

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

A Step in Faith

Lesson #13 for September 26, 2020

Scriptures: Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 4:18-20; Acts 9:3-6,10-20; John 21:15-19; 1 John 3:16-18.

1. It is impossible for us to even imagine the depth of the love that caused Jesus to leave His glorious position in heaven and come to this earth. Why did He do it? What kind of an impact has He had on the human race?

Never can the cost of our redemption be realized until the redeemed shall stand with the Redeemer before the throne of God. Then as the glories of the eternal home burst upon our enraptured senses we shall remember that Jesus left all this for us, that He not only became an exile from the heavenly courts, but for us **took the risk of failure and eternal loss**. Then we shall cast our crowns at His feet, and raise the song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." Revelation 5:12.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 131.2.[†]

2. If we are to become more like Jesus, might that involve some sacrifice on our part? What kind of sacrifices could we make that would actually impact our world? There are probably not even words in our language to describe the kind of love expressed by God when sending His Son to this earth.

Philippians 2:5-11: ⁵The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had:

⁶ He always had the nature of God,

but he did not think that by force he should try to remain equal with God.

⁷ Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had,

and took the nature of a servant.

He became like a human being

and appeared in human likeness.

⁸ He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death—his death on the cross.

⁹ For this reason God raised him to the highest place above

and gave him the name that is greater than any other name.

¹⁰ And so, in honour of the name of Jesus

all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below

will fall on their knees,

¹¹ **and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord,**

to the glory of God the Father.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Philippians 2:5–11). New York: American Bible Society.[†]

3. Does that mean that some day, the Devil and all of his evil angels will bow down and admit

that God was right? That will happen after the millennium at the third coming of Christ after every eye sees that panorama of the great controversy. **The evidence about God will be so compelling that even Satan will temporarily be bowing down and admitting that everything that God has done was right.**

4. While we use the term *Son* for Jesus and the term *Father* for God the Father, **the Godhead including the Holy Spirit have been equal in every way for all eternity. Christ was in no way inferior to His Father.** So, would it have been any different if God the Father had come to this earth instead of the Son?

Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, veiling His glory and humbling Himself, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed in unfolding its record of His own condescending grace. In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Release** No. 1581—The Melbourne Camp Meeting; God's Great Gift of Jesus; (Letter 83, 1895, written November 18, 1895, from Armadale, Melbourne, Australia, to Edson White); *21MR** 393.1.[†] Compare *That I May Know Him* 338.4.

5. Even though Christ set aside His divinity and never exercised it on His own behalf while on this earth, He nevertheless was fully God. At any moment, He could have exercised His divine power.

In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. “He that hath the Son hath life.” 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer's assurance of eternal life.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 530.3.[†]

6. However, Jesus chose to empty Himself of all those attributes which He had in heaven. He exemplified to the entire universe the law of love that controls heaven and was willing to come down to our world and make that ultimate sacrifice.
7. By His life and His death, Jesus has given us a choice: (1) We can seek to follow His example and with the Holy Spirit's help live lives as close to His life as possible; or (2) We will die His death, the death that results from separation from God, the only Source of life.
8. What would it mean to have a human being living in the 21st century exemplify the self-sacrificing love that Jesus exhibited? Would people be attracted? Could we learn to serve as He served and minister as He ministered? What would that cost us? It cost Jesus everything! Won't heaven be worth any sacrifice we could possibly make on this earth? God has promised that the joys of service and of seeing souls converted to the truth will outweigh the sacrifices even today.
9. So, when was the last time you truly had to die to self for Christ's sake? Do we have to sacrifice, daily, in order to be truly Christian?
10. Try to imagine yourself with Peter, Andrew, James, and John fishing all night on the Sea of Galilee. As you come to shore in the morning ready to stretch out your nets for repair, if necessary, and drying, you see Jesus coming. Your life is about to be changed forever.

Matthew 4:18-22: ¹⁸ As Jesus walked along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw two brothers who were fishermen, Simon (called Peter) and his brother Andrew,

catching fish in the lake with a net. ¹⁹Jesus said to them, “Come with me, and I will teach you to catch people.” ²⁰At once they left their nets and went with him.

