

Making Friends for God: The Joy of Sharing in His Mission

Sharing the Story of Jesus

Lesson #11 for September 12, 2020

Scriptures: Ephesians 2:1-10; 1 John 4:7-11; 5:13; Mark 5:1-20; Hebrews 10:19-22; Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 1:30.

1. As the famous poet Edgar Guest once wrote:

“I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I’d rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye’s a better pupil and more willing than the ear.”
2. Witnessing is not arguing over theology. Witnessing is telling what Jesus Christ has done for you. It is sharing what we know about Jesus. It is not trying to prove what we believe is right and what someone else might believe is wrong. **A life lived following the pattern of Jesus Christ is the most powerful argument that can be given in favor of the gospel.** It is called *Christianity*.
3. In at least two different places, Paul talked about what happens when a person is converted. Paul’s own personal testimonies is found in Acts 26; however, Ephesians 2:1-10 reveals basically the same ideas. Lives that were dead in trespasses and sin—fulfilling the desires of the flesh—have been changed until they are “exceedingly rich with His grace.” Life takes on new meaning. As John declared: “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:4, *NKJV**)
4. There have been many arguments down through the generations about whether or not we can be saved by keeping the commandments. Keeping any set of commandments is not the way to salvation. Salvation comes through a trusting relationship with Jesus Christ. That involves an active, daily searching for better ways to copy His life. But, it is also true that **faith works!** We keep God’s commandments because we have faith and are saved, not in order to be saved.
5. What does that change say to you about God? Is the good news apparent in your actions? Compare what Jesus said in John 13:34-35.

John 13:34-35: ³⁴ “And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵**If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.**”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., John 13:34–35). New York: American Bible Society.† Compare Leviticus 19:18.
6. What does this say about the change that happens when we really become one of Christ’s faithful disciples/followers? Do those words describe us?
7. James and John—who were, possibly, cousins of Jesus—were also known as “sons of thunder.” (Mark 3:17) There are several references in the New Testament to suggest that they were ready to call fire down on people, (Luke 9:54) and they wanted to stop people from performing miracles in the name of Jesus unless they were His disciples. But, a transformation came in their lives, especially the life of John, the younger of the two.

In the life of the disciple John true sanctification is exemplified. During the years of his close association with Christ, he was often warned and

cautioned by the Saviour; and these reproofs he accepted. As the character of the Divine One was manifested to him, John saw his own deficiencies, and was humbled by the revelation. Day by day, in contrast with his own violent spirit, he beheld the tenderness and forbearance of Jesus, and heard His lessons of humility and patience. **Day by day his heart was drawn out to Christ, until he lost sight of self in love for his Master.** The power and tenderness, the majesty and meekness, the strength and patience, that he saw in the daily life of the Son of God, filled his soul with admiration. He yielded his resentful, ambitious temper to the molding power of Christ, and divine love wrought in him a transformation of character.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 557.1.†

By beholding him we become changed into his divine likeness.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* January 18, 1881, par. 4.†

8. Read 1 John 1:1-4; 3:1; 4:7-11; 5:1-5. In these verses it is clear that John recognized a very clear distinction between those who knew God and were transformed *versus* those who did not know God and were people of this world. True disciples/children of God not only love God supremely but also their neighbors as themselves. They also obey God's commandments.
9. But, we must not try to use force to convince people of the gospel.

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.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 22.1.†

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, *Ministry of Healing** 470.1.†

10. Jesus was a part of three "missionary journeys" during which He sent His disciples out to practice their skills in Galilee. In the first and second missionary journeys, He took the disciples with Him, and they learned of Him before He sent them out on their own, on their third missionary journey. He also sent out other missionaries. Those missionaries were not from among His disciples. They were not even among His longtime followers. The first missionaries He sent out on their own were the former demoniacs, Gentiles from the region of Perea. They had been with Jesus for only a few hours. But, the power of Jesus had caused an enormous change in their lives. (See Matthew 8:28-29 and Mark 5:1-5.)
11. The interchange between Jesus and those demoniacs was quite remarkable. He/they were full of demons! And when Jesus cast the demons out, He allowed them to go into a herd of pigs which rushed down the hillside and drowned in the Sea of Galilee. If you were a Pharisee or even just a conservative Jew, would you drink water from or eat fish that had been taken from the Sea of Galilee after 2000 pigs had drowned there?

