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<b>What Did Jesus Teach About Mission?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Who Are Christ's Disciples?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Who Is the Source of the Power?</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>How Did Jesus Win Souls?</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>What Is Friendship Evangelism?</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>What Is the Most Important Decision?</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>How Do We Teach as Jesus Did?</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>How Does Jesus Want People to Live?</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>In What Ways Does Christ Baptize Us?</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>What Is the Value of Fellowship?</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>How Can Every Member Be Active for Christ?</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>How Did Christians Witness Through the Ages?</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>What Is Christ's Last Message to the World?</b>	<b>90</b>

# Contents



## Meet the Principal Contributor to This Quarter's Lessons



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# So Send I You

## Principles of Soul-Winning

The great controversy between Christ and Satan began when Satan accused the Creator of the universe before His subjects of being unjust and unfair. The great arch-rebel, Lucifer, has repeated these accusations throughout history, because he sees in them his best hope of persuading others to join him in rebellion against God.

In order for God to disprove these charges against His character, it is necessary that all His actions in relation to His subjects be so obviously just that no one will be able to find anything in them that might sustain Satan's accusations. Because of His perfectly loving character, God will never bring judgment upon the earth without giving earth's inhabitants fair and sufficient warning in advance. For this reason Noah preached a warning message for 120 years before the Flood came upon his generation. A host of prophets warned Israel for many years before the Babylonian captivity. John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles brought the gospel and the last warning message to the Jewish nation before it was finally judged and rejected as the chosen people of God.

Today the world is moving rapidly toward the greatest of all God's judgments, which will bring the terrible history of sin to its close. In order for the character of God to be vindicated and all humanity invited to serve Him, a clear message of salvation and warning must be given to all the world before its probation is irrevocably ended. We find just that warning message prophetically described in the testimonies of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12. Here is the "everlasting gospel" in the context of the judgment and Sabbath messages; a call to repentance and godly living, and a call to fellowship with the Creator.

We recognize that in order for this tremendously important message to be given to the world, there must be messengers. Who are they? Even though many Christian groups are presenting some aspects of the everlasting gospel, Seventh-day Adventists are committed to proclaiming every feature of that gospel as clarified in Scripture. Christ is calling His people to share His saving love with every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, inviting them to demonstrate living faith in Jesus Christ by uniting upon the platform of allegiance to all His commandments.

# What Did Jesus Teach About Mission?



*Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** John 4:34-38; Luke 15:1-24.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21).

**KEY THOUGHT:** God has commissioned human beings to share the good news of His saving love.

**WHAT A PRIVILEGE TO COOPERATE WITH JESUS** in His mission of mercy to the world! In Old Testament times, God chose Noah, Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Esther, Daniel, and many other humble, dedicated people to give His messages of salvation and warning. In New Testament times, Christ chose fishermen, tax collectors, widows, and even people of questionable reputation, including some who had been violent persecutors. Having experienced His saving power, they all became His special ambassadors.

Today Christ is calling men and women from all walks of life to join Him in the greatest challenge ever committed to humankind—the work of spreading the exciting news that, by accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, all may enjoy eternal life with Him.

"Everyone in whose heart Christ abides, everyone who will show forth His love to the world, is a worker together with God for the blessing of humanity. As he receives from the Saviour grace to impart to others, from his whole being flows forth the tide of spiritual life."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 13.

*Sunday*

*December 26*

**THE TIME FOR REAPING HAS COME (John 4:31-38).**

How did Jesus explain to His disciples that they should be ready at all times to cooperate with God in gathering a great harvest of souls? John 4:31-38.

Jesus had just concluded His interview with the woman of Samaria. The disciples arrived back from the town with food and offered some to Jesus. But He was no longer hungry or thirsty. He responded, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about" (John 4:32, NIV). The divine work of leading a soul to salvation was food enough for Jesus!

Then Jesus looked at the nearby fields of grain that in four months laborers would harvest. He said, "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35, NIV). As the Samaritans were coming out of the town to receive Him, Jesus pointed out the readiness of people everywhere to respond to His invitation. The Holy Spirit is much more operative in human lives than we recognize. He has been sowing seeds of truth in hearts all over the world. Multitudes are ready for the Lord to gather them into the kingdom of grace. If only we would believe Jesus' evaluation of the situation, we would respond by cooperating with Him in reaping the harvest.

**What should be our reaction to the spiritual need of the multitudes around us? Matt. 9:35-38; Luke 10:1-3.**

Jesus could not hide His love for people. When He saw the crowds that flocked to Him, His heart overflowed with concern. How could they be shepherded? Who was available to show them the way to God? "The harvest is plentiful," Jesus said, "but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matt. 9:37, 38, NIV).