²¹ He went on and saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in their boat with their father Zebedee, getting their nets ready. Jesus called them, ²²and at once they left the boat and their father, and went with him.—*Good News Bible*.*

11. Why do you suppose these men, some of whom were married, were willing to drop everything and make the uncertain choice to follow Jesus? What did those four know about Jesus before that? They, along with Philip and Nathaniel, had been followers of John the Baptist about one and one-half years earlier when Jesus came to be baptized; they had followed Jesus off and on after that. But, we need to remember that while they thought that Jesus was possibly the Messiah, they believed that the Messiah was going to help them overthrow the Romans! They were hoping to be part of His government in doing that! That was based on their interpretation of a few prophecies in the Old Testament.
12. There are some hints in the Gospels to suggest that James and John may have been cousins of Jesus. What qualified those six men for service? Would Jesus make such a call to anyone in our day?

Jesus chose unlearned fishermen because they had not been schooled in the traditions and erroneous customs of their time. They were men of native ability, and they were humble and teachable,—men whom He could educate for His work. **In the common walks of life there is many a man [and woman] patiently treading the round of daily toil, unconscious that he possesses powers which, if called into action, would raise him to an equality with the world’s most honored men. The touch of a skillful hand is needed to arouse those dormant faculties. It was such men that Jesus called to be His colaborers; and He gave them the advantage of association with Himself. Never had the world’s great men such a teacher. When the disciples came forth from the Saviour’s training, they were no longer ignorant and uncultured. They had become like Him in mind and character, and men took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 250.1.^{††}

Think of all the things that Jesus did that made Him different from any other man?

13. A short time later, Jesus called Matthew, a tax collector, to follow Him.

Matthew 9:9: Jesus left that place, and as he walked along, he saw a tax collector, named Matthew, sitting in his office. He said to him, “Follow me.”

Matthew got up and followed him.—*Good News Bible*.*

14. Tax collectors were Jews who, for the sake of money, had agreed to work for Herod and the Roman Empire to collect taxes from their fellow Jews. They were among the most hated and despised people in the land. This should lead us to ask two questions: (1) Why would Jesus choose to call such a person to follow Him? And (2) Why would Matthew leave his lucrative business to follow Jesus? What does God ask us to give up in order to follow Him? Matthew soon prepared a feast for Jesus and invited many less-than-desirable people to attend.

15. Think of the story of Saul/Paul. He was raised as a devout Jew and a Pharisee. He was young, energetic, and committed. Then, he had that experience on the road to Damascus. He was on his way to arrest and kill Christians. What changed? Paul did not change his Sabbath; he did not change his diet; he did not change his belief in the Scriptures. What he changed was his picture of God!

Acts 9:3-6,10-20: ³ As Saul was coming near the city of Damascus, suddenly a light from the sky flashed round him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?”

[Notice that God regards all of us as if we were a part of His own body.]

⁵ “Who are you, Lord?” he asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you persecute,” the voice said. [Paul must have expected to be killed right then. Wouldn’t that have been fair payback?] ⁶ “But get up and go into the city, where you will be told what you must do.”...

¹⁰ There was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. He had a vision, in which the Lord said to him, “Ananias!”

“Here I am, Lord,” he answered.

¹¹ The Lord said to him, “Get ready and go to Straight Street, and at the house of Judas ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying, ¹²and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come in and place his hands on him so that he might see again.” [Ananias must have almost died of shock!]

¹³ Ananias answered, “Lord, many people have told me about this man and about all the terrible things he has done to your people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come to Damascus with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who worship you.”

¹⁵ **The Lord said to him, “Go, because I have chosen him to serve me, to make my name known to Gentiles and kings and to the people of Israel.**

¹⁶**And I myself will show him all that he must suffer for my sake.”**

¹⁷ So Ananias went, entered the house where Saul was, and placed his hands on him. “Brother Saul,” he said, “the Lord has sent me—Jesus himself, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here. He sent me so that you might see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸At once something like fish scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he was able to see again. He stood up and was baptized; ¹⁹and after he had eaten, his strength came back.

Saul stayed for a few days with the believers in Damascus. ²⁰He went straight to the synagogues and began to preach that Jesus was the Son of God.—Good News Bible.*†‡

16. Why would Jesus choose someone like Paul? Think of the other people He chose to work for Him: (1) Demoniacs, (2) the Samaritan woman, (3) a formerly demon-possessed prostitute, (4) a tax collector, (5) a group of Galilean fisherman, and (6) thousands of others. How did Jesus impact their lives? What did they do about it?
17. Paul never stopped testifying to his belief in Jesus. No doubt, he was testifying to the Roman executioners who led him out to be beheaded. But, one of the last things he wrote to his friend Timothy said:

2 Timothy 4:5-8: ⁵But you must keep control of yourself in all circumstances; endure suffering, do the work of a preacher of the Good News, and perform your whole duty as a servant of God.

