts in service, focusing on the power of the Holy Spirit for outreach, are a mighty weapon in the Lord’s hands.

Read Matthew 9:37, 38. What does Jesus say about the harvest, and what is His solution to the problem?

The disciples saw only faint possibilities for the progress of the gospel, but Jesus saw great opportunities. He shared the good news with them that “ ‘the harvest truly is plentiful,’ ” and then He pointed out the problem: “ ‘the laborers are few’ ” (*Matt. 9:37, NKJV*). Christ’s solution was to pray for “ ‘the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’ ” (*Matt. 9:38, NKJV*). Small groups are an answer to Christ’s prayer and exponentially increase the number of laborers for Christ’s harvest.

The focus of all effective small groups is witness and service. Small group ministry will soon die out if its focus is inward and not outward. If the small group becomes self-serving and little more than a discussion group, it will fail in its purpose and lose the vital reason for its existence. Small groups exist to lead people to Jesus, nurture their faith in Jesus, and equip them to witness for Jesus.

Is it possible that God is calling you to start a small group in your home? Why not begin to pray about what God may be impressing you to do? You may be on the verge of the most spiritually rewarding time of your life.

Further Thought: A number of years ago, a small European church outside of one of the continent's major cities decided that it had to do something significant for the Lord. The church was stagnant. No one had been baptized for years. If the present trend continued, the church had little future. The pastor and his church board earnestly prayed and carefully considered what they might do.

As they studied the New Testament, they decided to establish a small group ministry. Nine lay people in the congregation caught the vision. They committed themselves to pray together and study how to establish their small group ministry effectively. Soon they decided to make each of their homes an evangelistic center. The groups learned to exercise their gifts in various ways. They launched prayer and hospitality ministries. They developed friendships in the community. They reached out in acts of kindness to their family, friends, and to former Adventists. The small group leaders began Bible studies in nine homes with 40 guests in attendance. They were amazed at what the Holy Spirit was doing. Eventually 17 of the 40 were baptized. The testimony of that small, stagnant church is that small groups make an enormous difference. They are one of God's means to involve multiple church members in the mission of the church.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, discuss further the essential elements in each small group as outlined in Thursday's study. In what other kinds of activities could a small group be involved? What are ways in which a small group could help those with special gifts really be able to use those gifts as never before?
- ❷ Why is it so important that small groups keep an outward, mission focus? That is, however much a group can help nourish and support its members, why must it always keep central to its purpose the spreading of the gospel? Why, too, should a small group always keep connected with the local church body? Why is that so important?
- ❸ Have you ever been a part of or heard of small groups that did not function effectively and eventually died out? Discuss the reasons why you think this might happen.
- ❹ Think about the story above, about what happened in Europe with the small group ministry. Why do you think it worked so well? What did they do that was, in many ways, so simple and, yet, so effective? Why, too, might working from the "safer" environment of homes, as opposed to a church building, be an effective way of beginning an outreach to the neighborhood or community?

Forgiven in East Timor

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The would-be killer of a Seventh-day Adventist store clerk won't face punishment after East Timor authorities accepted a decision by the clerk to forgive rather than seek justice in the attack. The case has shocked the East Timor town of Lospalos, where retribution is common, and even the police have expressed disbelief that store clerk Edu Wachumura chose to forgive.

The attacker, Juvinil Ananias, thrust a spear through a store door in a drunken attempt to kill Edu in 2017. The spear only nipped the tip of Edu's nose. Edu met Juvinil at a Lospalos police station in 2019 and signed a declaration to forgive him. Juvinil quietly expressed his remorse for his actions. "I am sorry," he said. "Thank you."

Juvinil offered to slaughter a pig and throw a feast in Edu's honor, but Edu declined, explaining that he doesn't eat pork. Police officers watched incredulously as Edu signed the paper in their presence. "You should at least give a gift or a cow to Edu," an officer told Juvinil.

The attack, which was featured as a Sabbath School mission story in fourth quarter 2018, occurred after Juvinil drunkenly stumbled into the store and swore at 28-year-old Edu, who was working behind the counter.

Edu, who had joined the Adventist Church after taking Bible studies from the store's owner, Zelindo João Lay, gently scolded him. Juvinil angrily threatened to kill Edu but backed off when he saw the other customers in the store. "I'm going to kill you tonight," he snarled as he headed out the door.

That night, Edu heard a knock on the double metal doors at the back of the shop. He went over to the doors, which were locked and chained together, and looked between them to see who was outside. At that moment, a spear plunged through the doors. In a split second, Edu raised an arm, diverting the course of the spear. The tip of the spear sliced the end of his nose.

Two days later, police came to the store to ask Edu whether he wanted the attacker to go to jail. Edu shook his head. "I've forgiven the man," he said. The police jailed Juvinil anyway for a week but then released him. The lengthy legal process played out until 2019, when Juvinil was officially declared forgiven by the authorities.



Zelindo hopes that the stunned local community will understand that God wants to forgive them—just as Edu forgave Juvinil. Following the attack, Edu's brother and sister were baptized, and Zelindo hopes many more people will follow their example.

"Everyone is talking about Edu's decision to forgive, and no one understands it," ZELINDO said. "It is the power of God."

Sharing *the* Story of Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Eph. 2:1–10, 1 John 4:7–11, Mark 5:1–20, Heb. 10:19–22, Gal. 2:20, 1 Cor. 1:30.*

Memory Text: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13, NKJV).

As stated in an earlier lesson, nothing argues more eloquently for the power of the gospel than a changed life. People may argue with your theology. They may debate about doctrines. They may call into question your understanding of the Scriptures, but they will rarely question your personal testimony of what Jesus means to you and has done in your life.

Witnessing is sharing what we know about Jesus. It is letting others know what He means to us and what He has done for us. If our witness consists solely of trying to prove that what we believe is right and that what others believe is wrong, we will meet with strong opposition. If our witness about Jesus comes from a heart that has been transformed by His grace, charmed by His love, and amazed at His truth, others will be impressed with how the truth we believe has impacted our lives. Truth presented in the context of a changed life makes all the difference.