It is impossible to pray that God will select and commission workers to gather in the harvest of souls without our becoming personally convicted of our own responsibility. As we pray, we need to ask, "Could I be one of the soul-winners Jesus has in mind? Or perhaps I have means or talents that will facilitate the sending of laborers into the harvest field."

**COMPASSION FOR OTHERS (Luke 15:1-24).**

**How did Jesus illustrate the various means He uses in leading people to respond to His love? Luke 15:1-24.**

The lost sheep knows it is lost, but cannot release itself from the brambles and vines in which it has become entangled. But with an aching heart, Jesus goes out into the darkness of this sinful world seeking that lost one (Luke 15:3, 4). And when He finds it, He tenderly carries it back to the safety of the sheepfold. Does our love for unsaved people inspire us to join Jesus in His search?

The coin is an inert piece of money with no awareness that it is lost (Luke 15:8). So millions are totally absorbed in the secular world with no awareness of their need. Jesus searches longingly for them, and when He finds them, He invites the angels of heaven to rejoice with Him. Are we searching with Him for these precious lost ones?

The lost son knew that he was lost and was able to respond to Christ's conviction that he should return home. "He came to his senses" (Luke 15:17, NIV), decided to go home (verse 18), and acted on his decision (verse 20). Are we moved with compassion to join the Father in meeting the returning sinner a long way off (verse 20)?

**What kinds of danger are Christ's true followers willing to risk when filled with compassion for the lost? Matt. 10:16-20.**

Arrest, beating, trial, and imprisonment are only part of the ordeal Jesus' followers have been asked to endure. They may have to face family disunity and disloyalty (Matt. 10:21, 34-36). They may be confronted by the hatred of those who reject their message (verse 21), and even by attempts to take their lives (verses 28-30). But as they witness to others, there is always the comforting assurance of Jesus' protecting presence (verses 29-31), His merciful intercession for them in heaven (verse 32), and His ultimate gift of eternal salvation (verse 22).

**"So send I you—My strength to know in weakness,  
My joy in grief, My perfect peace in pain."**

*—SDA Hymnal, No. 578*

**PERSONAL MINISTRY (Matt. 25:31-46).**

For what kinds of ministry to others will Jesus finally commend those whom He takes to His kingdom? Matt. 25:34-36. Why do you think the saved will not be aware that they have done anything worthy of commendation? Matt. 25:37-40.

Salvation is not by works; it is by Christ's grace alone (Eph. 2:8, 9). But to experience salvation by grace is inevitably to be motivated by an earnest longing to see others enjoying the same blessing. (See Eph. 2:10.) Supplying the material needs of the hungry and thirsty, sheltering the homeless, clothing the poor, caring for the sick, and ministering to those in prison (Matt. 25:35, 36) are practical ways in which we unconsciously give evidence of the saving effectiveness of Christ's grace in our hearts. Jesus did not teach that relieving material needs and social ills is the sum total of our outreach for others. Our practical ministry enables us to "preach good news to the poor . . . to proclaim freedom for the prisoners . . . to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18, NIV). The path to the heart of those being crushed by life's burdens is carved by loving ministry.

What does emulating the good Samaritan have to do with winning souls to Christ? What is the relationship between performing kind deeds and the task of proclaiming the Second Advent message? Luke 10:29-37.

Jesus was illustrating the command of Leviticus 19:18: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (NIV). If you were attacked, robbed, and left half-dead, wouldn't you respond positively to the one who risked his life, ignoring the prejudices of his race against yours and ministering unselfishly to your need? When you were well again, wouldn't you visit him and pour out your thanks for his saving your life? Wouldn't you want to know something of his motivation? Wouldn't you ask about his religious convictions, seek an understanding of his God, and, with deep gratitude, endeavor to emulate his love and compassion?

How would Jesus minister today? through hospital work? education? street evangelism? foster homes? day-care centers? Who are those in need today?

## SHARE THE GOOD NEWS (Matt. 24:14).

What is the good news that the whole world must hear before Jesus will return? Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20; John 3:16, 17; Rev. 14:6.

Jesus' commission to spread the good news of salvation made possible by the cross is for every member of the church, not only for preachers.

"Why is it that many more do not respond to the call [to work in the Lord's vineyard]? Is it because they think themselves excused in that they do not stand in the pulpit? Let them understand that there is a large work to be done outside the pulpit by thousands of consecrated lay members.

"Long has God waited for the spirit of service to take possession of the whole church so that everyone shall be working for Him according to his ability. When the members of the church of God do their appointed work in the needy fields at home and abroad, in fulfillment of the gospel commission, the whole world will soon be warned and the Lord Jesus will return to this earth with power and great glory."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 111. (See *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 16.)