⁶ As for me, the hour has come for me to be sacrificed; the time is here for me to leave this life. ⁷I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith. ⁸And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day—and not only to me, but to all those who wait with love for him to appear.—*Good News Bible*.*

18. Paul was so persuasive in explaining his Christianity that some members of Nero's household became Christians! (Philippians 4:22)

19. We have very limited knowledge of all the trials and troubles that Paul went through for Jesus. However, here is a very brief account of Paul:

2 Corinthians 11:25-30: ²⁵Three times I was whipped by the Romans; and once I was stoned. I have been in three shipwrecks, [That is not counting the shipwreck that we know about!] and once I spent 24 hours in the water. ²⁶In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger from fellow-Jews and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas, and dangers from false friends. ²⁷There has been work and toil; often I have gone without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty; I have often been without enough food, shelter, or clothing. ²⁸And not to mention other things, every day I am under the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹When someone is weak, then I feel weak too; when someone is led into sin, I am filled with distress.

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast about things that show how weak I am.—*Good News Bible*.*†

20. So, how has the love of God affected your life? Has it called you into action? Second Corinthians 5:14 (NKJV*) states, "For the love of Christ compels us." Commentators and other Bible translators have suggested that the love of God "leaves us no choice." What would that mean to you?

21. As we know, Peter's behavior in the courtyard of Annas and Caiaphas while Jesus was on trial was shameful and disgusting. (John 18:17,25,27) But, Jesus had not given up on Peter. He turned and looked straight at Peter just as he made his worst denial; and Peter saw Him.

While the degrading oaths were fresh upon Peter's lips, and the shrill [713] crowing of the cock was still ringing in his ears, the Saviour turned from the frowning judges, and looked full upon His poor disciple. At the same time Peter's eyes were drawn to his Master. In that gentle countenance he read deep pity and sorrow, but there was no anger there....

He [Peter] remembered His [Jesus's] solemn charge, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Matthew 26:41. He witnessed again the scene in the judgment hall. It was torture to his bleeding heart to know that he had added the heaviest burden to the Saviour's humiliation and grief. On the very spot where Jesus had poured out His soul in agony to His Father, Peter fell upon his face, and wished that he might die.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of*

22. So, just as Peter had denied his Lord three times, later, Jesus called for him to reassert his love three times.
23. Back in Galilee after the resurrection, some of the disciples came together; Peter suggested that they go fishing. All night they worked and caught nothing! As they were coming to shore, a Man called to them from the shore and asked, “Have you caught anything?” And they had to admit that they had nothing. Then, that Person, Jesus, told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat, closer to the shore, where, as fishermen, they did not expect to find any fish. Suddenly, their nets were so full that they were breaking! Later, Jesus sought to encourage Peter and give him a sense of forgiveness, acceptance, and purpose. He began to question Peter. In His first two questions, He asked Peter, “Do you love (*agape*) me?” Jesus was asking from Peter a divine, completely unselfish, kind of love. And Peter responded each time by saying, “I love (*Phileo*) you,” that is, I have a wonderful human love for you. And finally, Jesus asked, “Do you really *phileo* me?”

It seems as if Jesus is saying this—“Peter, I know that your love for Me flows through the weak channels of your humanity. You have denied Me three times, but I forgive you. My grace is yours. Begin where you are. Go to work for Me, and your love for Me will grow and expand into a deep divine love for others.” Peter failed Jesus at a very critical moment in Christ’s life; yet, that did not disqualify Peter from serving. Jesus sent a forgiven, changed Peter out to work for Him.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 173.

24. Try to imagine how you would feel if Jesus Himself told you that, someday, you would be crucified! At that point, the cross had become a very real truth for them.
25. But, Jesus knew that Peter would take His word seriously and become a changed man. He would call thousands to repentance and baptism, even in Jerusalem itself.
26. John recognized this love also. Often, Peter and John worked together.

1 John 3:16-18: ¹⁶This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for our brothers and sisters! ¹⁷Rich people who see a brother or sister in need, yet close their hearts against them, cannot claim that they love God. ¹⁸My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action.—*Good News Bible.**

27. Jesus assures us that life’s greatest joy and lasting happiness come when we are fulfilling the meaning of our existence by glorifying God by the way we live and share His love and truth with the world. Do we really believe that? Jesus is offering us an eternal reward if we will live lives after the pattern of His life.
28. So, what should the church be doing in the 21st century to follow up on all we have studied this quarter?

