

The Role of the Church in the Community

Jesus Won Their Confidence

Lesson #10 for September 3, 2016

Scriptures: Genesis 15:6; Numbers 14:11; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Daniel 6:1-3; Nehemiah 2:1-9; Deuteronomy 4:1-9; Acts 2:42-47.

1. The Gospels make it clear that the appeal of Jesus was widespread. What kinds of health and/or healing services were available in Jesus day? Were there hospitals? Were there doctors?

Luke 6:17-19 (GNB): ¹⁷ When Jesus had come down from the hill with the apostles, he stood on a level place with a large number of his disciples. A large crowd of people was there from all over Judea and from Jerusalem and from the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon; ¹⁸ they had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those who were troubled by evil spirits also came and were healed. ¹⁹ All the people tried to touch him, for power was going out from him and healing them all.

Matthew 4:24-25 (GNB): ²⁴ The news about him spread through the whole country of Syria, so that people brought to him all those who were sick, suffering from all kinds of diseases and disorders: people with demons, and epileptics, and paralytics—and Jesus healed them all. ²⁵ Large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Ten Towns, from Jerusalem, Judea, and the land on the other side of the Jordan.

2. How do you suppose the Pharisees felt about mixing with that crowd?

For several years, a Seventh-day Adventist church has provided breakfast five days a week for a local public elementary school. Though the nation itself was very secular, it just had passed a law providing enough money for each public school to have a chaplain, and the school and community wanted the Seventh-day Adventist church to provide one (it is rare to ask only one church to do that). The chaplain's role is to help look after the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the students and even the wider school community. The opportunities are amazing. "I enjoy the unique and special relationship we have with your church," the school principal had said to the church pastor, who was visiting the school, "and just wish other churches could be involved the way you are." When the pastor was leaving the grounds, the school's community liaison officer thanked him for what the church was doing and asked if she could attend one Sabbath.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, August 27, 2016.

3. The challenge for our study this week is to find ways in which we can win the confidence of people and attract them as Jesus did. As we have studied over the last few weeks and as in the titles of the recent lessons, Jesus "... desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence."—Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* 143.3.
4. *Confidence* is a Latin word composed of two parts: *con* meaning *with* and *fides* meaning *faith*. What does that imply? Jesus inspired trust.
5. In Hebrew the main root for *faith* is *amn*. That is the word from which we derive our word *amen*. Its basic meaning is constancy, continuity, and especially reliability. It means something you can trust and believe. It also implies truth. Jesus inspired confidence by

mingling with, having compass for, sympathizing with, and serving the people. How many people were attracted by His healings?

6. Read Genesis 15:6; Numbers 14:11; Isaiah 7:9; and Habakkuk 2:4. What do these texts teach us about trust and confidence? Abraham trusted God. To the Jews, Abraham was/is the quintessential example of faith. However, the Israelites, his descendants, did not trust God. Nevertheless, we know that real trust in God endures. And those who live in trust of God are living by faith.
7. The word for *faith* in Greek is *pistis*. It means belief, trust, absolute certainty, reliability, assurance, and confidence. Virtually every aspect of Christ's ministry inspired faith and confidence.
8. But, we know from reading all of Scripture that human beings often destroy confidence and trust by their behavior. (See Micah 7:5 and Psalm 118:9.) But, when properly understood, God's actions always inspire trust and confidence.
9. Could you write out your best definition of *faith*?

A biblical definition of *faith* based on all of Scripture and stated many times so well by one of God's best modern friends, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell, is as follows:

Faith is [just] a word we use to denote a relationship with God as with a Person well known. The better we know Him, the better this relationship may be.

Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deep admiration. It means having enough confidence in Him, based upon the more than adequate evidence revealed, to be willing to believe whatever He says [as soon as we are sure that He has said it], to accept whatever He offers [as soon as we are sure that He is the one who is offering it], and to do whatever He wishes [as soon as we are sure He is the one who wishes it]—without reservation—for the rest of eternity.