When Christ is the center of every doctrine and each biblical teaching reflects His character, those we are sharing the Scriptures with are much more likely to accept His Word.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 12.

Jesus: The Basis of Our Testimony

As Christians, we all have a personal story to tell, a story about how Jesus changed our lives and what He has done for us.

Read Ephesians 2:1–10. What were we like before we knew Christ? What is ours since we have accepted Christ?

A. Before we knew Christ (*Eph. 2:1–3*).

B. After we knew Christ (*Eph. 2:4–10*).

What an amazing change! Before we knew Christ, we were “dead in trespasses and sins,” “walking in the course of this world,” “fulfilling the desires of the flesh,” and “were by nature children of wrath” (*NKJV*). To put it simply, before we knew Christ, we wandered aimlessly through life in a lost condition.

We may have experienced what appeared to be happiness, but there was an angst of the soul and an unfulfilled purpose in our lives. Coming to Christ and experiencing His love made all the difference. In Christ we are truly “alive.” Through the “exceeding riches of His grace” and His “rich mercy” toward us, we have received the gift of salvation. He has raised us up to “sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (*NKJV*). In Christ, life has taken on new meaning and has new purpose. As John declares, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (*John 1:4, NKJV*).

Read Ephesians 2:10. What does this text tell us about how central good works are to the Christian’s faith? How do we understand this idea in the context of salvation by faith “without the deeds of the law” (*Rom. 3:28*)?

How has your life changed because of Christ, a change that could possibly help someone else come to a knowledge of Jesus?

The Transformative Power of Personal Testimony

John and James, the sons of Zebedee, were known as the “ ‘Sons of Thunder’ ” (*Mark 3:17, NKJV*). In fact, it was Jesus who gave them their nickname. An illustration of John’s fiery disposition took place when Jesus and His disciples were traveling through Samaria. When they tried to find a place of lodging for the night, they met with opposition due to the prejudice of the Samaritans against the Jews. They were refused even the humblest of accommodations.

James and John thought they had the solution to the problem. “When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’ ” (*Luke 9:54, NKJV*). Jesus rebuked the brothers, and they all left the village quietly. Jesus’ way is the way of love, not combative force.

In the presence of Jesus’ love, John’s impetuosity and anger were transformed to loving-kindness and a gentle compassionate spirit. In John’s first epistle, the word *love* appears nearly 40 times; in its various forms, it appears 50 times.

Read 1 John 1:1–4, 1 John 3:1, 1 John 4:7–11, and 1 John 5:1–5. What do these passages tell you about John’s testimony and the changes that took place in his life because of his interaction with Jesus?

There is an eternal principle of the universe. Ellen G. White states this principle well in these words: “The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

When we are committed to Christ, His love will shine through us to others. The greatest testimony of Christianity is a changed life. This does not mean we will never make mistakes and that we might at times not be the conduits of love and grace that we are supposed to be. But it does mean that, ideally, the love of Christ will flow from our lives, and we will be a blessing to those around us.

How well do you reflect the love of Christ to others? Think about the implications of your answer.

Telling the Story of Jesus

Who were the first missionaries that Jesus ever sent out? They were not among the disciples. They were not among His longtime followers. The first missionaries that Jesus sent out had been madmen, demoniacs who a few hours before had terrorized the countryside and struck fear into the hearts of the neighboring villagers.

With supernatural demonic power, one of these demoniacs broke the chains that bound him, shrieked in horrific tones, and mutilated his own body with sharp stones. The agony in their voices only reflected a deeper agony in their souls (*Matt. 8:28, 29; Mark 5:1–5*).

But then they met Jesus, and their lives were changed. They would never be the same. Jesus drove the tormenting demons out of their bodies into a herd of pigs and over a cliff into the sea (*Matt. 8:32–34; Mark 5:13, 14*).

Read *Matt. 8:28–34*. What happened to these men, and what did the townspeople find when they came out to see what had happened?

The demoniacs were now new men transformed by the power of Christ. The townspeople found them sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to every word from the Master’s mouth. We should note that Matthew’s gospel says that there were two demoniacs delivered, while Mark’s gospel focuses the story on only one of the two. But the point is, Jesus restored them physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Read *Mark 5:18–20*. Obviously the changed demoniac, this new convert, wanted to stay with Jesus, but what did Christ send him to do?

“For a few moments only these men had been privileged to hear the teachings of Christ. Not one sermon from His lips had ever fallen upon their ears. They could not instruct the people as the disciples who had been daily with Christ were able to do. But they bore in their own persons the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. They could tell what they knew; what they themselves had seen, and heard, and felt of the power of Christ. This is what everyone can do whose heart has been touched by the grace of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 340. Their testimonies prepared Decapolis, ten cities on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, to receive the teachings of Jesus. This is the power of personal testimony.

Testifying With Assurance

Read 1 John 5:11–13; Hebrews 10:19–22; and 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2. What assurance of eternal life do the Scriptures give us that allows us to testify of our salvation in Christ with certainty?

If we do not have the personal assurance of salvation in Jesus, it is not possible to share it with someone else. We cannot share what we do not have ourselves. There are conscientious Christians who live in a state of perpetual uncertainty, wondering whether they will ever be good enough to be saved. As a wise, old preacher once said, “When I look at myself, I see no possibility of being saved. When I look at Jesus, I see no possibility of being lost.” The Lord’s words ring with certainty down through the ages: “ ‘Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other’ ” (*Isa. 45:22*).

Our Lord wants each one of us to rejoice in the salvation that He so freely offers. He longs for us to experience what it means to be justified by His grace and be free from the condemnation that the guilt of sin brings. As Paul says in Romans 5, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom. 5:1, NKJV*). He adds that we can have the assurance that “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (*Rom. 8:1, NKJV*). The apostle John confirms that “he who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (*1 John 5:12, NKJV*).