Although Christ is drawing everyone to Himself (John 12:32), what kinds of response can we expect from people as we present the gospel? Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23. Note Jesus' interpretation of the parable:

## PLACE

## INTERPRETATION

Verse 4 "along the path" Verse 19 \_\_\_\_\_

Verses 5, 6 "rocky places" Verses 20, 21 \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 7 "among thorns" Verse 22 \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 8 "good soil" Verse 23 \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus' parable encourages those who are sharing the good news of His saving grace. Jesus never taught that the whole world will respond positively to His love. The parable of the sower illustrates that only those whose hearts are represented by the good soil will become subjects of Christ's kingdom.

**RECEIVE AND GIVE (John 21:1-23).**

What lesson did Jesus illustrate for His disciples after His resurrection? John 21:1-6, 11.

"Vividly they recalled the scene beside the sea when Jesus had bidden them follow Him. [See Mark 1:16, 17.] They remembered how, at His command, they had launched out into the deep, and had let down their net, and the catch had been so abundant as to fill the net, even to breaking. [See Luke 5:4-6.] Then Jesus had called them to leave their fishing boats, and had promised to make them fishers of men. It was to bring this scene to their minds, and to deepen its impression, that He had again performed the miracle. His act was a renewal of the commission of the disciples. It showed them that the death of their Master had not lessened their obligation to do the work He had assigned them. Though they were to be deprived of His personal companionship, and of the means of support by their former employment, the risen Saviour would still have a care for them. While they were doing His work, He would provide for their needs. And Jesus had a purpose in bidding them cast their net on the right side of the ship. On that side He stood upon the shore. That was the side of faith. If they labored in connection with Him—His divine power combining with their human effort—they could not fail of success."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 810, 811.

**Are you able to see the relevance to your life of Jesus' commission to Peter? Explain. John 21:15-23.**

Jesus' call to witness in the command, "Feed my lambs," "Feed my sheep," is for every one of us. Like Peter, we have all been "like sheep going astray" (1 Peter 2:25, NIV). But like him, we are invited to employ our talents in Christ's saving mission for a world in sin. Because of Calvary, we can "die to sins and live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24, NIV). We can take up the cross Christ is laying upon each of us and, consumed by love and compassion, take the gospel to our neighbors.

**Are you willing to commit your mind and body, time, talents, and service to the Lord Jesus Christ? In what ways do you believe He can use you in His mission to the world?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study the major aspects of Jesus' message for the world given in Luke 17:20-25. Read "Go Teach All Nations," in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 818-828.

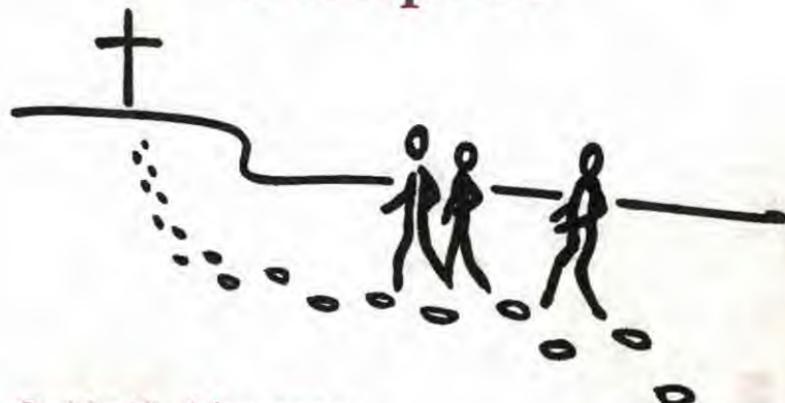
"All who consecrate soul, body, and spirit to God will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical and mental power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind. The grace of God enlarges and multiplies their faculties, and every perfection of the divine nature comes to their assistance in the work of saving souls. Through cooperation with Christ they are complete in Him, and in their human weakness they are enabled to do the deeds of Omnipotence."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 827.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can sharing the gospel with others be combined with personal ministry for their specific needs?
2. Why do you think some church members are not interested in witnessing for Christ?
3. What would it take for a revival of New Testament witnessing to begin in your local church? your community? your home?
4. How do we need to rearrange our priorities for time, work, money, and recreation to be part of a witnessing revival?
5. What things hinder such a revival?
6. Are you willing for this revival to begin with you?

**SUMMARY:** Jesus' mission for the world is to involve every one of His followers. Because the time of reaping has come, Christ invites us to reach out compassionately to unbelievers in loving personal ministry. When others know that we care about them, they will be willing to listen as we share the good news of salvation through Christ. With Christ's Spirit reigning in our hearts, we are to present the gospel to the world in preparation for our Lord's return.

