

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

Spirit-Empowered Witnessing

Lesson #5 for August 1, 2020

Scriptures: John 15:26-27; Acts 2:41-42; 4:31; 8:4; 17:33-34; 18:8; Hebrews 4:12.

1. Have you ever been asked to do something that you really believed was impossible? How did you respond? Imagine Jesus telling His eleven remaining disciples that they were to carry the gospel to the entire world! What was not mentioned there is that Jesus was going to give them an extraordinary Helper to accomplish the task. The Holy Spirit would be their motivation and their Assistant. The Holy Spirit was to make their witness effective in everything they did. Later, it was reported in Acts 17:6 that these early believers “turned the world upside down.” (NKJV*) That was a statement by one of their enemies! Even later, Paul said that the gospel was “preached to every creature under heaven.” (Colossians 1:23, NKJV*) So, how was all that accomplished?
2. With the right message and the right Spirit—the Holy Spirit—working with us, could we “turn the world upside down” in our day? There is certainly no hesitancy on His part! And He has the power to get the job done! Is the Holy Spirit quietly doing that even today?
3. We should constantly keep in mind the fact that God could send angels to appear as human beings and do the job without our help. But, that is not God’s plan. We need the experience of participating with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in spreading the gospel. So, They wait for us to do our small, but essential, part.
4. Have you ever had the experience of actually feeling the activity of the Holy Spirit as you sought to witness to someone? Remember that the Holy Spirit would love to reach out to every single person on this earth and convert them. He prepares people’s hearts even before we speak to them. Jesus Himself promised:
John 15:26-27: ²⁶ “The Helper will come—the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send him to you from the Father, and he will speak about me. ²⁷And you, too, will speak about me, because you have been with me from the very beginning.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., John 15:26–27). New York: American Bible Society.
John 16:8: “And when he comes, he will prove to the people of the world that they are wrong about sin and about what is right and about God’s judgement.”—*Good News Bible*.*
5. Remember that the Holy Spirit’s job is to direct us in making known to other human beings the truth about God and about Jesus Christ. The good news is about Them, not about us!
6. So, how does that cooperative effort actually work? Do we need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see the possibilities for witnessing? Shouldn’t we be praying for that every day? **So, if we are not witnessing, does that mean that we are not fully Christian?**
7. What is it that the Holy Spirit would like us to most clearly understand and teach to others? Seventh-day Adventists have always claimed that the three angels’ messages are our messages to the world in the final days of this earth’s history. What is it that we can say about the three angels’ messages that is unique? In order to correctly represent the three angels’ messages, we must have a good understanding of the great controversy in the context of all of Scripture. And if we try to witness without being as prepared as we can be,

will the Holy Spirit still help us?

8. If you read through the book of Acts and consider all the wonderful things that it describes, you might agree with many scholars who have called it, not the *Acts of the Apostles*, but the ***Acts of the Holy Spirit***.

9. So, what did the Holy Spirit do for the apostles that got them started on this work?

“There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” [Acts 2:5] During the dispersion the Jews had been scattered to almost every part of the inhabited world, and in their exile they had learned to speak various languages. Many of these Jews were on this occasion in Jerusalem, attending the religious festivals then in progress. Every known tongue was represented by those assembled. This diversity of languages would have been a great hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel; God therefore in a miraculous manner supplied the deficiency of the apostles. **The Holy Spirit did for them that which they could not have accomplished for themselves in a lifetime. They could now proclaim the truths of the gospel abroad, speaking with accuracy the languages of those for whom they were laboring. This miraculous gift was a strong evidence to the world that their commission bore the signet of Heaven. From this time forth the language of the disciples was pure, simple, and accurate, whether they spoke in their native tongue or in a foreign language.**—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 39.2-40.0.^{†‡}

10. There can be no doubt that the Holy Spirit was with them. Could this happen in our day?

11. Read Acts 2:41-42; 4:4,31; 5:14,42; 6:7; 15:5; and 16:5. So, where did they go to baptize people? Who prepared all that food? Were there a lot of Christian homes in Jerusalem itself? Were they baptizing in the pool of Siloam which was the public water supply?

12. Were there other times when the Holy Spirit came down just as He had at Pentecost? When Peter came back to Jerusalem after his experience with Cornelius and his family, he was immediately called to task for entering into the home of a Gentile and eating with them. So, Peter recounted the story. So that there could be no questioning about the truthfulness of the account, Peter had six witnesses from the church in Joppa to confirm his story. And then what happened?