If by faith we have accepted Jesus, and He lives in our hearts through His Holy Spirit, the gift of eternal life is ours today. This is not to say that once we have experienced the grace of God and salvation in Christ, we can never lose it (*2 Pet. 2:18–22, Heb. 3:6, Rev. 3:5*). We always have the free choice to walk away from Him; but once we have experienced His love and understood the depths of His sacrifice, we should never choose to walk away from One who loves us so much. Day by day we should look for opportunities to share with others the grace given us in Jesus.

Do you have assurance of salvation in Jesus? If so, on what do you base it? Why do you have that assurance? Where is it found? On the other hand, if you are not sure, why are you not sure? How can you find that assurance?

Something Worth Testifying About

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”
(*Gal. 2:20*).

There are certainly sacrifices when we accept Christ. There are things He asks us to surrender. Jesus made plain the commitment it would take to follow Him: “ ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me’ ” (*Luke 9:23, NKJV*). Death on a cross is a painful death. When we surrender our lives to the claims of Christ and this “old man” of sin is crucified (*see Rom. 6:6*), it is painful. It is painful at times to give up cherished desires and lifelong habits, but the rewards far outweigh the pain.

Powerful testimonies that have a life-changing impact on others focus on what Christ has done for us, not what we have given up for Him. They center on His sacrifice, not on our so-called “sacrifices.” For Christ never asks us to give up anything that it is in our best interest to retain.

Yet, the history of Christianity is filled with stories of those who had to make tremendous sacrifices for Christ’s sake—not that these people were earning salvation, or that their acts, no matter how selfless and sacrificial, gave them merit before God. Instead, in most cases, realizing what Christ has done for them, these men and women were willing to lay all on the altar of sacrifice, according to God’s calling in their life.

Read John 1:12, John 10:10, John 14:27, and 1 Corinthians 1:30. Our testimony always is based on what Christ has done for us. List some of the gifts of His grace mentioned in the texts above.

In light of the texts above, think about what Christ has done for you. You may have been a dedicated Christian all of your life, or possibly you have experienced a more dramatic conversion. Meditate on how good Jesus has been to you and the purpose, peace, and happiness He has given you. Think about the times He has given you the strength to get through the difficult experiences of your life.

What kind of sacrifices have you been called to make for the sake of Christ? What have you learned from your experiences that could be a blessing to others?

Further Thought: Read Mark 5:25–34.

“The wondering crowd that pressed close about Christ realized no accession of vital power. But when the suffering woman put forth her hand to touch Him, believing that she would be made whole, she felt the healing virtue. So in spiritual things. To talk of religion in a casual way, to pray without soul hunger and living faith, avails nothing. A nominal faith in Christ, which accepts Him merely as the Saviour of the world, can never bring healing to the soul. The faith that is unto salvation is not a mere intellectual assent to the truth. . . . It is not enough to believe *about* Christ; we must believe *in* Him. The only faith that will benefit us is that which embraces Him as a personal Saviour; which appropriates His merits to ourselves. . . .

“Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven’s chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.

Discussion Questions:

- ① What are the elements of a compelling testimony? Read Paul’s testimony before Agrippa in Acts 26:1–23. What was the foundation of his testimony?
- ② Why do you think our personal testimony of what Christ has done for us is so powerful? How, however, do you answer the question: *OK, that is what happened to you, but what if I don’t have that kind of experience? Why should your experience be able to teach me anything about why I should follow Jesus?*
- ③ What are some of the things you would want to avoid when giving your testimony to a nonbeliever?
- ④ Dwell on the question regarding assurance of salvation. Why is this such an important part of the Christian experience? How can we be assured of our own salvation while, at the same time, not being presumptuous?

Dead Woman Talking

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Tomasz Karauda, a 28-year-old Seventh-day Adventist physician in Poland, was asked to sign the death certificate of a woman who was still alive.

A nurse wheeled the woman over to the respiratory unit where Tomasz was doing his hospital residency.

By all appearances, she was dead. She had lung cancer, brought on by years of smoking. Rigor mortis was setting in, with the blood settling in her lower back. Her skin, usually pink as oxygen-filled blood flowed through her capillaries, had turned pale as her blood drained into the larger veins. Her condition was irreversible.

"I had never seen anything like that before," Tomasz said, recalling the moment. "She was dead, yet she was sitting in the wheelchair and talking."

The woman had been hospitalized in the crowded intensive care unit, but her physician, seeing that he could do nothing more, had sent her out in order to free up a bed for another serious case. The nurse asked Tomasz whether the woman could stay in the respiratory unit.

The respiratory unit also didn't have any free beds, so Tomasz placed a rolling bed into the corridor and gently laid the woman on it. Pulling up a chair, he sat down and spoke with her for the next two hours.

The woman knew that she was dying. She expressed regret over her life choices.

"I spent my entire life smoking," she said. "If only I could go back and do it over again."

Tomasz didn't know what to say. He felt as if he was caught in the biblical story of the thieves on the cross. He held the woman's hand.

Finally the woman took her last breath. Tomasz signed the death certificate. "It is a great responsibility to be a Christian physician," said Tomasz, who studied at a public medical school. "No one taught us in medical school how to deal with a situation like that."

He has found that it is helpful to take someone's hand and offer hope, saying, "Everything is going to be all right," even though the dying person knows that the only thing waiting is death.



"Sometimes it's best to say nothing at all," he said. "Sometimes the only thing you can do is hold someone's hand and pray silently."

The world is dying in sin. In many cases, rigor mortis is setting in, and the condition may seem irreversible. Will you hold someone's hand? Will you pray? Will you offer hope?

A Message Worth Sharing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Pet. 1:12, 16–21; Rev. 19:11–18; Rev. 14:14–20; Eccles. 12:13, 14; Rev. 14:6–12.

Memory Text: “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.’” (*Revelation 14:6, 7, NKJV*).