Anyone who has such faith is perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven.

[Faith also means that like Abraham and Moses, God's friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, "Why?"]—A. Graham Maxwell, *You Can Trust the Bible*, p. 81. [Content in brackets is added based on Dr. Maxwell's lectures.]

But, what is the relationship between faith and evidence? There has been a discussion about that relationship for hundreds of years. Is the most important point that you have some verified evidence on which to trust God? Or, is it more important that you are prepared to take the "leap of faith"? How do we determine what God's will is?

10. There are several African countries in which Seventh-day Adventist schools and hospitals are held in great respect. While working in Zambia and as a representative of our hospital at Mwami, I was personally invited to attend a gathering sponsored by Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, the first president of Zambia. While it is gratifying to know that Adventist institutions are held in such respect, it is important for us to recognize that even under the best of circumstances, we are merely conduits for the love of God.
11. Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; 5:1. Paul had to deal with some very difficult situations in Corinth. After he left Corinth, having worked there for one-and-a-half years, he later found that they had been persuaded to reject much of what they had learned. The church was full of jealousy, conflicts, even open immorality. Of course, none of us will be able to

represent Jesus perfectly; we are all human. And that was after years of work by Paul and Apollos.

12. But, Paul was able to say: “Imitate me, then, just as I imitate Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1, GNB) Would you dare to say that?
 13. If people came to your church or to your Sabbath school class, what would be their initial impressions? What would they see in you personally?
 14. Christians need to develop social capital. What is the meaning of the term *social capital*?
- Proverbs 22:1** (GNB): If you have to choose between a good reputation and great wealth, choose a good reputation.
15. How do we develop the skill of focusing people’s attention on Jesus Christ instead of on ourselves or even our church? We have been challenged by God and by Jesus to become as much like Him as possible; but, we will certainly never be a perfect image. (Compare Jeremiah 9:23.) If we do not represent Him correctly, will people be attracted? Misrepresenting Him would certainly not help!
 16. Social capital is like having good will or a good reputation in the community. It is like depositing money in the bank. When people have a good impression of you, then you have a better chance of correctly influencing them for Christ.

The *Church Manual* reminds us that Seventh-day Adventists “should be recognized as outstanding citizens . . . in working for the common good.” We “should support by our service and our means, as far as possible and consistent with our beliefs, efforts for social order and betterment,” maintaining “an uncompromising stand for justice and right in civic affairs.”—“Standards of Christian Living,” in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2010), pp. 137, 138. (As quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Tuesday, August 30)

17. Read Acts 7:9-10; Genesis 41:38-45; and Daniel 2:46-49; 6:1-3. These passages show us that even in the times of the Old Testament, people like Joseph and Daniel were able to inspire confidence in themselves by acting in Christlike ways wherever they were. Joseph ended up as prime minister of Egypt and Daniel as prime minister of Babylon and later Medo-Persia. And Daniel did it even though he was quite elderly when he entered Medo-Persia!
18. If you can, read *Patriarchs and Prophets* pages 217, 218, 221 and *Prophets and Kings* 628. In those pages you will find many positive words describing Joseph and Daniel—words like *gentleness, fidelity, wisdom, sound judgment, abilities, noble dignity, unswerving integrity, purity, uprightness, a good practical education, trustworthiness, constant awareness of God’s presence, modesty, innocence, justice, sympathy, mercy, wisdom, compassion, reasonableness, consistency, shrewdness, gifted with divine power, well qualified*, and having *wisdom and sound judgment*. How would you compare the character of Paul?
19. Many human beings are motivated by the desire for a good reputation among their fellow humans. But, notice these words from Ellen White.

The very motives of his heart are open to divine inspection. Every act, every word, every thought, is as distinctly marked as though there were only one person in the whole world, and the attention of heaven were centered upon him.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 217.4.