Acts 11:15-18: ¹⁵ “And when I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came down on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷It is clear that God gave those Gentiles the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; who was I, then, to try to stop God!”

¹⁸ **When they [the church leaders in Jerusalem] heard this, they stopped their criticism and praised God, saying, “Then God has given to the Gentiles also the opportunity to repent and live!”**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡}

13. Did Cornelius and his family begin to spread the gospel as the disciples were doing?

Acts 19:1-7: While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul travelled through the interior of the province and arrived in Ephesus. There he found some disciples ²and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?”

“We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit,” they answered.

³ “Well, then, what kind of baptism did you receive?” Paul asked.

“The baptism of John,” they answered.

⁴ Paul said, “The baptism of John was for those who turned from their sins; and he told the people of Israel to believe in the one who was coming after him—that is, in Jesus.”

⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

⁶ **Paul placed his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them; they spoke in strange tongues and also proclaimed God’s message.**

⁷ **They were about twelve men in all.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

14. Do we know exactly how and when Paul received the Holy Spirit? Was it on the road to Damascus? Or, was it later, out in the desert as he studied?
15. We know that it was the custom in Bible times not to count everyone who came to a gathering; instead, only to count the men. That seems to have been true when counting the number of baptisms in Acts 2:41 and 4:4 as well. That was an enormous number of people who joined the church in a relatively short period of time. Acts 5:14 suggests that many more also joined. How did the Sanhedrin reply to that?
16. It is important to notice another aspect of this explosive growth in the early Christian church: Some really important stories involved single individuals such as Lydia, the Philippian jailer and his family, the demon-possessed slave girl in Philippi, the Ethiopian eunuch, etc. Why do you suppose God went to such extraordinary lengths to reach a single individual such as He did for the Ethiopian eunuch?
17. Jewish tradition required that if there were at least 10 families in a given town, village, or city, they had to establish a synagogue. This idea was apparently carried over to Christian thinking and would have required many gathering places for Christians to come together. We know almost nothing about those gathering places if they existed at all. We do know that they often met in people’s homes. The very early Christian groups met in the temple courtyard in Jerusalem! Imagine the explosive growth of that Christian group meeting right under the noses of the Sanhedrin!
18. Read Acts 7:55; 8:29; 11:15; 15:28-29; and 16:6-10. What different things did the Holy Spirit do on those occasions to help in the spreading of the gospel? Think of Stephen, looking up to heaven as he was being stoned and seeing Jesus standing at the right side of God! Remember how Philip was guided miraculously to the carriage of the Ethiopian eunuch. Look what God did to get Peter to reach out to Cornelius and his family.
19. But, you can be sure that even in those days, the Devil was so exasperated because of the success of the life and even the death of Jesus that he was determined to do everything he could to prevent that new church from getting started or flourishing. At the first “general conference session” mentioned in Acts 15, they concluded with certain interesting rules:
Acts 15:28-29: ²⁸ “The Holy Spirit and we have agreed not to put any other burden on you besides **these necessary rules:** ²⁹eat no food that has been offered to idols; eat no blood; eat no animal that has been strangled; and keep yourselves from sexual immorality. You will do well if you take care not to do these things. With our best wishes.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

20. Why were these rules “necessary”? It was not for salvation; it was so that the Jews would consent to even get close to or sit beside the Gentiles including in worship or at meals.
21. Does the Holy Spirit ever stop people from witnessing?

Acts 16:6-10: ⁶ They travelled through the region of Phrygia and Galatia because **the Holy Spirit did not let them preach the message in the province of Asia.** ⁷When they reached the border of Mysia, they tried to go into the province of Bithynia, but **the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.** ⁸So they travelled right on through Mysia and went to Troas. ⁹That night Paul had a vision in which he saw a Macedonian standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us!” ¹⁰As soon as Paul had this vision, **we** got ready to leave for Macedonia, because **we** decided that God had called **us** to preach the Good News to the people there.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