Christ's atoning death was universal; that is, it was meant for all people who have ever lived, regardless of when or where. Thus, the gospel speaks to people of every language group, culture, and background. It bridges ethnic divides. It is the incredibly good news that Jesus, in His life, death, and resurrection, has triumphed over the principalities and powers of hell. The gospel is all about Jesus. He died for us and now lives for us. He came once to deliver us from the penalty and power of sin and is coming again to deliver us from the presence of sin. He died the death we deserve so that we can live the life He deserves. In Christ we are justified, sanctified, and one day glorified.

The Bible focuses on the two comings of Jesus. He came once to redeem us and will return to take home what He has purchased at such an infinite cost. The Bible's last book, Revelation, was written especially to prepare the world for Jesus' return. It is an urgent message for this generation. In this week's lesson, we will study Revelation's relevance for a twenty-first-century contemporary society. Together we will discover anew Jesus' appeal to His last-day church to share this end-time message.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 19.

Peter's Present-Truth Message

Throughout salvation history, God has regularly sent a special message through the prophetic Word to prepare people for what was coming. God is never caught off guard (*Isa. 46:9, 10*). He prepares His people for the future by sending prophets to reveal His message before the judgment falls (*Amos 3:7*). In the days before the Flood, God sent a message to the world through Noah that the Flood was coming. In Egypt, God raised up Joseph to prepare for the famine during the seven years of plenty. The Jewish prophets warned the Israelite leaders of the coming destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies. John the Baptist's message of repentance prepared a nation for the first coming of Jesus.

Read 2 Peter 1:12. What expression does Peter use to describe God's message to his generation?

Read 2 Peter 1:16–21. What was this “present truth” message that Peter and the disciples proclaimed?

The message of eternal significance for the first century was that Christ had come. The Father's love was revealed through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Although the “wages of sin is death,” through Christ eternal life has been secured for all. It is our choice whether by faith we will receive it (*Rom. 3:23, Rom. 6:23, Eph. 2:8*). This message of salvation in Jesus will never be out of date. It is present truth for every generation.

The Bible's last book, Revelation, presents Jesus and His eternal salvation in an end-time context to prepare a people for His soon return. It exposes the falsehood of human tradition and self-centered religiosity. From the beginning to the end, Revelation reveals Jesus and His work in behalf of humanity.

Jesus is the true witness of His Father's character. He is the “ruler over the kings of the earth.” He is the One “who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father” (*see Rev. 1:1–6, NKJV*). Revelation is all about Jesus and His end-time message to get His people ready for His soon return.

When you think of the book of Revelation, what comes to your mind? Are your thoughts more about beasts and prophetic symbols than about Jesus? Why do you think Jesus gave us the prophecies in Revelation? How do they reveal His loving plans for humankind?

Revelation's End-Time Focus

The gospels primarily center on Christ's first coming. They tell the story of His birth, His life and ministry, and His death and resurrection. Although they speak of His second coming, that is not their main emphasis. The book of Revelation's primary focus, however, is the climax of the centuries-long conflict of the ages. Each of its major prophecies ends in the glorious return of our Lord.

Read Revelation 1:7, Revelation 11:15, Revelation 14:14–20, and Revelation 19:11–18. What similar conclusion do you see in each of these passages?

From the first to the last chapter of the book of Revelation, the climax of each prophecy is the coming of Jesus. The “Lamb who was slain” (*Rev. 5:12, NKJV*) is coming again as King of kings and Lord of lords (*Rev. 19:16*). He will defeat all of the foes that oppress and persecute His people (*Rev. 17:14*). He will deliver them from this nightmare of sin and bring them home to glory. The great controversy between good and evil will be ended. The earth will be made new, and the redeemed will live with their Lord forever (*Rev. 21:1–4*).

In Revelation 22:7 (*see also Rev. 22:12, 17, 20*), Jesus says: “Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (*NKJV*). Thus, Jesus’ final appeal to all humanity is to respond to His love, accept His grace, and follow His truth to be ready for His soon return. Revelation concludes with Jesus’ invitation, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’” (*Rev. 22:17, NKJV*).

Our Lord invites all of those who seek for eternal life to come to Him. He then invites those of us who have accepted the message of salvation and are eagerly anticipating His return to join Him in inviting others to accept the message of His love. He sends us out on His mission to share His message to prepare a world for His soon return. There is nothing more rewarding than participating with Jesus in His mission to the world. There is nothing more fulfilling than cooperating with Christ in His last-day plan of salvation.

Christ, coming quickly? John wrote those words about two thousand years ago. However, given our understanding of the state of the dead, why is Christ's second coming never more than an instant after our death? How does this fact help us to understand how quickly, indeed, Christ is coming?

Revelation's End-Time Message

The epicenter of Revelation is chapter 14. This chapter is of paramount importance to God's people living in the last days of human history. It unfolds God's last-day message to humankind. This end-time message is crucial to the people of God and to all humanity.

Read Revelation 14:14–20. What symbolism is used here to portray the return of our Lord?

The symbolism of the harvest is used throughout the Bible to describe Christ's return (*Matt. 13:37–43, Mark 4:29*). In Revelation 14, the harvest of ripe grain represents the redemption of the righteous, and the harvest of overripe grapes depicts the destruction of the wicked. Revelation 14:6–12 contains an urgent last-day message to prepare men and women for earth's final harvest.

Read Revelation 14:6, 7. What is the essence of the message found in these two verses? How do they help us to understand who we are as Seventh-day Adventists?

The message of the first angel in Revelation 14 appeals to a twenty-first-century generation longing for purpose in their lives. It presents the gospel of God's grace that provides forgiveness for all. It cleanses us from the guilt of sin and gives us power to be overcomers. This message provides the basis for all self-worth in the fact that Christ created us and redeemed us. It points out that one day all injustice will come to an end in God's final judgment. It is incredibly good news because it reveals that unrighteousness will not last forever.

“In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light-bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.”—Ellen. G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 119, 120. As a church, but even more important, as individuals, how can we take these words to heart?