# Who Are Christ's Disciples?



## Sabbath Afternoon

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rom. 9:24-26; 12:3-8; Heb. 8:10-13; Mark 3:31-35.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:5, 6, RSV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Christ's disciples are all those who demonstrate their faith in Him by doing whatever He asks.

**THE MEDIEVAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN CLERGY AND LAITY** is unbiblical. In Scripture, ministers of the Word are part of God's people (Matt. 1:21; Titus 2:14). Spiritually they are not separate from or superior to them. During the Middle Ages the theory developed that priests are a superior spiritual class, while the laity are the inferior secular class. The lay-person was to find God through the priest, who could forgive sins, define doctrine, and interpret the Bible.

The teachings of the sixteenth-century Reformers did much to break this unbiblical distinction between clergy and laity. Nevertheless, it has continued in many Protestant churches. The result is that church members tend to exalt their pastors as a spiritually privileged class who are primarily responsible for soul-winning. This lesson presents the Bible answer to this attitude.

**COMPANIONS OF CHRIST (1 Peter 2:5, 9).**

Although in Old Testament times the Levites were given special priestly responsibilities, how did the Lord regard Israelites in general? Ex. 19:6; Isa. 61:6.

Israelite priests performed a special ministry in the sanctuary (later the temple) as types or examples of the various aspects of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. But they were not a spiritually favored class. They too were sinners in need of atonement and forgiveness. (See Lev. 4:1-12.) The Lord, not the priest, forgave sin. (See Lev. 4:31, 35.) The mediatorial role of Israelite priests was no substitute for direct fellowship between God and the individual sinner.

Moreover, the Levitical priests were part of "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6, RSV). Every Israelite was to be a priest—a spiritually pure servant of God, committed to unselfish service within Israel and faithful witness to alien peoples. (See Isa. 43:10, 12.)

In the New Testament church, every believer has a priestly function. (See Rev. 1:6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9.) A priest is humanity's representative before God, and God's representative before humanity. A priest shares God's love with others. Whether in the home, the workplace, or the church, every Christian believer has priestly responsibilities. By His death and heavenly mediation, Jesus has freed us from our sins (Rev. 1:5). Now He calls us to be His companions in service. The Father and the Son live within us by the Holy Spirit (John 14:18, 23). Hence, we are able to represent Christ and the Father to others. We are each to be a living part of Christ's spiritual house, the church.

Ordained clergy are *part* of this spiritual house (Titus 1:1-9; 2:14; 1 Tim. 3:1-12). But they are by no means the whole house. As the Old Testament priests had a specialized ministry within the people of God, so do Christian pastors or elders—a somewhat different ministry, but nonetheless specialized. Even so, their ministry involves facilitating the various roles of other church members, not superseding them.

**In what practical ways are you able to fulfill your priestly roles in the home, the workplace, and the church?**

**WHO ARE GOD'S PEOPLE? (Rom. 9:24-26).**

Both Old and New Testaments include the clergy among God's people. There is no distinction between clergy (religious) and people (secular). Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* points out that in the New Testament "the Figurative Meaning of *laos* [people] = the Christian Community." —Vol. IV, p. 54. The Christian community includes both ministers and church members.

**Note who were included among God's "people" as the word is used in the Old Testament:**

Ex. 19:4-8 \_\_\_\_\_

Deut. 7:6-11 \_\_\_\_\_

Deut. 21:9 \_\_\_\_\_

Jer. 11:4 \_\_\_\_\_

God's people were the object of His special concern, not because they were more worthy than others, but because, as believers in Him, they were chosen to represent His loving character to other nations. "My people" throughout the Old Testament are leaders, priests, and citizens.

**Who are God's *people* in the New Testament?**

Matt. 1:21 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 15:14 \_\_\_\_\_

Rom. 9:24-26 \_\_\_\_\_

Rom. 15:9-13 \_\_\_\_\_

Christ's people are Christian believers in general, including ordained elders and pastors. (See 2 Cor. 6:16.) Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a *people* of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14, RSV).

**How should the fact that both church members and pastors are part of the same "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9) influence their attitudes to one another and to nonbelievers?**

## THE SAME COVENANT FOR ALL (Heb. 8:10-13).

What was the heart of the covenant God made with Abraham? Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:1-11; Gal. 3:6-14.

Abraham entered into the experience of righteousness and salvation by faith in the Messiah to come. This same covenant with God was to be the experience of all Abraham's descendants, priests and people alike: "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you" (Gen. 17:7, RSV). God commanded the same covenant "for a thousand generations" (1 Chron. 16:15-17, RSV).

