

The Christian Life Community

Lesson #12 for June 20, 2009

Scriptures: Genesis 11:1-4; 12:1-3; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:1-15; Rev. 22:1-6.

1. This lesson is about the benefits of “community” and whether or not your “church family” is a true community. A number of “mega-churches” in the U.S. have grown to the size that they are because they have been focusing on community. Even in those large churches, in order to have a sense of community, people are organized into small groups.
2. What benefits do you see from belonging to your church? What benefits does your church receive from having you as a member? Why do you go to church? Why do you go to a specific Sabbath School class? Why do you come to this class? Do you feel comfortable here? Would you feel comfortable inviting someone else to your Sabbath School class?
3. How important is community to you? If you were to move to a new location, how quickly would you seek out the nearest Adventist church? What would you look for in that church? What are the most important aspects of community in your mind? If you could not find a Sabbath School class that you were comfortable with, would you start a new one? Would you teach it? Why do you choose to belong to your church? Are there benefits that you enjoy every week? Do you belong to your church because you think it is a responsibility that God has given you? Do you enjoy going to church? What unique contributions do you personally make to your church family?
4. Down through the millennia, God has had a very difficult time establishing community groups that are healthy, happy, and holy! Why do you think that has been? We humans seem to want to gather together more for bad or evil reasons than for good ones. Why? Read Genesis 11:1-4. What were the people on the plains of Shinar at Babel trying to accomplish? With the whole world open before them, why were they living in a tightly knit community? Did they have common interests? Did they want someone to talk to? God fixed that!
5. What contrasts do you see between the experience at the Tower of Babel and God’s experience with Abraham? Why did God think it was necessary to take Abram—Abraham—away from his family and his community to a far country in order to keep him as a friend?
6. At the very beginning, God told Abraham that his descendants were to be a blessing to all nations. (Genesis 12:1-3) They were to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. Did Israel ever take that task seriously? During the reign of David or Solomon? Why? Or, why not? What have we accomplished in 2000 years? What are Adventists accomplishing now?
7. God has apparently assigned the task of “finishing” the gospel work at the end of time to His people primarily through the Seventh-day Adventist Church. God’s people at the end of time are called “a royal priesthood,” “an holy nation.” (1 Peter 2:9,10, KJV) But God has had to start over so many times down through history. Think of the “restarts” with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the Christian Church. What makes us think that God will succeed this time in accomplishing His ultimate goal? Is it clear to you that God is making progress? What events, progress, or statistics would you cite to suggest that God’s true people are moving closer to the kingdom? Are we put here for a special purpose?
8. How are we like—or unlike—the ancient people of Israel? The SDA Church now has about 16

million members. Is God waiting for us to get to a certain number? We have been told that we should have finished the work when our church membership was only ten or twenty thousand. (Ev 694-697) Of course, the children of Israel did not succeed in what God called them to do? Will we? Do people make better spiritual progress when there is a crisis? Should God bring on crises? Didn't God "win the war" at the time when Jesus died? But He wants to take as many of us as possible back to heaven with Him.

We need to recognize that the conflict between God and Satan is taking place on two very distinct levels. God won the great controversy through the life and death of Jesus. But the great controversy is still going on in the minds and hearts of humans here on earth. Are those two levels related in any way? Does God's winning the great controversy on Calvary affect the great controversy in my head? Are we taking advantage of every opportunity to tell the truth about God to anyone who will listen? Why are so few of us really doing that? Are the current crises in the world giving us more opportunities to talk about God?

9. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. That is probably the clearest and best example in the Bible of how a church group is to integrate and work together. Pastors are not the only ones who should be talking about God! Everyone should be talking about God. Just because you do not have a degree in theology does not mean that you cannot give a very powerful witness. Religion and politics have become issues at "center stage" in our world. Are we ready to speak the truth on God's behalf?
10. Think about your personal relationship to the church. If the church is like a human body, what part would you be? What part of the body do you think most clearly represents what you do for the church? Are you an eye? A tongue? Or an ear? Are you a bone? Or muscle? Or just a piece of fat?
11. Do you see your church community functioning as a unit? Or, is your church group divided—even in competition or disunity? Do you personally make an effort to help spread the gospel? Do you understand what your church community is doing to finish the gospel? Is your church making significant progress in finishing the gospel in your area?
12. Paul often addressed church groups to whom he was writing letters as "saints." What is a saint? Have you ever met a "saint"?

For Paul [and for other Bible writers], the term saint had none of the stained-glass window connotations that it has for us. A saint was not some ancient, larger-than-life, perfect Christian, but anyone called and set apart by God who became part of the community of faith.—John C. Brunt, *Romans, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), p. 42.

13. At the quinquennial session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, there are reports given from each division of the world field. Progress is touted in terms of membership growth, church growth, and increase in tithes received. Are those the criteria that God is waiting for to finish the gospel? Those are numbers which are fairly easy to calculate and give "us" something to talk about. If God were giving the report for each world division at the end of the five-year quinquennium, what would He report? If God were reporting on your church or perhaps on you as a church member, what would He say?
14. Does your church congregation see you as an essential part of their mission? Do they miss you when you are absent? Do you wish you had a more active role in the church? Are you not

sure exactly what role you should play? Have you explored the possibilities? Is your Sabbath School class a small “community”? How much do we really know each other? How much do we really share? Do we feel comfortable with each other outside of class? Or are we so busy with the “urgent” that we never have time for the important? Is “busyness” one of the Devil’s most successful tools? What if you were placed in a town where there was not one other Adventist? What would you do? Would you make a difference?