Understanding God's Message More Fully

Revelation's last-day message presents Jesus in the fullness of His saving grace for all humanity (*Rev. 14:6*). It is an earnest appeal to “fear,” or give reverence, to God in all we do—to respect His commands and obey His law in the light of God's judgment (*Rev. 14:7*). To “fear God” has to do with how we think. It is an appeal to live to please God and to place Him first in all of our thoughts. It is an attitude of obedience that leads us to live godly lives (*Prov. 3:7, Acts 9:31, 1 Pet. 2:17*). This message also invites us to “give glory” to God. Giving glory to God relates to what we do in every aspect of our lives.

Read Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14 and 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. How do these verses help us to understand what it means to both fear God and give glory to Him?

In an age of moral irresponsibility, when millions of people feel that they are accountable to no one but themselves, this judgment-hour message reminds us that we are responsible for our actions. There is a relationship between an attitude of reverence for God, obedience to God, and the judgment. Obedience is the fruit of a saving relationship with Jesus. Only His righteousness is good enough to pass the judgment, and, in His righteousness, we are secure. Through His righteousness we live to glorify His name in all that we do.

Read Revelation 14:7, Revelation 4:11, Genesis 2:1–3, and Exodus 20:8–11. What is the basis of all true worship of God, and how does the Sabbath reflect this understanding?

Satan has attacked the Sabbath because he knows that it is the very heart of worship. It exalts Christ as the Creator and appeals to all men and women everywhere to “worship Him who made heaven and earth” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). It speaks with relevance in an age of evolution. It calls us back to worshiping the Jesus who created us and who gives us a sense of our true worth in Him.

Think about how important the Sabbath is as a reminder of God as our Creator and, hence, the One who alone is worthy of our worship. After all, what other teaching is so important that God commands one-seventh of our lives every week in order to help us remember Him as our Creator?

God's Final Appeal

Read Revelation 14:8, Revelation 17:3–6, and Revelation 18:1–4. What do we learn about spiritual Babylon from these verses?

In the book of Revelation, the term “Babylon” represents a false system of religion based on human works, man-made traditions, and false doctrines. It exalts human beings and their self-righteousness above Jesus and His sinless life. It places the commands of human religious teachers above the commands of God. Babylon was the center of idolatry, sun worship, and the false teaching of the immortality of the soul. This false religious system has subtly integrated many of ancient Babylon’s religious practices into its worship. God’s last-day message to our dying planet is the message of Jesus and His righteousness. It echoes heaven’s appeal: “ ‘Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. . . . Come out of her, my people’ ” (*Rev. 18:2, 4*). God has divinely raised up the Seventh-day Adventist Church to exalt the message of Christ in all of its fullness. To exalt Jesus is to lift up everything He taught. It is to proclaim the One who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (*John 14:6*). It is to expose the errors of Babylon in contrast to the truths of Jesus.

Read Revelation 14:7, 9–11. What contrasting objects of worship are highlighted in these verses?

Revelation 14 describes two different acts of worship—the worship of the Creator and the worship of the beast. These two acts of worship center around God’s day of worship, the true Sabbath, and a substitute, or counterfeit, Sabbath. The Sabbath represents the rest, assurance, and security that we have in Christ our Creator, Redeemer, and coming King. The counterfeit day represents a human and false substitute based on human reasoning and man-made decrees.

Read Revelation 14:12. What is this text saying, especially in the context of what came before? How are the law and grace both revealed in this text, and what should this teach us about how law and grace are two inseparable aspects of the gospel?

Further Thought: “God has called His church in this day, as He called ancient Israel, to stand as a light in the earth. By the mighty cleaver of truth—the messages of the first, second, and third angels—He has separated them from the churches and from the world to bring them into a sacred nearness to Himself. He has made them the depositaries of His law and has committed to them the great truths of prophecy for this time. Like the holy oracles committed to ancient Israel, these are a sacred trust to be communicated to the world.

“The three angels of Revelation 14 represent the people who accept the light of God’s messages and go forth as His agents to sound the warning throughout the length and breadth of the earth. Christ declares to His followers: ‘Ye are the light of the world.’ Matthew 5:14. To every soul that accepts Jesus the cross of Calvary speaks: ‘Behold the worth of the soul. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”’ Mark 16:15. Nothing is to be permitted to hinder this work. It is the all-important work for our time; it is to be far-reaching as eternity. The love that Jesus manifested for the souls of men in the sacrifice which He made for their redemption, will actuate all His followers.

“Christ accepts, oh, so gladly! every human agency that is surrendered to Him. He brings the human into union with the divine, that He may communicate to the world the mysteries of incarnate love. Talk it, pray it, sing it, fill the world with the message of His truth, and keep pressing on into the regions beyond.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, pp. 58, 59.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How do the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 identify the essence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?
- ② Think about the Sabbath and the importance of what it represents. As we saw this week, the message it contains is so important that God commands that we set apart one-seventh of our lives in order to remember Him as our Creator and our Redeemer. Also, unlike a holy mountain or a holy city, we don’t have to go to it to worship. Every week, at about a thousand miles per hour (at least, near the equator), the Sabbath comes to us. How does this truth also help us to understand the importance of the day and what it points to?
- ③ How can we explain the idea of the fall of Babylon, or the concept of the mark of the beast, in the most winsome way? That is, how can we present these truths in the least offensive way possible, even though we must understand that despite our best efforts some people will be offended?

Adventist in the Next Life

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

The elderly woman listened attentively in Sabbath School in Southeast Asia.

Her Sabbath School lesson book was filled in meticulously. She looked up every verse in her Bible. Many verses were underlined in it. She placed money in the Sabbath School mission offering.

The woman, known to church members as “Grandmother,” looked like a model Seventh-day Adventist.

Visiting U.S. church leader Gregory Whitsett met with Grandmother after church to ask why she had left her non-Christian world religion to become an Adventist.

Grandmother related a tragic story about losing her parents in an accident at the age of five and suffering years of harassment by evil spirits. She sought help from doctors and spiritual mediums, but the medicine offered only temporary relief.