At Sinai, God offered His people the same covenant terms that He had offered Abraham. (Compare Ex. 19:5, 6 with Gal. 3:15-17.) But they attempted to serve God in their own strength. The result was spiritual failure and moral disaster. (See Ex. 19:8; 24:3, 7; Exodus 32.) Thus they perverted God's "everlasting covenant." God speaks of the "old covenant" at Sinai, not because He gave anything faulty, but because His people responded in a faulty way. (Compare Gal. 4:22-31.)

What are the blessings of the covenant that God wishes to enter into with His people today? Compare Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-13.

Christ presents all His people with the same terms—righteousness and salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. This spiritual experience is for church members and pastors alike. Clergy have no more opportunity of salvation than other believers. To have sins forgiven and God's law written on the heart by the Holy Spirit is the privilege of every believer in Jesus Christ. (See also Rom. 10:6-10.)

Spiritual privilege involves spiritual responsibility. Because believers are to receive from Christ the glory of His presence in their hearts, they have the privilege of sharing Him with others. "You received without paying, give without pay" (Matt. 10:8, RSV).

Have you entered into a covenant relationship with Christ? By what kind of ministry to others can you share this fellowship?

**ONE BODY—DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS (Rom. 12:3-8).**

How does Paul illustrate the different functions of believers within the Christian church? Rom. 12:3-8.

Notice that Paul's counsel in this passage is addressed to "every one among you" (Rom. 12:3, RSV). The "one body in Christ" (verse 5) is the entire church, including every member with his or her particular talents and spiritual gifts. Whatever those gifts, they are to contribute to the health of the "body." God calls every believer to recognize his or her individual privilege and responsibility as part of Christ's "body."

"It is not the Lord's purpose that ministers should be left to do the greatest part of the work of sowing the seeds of truth. Men who are not called to the ministry are to be encouraged to labor for the Master according to their several ability. Hundreds of men and women now idle could do acceptable service. By carrying the truth into the homes of their friends and neighbors, they could do a great work for the Master."—*Christian Service*, p. 67.

**What is a major responsibility of the ordained ministers of the church? Eph. 4:11-16.**

"The saints" (Eph. 4:12), or believers in Christ, are to be equipped for the work of ministry by evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In those parts of the world where this plan has been most closely followed, church members have become successful soul-winners.

"It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of soulsaving depends alone upon the ministry. The humble, consecrated believer upon whom the Master of the vineyard places a burden for souls, is to be given encouragement by the men upon whom the Lord has laid larger responsibilities. Those who stand as leaders in the church of God are to realize that the Saviour's commission is given to all who believe in His name. God will send forth into His vineyard many who have not been dedicated to the ministry by the laying on of hands."—*Christian Service*, p. 68.

**Do you desire to learn how to win souls? How can you employ your particular talents in applying the soul-winning principles taught by evangelists and pastors?**

**CHRIST'S DISCIPLES ARE HIS FRIENDS (Mark 3:31-35).****Who are claimed by Christ as His relatives? Mark 3:31-35.**

Jesus loved His family and gave special attention to His mother. But on this occasion His concern was to emphasize that, as God, His relationship with His faithful followers transcends His human relationship with members of His family. Christ's disciples are closer to His heart than any human relationship can fully illustrate.

His disciples do His will, but they do not *earn* the close relationship that Christ described. Because His Spirit fills their hearts, they are *able* to do His will. In union with Christ is the power for doing the will of God. True disciples of Christ are saved by grace that empowers them to do the works that He asks. (See Eph. 2:8-10.)

**What is the basis of Jesus' friendship with His disciples? John 15:12-17.** In this passage, Jesus outlines not only the basis of His friendship with His disciples, but the work that He expects His friends to do. Consider how your ministry for souls will be influenced by Jesus' counsel:

**Verse 12 "Love one another"** \_\_\_\_\_

**Verse 13 Willingness to die for others** \_\_\_\_\_

**Verse 14 Willingness to obey Christ's commands** \_\_\_\_\_

**Verse 15 Receiving knowledge from Jesus** \_\_\_\_\_

**Verse 16 The commission to bear fruit** \_\_\_\_\_

**Verse 16 Power in prayer** \_\_\_\_\_

Note how the great commission Jesus gave after His resurrection relates to the message in John 15. He urged the believers to "make disciples" (Matt. 28:18, 19, RSV). And they obeyed Him. (See Acts 2:41-47.)

**Identify the ways in which you are demonstrating the characteristics of a true disciple of Christ. In what ways are you sharing your friend Jesus with others?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study the following passages regarding discipling: Isa. 8:16; John 13:35; 15:8; Acts 6:7; 11:26. Read "A Division of Labor" in *Gospel Workers*, pp. 196-200.

**United work for Christ.** "The world will be convinced, not by what the pulpit teaches, but by what the church lives. The ministry in the desk announces the theory of the gospel; the practical piety of the church demonstrates its power. . . .

