

# ***Making Friends for God: The Joy of Sharing in His Mission An Exciting Way to Get Involved***

Lesson #10 for September 5, 2020

Scriptures: Genesis 1:1-2,26; Exodus 18:21-25; 1 Corinthians 12:12-25; Acts 4:31; 12:12; 16:11-15,40; Matthew 9:37-38.

1. There is strength in numbers. King Solomon, often called the wisest man who ever lived, recognized this principle.

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12:** <sup>9</sup>Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. <sup>10</sup>If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls, it's just too bad, because there is no one to help him. <sup>11</sup>If it is cold, two can sleep together and stay warm, but how can you keep warm by yourself? <sup>12</sup>Two people can resist an attack that would defeat one person alone. A rope made of three cords is hard to break.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Ecclesiastes 4:9–12). New York: American Bible Society.

2. Small groups have worked together effectively as recorded throughout Scripture. Even the Godhead works together as a very effective and efficient small Group.

**Genesis 1:1-2,26:** <sup>1</sup> In the beginning, when **God** created the universe, <sup>2</sup>the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the **Spirit of God** was moving over the water.... <sup>26</sup> Then God said, “And now **we** will make human beings; they will be like **us** and resemble **us**.”—*Good News Bible.\*†*

3. The plural Hebrew name for God, *Elohim*, is followed in verse 26 by plural pronouns.
4. God was the first One to organize a small group: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While we cannot begin to understand all the implications of that, we know that those Three work together very closely while having individual responsibilities, making the work more efficient.
5. In the birth of Christ Jesus, we see the Father sending the Holy Spirit to impregnate Mary to give birth to the Son, baby Jesus. Later, at the time of His baptism, the voice of the Father was heard; the Dove, representing the Holy Spirit was seen; and Jesus came up out of the water. All through His life, the three of Them worked together to perform all that Jesus did. Even in His death, They cooperated.

**John 10:17-18:** <sup>17</sup> “The Father loves me because I am willing to give up my life, in order that I may receive it back again. <sup>18</sup>**No one takes my life away from me. I give it up of my own free will. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it back. This is what my Father has commanded me to do.**”—*Good News Bible.\*†*

**Romans 8:11:** If the **Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from death**, lives in you, then he who raised Christ from death will also give life to your mortal bodies by the presence of his Spirit in you.—*Good News Bible.\*†*

**1 Corinthians 15:15:** More than that, we are shown to be lying about **God, because we said that he raised Christ from death**—but if it is true that the

dead are not raised to life, then he did not raise Christ.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

6. **It has always been God's plan to work through every means He has available to Him to save as many as possible.** God could have created us as robots without the ability to rebel against Him. But, God's government never works by force or coercion. Free will is one of the basic foundations of God's government. (See *Desire of Ages* 22.)

**1 Timothy 2:4:** Who **wants everyone to be saved** and to come to know the truth.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

**2 Peter 3:9:** The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because **he does not want anyone to be destroyed**, but wants all to turn away from their sins.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

7. We will spend the rest of eternity studying the plan of salvation. So, if you do not feel like you understand it fully now, you are alright.

8. Moses was born and preserved miraculously from the river, lived those first years of his life sheltered in a wonderful Hebrew household, and then, was educated in the royal palace of Pharaoh. But, he was not yet ready to do God's will. He needed 40 years of herding sheep in the wilderness to prepare him. Then, God called him to do the most important job, beginning at the age of 80! Isn't that past retirement age?

9. But, even at that point, having followed God's plan for delivering the children of Israel out of Egypt, he was not above receiving advice from his father-in-law, Jethro.

10. **Exodus 18:21-25:** <sup>21</sup> "But in addition, you should choose some capable men and appoint them as leaders of the people: leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. They must be God-fearing men who can be trusted and who cannot be bribed. <sup>22</sup>Let them serve as judges for the people on a permanent basis. They can bring all the difficult cases to you, but they themselves can decide all the smaller disputes. That will make it easier for you, as they share your burden. <sup>23</sup>If you do this, as God commands, you will not wear yourself out, and all these people can go home with their disputes settled."

<sup>24</sup> Moses took Jethro's advice <sup>25</sup>and chose capable men from among all the Israelites. **He appointed them as leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

11. Thus, we see that even the children of Israel, camping in the wilderness, were organized into small groups, the smallest of which had 10 people. Isn't it amazing that small group specialists tell us that the ideal size for group interaction is between 6 and 12.