One day, an Adventist pastor moved next door, and Grandmother curiously watched people gather at his home every Friday evening. She stood at his gate to find out what was happening and heard music. Peace filled her as she listened to the music week after week. The pastor couldn’t convince her to come into the house, but he learned about her spirit problems and offered to pray. Grandmother agreed, and the evil spirits left permanently. Filled with gratitude, she accepted Jesus and joined the Adventist Church.

Whitsett, director of the Center for East Asian Religions, part of the Adventist world church’s Global Mission program, asked Grandmother to explain what Jesus meant to her.

“Jesus means everything to me,” the old woman said, speaking through a missionary-interpreter. “He healed me and has given me peace. I cannot help but speak about Jesus to everyone whom I meet. I am an old woman, and I don’t have much longer to live. I love Jesus so much that I have decided to be Adventist in my next life too.”

The missionary-interpreter was stunned. She had studied the Bible with Grandmother and thought that she had left her old views completely.



Grandmother’s situation is not uncommon among people who become Christian after following other world religions and traditional animistic practices, church leaders say. This is a major challenge in gospel outreach and a reason for the establishment of the Center for East Asian Religions and other Global Mission Centers at globalmissioncenters.org. Please pray for the work of the Global Mission Centers and for people like Grandmother.

A Step in Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Phil. 2:5–11; Matt. 4:18–20; Acts 9:3–6, 10–20; John 21:15–19; 1 John 3:16–18.*

Memory Text: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men” (*Philippians 2:5–7, NKJV*).

Jesus came to this world of suffering and death in order to reveal the Father's character of love, to win back the affection of the human race, and to redeem all humankind. “Never can the cost of our redemption be realized until the redeemed shall stand with the Redeemer before the throne of God. Then as the glories of the eternal home burst upon our enraptured senses we shall remember that Jesus left all this for us, that He not only became an exile from the heavenly courts, but for us took the risk of failure and eternal loss. Then we shall cast our crowns at His feet, and raise the song, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.’ Rev. 5:12.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 131.

The sacrifice that Jesus made for our salvation is incalculable. When we respond to His leading, accept His command, and unite with Him in reaching lost people for His kingdom, it calls for sacrifice. Although our sacrifices can never in any way compare to His, soul-winning ministry is a leap in faith for us, as well. It leads us out of our comfort zones into uncharted waters. At times our Lord calls us to make sacrifices, but the joys He offers are far greater.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 26.

Jesus' Self-Sacrificing Love

The apostle Paul encourages us to “let” or “allow” or “permit” the mind of Christ to dwell in us. This leads us to some fascinating questions. What was the mind of Christ like? What governed His thought patterns? What was the essence of His thinking?

Read Philippians 2:5–11. How do these verses reveal the heart of Christ's thinking and the pattern that governed His entire life?

From all eternity Jesus was equal with God. Paul declares this eternal truth in these words, “who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God” (*Phil. 2:6, NKJV*). The word translated as “form” is the Greek word *morphē*. It means the very essence of a thing. It links two things that are of equal value. *The SDA Bible Commentary* puts it this way: “This places Christ on an equality with the Father, and sets Him far above every other power. Paul stresses this in order to portray more vividly the depths of Christ's voluntary humiliation.”—Volume 7, p. 154. Speaking of His eternal nature, Ellen G. White adds, “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

Jesus, who was equal with God from all eternity, “made Himself of no reputation” (*Phil. 2:7, NKJV*). This also is a fascinating Greek expression. It literally can be translated “emptied.” Jesus voluntarily “emptied Himself” of His privileges and prerogatives as God's equal to take on the form of a man and become a humble servant of humanity. As a servant, He revealed heaven's law of love to the entire universe and, eventually, performed the ultimate act of love on the cross. He gave His life to save ours, eternally.

The essence of Jesus' thinking was self-sacrificial love. To follow Jesus means that we love as He loved, serve as He served, and minister as He ministered. Allowing Jesus through His Holy Spirit to empty us of selfish ambition will cost us something. It cost Jesus everything. But Scripture says of Jesus, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name” (*Phil. 2:9, NKJV*).

Heaven will be worth any sacrifice we make on earth. There will be sacrifices along the way, but the joys of service will outweigh them today, and the eternal joy of living with Christ throughout all eternity will make any sacrifice we make here seem insignificant.

When was the last time you truly had to die to self for Christ's sake? What does your answer say to you about your Christian walk?

Commitment's Call

Imagine that you are Peter and John. The sun has just risen on a beautiful Galilean morning, chasing away the chill of the night air. Your thoughts are on one thing: catching fish, a lot of them. The fishing has been good recently, and you are looking forward to another day of great fishing. Then in the early morning light you see Him approaching, Jesus of Nazareth. Little do you know that in a few moments your whole life will change. You will never be the same again.

Read Matthew 4:18–20. **Why do you think Peter and John were willing to make such a radical commitment to follow Christ? What in the text indicates that Jesus was calling them to a higher purpose than catching fish?**

From the gospel of John we learn that these men already knew something about Jesus for more than a year, yet had not made a full commitment to Him. Still, there must have been a divine demeanor about Christ, something about His appearance, words, and actions that indicated to these Galilean fishermen that He was inviting them to a divine calling. The reason they left their boats, occupation, and familiar surroundings to follow Him was that they sensed the call to a higher purpose. These ordinary fishermen recognized that they were called for an extraordinary purpose. In the same way, God may not be calling you to leave your profession today, but He is calling you to an extraordinary purpose: to share His love and to witness of His truth for the glory of His name.

Consider the call of Matthew, the tax collector, in Matthew 9:9. **What do you see in this passage that is quite remarkable?**

Tax collectors in the Roman world were often extortionists who used their official power to oppress the common people. They were some of the most hated and despised characters in all of Israel. Christ's invitation, "Follow Me," presupposes that Matthew had heard of Jesus and in his heart had a longing to follow Him. When the invitation came, he was ready. He was amazed that Christ would accept him and invite him to be one of His disciples.