20. Churches are voluntary organizations. No one is compelled to join or to continue serving or even attending. That also means that churches often have limited funds for carrying out projects. So, what can we do to develop more social capital? Nehemiah had inspired confidence in the emperor of the Medo-Persian government by his faithful service. (Nehemiah 2:1-9) As a result, at his heaven-inspired request, Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judea and was able to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.

Nehemiah did not depend upon uncertainty. The means that he lacked he solicited from those who were able to bestow. And the Lord is still willing to move upon the hearts of those in possession of His goods, in behalf of the cause of truth. Those who labor for Him are to avail themselves of the help that He prompts men to give.... The donors may have no faith in Christ, no acquaintance with His word; but their gifts are not on this account to be refused.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* 634.1.

21. Nehemiah got a great deal of support, including money and materials, from the Medo-Persian government. Despite the fact that he was opposed by a number of local enemies, he accomplished what he went to do. How can we as Seventh-day Adventists gain the confidence and support of businesses and even governments in our communities?
22. A very successful local businessman and his family have recently donated \$100 million for the building of the new hospital at Loma Linda University Health. He and his family were impressed by the medical care that they have received there. Their gift matches the largest donation ever made to a university in California.
23. About the same time, a local Indian tribe was impressed to give \$10 million for the building of a low-income outreach community clinic and school operated by Loma Linda University Health in a needy local city.
24. One of the challenges that the church sometimes faces is what do we do with gifts given by groups that represent businesses or industries that are doing things contrary to our beliefs? This will always be a delicate question and must be answered on a case-by-case basis.
25. What is the best way to build social capital? Would it not be to practice the golden rule?
26. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been blessed with more light than any other people in the history of our world. That light includes not only a correct theology including a correct understanding of the cross, the sanctuary, the state of the dead, the Sabbath, and the great controversy, but also important ideas about health and healing and also about education and ministry.
27. How much of what we have received do you think God wants us to share? Are we to hoard God's gifts? Or, to share them? Look at the advice given by Moses to the children of Israel as recorded in Deuteronomy 4:7-9.
28. A few years ago, a Seventh-day Adventist congregation asked themselves the question: "Would our community miss us if somehow we disappeared overnight?" They did not like the answer they got. So, they began to reach out into the community, building bridges instead of walls. They became involved in various community projects; attitudes toward Adventism changed. What a surprise!
29. Read Acts 2:42-47. How did this positive attitude toward Christianity affect the number of people joining the church? Even Pharisees and priests became members of the early Christian church! (Acts 6:7 and 15:5)
30. How did Jesus impact the communities He served?

As He [Jesus] passed [20] through the towns and cities He was like a vital current, diffusing life and joy.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 19.4

Christ recognized no distinction of nationality or rank or creed. The scribes and Pharisees desired to make a local and a national benefit of the gifts of heaven and to exclude the rest of God's family in the world. But Christ came to break down every wall of partition. He came to show that His gift of mercy and love is as unconfined as the air, the light, or the showers of rain that refresh the earth.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* 25.3.

A kind, courteous Christian is the most powerful argument in favor of the gospel that can be produced.—Ellen G. White, *2 Manuscript Releases* 109.2; *Selected Messages, book 3*, 238.4. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

31. Remember that every merciful act to the needy or the suffering is regarded as though it had been done to Jesus. (Matthew 25:31-46)
32. So, as we are approaching the end of this world's history, has the time come for Seventh-day Adventist Christians to learn of the needs of the community and reach out like Jesus did?
33. Matthew 10:22 (GNB): Everyone will hate you because of me. But whoever holds out to the end will be saved.
34. How does this verse fit with what we have been studying this week? Doesn't it seem like a contradiction?
35. There is no question about the fact that those people who are attracted to our church by becoming friends and gaining confidence in a church member are much more likely to remain members after they have joined the church than those who are brought in simply by a brief evangelist series. So, we as church members must find ways to mingle, to show sympathy, to minister to people's needs, and to win their confidence. Do we need to speak the truth as well as act like Jesus in order to win their confidence? Could we win their confidence by actions alone? Or, by words alone?
36. What did Jesus say about the crowds that gathered around Him on a daily basis?
37. **Matthew 9:36** (GNB): As he saw the crowds, his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were worried and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
38. We must constantly recognize that we are not winning people to us as individuals or even to our church; instead, we are winning people to Christ.
39. It is very difficult to know what influence you might have by even a few simple acts of kindness.