15. Many traditional societies are based on extended family units. Many relatives live together—or at least nearby—and work together. In much of the western world, that unity has been broken apart, and, at best, the family unit is little more than father, mother, and one or two children. How has that affected our views of “community”? Different societies have very different norms for community and what is acceptable practice and even who you can openly talk to? Hugging and even kissing is considered normal in some societies! Others tend to stand 3 feet apart in order to feel comfortable. Is the gospel about making people feel comfortable? We need to figure out ways to make people feel comfortable. If you can find a way to make people feel comfortable and accepted, they will flock to your doors. How do we reach out to a world that is crammed with information and entertainment overload. People have grown accustomed to getting everything in “sound bites.” If you cannot say what you have to say in a few seconds, they want to move to something else!
16. Does God need a “community” of some sort to finish His work? Does it take a “village”? How would you describe the community referred to as “the 144,000”? What does God need to do to get us to take Him seriously, place His work as the number one priority in our lives, and “get on” with spreading the gospel? Would we qualify to be a part of that group?
17. Take a close look at yourself, your family, your Sabbath School class, and your church. How many of those units are obviously working toward finishing the gospel? How many of them are clearly trying to help out in God’s work versus helping themselves out? Why do so many of the explanations of the plan of salvation have a very definite “selfish” feel? People want to know, “What must I do to be saved”? How many are asking about God’s reputation? How many are concerned about the salvation of others around them? We need to grow up! It is appropriate for children to sing “Me, me, me.” But adults need to get beyond that!
18. Read Ephesians 4:1-15. From these verses it should be clear that God has given each one of us a certain number of talents or gifts. But what about Matthew 18:2-4?

All must move like parts of a well-adjusted machinery, each part dependent on the other part, yet standing distinct in action. And each one is to take the place assigned him and do the work appointed him. God calls upon the members of His church to receive the Holy Spirit, to come together in unity and brotherly sympathy, to bind their interests together in love.—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 276.3.

19. Could you make a list of the requirements that you recognize for being a “good” church member? (1 Corinthians 16:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:14,17,25; Hebrews 10:25; 1 Peter 3:15.) These verses suggest that we should support the church financially; we should encourage, warn, help, deal patiently with, and “at all times” pray for the other members of the church; we should meet together; we should be ready at all times to give an answer for the faith that is in us.
20. In our society of instant gratification where we expect to get what we want when we want it, how does the church fit in? Is it totally unrealistic for us to consider the possibility that church members might look for an opportunity to contribute rather than just receive? In 1961, John F.

Kennedy said, “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” Is that an appropriate question that we should be asking about serving in our church? How would our churches be different if we each took that attitude?

21. Have any of us made any real sacrifice for the church? Is it reasonable for God to ask for that? Read Matthew 16:18. What does it mean to say that Jesus Christ is the “rock” or foundation of the Christian church? Compare **Ephesians 2:20**; 4:15,16; Revelation 1:12-16,20. Was Peter the “rock” that Jesus was talking about? All of us are to be building blocks in that same church with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone.
“What kind of church would my church be, if every church member were just like me?”
22. Could you give a clear description of God’s true people at the end of time?
23. More and more we see the world rejecting Christian principles, church membership, church attendance, even the Scriptures. Under these circumstances how are church members ever supposed to be the “salt of the earth”? (Matthew 5:13)
24. One way in which churches have become more involved is by taking up mission projects and affiliating with other church groups or projects in other parts of the world. Do you think that is a good idea? Why? Or, why not? Do we need to encourage people to look beyond themselves? Is it more difficult to speak to your neighbor next door than it is to support a project on the other side of the world?
25. Many churches have tried to develop biblical or other kinds of evidence to support the idea that theirs is the only “true church.” Do you think church membership is necessary for salvation? Could you be a member of God’s “true church” without belonging to a human organization? Are there advantages to belonging to a church organization?
26. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of the last churches to try to maintain a worldwide organization. In dealing with many issues, it is difficult to maintain a unified approach around the world. People think and act differently in different areas. As the church grows larger and larger, it becomes more and more difficult to harmonize and integrate the needs of the entire world field. Would the church be better off if it divided into more or less autonomous parts in different regions of the world?
27. Do you think the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a “divine institution”? Does it clearly seem to be a “member” of Christ’s body? What about your local congregation?
28. From the beginning of human history, God has sought to develop groups of people who would believe in Him, trust in Him, and represent Him correctly. At our point in history, God is waiting for such a group to “pull together” and to represent Him correctly even at the threat of losing their lives. Why does God depend on us for anything? Couldn’t He Himself or perhaps some of the angels do a better job of virtually anything than we do? What does it tell us about God to recognize that He prefers to work through us? Do we need that approach? Or does God need it? Are you ready to be used by God? In 1888, the latter rain began to be poured out, but our church leaders stopped its spread. (1SM 233-235)

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