12. Look at the experience of Jesus Himself with His disciples.

**Luke 6:12-13:** <sup>12</sup> At that time **Jesus went up a hill to pray and spent the whole night** there praying to God. <sup>13</sup>When day came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he named apostles.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

**Matthew 10:1,8:** <sup>1</sup>Jesus called his twelve disciples together and gave them authority to.... <sup>8</sup>**Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases, and drive out demons.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

13. But, we must recognize that the groups that worked with Jesus were more than just His twelve disciples.

**Luke 8:1-3:** <sup>1</sup> Some time later Jesus travelled through towns and villages, preaching the Good News about the Kingdom of God. **The twelve disciples went with him, <sup>2</sup>and so did some women who had been healed of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (who was called Magdalene), from whom seven demons had been driven out; <sup>3</sup>Joanna, whose husband Chuza was an officer in Herod's court; and Susanna, and many other women who used their own resources to help Jesus and his disciples.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

14. Did those women work together as a small group, taking care of the disciples and Jesus? What did the disciples learn from Jesus about organizing and directing a small group? What kinds of things did Jesus accomplish through that small group? As we have seen in previous lessons, He and His followers “turned the world upside down.” (Acts 17:6)

**1 Corinthians 12:12-25:** <sup>12</sup> Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts....—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*<sup>\*</sup> for Tuesday, September 1.

15. Think about how God has designed all of that so that it can be coded into 23 pairs of strands of DNA! The 1 trillion cells in the human body get programmed to do their specific task; they lose the ability to do other tasks even though the DNA code is still there inside each cell that still has a nucleus.
16. When working alone, it is very easy to become discouraged or to be distracted by some other responsibility. However, when we are working together, it is easier to keep our focus on the common goal.

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.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,<sup>\*</sup> vol. 7, 21.4-22.0.<sup>†</sup>

17. So, there should be no question about the fact that God intended for us to continue our work of finishing the gospel by organizing into small groups.
18. What can we learn about small groups from the experience of the disciples and apostles in early Christianity? Very quickly, the work expanded beyond the time and capacity of the 11 disciples. They chose a replacement for Judas; but, they soon felt it necessary to choose seven more men whom we call *deacons*. (See Acts 6.)

19. Paul was constantly working with other groups.

**Acts 18:1-5:** <sup>1</sup> After this, Paul left Athens and went on to Corinth. <sup>2</sup>There he met a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his **wife Priscilla**, for the Emperor Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, <sup>3</sup>and stayed and worked with them, because he earned his living by making tents, just as they did. <sup>4</sup>He held discussions in the synagogue every Sabbath, trying to convince both Jews and Greeks.

<sup>5</sup> When **Silas and Timothy** arrived from Macedonia, Paul gave his whole time to preaching the message, testifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

**Acts 20:3-4:** <sup>3</sup>He was getting ready to go to Syria when he discovered that there were Jews plotting against him; so he decided to go back through Macedonia. <sup>4</sup>**Sopater son of Pyrrhus, from Berea, went with him; so did Aristarchus and Secundus, from Thessalonica; Gaius, from Derbe; Tychicus and Trophimus, from the province of Asia; and Timothy.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

20. There can be multiple reasons for working in small groups. Paul had gone to great lengths to raise a lot of money from the Gentile converts in Macedonia and Achaia. He was preparing to take all that money back to Jerusalem for the benefit of the poor there. So, he needed a number of people to travel with him to carry the gold and to protect each other.

On this occasion, Paul and his companions formally presented to the leaders of the work at Jerusalem the contributions forwarded by the Gentile churches for the support of the poor among their Jewish brethren. The gathering of these contributions had cost the apostle and his fellow workers much time, anxious thought, and wearisome labor. The sum, which far exceeded the expectations of the elders at Jerusalem, represented many sacrifices and even severe privations on the part of the Gentile believers.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*\* 399.2.

21. It is clear that Paul chose people from a variety of churches so they could all eventually report back to their home base about how the money was handled and delivered to the people in Jerusalem. No doubt, each of those chosen associates also had special skills and abilities that were of mutual benefit.