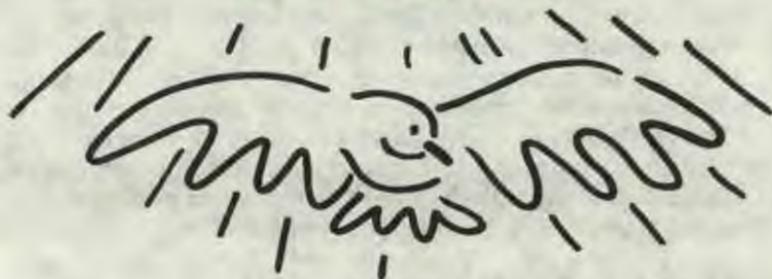
"The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers."—*Christian Service*, pp. 67, 68.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Suppose your church had to share a pastor with 25 or more churches as is common in some parts of the world. How would you and your fellow church members conduct the business of the church, including soul-winning ministry?
2. How are the truths taught in this lesson *not* a depreciation of the pastor's role and authority?
3. How can church members be soul-winners when they are so busy working for economic survival?
4. If your church depends too much on the pastor for spiritual enlightenment and expects him to do most of the visiting and soul-winning, how can you help to bring about change? What can you do to inspire your fellow church members to organize for soul-winning ministry?

**SUMMARY:** The Bible teaches that every Christian believer is a "priest" with the responsibility of living in fellowship with Jesus and sharing Him with others. The laity is not spiritually inferior to the clergy. The clergy are part of God's "people" and subject to the same divine commands. Given the same covenant relationship with Christ and empowered by the same divine Spirit, all disciples of Christ—pastors and church members—are to use their various talents to win others to Him.

# Who Is the Source of the Power?



## Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Joel 2:23, 28-32; Acts 2:1-21, 38, 39; 3:19; Rev. 6:9-11; 14:1-5; 18:1.

MEMORY TEXT: "And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory" (Revelation 18:1).

KEY THOUGHT: The spiritual power of the Holy Spirit enables us to overcome sin, reflect the character of Jesus, and witness to others of His saving love.

**BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.** Evangelist D. L. Moody once held up a glass before an audience and asked, "How can I get the air out of this glass?" One man suggested, "Suck it out with a pump." But Moody explained that a vacuum would be created that would shatter the glass. Various other unsatisfactory suggestions were offered. Finally Moody filled the glass with water. "There," he said, "all the air is now removed." Then he went on to explain that spiritual victory is not achieved by attempting to suck sin out, but by driving it out by being filled with the Spirit.

The Bible speaks of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's people as the power for spiritual victory and for witnessing to others. The Holy Spirit's presence is as readily available today as it was on the day of Pentecost. God's final message to the world will be empowered by an unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon those willing to fulfill the conditions.

**THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S POWER (Joel 2:23, 28-32).**

**By what means does the Lord plan to revitalize the waning spiritual forces of His people? Joel 2:23, 28-32.**

In the Middle East the former rain falls in the autumn (October-November), when the seed is sown. The latter rain falls in the spring (March-April), ripening the grain for the harvest. The clause in Joel 2:23 translated by the King James Version, "He hath given you the former rain moderately," may be translated from the Hebrew, "He has given to you the early rain for righteousness," or "He has given you the teacher for righteousness."

The Holy Spirit is the teacher who brings righteousness to our hearts. (Compare Isa. 32:15-17; Rom. 8:9, 10.) If Joel's contemporaries had been willing to repent, the Lord would have given them special spiritual and material blessings. The land would produce again, and there would be plenty of grain, wine, and oil. (See Joel 2:24-27.)

The last phrase of Joel 2:23 translates, "at the first." Verse 28 begins, "And it will be afterward." The second blessing would come in the distant future from Joel's day when the spiritual former and latter rains would be poured out with unprecedented power. The latter-rain outpouring will come shortly before the second coming of Jesus. (See verses 30-32.)

**Jesus promised that, after His death and resurrection, there would be a special outpouring of the Spirit upon His faithful, praying people. Note the special blessings the Spirit brings to the Christian church:**

1. John 14:16-20, 23. His presence is the presence of Christ and the Father.
2. John 14:15, 16, 21-24. He is given to those willing to obey Christ's commandments.
3. John 15:26; 16:13-15. He represents Christ and teaches His truth.
4. John 16:8-11. He convicts of sin, the need for the righteousness of Christ, and the coming judgment.
5. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8. He provides spiritual power.

**What evidence do you have that you have received Christ's promised gift of the Holy Spirit?**

**THE FORMER RAIN IN HISTORY (Acts 2:1-21).**

How did the disciples of Jesus prepare for Pentecost? Describe how the promises of Joel and Jesus were fulfilled for them. Acts 1:14; 2:1-21.