Deep within all of our hearts there is a longing for something more in life. We, too, want to live for something worthwhile, for a grander, nobler purpose. Hence, Christ calls us, like Matthew, to follow Him.

Think about what people have had to give up to follow Jesus. Why, in the end, will it always be worth it?

Paul: God's Chosen Vessel

When Paul accepted Christ, his whole life was radically changed. Christ gave him an entirely new future. He led him out of his comfort zone to experiences he could hardly have imagined. Through the Holy Spirit's guidance, the apostle Paul proclaimed the Word of God to thousands throughout the Mediterranean world. His witness changed the history of Christianity and the world.

Read Acts 9:3–6, 10–20. How do these verses reveal that Jesus had a divine purpose for Paul's life?

Jesus often chooses the most unlikely candidates to bear witness to His name. Think of the demoniacs, the Samaritan woman, a prostitute, a tax collector, Galilean fishermen, and now a fierce persecutor of Christianity. These were all changed by grace and then sent forth with joy in their hearts to tell the story of what Christ had done in their lives. Each never tired of telling the story. What Christ had done for them was so marvelous that they had to share it. They could not be silent.

Compare Acts 28:28–31 and 2 Timothy 4:5–8. What indications do we have in these verses that Paul never wavered from his commitment to give his entire life to Christ in soul-winning ministry?

At the end of his life, while under house arrest in Rome, Paul affirmed that “ ‘the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!’ ” (*Acts 28:28, NKJV*). The record says that he received all who visited him and preached the Word to them (*Acts 28:30, 31*). At the end of his life, he urged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist, and Paul could say of himself, “ ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith’ ” (*2 Tim. 4:7, NKJV*).

Although our call may not be as dramatic as Paul's, God is calling each one of us to participate with Him in His work of changing the world. It is obvious that despite all the hardship he had faced over the years (*see 2 Cor. 11:25–30*), Paul stayed faithful to his calling in the Lord. The story of how this former persecutor of the followers of Jesus became the most influential and consequential advocate of the Christian faith (with the exception of Jesus) remains a powerful testimony to what the Lord can do through someone who dedicates his or her life to the work of the Lord.

What has God called you to do? Are you doing it?

The Demands of Love

Love always manifests itself in action. Our love for Christ compels us to do something for lost humanity. Paul stated it clearly when he said to the church at Corinth, “For the love of Christ compels us” (*2 Cor. 5:14, NKJV*). Christianity is not primarily giving up bad things so that we can be saved. Jesus did not “give up” bad things in heaven so that He could be saved. He gave up good things so that others could be saved. Jesus does not invite us merely to give our time, talent, and treasures to His cause; He invites us to give our lives.

In a morning meeting with the disciples on the shores of Galilee, Jesus brilliantly outlined the demands of divine love.

Read John 21:15–19. What question did Jesus ask Peter three times, and what was Peter’s response? Why did Jesus ask Peter this particular question three times?

Peter denied his Lord three times, and Jesus elicited a response of love from Peter’s own lips three times. In the presence of the disciples, Jesus was rebuilding Peter’s confidence that he was forgiven by divine love and that Jesus still had work for him to do in His cause.

Read John 21:15–19 again, this time especially noting Jesus’ response to Peter’s affirmation of his love for Christ. What did Jesus tell him to do in response?

Divine love is active, not passive. Genuine love is more than a warm feeling, more than a nice idea. It involves commitment. Love compels us to act. It leads us to reach out to a lost world of God’s children in desperate need. When Jesus said to Peter, “ ‘Feed My lambs,’ ” it was both a command and a comforting reassurance. The Master called for a response to love, and He also encouraged Peter that He still had a work for him to do even despite Peter’s truly shameful action when Jesus had been arrested. Peter not only denied knowing Jesus, exactly as Christ had told him that he would, but Peter also denied it with curses, as well.

The point? You may have desperately failed your Lord. You may have denied Him by your actions more than once. The good news is that grace is still available, and God is not done with you yet. There is still a place in His work for you if you are willing.

Like Peter, have you ever “denied” the Lord? If so, what does the story, not only of Peter’s denial but also of Christ’s words to Peter here, say to you?

Love's Commitment

At the end of the conversation between Peter and Jesus, we see two men walking on the beach. As the waves lap at the shore, Jesus tells Peter about the cost of discipleship. He wants Peter to know clearly what he will face if he accepts Jesus' invitation to "feed My sheep."

Read John 21:18, 19. What did Jesus tell Peter about the cost of discipleship? Why do you think Jesus revealed something so startling to Peter at this point in his life?

In these words, Christ foretold the martyrdom that one day Peter would experience. His hands would be stretched out on a cross. In this revelation, Christ offered Peter a choice. He offered him life's greatest joy: seeing souls won for the kingdom of God. On the day of Pentecost he would see thousands come to Christ. He would perform miracles in Jesus' name and glorify Him before many more thousands. He would have the everlasting joy of fellowship with Christ in His mission.

But that privilege would come with a price. It would demand a sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice. Peter was asked to make the commitment with his eyes wide open. For Peter now knew that no sacrifice was too great to join Jesus in His mission to the world.

Read 1 John 3:16–18. For John, love is more than a vague abstraction. How does John define love's ultimate sacrifice?

In eternity, nothing we have ever done will seem like a sacrifice. Our investment of time and effort, the investment of our lives, will seem overabundantly rewarded. Yet, what a joy it is to turn love into action, to turn intentions into commitment. When we respond to divine love by holding nothing back as we reach out in service to witness to others as ambassadors of Christ, we fulfill the purpose of our lives and experience life's greatest joy. As Jesus so aptly put it, " 'If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them' " (*John 13:17, NKJV*). Life's greatest joy and lasting happiness come when we are fulfilling the meaning of our existence by glorifying God by the way we live and share His love and truth with the world.

It's hard to grasp the idea of eternity, when all we know is a tiny bit of time. But, as well as you can, try to imagine eternal life, an eternal *good* life—better than anything we can have here—and, thus, why nothing here, in this short spurt of time, would be worth losing the promise of eternal life that we have in Jesus.