In August 1980, nine-week-old baby Azaria Chamberlain disappeared from the family tent at a campground near Uluru (also known as Ayers Rock), in Australia's Northern Territory. The parents, Pastor Michael Chamberlain and his wife, Lindy, maintained that a dingo, an Australian native dog, had taken her. However, public opinion turned against the family, and eventually Lindy Chamberlain was tried and convicted of murder. At the time, lawyer and author John Bryson couldn't believe what he was seeing. As a boy, Bryson was friendly with a well-known Seventh-day Adventist family in Melbourne who took him on skiing trips. When rumors about the Chamberlains and the Adventist Church were circulating, he knew it didn't fit with what he knew of

Adventists. This led him to research and write a book called *Evil Angels*, a powerful account of the Chamberlain case that proved influential in changing public opinion and bringing about a retrial—which proved Lindy Chamberlain innocent. Although Bryson was not a Seventh-day Adventist, nor even a Christian, the childhood influence and example of that well-known Adventist family won his confidence and positively shaped his convictions about Adventists, which in turn spurred him to intercede on behalf of an Adventist woman wrongly convicted. What a testament to the power of influence and the importance of living out our faith.—*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 133.

40. Try to imagine being in the situation of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Almost certainly, they were merely teenagers. But, somehow, they excelled in their education and won the confidence of a pagan emperor. They rose to the highest levels in the Babylonian government. How was that possible? (See Daniel 6:1-3; 2:1,47-49.)
41. So, how are Adventists known in your community? There is a story told about a time in the 1960s when the religious liberty secretary of the General Conference had the opportunity to visit then retired President Eisenhower. When he introduced himself as a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Eisenhower looked puzzled briefly and then brightened up and said: “Didn’t Adventists have something to do with the development of peanut butter?” While there may be nothing wrong with peanut butter unless one is allergic to peanuts, Seventh-day Adventists certainly need to be known for more than that!
42. Read Matthew 9:9-10. Jesus was despised by the Pharisees in particular because He was so good at mingling with and sympathizing with the despised lower classes. He seemed to love them. Perhaps even more amazing was that sinners seemed to love Him and wanted to spend time with Him! What was His secret? As recorded in Matthew 23, Jesus spelled out reasons why the Pharisees did so poorly at winning people to their cause.
43. We have the difficult task of standing firm for principle; but, through love, patience, and kindness, we also have the ability of making sinners feel comfortable in our presence so that we can win them to be friends of God.
44. Why is it that opinions about Seventh-day Adventists vary so much around the world? In some places, Adventism is very popular and very respected. In many other areas, it is hardly known. What can we do about that? There was a very interesting comment reportedly made by Mahatma Gandhi as published in *Christianity Today*, August 14, 2008.

Oh, I don’t reject Christ. I love Christ. It’s just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ. If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today.—Samuel, D. (2008). “Mahatma Gandhi and Christianity.” *Christianity Today*. <http://in.christiantoday.com/articledir/print.htm?id=2837>. Retrieved on May 18, 2012 and also on July 31, 2016.

45. What do you think it was that inspired such popularity for the very early apostles as described in Acts 2? How can we inspire that same degree of popularity and excitement? We know the day is coming when we will not be popular, but rather, will be persecuted. How much time do we have left? How popular is the Adventist Church in your area? We are not just trying to become popular; we are trying to win people to Jesus Christ!

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