22. When traveling to a new area, it was Paul's custom to search out the local synagogue or synagogues and preach to the members. Often, he would be successful in converting some to Christianity; but, later, he was often rejected and thrown out by the remaining members of the synagogue.

23. But, there were times when he traveled to cities such as Philippi where apparently no synagogue had been established. So, what did he do?

**Acts 16:11-15,40:** <sup>11</sup> We left by ship from Troas and sailed straight across to Samothrace, and the next day to Neapolis. <sup>12</sup>From there we went inland to Philippi, a city of the first district of Macedonia; it is also a Roman colony. We spent several days there. <sup>13</sup>On the Sabbath we went out of the city to the riverside, where we thought there would be a place where Jews gathered for prayer. We sat down and talked to the women who gathered there. <sup>14</sup>One of those who heard us was Lydia from Thyatira, who was a dealer in purple

cloth. She was a woman who worshipped God, and the Lord opened her mind to pay attention to what Paul was saying.<sup>15</sup> After she and the people of her house had been baptized, she invited us, “Come and stay in my house if you have decided that I am a true believer in the Lord.” And she persuaded us to go....<sup>40</sup> Paul and Silas left the prison and went to Lydia’s house. There they met the believers, spoke words of encouragement to them, and left.—*Good News Bible*.\*

24. Peter also worked with small groups that used their prayers to support him in his ministry. There were 5000 male Christian believers in and around Jerusalem. When Peter was imprisoned and expecting to be executed the next morning, an amazing event took place; Peter was miraculously released from prison. Then, what did he do?

**Acts 12:11-19:** <sup>11</sup> Then Peter realized what had happened to him, and said, “Now I know that it is really true! The Lord sent his angel to rescue me from Herod’s power and from everything the Jewish people expected to happen.”

<sup>12</sup>Aware of his situation, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.<sup>13</sup> Peter knocked at the outside door, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer it. <sup>14</sup>She recognized Peter’s voice and was so happy that she ran back in without opening the door, and announced that Peter was standing outside. <sup>15</sup> “You are mad!” they told her. But she insisted that it was true. So they answered, “It is his angel.”

<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile Peter kept on knocking. At last they opened the door, and when they saw him, they were amazed. <sup>17</sup>He motioned with his hand for them to be quiet, and he explained to them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell this to James and the rest of the believers,” he said; then he left and went somewhere else.

<sup>18</sup> When morning came, there was a tremendous confusion among the guards—what had happened to Peter? <sup>19</sup>Herod gave orders to search for him, but they could not find him. So he had the guards questioned and ordered them to be put to death.—*Good News Bible*.\*

25. This story about Peter knocking on the door and the group’s response, “It is his angel,” is one of our key verses, suggesting that we all have guardian angels. We do not know exactly what small group it was who were praying for Peter and, no doubt, there were many other groups in Jerusalem also praying for him. But, in the larger context of the great controversy, it gave God permission to act and release Peter from prison and save his life.
26. The Roman Catholic Church has always claimed that the pope is a “direct spiritual descendent” from Peter himself whom they claim was the head of the first Christian church. When Peter was released from prison, thus saving his life, he went immediately to that small group meeting in the home of John Mark’s parents. After speaking with them briefly, Peter said: “Tell this to James and the rest the believers.” (Acts 12:17, *GNB*\*) What does this tell us about who was regarded as the leader of the church in Jerusalem at that time?
27. It is known that there were at least 200 synagogues in and around Jerusalem. The size of each one of the synagogues was small to medium. Do you think some of the Christians continued to worship with the Jews in the synagogues? If they were rejected in the synagogues, then, it would have been natural for them to meet in small groups in homes.