Jesus' disciples spent the days after His ascension in Bible study and prayer. They put away their differences and unitedly sought the Lord for the power of the Holy Spirit to witness for Him to all humanity. Their burden was to receive heaven's qualification for ministry to lost souls.

Note from Scripture and Ellen White's book *The Acts of the Apostles* the results of Pentecost for Jesus' followers and those to whom they witnessed:

**1. They had love for one another.** Acts 2:44-46; 4:32.

"Every Christian saw in his brother a revelation of divine love and benevolence. One interest prevailed; one subject of emulation swallowed up all others. The ambition of the believers was to reveal the likeness of Christ's character and to labor for the enlargement of His kingdom."—Page 48.

**2. They proclaimed the gospel with courage and power.** Acts 2:14-42; 4:13, 33. "They [priests and rulers] had thought to find the apostles cowed with fear under the strong hand of oppression and murder, but they find them lifted above all fear and filled with the Spirit, proclaiming with power the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth."—Page 42.

**3. Thousands were converted.** Acts 2:37, 41, 42, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 11:21. "The arguments of the apostles alone, though clear and convincing, would not have removed the prejudice that had withheld so much evidence. But the Holy Spirit sent the arguments home to hearts with divine power."—Pages 38, 45.

**4. Spiritual gifts were bestowed.** Acts 2:4; 3:6, 7; 6:3-6. "Not that all the gifts are imparted to each believer. The Spirit divides 'to every man severally as he will.' 1 Cor. 12:11. But the gifts of the Spirit are promised to every believer according to his need for the Lord's work."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 823.

Has there been a repetition of Pentecost in your life? your church? Why? Or, why not?

**THE FORMER RAIN IN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE (John 3:5-8).**

What do the following passages teach regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts?

John 3:5-8, 20, 21 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Cor. 6:11 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Cor. 12:4-7, 11 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Cor. 3:17, 18 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 5:2-5, 18 \_\_\_\_\_

The work the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the heart of the repenting sinner is identical to His work for the first disciples of Jesus. (1) He transforms; (2) He makes holy; (3) He causes spiritual growth; (4) He gives victory over sin; (5) He imparts spiritual gifts.

"In the new birth the heart is brought into harmony with God, as it is brought into accord with His law. When this mighty change has taken place in the sinner, he has passed from death unto life, from sin unto holiness, from transgression and rebellion to obedience and loyalty."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 468.

**What seal or guarantee is provided by the Holy Spirit for the person who accepts Christ as Saviour and Lord? Eph. 1:13, 14 (compare 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 5:5).**

The seal, stamp, or impression made in the heart by the Holy Spirit's presence is the "earnest" (KJV) or "guarantee" (RSV) that the believer has the gift of eternal life. (See John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 5:11-14.) The word translated "guarantee" (RSV) means "first installment, deposit, pledge," that which secures a legal claim to something.

The first seal of the Holy Spirit is equivalent to the former rain spoken of by Joel and Hosea. (Compare Joel 2:23; Hosea 6:3; 10:12.)

**Is the new-birth experience a once-in-a-lifetime experience, or should it occur daily? (See Col. 2:6; Gal. 5:16, 25; 2 Cor. 4:16.)**

**CONDITIONS FOR THE LATTER RAIN (Acts 2:38, 39; 3:19).**

"Unless the former rain has fallen, there will be no life; the green blade will not spring up. Unless the early showers have done their work, the latter rain can bring no seed to perfection."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 506.

**Why is turning away from sin so important to the person who wants to be a disciple of Christ? Acts 2:38, 39; 3:19.**

Neither the former nor the latter rain can be experienced by the person who is cherishing sin. Not only does the Holy Spirit give us initial deliverance from sin; He is the indwelling power for habitual victory and spiritual growth. Joel's prophecy of the ultimate outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain can be fulfilled only for those who are putting away sin.

"Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God [the end-time seal] while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement. Then the latter rain will fall upon us as the early rain fell upon the disciples on the Day of Pentecost."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 214.

"Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully. . . . I saw that none could share the 'refreshing' unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action."—*Early Writings*, p. 71. (Compare 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 4:13; 1 Peter 1:15, 16; Rev. 3:2, 4, 5.)

**What other conditions must we fulfill if we are to have the latter rain? Zech. 10:1; Acts 1:8; 4:32.**

Joel's prediction for the church will be fulfilled when we are willing to engage in a unity of prayer and are willing to allow Christ's power to witness through us.

"When we have entire, wholehearted consecration to the service of Christ, God will recognize the fact by an outpouring of His Spirit without measure; but this will not be while the largest portion of the church are not laborers together with God."—*Christian Service*, p. 253.

