

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

Developing a Winning Attitude

Lesson #9 for August 29, 2020

Scriptures: John 4:27-30,39-42; Matthew 15:21-28; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4; Romans 15:7; Ephesians 4:32; 1 Peter 3:15.

1. Have you ever considered the life of Jesus and noticed who the people were that He encouraged versus the people He condemned? Why do you think it is that all the people who thought they were righteous ended up getting His condemnation while many who were “obviously sinners” received His blessing? Does it seem like He was mixed up? And what does it say to you that the Judge of the entire universe was so incredibly forgiving? He is the same Judge who, one day, will stand, speaking on our behalf and answering Satan’s accusations against us. (See Zechariah 3:1-5.)
2. Do any of us have the attitude of the Pharisees? Why would we think like that? Do we sometimes suggest that we “have the truth”? Does that make us better? Or, just more in debt to those who have not yet received the truth?
3. Can you think of any place in the Bible where Jesus exhibited pride? Or, superiority? Was He bragging in John 8 when He essentially said to the Sanhedrin—three times—“I am God”? (John 8:24,28,58) Think of the responses of people who received His forgiveness. The former demon-possessed prostitute, Mary, ended up being one of His most faithful followers. The murderer, Saul, ended up being Paul, His most ambitious and successful evangelist. The two former demoniacs from Gadara, the first Gentile missionaries, ended up bringing an entire region of people to hear Jesus, and the masses were fed by Him.
4. If God Himself in human form did not exhibit pride or superiority, how would we dare to do so? Why do you think the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been so much more successful in reaching out to the poor and disadvantaged in our world than we have at reaching the rich and the powerful? Should we be looking for ways to reach out to the more prosperous members of society? Or, should we just continue to focus on the poor? Why are the poor more willing to listen to the gospel message? Why is our church growing so much faster in Africa and some parts of Asia and South America than it is in North America or Europe where Protestantism started?
5. So, how can we develop the kind of attitude that Jesus had?
6. Read John 4:27-42. With His divine insight guided by His Father, Jesus knew perfectly well the full history of that woman that He met at the well of Sychar. And yet, look at that discussion with her. He revealed something to her that He probably had not yet even revealed to His disciples! And what was the result? Jesus spent two days in her village, teaching and preaching and healing Samaritans. How do you think the disciples felt about ministering to the Samaritans? The animosity between Jews and Samaritans is well known; it went back to 700 B.C. But, Jesus paid no attention to those traditional animosities.
7. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have often bragged that we are the fastest growing major church in the world. But, Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Latter Day Saints (Mormons) are also growing very quickly. Do we have anything that they do not? Is it clear in your mind what that might be? Do we know God better because of our understanding of the great controversy?
8. It is well-known that when traveling from Jerusalem to Galilee, Jews customarily went down

into the Jordan Valley, crossed the river near Jericho, traveled up on the east side of the Jordan River through the Gentile territory of Perea, and then, crossed the Jordan River again as they were going into Galilee—all just to avoid going through Samaria.

9. So, why does John 4:4 (NKJV*) say that “He [Jesus] **needed** to go through Samaria”?^{††} Is it that the Holy Spirit knew that there was a group of people ready to listen to His teaching and preaching? Did He know their hearts would be turned to God? Are we able to see possibilities in people that others do not? Could that happen to one of us today?

When Jesus sat down to rest at Jacob’s well, He had come from Judea, where His ministry had produced little fruit. He had been rejected by the priests and rabbis, and even the people who professed to be His disciples had failed of perceiving His divine character. He was faint and weary; yet He did not neglect the opportunity of speaking to one woman, though she was a stranger, an alien from Israel, and living in open sin....

This woman represents the working of a practical faith in Christ. Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 194.3-195.2.

Though He was a Jew, Jesus mingled freely with the Samaritans, setting at nought the Pharisaic customs of His nation. In face of their prejudices He accepted the hospitality of this despised people. He slept with them under their roofs, ate with them at their tables—partaking of the food prepared and served by their hands—taught in their streets, and treated them with the utmost kindness and courtesy. And while He drew their hearts to Him by the tie of human sympathy, His divine grace brought to them the salvation which the Jews rejected.—Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up** 183.3.