22. How do you suppose the Holy Spirit was actually guiding Paul on those occasions? How did He prevent Paul from going into the province of Asia and, later, the province of Bithynia? What we know is that Paul traveled to the city of Troas. It was there that he met Dr. Luke. Dr. Luke joined Paul’s group at that point and followed Paul for most of the rest of Paul’s life. As a result of these few stories that we have just mentioned, the Christian message was taken to the continent of Africa and to the continent of Europe.
23. We may not be given the responsibility of carrying the gospel to new continents for the first time; but, in spreading the gospel, the power of the Holy Spirit is, nonetheless, effective in our day. Try to imagine how exciting it would be if everyone in our Sabbath school class was out witnessing in some way every week and could come back with marvelous stories of the work of the Holy Spirit on the following Sabbath. Do you think that could happen?
24. In each of these stories, it is important to notice that the message that was carried to the new believers was from God’s Word. This was not a matter of individuals telling about some unusual things that happened to them as people; they were carrying the Spirit-inspired Word and sharing it with those who needed to hear it.
25. So, what is the most important work of the Holy Spirit? There is no question that the most important work of the Holy Spirit in the history of our world has been the giving of our Bible to the various authors as well as the preservation of it down through the generations, with the copying and translation being done accurately. As a result, today, we have God’s Word to hold in our hands. It was all done under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:4,31: ⁴But many who heard the message believed; and the number of men grew to about 5,000.... 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*.^{*†}

Acts 8:4: The believers who were scattered went everywhere, preaching the message.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

Acts 11:19-26: ¹⁹ Some of the believers who were scattered by the persecution which took place when Stephen was killed went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, telling the message to Jews only. ²⁰**But other believers, who were from Cyprus and Cyrene [Libya], went to Antioch and proclaimed the message to Gentiles also, telling them the Good News about the Lord Jesus.** ²¹The Lord’s power was with them, and a great number of

people believed and turned to the Lord.

²² The news about this reached the church in Jerusalem, so they sent **Barnabas** to Antioch. ²³When he arrived and saw how God had blessed the people, he was glad and urged them all to be faithful and true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and many people were brought to the Lord.

²⁵ Then **Barnabas** went to Tarsus to look for **Saul**. ²⁶When he found him, he took him to Antioch, and for a whole year the two met with the people of the church and taught a large group. **It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.**—*Good News Bible*.*††

26. Christians were being mocked for following a “dead Man”! With derision, they were asked how He could help them since He was dead.

Acts 18:24-25: ²⁴ At that time a Jew named Apollos, who had been born in Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent speaker and had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord, and with great enthusiasm he proclaimed and taught correctly the facts about Jesus. However, he knew only the baptism of John.—*Good News Bible*.*

27. Has the Holy Spirit and the witness of Scripture had a significant impact on your life? What has it done?

2 Peter 1:21: For no prophetic message ever came just from human will, but people were under the control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God.—*Good News Bible*.*

Hebrews 4:12: The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart.—*Good News Bible*.*

28. Recognizing the incredible challenges that the early church faced, the Holy Spirit did marvelous things as recorded in the book of Acts. Think of the cultural biases that He overcame, transforming lives and changing deeply ingrained habits. Meanwhile, He was guiding the teaching of new people all the time about the wonderful story of Jesus. We need to notice that the Holy Spirit meets people where they are; but, He does not leave them there. He transforms people’s lives.

29. Read Acts 16:11-15,23-34; 17:33-34; 18:8. What can and should we learn from these experiences of conversion in which Paul impacted the lives of people in very different social standings—from the elite of the Areopagus to the leaders of synagogues. Think of the people specifically mentioned: Lydia, a prosperous Jewish businesswoman; the Philippian jailer, a middle-class Roman civil servant; Dionysius, the Areopagite; and others.

30. You may look around in your society and your culture and feel like it would be incredibly difficult to reach out to someone and see their life changed. Are you saying that this is beyond the Holy Spirit’s ability? Remember that Christ died for everyone, not just for a small group of so-called Christians. Doesn’t everyone deserve the right to hear about that marvelous sacrifice? Notice what Ellen White wrote about the work of the Holy Spirit.

The lapse of time has wrought no change in Christ’s parting promise to send

the Holy Spirit as His representative. It is not because of any restriction on the part of God that the riches of His grace do not flow earthward to men. **If the fulfillment of the promise is not seen as it might be, it is because the promise is not appreciated as it should be. If all were willing, all would be filled with the Spirit.** Wherever the need of the Holy Spirit is a matter little thought of, there is seen spiritual drought, spiritual darkness, spiritual declension and death. Whenever minor matters occupy the attention, the divine power which is necessary for the growth and prosperity of the church, and which would bring all other blessings in its train, is lacking, though offered in infinite plenitude.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 50.1.†

Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church....

The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people....

