

The Role of the Church in the Community

Jesus Bade Them, “Follow Me”

Lesson #11 for September 10, 2016

Scriptures: John 10:1-5,16; Luke 9:2; 19:1-10; Revelation 3:20; 14:6-7; Acts 26:11-27.

1. This lesson will focus on the final step in ministering according to Jesus’s plan: Welcoming people to follow Him.

In A.D. 362, Roman emperor Julian launched a campaign to revive paganism. Christianity was taking over the Roman Empire, and he and the pagan leaders were worried. Julian’s advice to a prominent pagan priest expresses his concern and gives a clue as to why Christianity was growing so rapidly:

“I think that when the poor happened to be neglected and overlooked by the [pagan] priests, the impious Galileans [Christians] observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence. . . . [They] support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us.’ ”—Quoted in Rodney Stark, *Cities of God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), p. 31.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, Saturday, September 3. [Brackets and content in brackets are in *Bible Study Guide*.]

Julian wrote of the Christians: *These impious Galileans not only feed their own poor, but ours also; welcoming them into their agape, they attract them, as children are attracted, with cakes... Whilst the pagan priests neglect the poor, the hated Galileans devote themselves to works of charity and by a display of false compassion have established and given effect to their pernicious errors. See their love-feasts and their tables spread for the indigent. Such practice is common among them and causes a contempt for our gods.*—<http://casadeblundell.com/jonathan/those-impious-galileans/>

The fact that Christian charities were open to all, including pagans, put this aspect of Roman citizens’ lives out of the control of Imperial authority and under that of the Church. Thus Julian envisioned the institution of a Roman philanthropic system, and cared for the behaviour and the morality of the pagan priests, in the hope that it would mitigate the reliance of pagans on Christian charity, saying: *“These impious Galileans not only feed their own poor, but ours also; welcoming them into their agapae, they attract them, as children are attracted, with cakes.”*—Quoted in: Schmidt, Charles (1889). *The Social Results of Early Christianity* (2 ed.). Wm. Isbister. p. 328.—“Julian (emperor).” *Wikipedia*. Retrieved June 19, 2016. [Italic type is in source documents.]

2. Christianity had been an illegal religion for almost 300 years. In A.D. 311, Christianity became officially tolerated by order of Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximianus Augustus (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict_of_Tolerations_by_Galerius) and then officially recognized by Constantine the Great in the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313. Through all of this, Christianity had continued to grow. The Roman government which had by that time moved to Constantinople was concerned about the loss of its influence. Why do you suppose it was that Christianity had developed such an impact on the pagan Roman world? Do Julian’s comments help us to understand what had happened?

Tertullian had commented in A.D. 197 in a response to the Roman religious leaders that “We [Christians] are not a new philosophy but a divine revelation. That’s why you can’t just exterminate us; the more you kill, the more we are. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” [Content in brackets is added.] How is that related to the above statements? Christians made the claim that the pagan “gods” were nothing more than pieces of stone or metal. The pagans responded by claiming that the Christian God was dead! How did the Christians feel about their God vs. how the pagans felt about their gods?

3. Read John 10:1-5,16. In ancient Palestine, sheep followed their own shepherd. They came to know his voice and followed him. They would not follow the voice of someone who was not their shepherd. So, could we expect people to follow the voice of Jesus when they have come to know Him or respect Him in our day? By far the most effective method for bringing people into the church is to love them in by being their friend.

It has been shown me that our camp meetings are to increase in interest and success. As we approach nearer the end, I have seen that in these meetings there will be less preaching and more Bible study. There will be little groups all over the ground with their Bibles in their hands, and different ones leading out in a free, conversational study of the Scriptures.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 6, 87.4.

If one half of the sermonizing were done, and double the amount of personal labor given to souls in their homes and in the congregations, a result would be seen that would be surprising.—Ellen G. White, *MS 139*, 1897; *Evangelism* 430.3.

It has often been presented to me that there should be less sermonizing by ministers acting merely as local pastors of churches, and that greater personal efforts should be put [180] forth. Our people should not be made to think that they need to listen to a sermon every Sabbath. Many who listen frequently to sermons, even though the truth be preached in clear lines, learn but little. Often it would be more profitable if the Sabbath meetings were of the nature of a Bible class study. Bible truth should be presented in such a simple, interesting manner that all can easily understand and grasp the principles of salvation.—Ellen G. White, *Loma Linda Messages* 179.6.

4. So, how do we prepare for those cunningly devised deceptions that Satan will bring to us as this world comes to an end? We must become very familiar with the truth and with the voice of Jesus. By clearly understanding the truth as revealed in the life and death of Jesus, we are better prepared to see the falsehoods presented by the Devil. And when we do that, we can be conduits through which God’s light can shine out to those around us.