Further Thought: “Those who have the spiritual oversight of the church should devise ways and means by which an opportunity may be given to every member of the church to act some part in God’s work. Too often in the past this has not been done. Plans have not been clearly laid and fully carried out whereby the talents of all might be employed in active service. There are but few who realize how much has been lost because of this.

“The leaders in God’s cause, as wise generals, are to lay plans for advance moves all along the line. In their planning they are to give special study to the work that can be done by the laity for their friends and neighbors. The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.

“The salvation of sinners requires earnest, personal labor. We are to bear to them the word of life, not to wait for them to come to us. Oh, that I could speak words to men and women that would arouse them to diligent action! The moments now granted to us are few. We are standing upon the very borders of the eternal world. We have no time to lose. Every moment is golden and altogether too precious to be devoted merely to self-serving. Who will seek God earnestly and from Him draw strength and grace to be His faithful workers in the missionary field?

“In every church there is talent, which, with the right kind of labor, might be developed to become a great help in this work. That which is needed now for the upbuilding of our churches is the nice work of wise laborers to discern and develop talent in the church—talent that can be educated for the Master’s use.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 116, 117.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is the main thought of the Ellen G. White quote above? What impact can it have on your personal witnessing and your church’s outreach?
- 2 How is genuine love always manifested? What are counterfeit forms of love that have little to do with genuine love?
- 3 In class, talk about the sacrifices that people have made for the Lord, including the loss of life. What can you learn from these stories?
- 4 Think about your answer to the question at the end of Sunday’s study, about what you have sacrificed for Christ. What, in fact, have you sacrificed? Why did you do it? Was it worth it? How could you explain to someone who is not a Christian what you did and why you did it?

Pregnant for Two Years

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Fanta Camara was excited when she noticed a bump on her belly. But as the bump grew bigger, she began to feel ill. She felt so terrible that she went to the hospital in Conakry, Guinea.

A physician examined her belly. “You aren’t pregnant,” he said.

Fanta didn’t believe the physician. She asked a relative, who was a nurse, to take a look. “You are pregnant,” the relative said. “There is a baby in your belly.” Fanta beamed with joy. But she still felt ill, and the relative wasn’t sure how to help. She went to another hospital. “You aren’t pregnant,” the physician said. Fanta visited a third hospital. “You are pregnant,” the physician said. But he didn’t know how to help.

As the weeks passed, Fanta’s health worsened. She could barely walk.

Five months after Fanta noticed the bump on her belly, a stranger appeared in her bedroom. He had the feet and legs of a man but the chest and face of a leopard. She was scared. “You will not have that child in your belly,” the stranger said, and, turning, seemed to walk out through the bedroom wall.

The next night, the stranger again appeared in the bedroom. “You will not have that child in your belly,” he said. Every night he visited Fanta.

A year passed. Two years. As the third year started, Fanta was still pregnant and miserable. Then she remembered Tranquille Fassinadouno. She had ignored him because he was the only Christian in their neighborhood, but now she was desperate. After hearing her story, Tranquille, a Global Mission pioneer, prayed and fasted for three days, asking God for wisdom.

Then he went to Fanta and, opening his Bible, read Ephesians 6:12, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (NKJV).

He spoke to unseen spiritual hosts in the house. “All evil spirits who do not confess the name of Jesus Christ leave immediately in the name of Jesus Christ,” he said. Turning to Fanta, he said, “If you see that evil spirit again, just command it to leave in the name of Jesus.”

That night, Fanta was lying in bed when the evil spirit appeared. Before



he could speak, she said, “Leave in the name of Jesus Christ.” The evil spirit immediately disappeared in a cloud of smoke, never to return.

Three days later, Fanta gave birth to a healthy baby girl. “I believe in Jesus now,” Fanta said.

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering that will help people in Guinea and elsewhere in the West-Central Africa Division learn about Jesus.

Proverbs 9:10 says “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (*NKJV*). All true knowledge, wisdom, and understanding have their source in the Lord. Christian education should direct our minds toward the Lord and His revelation about Himself. Through nature, the Written Word, and the revelation of Christ in that Written Word, we are given all we need to have a saving relationship with our Lord and to love Him with all our heart and soul. Nature speaks of God’s goodness and character when studied through the perspective of Scripture. The Bible is the perfect standard of truth, the greatest revelation we have of who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing for us. The Bible and its message of Creation and Redemption must be central to all Christian education.

Christian education must help students better understand the light that God offers us from heaven. What good is a great education in science, literature, economics, or engineering if, in the end, you face the second death in the lake of fire? The answer is obvious, isn’t it? This quarter, we will explore what it means to have a “Christian education” and how we, as a church, can obtain it.

Lesson 1—Education in the Garden of Eden

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The First School** (*Gen. 2:7–23*)

MONDAY: **Intrusion** (*Gen. 3:1–6*)

TUESDAY: **Missing the Message** (*Gen. 3:4–6*)

WEDNESDAY: **Regaining What Was Lost** (*2 Pet. 1:3–11*)

THURSDAY: **The Despisers of Authority** (*2 Pet. 2:1–17*)

Memory Text—*Job 36:22, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: “Eden was the schoolroom, nature was the lesson book, the Creator Himself was the instructor, and the parents of the human family were the students.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 20.

Lesson 2—The Family

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The First Family** (*Gen. 1–3:15*)

MONDAY: **The Childhood of Jesus** (*Luke 1:26–38, Luke 1:46–55*)

TUESDAY: **Communication** (*Prov. 10:31, 32; 1 John 3:18*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Role of Parents** (*Eph. 6:4, Prov. 31:10*)

THURSDAY: **Lest Ye Forget** (*Deuteronomy 6*)

Memory Text—*Proverbs 1:8, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Life itself is a school, in which we are always learning.

Lessons for People Who are Legally Blind The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on audio CD, and via online download to people who are legally blind or physically disabled. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; email: services@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.