Only to those who wait humbly upon God, who watch for His guidance and grace, is the Spirit given. The power of God awaits their demand and reception. This promised blessing, claimed by faith, brings all other blessings in its train.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages 671.2-672.1.†**

31. What could you as an individual Christian and Seventh-day Adventist do to spread the truth about God? You could pass out a piece of literature. You could give a Bible study following lessons that have been prepared in advance. You could participate with others in a group to conduct an evangelistic effort. The Holy Spirit has many other ways in which you could work with Him if you just give Him an opportunity. Shouldn't each of us ask for it every day?
32. Can you think of a time when the Holy Spirit opened to your mind such an opportunity? What were the results? If so, share it with your Sabbath school class. What prevents you from sharing your faith? Are you timid? Are you afraid? Do you feel you are too ignorant? Remember that if you are witnessing, the Holy Spirit will be your Guide.
33. Spreading the gospel to people around the world is God's number one mission to accomplish before Jesus can come again. (See Matthew 24:14.) And when someone decides to leave his evil ways and become a Christian, remember that Luke 15:7,10 tell us there is rejoicing in heaven! Wouldn't you like to make heaven rejoice?
34. To better understand exactly what Christ intended for the Holy Spirit to do, read John 14-16 which explains a portion of the events that happened in the upper room before Jesus and His disciples went out to the Garden of Gethsemane.
35. We must always remember that the work of converting souls is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not our work! We are just cooperating. We are not the main force in that activity.
36. Think about what you know about the disciples that Jesus chose to follow Him. When they

joined Jesus, they thought they would become members of His royal cabinet to rule the Jews from Jerusalem. But, He was choosing them to spread the gospel to the world and to die as martyrs! Were they qualified for that work? Were they highly educated?

37. How did Jesus choose His disciples? What kind of men were they?

The first thing to be learned by all who would become workers together with God is the lesson of self-distrust; then they are prepared to have imparted to them the character of Christ. This is not to be gained through education in the most scientific schools. It is the fruit of wisdom that is obtained from the divine Teacher alone.

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 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 collaborators; 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. [Acts 4:13]—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 249.4-250.1.[†]

38. Paul, who joined them after the stoning of Stephen, was by far the best educated among them. But, what really mattered in their case was that they gathered together, they prayed, they confessed their sins and faults to each other, and they repented of their selfish attitudes; then, barriers were broken down. And then, they were prepared for Pentecost.

39. But, notice something very interesting.

Acts 1:12-15: ¹²Then the apostles went back to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is about a kilometre away from the city. ¹³They entered the city and went up to the **room** where they were staying: Peter, John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Patriot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴They gathered frequently to pray as a group, **together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.**

¹⁵ A few days later there was a meeting of the believers, about 120 in all, and Peter stood up to speak.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Were these the ones who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?][†]

40. One of the puzzling questions about what happened on the day of Pentecost is where could they possibly have gathered in a room or space large enough to accommodate thousands of people? And why did the brothers and mother of Jesus suddenly join the group? Were they accepted by the disciples?

41. If you had been one of those disciples at that point in time, try to imagine how you would have told the story of Jesus.

The witness of the apostles was presented, not in their own strength, but in a power they could never have engendered within themselves. Theirs was

the energizing of the Divine Spirit.—Article on Acts 4:33. In F. D. Nichol (Ed.), *SDA Bible Commentary*,* vol. 6, 173.

42. When the disciples finally left Jerusalem and began to spread out, they went from Jerusalem to Western Europe and as far east as India. They went down into Africa and up at least as far north as northern Turkey. **Try to imagine how it would have impacted the people in all those different areas to have a stranger show up and be able to speak perfectly in the people's language! And churches were "planted" everywhere they went.**
43. In fact, through a dream, Paul was led to carry the gospel into Europe for the first time. It is possible that some of the Jews who learned about Christianity at Pentecost or some later occasion at Jerusalem may have been already starting up churches in Rome and other such places. But, Paul specifically said that he wanted to start churches in places where the gospel had not yet been preached. Why do you suppose he made that choice? Did he feel that considering what he had done to the church in the early days, he needed to work in the most challenging areas to bring people to the truth?
44. Don't you wish that you had the stories of the evangelistic efforts of all the other disciples and apostles? Were they as remarkable as the stories of Paul which we have preserved for us in the Bible including in the book of Acts? Is there any reason to think that the Holy Spirit has lost His ambition, motivation, or power to witness?
45. Do you really believe that if you opened the door and began to witness to someone that the Holy Spirit would stand with you? What barriers do you perceive that might keep you from witnessing? Have you ever tried to witness without requesting the special help of the Holy Spirit? Do you think that the Holy Spirit would be willing to use you?

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