The Saviour was above all prejudice of nation or people; he was willing to extend the blessings and privileges of the Jews to all who would accept the light which he came to the world to bring. [This could be the answer to every form of racism or prejudice.] It caused him great joy to behold even one soul reaching out to him from the night of spiritual blindness. **That which Jesus had withheld from the Jews and enjoined upon his disciples to keep secret, was distinctly opened before the inquiring woman of Samaria; for He who knew all things perceived that she would make a right use of her knowledge and be the means of leading others to the true faith.**—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*,* vol. 2, 147.1.^{††}

10. When talking with the woman of Samaria, Jesus could very easily have fallen into the trap of arguing about Jewish religious practices versus Samaritan religious practices. He did not. We should not allow ourselves, especially as we are first speaking of spiritual things with someone, to fall in the trap of arguing with people about their beliefs versus our beliefs. Our job is to present Jesus Christ to them.
11. The disciples of Jesus saw in that woman only a woman burdened with sin and a Samaritan from whom they needed to keep a safe distance. But, Jesus recognized—with the assistance of the Holy Spirit—receptivity in her heart.

12. So, why do you think Jesus chose to lead His disciples through Samaria instead of taking them down across the Jordan and up through Perea as most of the Jews were accustomed to doing? Did He know in advance that there was a woman that He would meet by the well at Sychar and what the result would be?

13. Consider a later story:

Acts 8:4-5,14: ⁴ The believers who were scattered went everywhere, preaching the message. ⁵ Philip went to the principal city in Samaria and preached the Messiah to the people there.... ¹⁴ The apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had received the word of God, so they sent Peter and John to them.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Acts 8:4-5,14). New York: American Bible Society.

14. Do you think Philip would have gone to Samaria if Jesus had not opened the door earlier?

15. When we reach out to people, even some who appear to be very far from the kingdom of heaven, should we expect an immediate response? Often, after sowing seed, it may be a long time before any harvest is reaped.

16. Are people naturally attracted to you? Are you ever inclined to be harsh? Critical? Or, unfriendly? Do we ever turn people away, even unintentionally, by our attitudes?

John 15:15: “I do not call you servants any longer, because servants do not know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.”—*Good News Bible.**

17. If God is willing to accept us—sinful as we are and so far removed from the Garden of Eden—and still wants to call us His friends, how could we ever feel like some other human being was too low for us to be his/her friend? Christianity should be a participatory religion.

18. Do you criticize your friends for their weaknesses and their mistakes? How long would they remain your friends if you did that? Or, do we tend to accept our friends even when they make mistakes?

19. Look at this story from the life of Jesus.

Matthew 15:21-28: ²¹ Jesus left that place and went off to the territory near the cities of Tyre and Sidon. [He had been rejected in Judea and Galilee.] ²² A Canaanite woman who lived in that region came to him. “Son of David!” she cried out. “Have mercy on me, sir! My daughter has a demon and is in a terrible condition.”

²³ But Jesus did not say a word to her. His disciples came to him and begged him, “Send her away! She is following us and making all this noise!”

²⁴ Then Jesus replied, “I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the people of Israel.”

²⁵ At this the woman came and fell at his feet. “Help me, sir!” she said.

²⁶ Jesus answered, “It isn’t right to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

²⁷ “That’s true, sir,” she answered; “but even the dogs eat the leftovers that fall from their masters’ table.”

²⁸ So Jesus answered her, “You are a woman of great faith! What you want will be done for you.” And at that very moment her daughter was healed.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

20. The ancient Canaanites worshiped heathen deities such as Baal, El, Asherah, and Astarte. Those were fertility cult deities. Worshiping them was supposed to give one better crops and cause one’s animals to have more young. There is some evidence to suggest that they even offered human sacrifices as a part of their religious services. (See 2 Kings 17.)
21. How do you suppose the disciples would have described that Canaanite woman before she met Jesus? Wouldn’t she have been considered an outcast from God? Untouchable and unwinnable? How do you suppose their attitudes changed after that encounter with Jesus?
22. Did Jesus’s response to that woman sound like discrimination? But, Jesus knew about her faith and was only testing her so that He could demonstrate what a wonderful faith it was.

Jesus agreed with people where He could, accepted them where they were, and affirmed them when He was able. He developed caring relationships with others, and it was in the context of these relationships that He planted the seeds of faith and shared divine truths.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} 121.[†]

23. Consider the story of the Mary Magdalene who poured that perfume on Jesus.

Mark 14:6-9: ⁶ But Jesus said, “Leave her alone! Why are you bothering her? She has done a fine and beautiful thing for me. ⁷You will always have poor people with you, and any time you want to, you can help them. But you will not always have me. ⁸She did what she could; she poured perfume on my body to prepare it ahead of time for burial. ⁹Now, I assure you that wherever the gospel is preached all over the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*} [See also Luke 8:1-3.][†]

24. In these two stories, we have a few bits of information about two very different women. In Matthew 15, the woman was a Canaanite. She was a descendant of those people of Canaan who were supposed to have been driven out or destroyed when the children of Israel entered in the days of Joshua in about 1400 B.C.! Did Jesus turn to her and say, “You weren’t even supposed to be born”? At first, Jesus treated the Canaanite woman in the very way that Jews normally would have treated her. Thus, He gave His disciples a chance to see the extreme contrast between their normal behavior and what God expected of them. It was an example of how they would be expected to relate to other foreigners after their experience at Pentecost.
25. The woman who anointed Jesus’s feet at that feast one week before His crucifixion was Mary Magdalene.