Those who have the spiritual oversight of the church should devise ways and means by which an opportunity may be given to every member of the church to act some part in God’s work. [Does God really expect every church member to serve?] Too often in the past this has not been done. Plans have not been clearly laid and fully carried out whereby the talents of all might be employed in active service. There are but few who realize how

much has been lost because of this.

The leaders in God's cause, as wise generals, are to lay plans for advance moves all along the line. **In their planning they are to give special study to the work that [117] can be done by the laity for their friends and neighbors. The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.**

The salvation of sinners requires earnest, personal labor. We are to bear to them the word of life, not to wait for them to come to us. Oh, that I could speak words to men and women that would arouse them to diligent action! The moments now granted to us are few. We are standing upon the very borders of the eternal world. We have no time to lose. Every moment is golden and altogether too precious to be devoted merely to self-serving. Who will seek God earnestly and from Him draw strength and grace to be His faithful workers in the missionary field?

Development of Talent in the Churches

In every church there is talent, which, with the right kind of labor, might be developed to become a great help in this work. That which is needed now for the upbuilding of our churches is the nice work of wise laborers to discern and develop talent in the church—talent that can be educated for the Master's use. There should be a well-organized plan for the employment of workers to go into all our churches, large and small, to instruct the members how to labor for the upbuilding of the church and also for unbelievers. It is training, education, that is needed. Those who labor in visiting the churches should give the brethren and sisters instruction in practical methods of doing missionary work.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 9, 116.3-117.2 (1909).[†] Compare *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, November 4, 1908, par. 8-12.

29. Have you ever been a member of a church where the pastor considered it his greatest work to get every member active in working for God? Are we willing to accept the challenge of stepping out of our comfort zones and reaching out to try to tell others about Jesus? What would happen if even a single Sabbath school class managed to do that?
30. God is offering us the highest privilege that is imaginable—fellowship with Himself in the work of finishing the gospel. Are we prepared to take Christ's yoke? Would anything else really matter if we did that?
31. The New Testament church was on fire for God. And the result was that almost every one of them was witnessing. Try to imagine the impact they had on the people of Jerusalem in those next few days and months! There was no church organization at that point. There will be no official church organization at the end of time. Think of what was accomplished by deacons like Stephen and Philip.
32. If Jesus was willing to give up all that He enjoyed as the King of heaven and come down and die a sacrificial death for us, how should we respond?
33. We live in a world where many groups are clamoring for their rights. People are marching and fighting and destroying public property, supposedly in order to gain their rights. But, what are Christians supposed to be doing?

“Christians give up claims of equality and serve one another in love and humility to prevent the spirit of competition from flaring up. Through this act of self-lowering, Christians also distinguish themselves from the people of the world, who seek their rights and engage in struggles to achieve equality with their peers and superiors.”—(Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), p. 1552.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 172].[‡]

Jesus did not contend for His rights. Often His work was made unnecessarily severe because He was willing and uncomplaining. Yet He did not fail nor become discouraged. He lived above these difficulties, as if in the light of God’s countenance. He did not retaliate when roughly used, but bore insult patiently.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 89.4.[†]

34. Jesus went from the highest possible position in the universe to the lowest possible position, dying on the cross. And He did that for us, to show us what divine love really means.
35. At what age did Jesus begin to recognize who He really was? He learned things from His mother’s knee that He Himself had spoken to Moses. What did Mary say to Him? What insights do you think Jesus gained on that first Passover at the age of 12 when He went to Jerusalem?

The spirit of unselfish labor for others gives depth, stability, and Christlike loveliness to the character, and brings peace and happiness to its possessor. The aspirations are elevated. There is no room for sloth or selfishness. Those who thus exercise the Christian graces will grow and will become strong to work for God. They will have clear spiritual perceptions, a steady, growing faith, and an increased power in prayer. The Spirit of God, moving upon their spirit, calls forth the sacred harmonies of the soul in answer to the divine touch. Those who thus devote themselves to unselfish effort for the good of others are most surely working out their own salvation.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 80.2.

36. Are we prepared—as it has been suggested in our lessons for this quarter—to pray each morning, asking God to give us opportunities for witnessing to others?

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** 347.3.[†]

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