28. In our day, small groups are very important because it is much easier for a person who is being attracted to the gospel to meet in someone's home than to be taken to a formal church gathering where there might be many people s/he has never met.
29. Sometimes, we seem to imply that the entire Christian group met in the "upper room." That would have been completely impossible. So, what do we know about that upper room?
- Acts 4:31:** When they finished **praying**, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and **began to proclaim God's message with boldness.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>
- Acts 12:12:** Aware of his situation, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where **many people had gathered and were praying.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup> [The upper room in Jerusalem was, no doubt, located in the home of John Mark's parents. Who was the young man in Mark 14:52?]<sup>‡</sup>
30. Small groups can help us not only by supporting us with their prayers and encouraging us to stay faithful to our goals and reaching out to others, but they also provide a wonderful fellowship of encouragement.
31. Try to imagine yourself in one of the groups of people that followed Jesus. Except for His times of prayer at night and early in the morning, He must have been flocked by people continuously. Is it any surprise that He made the following comments?
- Matthew 9:37-38:** <sup>37</sup>So he said to his disciples, "The harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in. <sup>38</sup>Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest."—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>
32. How much help were the disciples in dealing with those crowds? It should be clear that **the focus of each of the groups we have spoken about was witnessing and service.** Could it be that today, God is calling us to organize into small groups to continue that ministry? Those who have been able to organize or join an effective small group find it absolutely exciting and spiritually rewarding. Think of the small boy who offered his meal to Jesus! What did he say to his mother when he got home? Did he take some of the leftovers home?
33. It is important for the small groups that get organized to keep their focus on reaching out. Otherwise, it is easy for the group to deteriorate into nothing more than a discussion group.
34. There are two verses in the book of Acts which add an extra dimension to the question of working with groups.
- Acts 6:7:** And so the word of God continued to spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem grew larger and larger, and **a great number of priests accepted the faith.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>
- Acts 15:5:** But some of the believers who **belonged to the party of the Pharisees** stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and told to obey the Law of Moses."—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>
35. How do you suppose former members of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, even priests, were integrated into the small groups? Did they join many small groups? Did they try to dominate the small groups?
36. Many small groups are already functioning within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in various parts of the world. In studying these groups, it has been seen that prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and witnessing are the key elements of a successful small group.

37. Small groups that focus only on witnessing often burn themselves out because of ceaseless activity. **They need prayer, Bible study, and fellowship to keep them going.**
38. It is important to remember that **our witness is not only to the world and other church members, but also to the universe!**

**Ephesians 3:9-10:** <sup>9</sup> And of making all people see how God's secret plan is to be put into effect. God, who is the Creator of all things, kept his secret hidden through all the past ages, <sup>10</sup>**in order that at the present time, by means of the church, the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms.**—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

39. What could we possibly teach the universe about God?
40. And what did Jesus Himself say about groups that would continue to carry on the gospel message after He was gone?

**John 17:20-23:** <sup>20</sup> "I pray not only for them, but also for those who believe in me because of their message. <sup>21</sup>I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me. <sup>22</sup>I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one: <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me."—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

41. He planned for us to be in cooperation with Him, just as He is in cooperation with the Father! Love is the very principle of God's government, and love can only exist where there is more than one individual involved. **Small groups are the perfect setting for Christian love to grow and expand.**
42. So, looking over the whole picture, why do you suppose there was such an explosive growth in the early Christian church? First of all, we must recognize that much of it was a result of the work that Jesus had already done. But:

**Acts 2:42:** They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.—*New King James Version*<sup>\*</sup>

43. Even when being threatened with murder, these early Christians continued to witness and meet in small groups and continue to fellowship together.
44. Just as the different systems work in the human body to sustain, nourish, and support each other, so small groups in the Christian church should do that for the church.

Involvement in a small group fosters Christian commitment, responsibility and accountability. **Christianity is not a solo act. We are Christians in community, contributing by using our gifts in and for the community.**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*<sup>\*</sup> 134.<sup>†</sup>

45. Small groups were organized in the early church for specific tasks; however, they quickly began to expand their outreach to include much more. Think of the deacons who were chosen to "wait on tables" and soon became great evangelists.

One of the things that we must be extremely careful about in the organization of small groups is thinking that every group must be the same. In the New Testament, there were different groups, meeting different needs, performing different ministries for the good of the whole.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*<sup>\*</sup> 135.

46. Could a Sabbath school class be organized into a small group? Absolutely! Our Bible Study Guide ends with these three practical possibilities for how each of us could become involved in the church.

1. Have you ever thought of starting a small nurture group in your home?
2. Is there a ministry group the Holy Spirit has been impressing you to become a member of?
3. What would you think of your Sabbath School class becoming a Sabbath School action unit that meets once a month to pray, fellowship, study the Word, and plan a Sabbath School class mission activity?

In the New Testament Christian church, there were no spectators. So, let's get involved. We will grow in Christ, and others will be blessed as we use our gifts in service in the context of a small group.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 136.

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