When Mary anointed the Saviour’s feet, Judas manifested his covetous disposition.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*^{*} 720.2.[†]

Jesus in his mercy had pardoned the sins of Mary, which had been many and grievous, and her heart was full of love for her Saviour. She had often heard him speak of his approaching death, and she was grieved that he should meet so cruel a fate. **At great personal sacrifice she had purchased an alabaster box of precious ointment with which to anoint the body of Jesus at his death. But she now heard many express an**

opinion that he would be elevated to kingly authority when he went to Jerusalem, and she was only too ready to believe that it would be so. She rejoiced that her Saviour would no longer be despised and rejected, and obliged to flee for his life. In her love and gratitude she wished to be the first to do him honor, and, seeking to avoid observation, anointed his head and feet with the precious ointment, and then wiped his feet with her long, flowing hair.—Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*,* vol. 2, 375.1.† [See John 12:3.]‡

26. What can we learn about the attitude of Jesus toward sinners from His interactions with these two women?
27. Friendship alone does not win people to Christ. It is certainly the right starting place; but, our just having friends who are in the world does not attract them to Jesus unless we find ways to speak on His behalf. Should we ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in finding opportunities to introduce the subject of Jesus to people? Are we prepared to tell the good news to anyone who asks us? (1 Peter 3:15)
28. In the past, some Seventh-day Adventists have felt so superior because of “having the truth” and “keeping the Sabbath” that when they have opportunities to speak to those who are not Adventists, they have launched into a diatribe against those who are not meeting their standards! How sad!
29. Notice, these descriptions of the way Jesus—and later Paul, Silas, and Timothy—took on such a task.

Ephesians 4:15: Instead, **by speaking the truth in a spirit of love**, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head.—*Good News Bible*.*†

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4: ¹ From Paul, Silas, and Timothy—

To the people of the church in Thessalonica, who **belong to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:**

² May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

³ Our brothers and sisters, we must thank God at all times for you. It is right for us to do so, because **your faith is growing so much and the love each of you has for the others is becoming greater.** ⁴That is why we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God. We boast about **the way you continue to endure and believe** through all the persecutions and sufferings you are experiencing.—*Good News Bible*.*†

30. But, are we just supposed to ignore people’s sins? Notice these incredible words from Ellen White.

If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful [full of pity], there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 9, 189.4.‡

31. What would happen to a Sabbath school class or church group that made an intentional effort to exhibit kindness, courtesy, tender-heartedness, and pity or mercy to all with whom they come into contact? With all whom they associate? Would people actually try to crowd into that Sabbath school class or church? See John 13:34-35.

32. So, what is the basic principle upon which we are to accept sinners?

Romans 15:7: Accept one another, then, for the glory of God, as **Christ has accepted you.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Ephesians 4:32: Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as **God has forgiven you through Christ.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

33. If God has forgiven us despite all our foibles and mistakes, how can we criticize other sinners? Recognizing the graciousness with which Christ has accepted us should make us eager to extend that kind of acceptance and grace to others.

34. As faithful Seventh-day Adventists, we may feel that we are not hiding any secret sins! However, what sins are most offensive to God?

God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation, as well as in that of man; but however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God. Man's judgment is partial, imperfect; but God estimates all things as they really are. The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while **pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God; for they are contrary to the benevolence of His character**, to that unselfish love which is the very atmosphere of the unfallen universe. He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; **but pride feels no need**, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 30.1.[†]

35. Do any of us have any pride? Selfishness? Or, covetousness?

36. Read Romans 5:6-11. This should eliminate all objections that we might have in accepting others!

Jesus's attitude was not: "Do whatever you please. It's all right. I still accept you." His attitude was, rather: "No matter what you have done, I am willing to forgive you and provide you with power to change." Biblical truth presented humbly in Christ's spirit with a loving attitude wins hearts and changes lives.

We cannot change our lives by ourselves; it is by beholding what is good and inspired that we allow the Holy Spirit to have access to our minds. He is the One who can change us.

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 555.1.[†] Compare *The Desire of Ages* 83.4.