There is nothing more calculated to strengthen the intellect than the study of the Scriptures. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. If God’s word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose rarely seen in these times.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* 90.1. Compare *GC* 555.1.

5. Why do you think Jesus had such a powerful “drawing effect” on people? Was it only because of His miracles of healing? Why were they so eager to stay and listen to His teachings? What did they see in Him? Was it because He set self aside, taking on the

nature of sinners and ministering to their needs? Shouldn't we do the same? How can we better live, speak, and teach like Jesus? Why were sinners attracted to Someone who was so obviously sinless?

6. Read Luke 19:10; Mark 1:17; Luke 9:2; and Revelation 14:6-7. Each of these verses makes it clear that the final task for God's chosen people at the end of this world will be to spread the gospel to every corner of the world. Are we really clear about what the gospel message is?
7. How often do visitors come wandering into your church, asking to know more about the gospel? If that does not happen very often, what do we need to do?

We are not to wait for souls to come to us; we must seek them out where they are. When the word has been preached in the pulpit, the work has but just begun. There are multitudes who will never be reached by the gospel unless it is carried to them.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 229.3.

Are we hiding away in our little Adventist places? How many of us have close friends that are from other churches, even other religions?

8. In what ways did Jesus suggest through His parables and through His teachings that it is our responsibility to reach out? Read Matthew 18:10-14. Remember that the little ones that Christ was speaking about earlier in that chapter might have been not only literal children but also immature Christians. There is an enormous number of members in our churches who have not really heard and understood the full meaning of the gospel—the truth about God. What are we doing to reach out to them?

There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. **Accompanied by [144] the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.**—Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* 143.4. [Bold type is added.]

9. To many of us, spreading the gospel implies that we reach out to others who may already be Christians. What are we doing to reach out to secular people, atheists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.? Is doing so an impossible task? If we can get a group organized to go through the Bible, we will not need to focus on our doctrines; they will come up as we go along. We need to let them know that we can each learn from all the others.
10. Over the last several weeks, we have studied ways in which we can minister to those who are needy in our communities. But, we know it needs to go beyond just ministering to their needs. We need to make bridges so they can come to Jesus. And what do those bridges consist of? Us!

The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross or a crown, but it is that which reveals the union of man with God. By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is to be convinced that God has sent His Son as its Redeemer. **No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.**—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of*
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Healing 470.1; *AG* 276.7; *LDE* 191.4. [Bold type is added.]

11. Is there enough new, inviting, and interesting material being presented in your church to keep the attention of the members, especially of the younger members? Do people who come for the first time feel welcome? Do they want to come back?
12. Do our churches ever seem uninviting? There have been times in the past when we have repulsed people who have come to us instead of welcoming them. Notice these very sad words.

The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, 371.3 (1901).

13. That is a very sad testimony. Think how different things could be.

Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.

It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, (2 Peter 3:12, *margin*). Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 69.1-2; *8T* 22.3-4; *LHU* 274.6-7; *Ev* 696.5; *LDE* 39.3. [Bold type is added.]

14. Read Luke 19:1-10. Zacchaeus desperately wanted to see Jesus. He had listened to John the Baptist and had heard about Jesus and had already begun to reform his life as a tax collector. (*DA* 552) But, the way had proven to be difficult. Now that Jesus was actually in his home city of Jericho, Zacchaeus was determined to see Him. Try to imagine this wealthy tax collector running through the streets, trying to get ahead of the crowd, and then, climbing up in a tree while wearing all his expensive robes. Were the children laughing at him? Try to imagine his incredible surprise when Jesus stopped right under him and said, "Come down, Zacchaeus, I want to stay at your house tonight!"
15. How are we at inviting and welcoming visitors to our churches?
16. Evangelist Mark Finley reminds us that not to introduce God to people is spiritual malpractice. Jesus's method of evangelism was to touch people at their points of greatest need. That is medical missionary work. But, Jesus did not stop with meeting their physical needs; He welcomed them into the kingdom of God, and He offered them eternal life.
17. Do you feel uncomfortable inviting people to come to church or even to accept Christianity? Do you think that job should be left to the pastor? As you become acquainted with new friends—and hopefully you have some—and you ask about their family and their occupation, do you feel comfortable asking about their religion? Might that give you an opportunity to share your personal testimony? Personal testimonies are very powerful ways to witness.
18. Read Acts 26:11-27. What can we learn from Paul's testimony before King Agrippa? Paul first talked about his life before he became a Christian. Then, he talked about his

experience on the Damascus road; and finally, he talked about what God had done for him and with him and through him after that. And then he made an appeal. Shouldn't we be able to do the same?