Matthew 8:32-34: ³² "Go," Jesus told them; so they left and went off into the pigs. The whole herd rushed down the side of the cliff into the lake and was

drowned.

³³ The men who had been taking care of the pigs ran away and went into the town, where they told the whole story and what had happened to the men with the demons. ³⁴So everyone from the town went out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their territory.—*Good News Bible*.*

Mark 5:13-14: ¹³He let them go, and the evil spirits went out of the man and entered the pigs. The whole herd—about 2,000 pigs in all—rushed down the side of the cliff into the lake and was drowned.

¹⁴ The men who had been taking care of the pigs ran away and spread the news in the town and among the farms. People went out to see what had happened.—*Good News Bible*.*

12. This former demoniac (and he probably had a companion [See Matthew 8:28-34.]) was the first Gentile missionary! Would we have chosen him? There are two very important things to know about this story which few know. These two men had an enormous impact on that mostly-Gentile area, as Ellen White explained.

Though the people of Gergesa had not received Jesus, He did not leave them to the darkness they had chosen. When they bade Him depart from them, they had not heard His words. They were ignorant of that which they were rejecting. Therefore He again sent the light to them, and by those to whom they would not refuse to listen.

In causing the destruction of the swine, it was Satan's purpose to turn the people away from the Saviour, and prevent the preaching of the gospel in that region. But this very occurrence roused the whole country as nothing else could have done, and directed attention to Christ. Though the Saviour Himself departed, the men whom He had healed remained as witnesses to His power. **Those who had been mediums of the prince of darkness became channels of light, messengers of the Son of God.** Men marveled as they listened to the wondrous news. A door was opened to the gospel throughout that region. **When Jesus returned to Decapolis, the people flocked about Him, and for three [341] days, not merely the inhabitants of one town, but thousands from all the surrounding region, heard the message of salvation. Even the power of demons is under the control of our Saviour, and the working of evil is overruled for good.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 340.2-3.†

But the purposes of Christ were not thwarted. He allowed the evil spirits to destroy the herd of swine as a rebuke to those Jews who were raising these unclean beasts for the sake of gain. Had not Christ restrained the demons, they would have plunged into the sea, not only the swine, but also their keepers and owners. The preservation of both the keepers and the owners was due alone to His power, mercifully exercised for their deliverance. Furthermore, this event was permitted to take place that the disciples might witness the cruel power of Satan upon both man and beast. The Saviour desired His followers to have a knowledge of the foe whom they were to meet, that they might not be

deceived and overcome by his devices. It was also His will that the people of that region should behold His power to break the bondage of Satan and release his captives. **And though Jesus Himself departed, the men so marvelously delivered, remained to declare the mercy of their Benefactor.**—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 515.1.†

13. What happened to these men? What did the townspeople find when they went to see what had happened? Would we have chosen him/them? There are two very important things to know about this story that few know.

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** 340.1.†

14. The demoniacs became 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. However, the point is, Jesus restored them physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.
15. Obviously, the changed demoniac, this new convert, wanted to stay with Jesus; but, what did Christ tell him to do?

Mark 5:18-20: ¹⁸ As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had had the demons begged him, "Let me go with you!"

¹⁹ But Jesus would not let him. Instead, he told him, "Go back home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how kind he has been to you."

²⁰ So the man left and went all through the Ten Towns, telling what Jesus had done for him. And all who heard it were amazed.—*Good News Bible*.*

16. Did those former demoniacs somehow find out that Jesus was coming back to their territory? 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.
17. In addition to all that we have seen that resulted from the witness of this/these one/two demoniac(s), we need to note that when the Christians, following the instructions of Jesus, (Matthew 24:15-21; Mark 13:14-20; Luke 21:20-24) fled from Jerusalem after the first attack from the Romans in 66 A.D., they established a new Christian headquarters at Pella in that same Gentile territory where the demoniacs first testified to those Gentile people. Did the disciples have any idea why they were crossing the Sea of Galilee into Gentile territory? Notice that in the verses listed above in Matthew, Jesus considered Daniel to be a prophet.
18. Do you feel assured of your salvation? Can you say with confidence, "I am saved"?
19. Read 1 John 5:11-13 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-2. If we do not have the salvation of Jesus in our lives, how can we share it with others? 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.”