37. If our goal is to become more and more like Jesus and if we know that He has accepted us, we should be more than willing to accept others, despite their sins. This is not an

invitation to encourage them to remain in their sins; however, by accepting the Holy Spirit, they can be transformed by beholding Him on a daily basis if they are willing.

38. What groups of people rebuked and criticized Jesus? What groups of people accepted Him openly? Why was Jesus scorned by the so-called righteous Pharisees and Sadducees but at the same time was called a “friend of sinners”?

His grace saves us so that we can know His truth and live His life. Truth without love leads to stifling legalism, which strangles spiritual life. So-called love without truth leads to tolerant sentimentalism with no substance, leaving an individual adrift on a sea of uncertainty. Truth presented in love leads to an authentic Christian experience that provides clear direction, purpose, and certainty.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, August 27.

1 Peter 3:15-16: ¹⁵But have reverence for Christ in your hearts, and honour him as Lord. **Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you,** ¹⁶**but do it with gentleness and respect.** Keep your conscience clear, so that when you are insulted, those who speak evil of your good conduct as followers of Christ will be ashamed of what they say.—*Good News Bible.*†*

39. Are we supposed to be encyclopedias of biblical knowledge so that we know immediately how to answer any question that is brought to us? That, of course, would be nice; but, it is impossible. However, a person who asks a question—a serious question—needs to be given a serious answer. If we do not know the answer, we need to know where we can find the answer. And that is not so hard to do.
40. Do we really know what we believe? And why we believe it? Are we able to explain that to others? And what does it mean to explain what we believe with “meekness and fear”?
41. Have you ever been asked, “Why are you a Christian?” How did you respond? Why did you give that response?

In Christ is the tenderness of the shepherd, the affection of the parent, and the matchless grace of the compassionate Saviour. His blessings He presents in the most alluring terms. He is not content merely to announce these blessings; He presents them in the most attractive way, to excite a desire to possess them. So His servants are to present the riches of the glory of the unspeakable Gift. The wonderful love of Christ will melt and subdue hearts, when the mere reiteration of doctrines would accomplish nothing. “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God.” “O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! . . . He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom.” Isaiah 40:1, 9-11.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 826.3. [Printed version]‡

42. There are some people who seem to specialize in pointing out the sins of others. Why do they do that?

The very act of looking for evil in others develops evil in those who look. By dwelling upon the faults of others, we are changed into the same image. **But by beholding Jesus, talking of His love and perfection of character, we become changed into His image. By contemplating the lofty ideal He**

has placed before us, we shall be uplifted into a pure and holy atmosphere, even the presence of God. When we abide here, there goes forth from us a light that irradiates all who are connected with us.—Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing** 492.2; *Gospel Workers** 479.2.[†]

43. It has been suggested that we need to approach people with the understanding that there is a hidden hunger in their souls to know God. It may seem like the world around us is completely uninterested in spiritual matters; but, that is not true.
44. Stop and think for a moment how Jesus approached: (1) a Samaritan woman, (2) a Jewish scribe, (3) a Roman soldier, (4) a Canaanite seeker with a demon-possessed daughter, and (5) that woman whose reputation was severely soiled. From these stories, have you learned anything about the attitude of Jesus?
45. There are many stories that could be told about people who were probably led by the Holy Spirit—even though they did not know it—and came into contact with a Seventh-day Adventist church or member and became faithful church members. As a Sabbath school class or church, are we holding open our doors to make such encounters more likely?
46. Friendship and love open the doors of hearts; but, it does not lead people to Christ without some kind of intentional witness.
47. How would you and your church respond to the following scenes?
 1. A homeless man camps out in your church parking lot. He has been there for three nights. What are appropriate ways to relate to him and some not so appropriate ways? How can you be redemptive without turning the parking lot into a tent city for the homeless and negatively impacting the neighbors?
 2. A Catholic business associate has just lost a wife due to an extended bout with breast cancer. He is troubled that his wife may be suffering in purgatory. How can you present the truth about the state of the dead in a comforting way, in love, without offending him?
 3. A young couple you know well that are not Seventh-day Adventists have just lost a 12-year-old son in a car accident. How can you share the hope of Christ's return without trivializing the death of their son?—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide**122-123.
48. Consider these principles for developing a winning attitude:
 1. Ask Jesus to impress you that all people have spiritual longings and are winnable to Christ.
 2. Seek to develop positive Christ-centered relationships with those in your sphere of influence.
 3. Pray for opportunities to share divine truth.
 4. Present biblical truths in the context of loving relationships.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide**123.
49. Are we ready to try these principles?

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