19. Read Revelation 3:20; Matthew 7:7-8; and John 1:12. These passages make it clear that people must be willing to accept the love of Jesus and His appeal to them. Jesus stands at the door and knocks. He does not force His way in. There is many a soul out there who feels a deep need but does not understand exactly what is missing in his life. In our day, we see people going on rampages, killing others and then killing themselves because their lives are not what they want them to be.
20. Have you ever had anyone come to you and say that s/he would like to know more about your church? Or, about Christianity? Usually, that only happens as a part of a larger conversation. How did it make you feel? Shouldn't we pray every day that God will make us sensitive to the felt needs of others around us? Are we inclined to be too aggressive, or maybe not aggressive enough, in spreading the gospel? Remember that if people do not accept the invitation of Jesus, they will experience eternal loss.
21. What is it like to work with the Holy Spirit? Will God give us the words to use to invite someone to make a commitment to Jesus?
22. Think about your own personal experience in the church. What are the reasons why you keep coming? Do we recognize that God is present in our services? Do we remember that inviting people to accept Jesus may be one of our tasks? Do we remember that conversion is one hundred percent the role of the Holy Spirit?
23. Following our recent lessons, have you been looking for opportunities to reach out and minister to others by showing them sympathy?
24. Read Revelation 3:20. Jesus is apparently standing at the door, knocking. Is that all He is doing? No! He also calls to us.
25. Paul suggested that we all need to be ambassadors for Jesus Christ. Read 2 Corinthians 5:20 where we are invited to speak on Christ's behalf. In fact, God Himself wants to speak through us. How can we experience that in our own lives?
26. From reading the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, we know that difficult times are ahead of us. Are we willing to move out of our comfort zone for the sake of the gospel? Remember that true Christians will be willing to do whatever God wants them to do. They will "follow the Lamb wherever he goes." (Revelation 14:4) Remember that following the Lamb has led many even to martyrdom. Isn't that where Jesus went?
27. Have you thought about praying to God to give you opportunities to speak on His behalf? Are you prepared to speak on His behalf? We have talked about mingling with other people, showing them sympathy, ministering to their needs, and hopefully, winning their confidence. But, there is one final step that we must not leave out, and that is to bid them to follow Jesus.
28. In the chapel of Keble College, Oxford, hangs a famous painting by British painter Holman Hunt that illustrates this verse. Jesus is depicted knocking on a door with one hand, holding a lantern in the other. Significantly, there is no handle on the door—the only way it can be opened is if the person inside chooses to do so.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 146.
29. Jesus never forces His way into our lives. He knocks, He calls, and He invites; but, the

choice is ours. The water of life is free to “whomsoever will.”

30. In John 10:7, Jesus said, “I am the door.” What is He trying to tell us? Jesus did not hesitate to associate with those whom the Jewish leaders despised. He spent a lot of time with tax collectors and prostitutes. What kind of barriers do we see in our day that might prevent us from reaching out to some needy son or daughter of God?
31. Jesus is pictured as repeatedly—and we have mentioned the story of Zacchaeus—reaching out and searching for the lost. In Luke 15, He talked about the lost sheep, the lost coin, and even the lost son or the prodigal son.
32. Read Ezekiel 34:2-4. What kind of shepherds was he talking about? Were they attractive to the sheep? Were they doing anything to take care of the flock? In contrast to the shepherds mentioned in the early verses of the chapter, read Ezekiel 34:11,16. God searches for His sheep. He looks for the lost and brings them home, healing them and strengthening them.
33. Are we prepared to follow Jesus’s methods for winning souls? Have you ever tried to go through the steps that we have talked about: Mingling with people, ministering to them, sympathizing with them, and then inviting them to church?

More than 100 years ago, Dr. David Paulson, founder of the Hinsdale Hospital and Sanitarium near Chicago, wrote, “The man who is interested in only those whom he thinks can become church members as a result of his ministrations will find fewer and fewer openings for missionary work; for he gradually develops in others a spirit of distrust and suspicion, which closes more and more doors against him; while, on the other hand, the worker who has allowed the needs of humanity to touch his heart will try to benefit the ‘nine lepers’ even if he knows perfectly well that they will never join his church.”—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 148-149.

34. Is there some magical way to determine who is going to respond to the call and who will not? Of course not! We need to reach out to as many as possible and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. As a church, are we inclined to try to bring people into the church before we have mingled with them, showed sympathy, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence? If Jesus, the King of glory, took time to go through those steps, shouldn’t we be willing to?

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