20. Luke 15:7,10 assure us that when we correctly represent Jesus Christ before others and they are attracted to the gospel, there is rejoicing in heaven. Could you make heaven rejoice?
21. Read Romans 5:1; 8:1. Is it possible for someone who has once been saved—and apparently been a faithful church member—to fall away? See 2 Peter 2:18-22; Hebrews 3:6; and Revelation 3:5; and chapter 29 of *The Great Controversy*.

Galatians 2:20-21: ²⁰So that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me. ²¹I refuse to reject the grace of God. But if a person is put right with God through the Law, it means that Christ died for nothing!—*Good News Bible*.*

22. Having said all of that, we need to recognize that it is still a narrow road that we are entering.

Luke 9:23: And he said to them all, “Anyone who wants to come with me must forget self, take up their cross every day, and follow me.”—*Good News Bible*.*

23. Did the disciples have any idea of what Jesus was talking about when He mentioned a cross? Taking up one’s cross is not easy, nor is it necessarily enjoyable. We may have to give up cherished desires and lifelong habits. But, when all is said and done and we have learned to live the new Christian life, the rewards far outweigh the pain.
24. Many martyrs will tell us their stories when we get to the better land; they will make it clear that they paid the ultimate sacrifice that they could pay. But, they will immediately turn to tell us: “But, it was all worth it because of what Christ has done for me.” See John 1:12; 10:10; 14:27; and 1 Corinthians 1:30.
25. Can you think of certain times in your life when Christ has made a huge impact? You may have been a Christian, at least in name, all of your life. Do you feel that you have made many sacrifices for God and the gospel?
26. Read Mark 5:25-34. This is the story of the woman with a 12-year history of bleeding. She managed to get close enough to Jesus just to touch the edge of His cloak, and she was instantly healed. Jesus recognized her faith and told her to go in peace.

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** 347.1-3.^{†§}

27. Think of stories that are powerful witnesses to the truth of the gospel. What gives those stories their power? Think of Paul and his appeal to Agrippa as recorded in Acts 26. He first described what his life was like as one of the honored Pharisees. Then, he described his experience on the Damascus road. Finally, he talked about the new life he was living.
28. When we explain what Jesus has done for us, someone might ask, “But how does that affect me?” Each personal testimony to the powerful effect of the gospel is a proof of what is possible.
29. When giving our testimonies, we should avoid talking about vivid details of our sinful behaviors in the past. We should also avoid claiming all sorts of righteous actions in the present.
30. Witnessing is not intended to be easy. It might even seem like a laborious task if you are doing it just because you think you have to. But, to someone who has a strong faith relationship with Jesus Christ and loves Him, it will be a loving response.
31. We need to recognize that if we are true Christians, we have been born again. We have enjoyed a transformative experience.

Ephesians 2:13-14: ¹³But now, in union with Christ Jesus, you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood [Footnote in electronic version: *by the blood of Christ; or by the sacrificial death of Christ*] of Christ. ¹⁴For Christ himself has brought us peace by making Jews and Gentiles one people. With his own body he broke down the wall that separated them and kept them enemies.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†§}

32. Surrounding the temple in Jerusalem, there was a strong barrier about four and one-half feet high with 13 large stone slabs on which a warning was written in both Greek and Latin, telling Gentiles or any foreigners that if they proceeded beyond that wall, it was at the risk of their lives. (See “Jerusalem temple barrier” on Google Images.)

“There was a partition made of stone. . . . Its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters that ‘no foreigner should go within that sanctuary.’ ”—Flavius Josephus, *History of the Jewish War* (5.5.2), quoted in NIV, *Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2005), p. 1917.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 146].^{†§}

33. In effect, the Jews were saying that Gentiles had no access to the presence of God in the Jewish sanctuary. However, Christ did away with all such distinctions. The gospel is for everyone; salvation is for everyone. That Ethiopian eunuch to whom Philip preached would not have been allowed into the Jewish temple. But, apparently, since he was willing to pay enough money, they sold him a scroll of Isaiah. See Acts 8:26-40.

34. We have talked about the changes that took place in the life of John. In his later years, John was so kind and gentle and spoke the gospel with such love that one writer has said, “John wrote with his pen dipped in love.”

Love is a heavenly attribute. The natural heart cannot originate it. This heavenly plant only flourishes where Christ reigns supreme. Where love exists, there is power and truth in the life. Love does good, and nothing but good. Those who have love bear fruit unto holiness, and in the end everlasting life.—Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*,* January 13, 1898, par. 9. Compare 7SDABC 952.5; TMK 167.4.

Witnessing is not a spiritual gift given to only a very few people. It is the role of every Christian. Simply tell what Christ has done for you. Share with others the peace you have found in Jesus. Tell them how Christ gave you purpose in your life. Pray for opportunities to tell those around you the joy you have in following Jesus. Tell them how you grasped His promises by faith and found them to be true. Share answers to your prayers or Bible promises that are meaningful to you. You will be surprised at how others will respond to a faith that is genuine....

If someone asked you the question, “Do you have eternal life?” how would you respond? Would your answer be vague or certain? Would you say, “I sure hope so” or “I wish I knew” or “I am not certain”? Jesus wants you to have the certainty of eternal life. The apostle John declares that “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (1 John 5:11, NKJV). He then adds words too clear to be misunderstood: “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” (1 John 5:11-13, NKJV). As long as we have Jesus Christ living in our lives, the gift of eternal life is ours. He is life, and in Him we have life. It is this assurance that gives power to our witness. Our assurance is not based on our good works or our superior righteousness. It is based on Christ alone, who lives in our lives by the Holy Spirit producing good works through us.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 147-148.†§

35. Some Seventh-day Adventists have been reluctant to say that they are saved because of what Ellen White wrote in *Christ Object Lessons*.

Never can we safely put confidence in self or feel, this side of heaven, that we are secure against temptation. **Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading.** Every one should be taught to cherish hope and faith; but even when we give ourselves to Christ and know that He accepts us, we are not beyond the reach of temptation. God’s word declares, “Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried.” Daniel 12:10. Only he who endures the trial will receive the crown of life. (James 1:12.)—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons** 155.1.†

36. A careful analysis of that statement reveals that she was speaking in response to those who were claiming that they were “Once saved; always saved.” Many have described this claim as “cheap grace”; but, grace was never cheap. It cost the death of our Lord and Savior.

37. But, nevertheless:

Each one of you may know for yourself that you have a living Saviour, that he is your helper and your God. You need not stand where you say, "I do not know whether I am saved." Do you believe in Christ as your personal Saviour? If you do, then rejoice.—Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*,* April 10, 1901, par. 14.

38. How do you interpret this statement in your personal life?

1 John 5:12-13: ¹²Whoever has the Son has this life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

¹³ I am writing this to you so that you may know that you have eternal life—you that believe in the Son of God.—*Good News Bible*.*

39. Do we have any question about God's ability to raise the righteous dead at the end? If He can "re-create" us at the end, He certainly could have created mankind in the beginning. Do we have any question about God's ability to work with us in carrying the gospel to others?

When once the gaze is fixed upon Him, the life finds its center.... Duty becomes a delight and sacrifice a pleasure. To honor Christ, to become like Him, to work for Him, is the life's highest ambition and its greatest joy.—Ellen G. White, *Education** 297.0.

40. Has that been your experience with Jesus Christ? What do you think about when you have an opportunity to witness? Are you embarrassed that you do not know the Bible better?

© 2020, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. *Electronic version. †Bold type is added. ‡Text in brackets is added. §Italic type is in the source. Info@theox.org

Last Modified: July 27, 2020

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSTG-HartWitnessing - God' Mission\SS-11-Witnessing-2020_09_12-Fin+.wpd