## THE FINAL SEAL AND THE LATTER RAIN (Rev. 14:1-5; 18:1).

Under what conditions will the Lord come to raise those who died believing and who have been vindicated in the pre-Advent judgment? Rev. 6:9-11 (compare Dan. 12:1-3).

The martyrs under the altar are symbolic of all the dead who are vindicated in the pre-Advent judgment prior to Jesus' second coming. The altar symbolizes the altar of burnt offering in the court of the earthly sanctuary, under which the blood of the sacrifices was poured. (See Lev. 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34.) The cry of the dead is answered by their vindication in the pre-Advent judgment; metaphorically they are given white robes. They are to rest a "little longer" (Rev. 6:11, RSV) until something vital happens for their living brethren and sisters.

The Greek of Revelation 6:11 does not contain the word *number*, nor is that word necessary to the meaning of the passage. The Greek translates simply: "And there was given to them each a white robe, and it was said to them that they should rest a little longer, *until their fellow servants and their brethren who are about to be killed as they were might be made complete.*"

While the Spirit reigns in our hearts, we are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10), but we tend to choose sin to replace Him as Lord of our lives (Rom. 6:15, 16).

"Are we seeking for His fullness, ever pressing toward the mark set before us—the perfection of His character? When the Lord's people reach this mark, they will be sealed in their foreheads. Filled with the Spirit, they will be complete in Christ, and the recording angel will declare, 'It is finished.'" —Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1118.

**Note the spiritual condition of those who receive the end-time seal of God. Rev. 7:1-3; 14:1-5.** By giving us victory over sin in the former-rain experience, the Holy Spirit prepares us for the end-time seal of God, involving the outpouring of the Spirit in latter-rain power. (See *Early Writings*, p. 71.) Those who have this seal have received from the Holy Spirit the gift of God's character (Rev. 14:1). "And in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless" (Rev. 14:5, RSV).

What do the end-time seal of God and the latter rain have to do with the finishing of God's work in the earth? See Friday's lesson.

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study Revelation 18:1 in relation to this lesson. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would "testify" of Him (John 15:26). The Holy Spirit convicts the *world* "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8, italics supplied). The "angel" of Revelation 18:1 symbolizes the Holy Spirit, who enlightens the earth with Christ's righteousness. By living out Christ's life through His people and empowering them to take heaven's final message to the world, the Spirit will enlighten the world with Christ's glory.

"The angel who unites in the proclamation of the third angel's message is to lighten the whole earth with his glory. . . . The work will be similar to that of the Day of Pentecost. As the 'former rain' was given, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the opening of the gospel, to cause the upspringing of the precious seed, so the 'latter rain' will be given at its close for the ripening of the harvest."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 611.

Note the experience of God's Spirit-filled people *before* the close of probation, as described in *Early Writings*, pp. 270, 271:

1. "The company of guardian angels around them had been doubled, and they were clothed with an armor from their head to their feet."
2. "They had obtained the victory, and it called forth from them the deepest gratitude and holy, sacred joy."
3. "Evil angels still pressed around them, but could have no power over them."

4. "I heard those clothed with the armor speak forth the truth with great power. It had effect. Many had been bound; some wives by their husbands, and some children by their parents. The honest who had been prevented from hearing the truth now eagerly laid hold upon it. All fear of their relatives was gone, and the truth alone was exalted to them. They had been hungering and thirsting for truth; it was dearer and more precious than life. I asked what had made this great change. An angel answered, 'It is the latter rain, the refreshing from the presence of the Lord, the loud cry of the third angel.'"

**SUMMARY:** The former and latter rains symbolize (1) the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and (2) the end-time outpouring of the Spirit before Jesus comes. The constant infilling of the Spirit in the former rain enables believers to witness for Christ, and it prepares them to receive the latter rain as the power to finish God's work in the earth before the second coming of Jesus.

# How Did Jesus Win Souls?



## Sabbath Afternoon

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** John 3:1-21; 4:1-42; Luke 8:1, 2; 18:18-30; Matt. 10:7, 8.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above'" (John 3:3, NRSV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Jesus' soul-winning ministry was not confined to public preaching. Much of His ministry was devoted to direct appeals to individuals. The master of the personal interview, Jesus demonstrated for us how to influence others to respond to His love.

**INTRODUCE OTHERS TO JESUS.** A pastor was having Bible studies with two young men. Their mother was a church member, but their father was not. Invited to join the Bible studies, he refused on the ground that he had too many unanswerable questions. When his sons were having their Bible study, he sat reading the newspaper in the same room. One evening, the pastor invited the young men to give their hearts to Jesus and to be baptized. Folding his newspaper, their father listened quietly as they agreed. Impressed to appeal to the father also, the pastor said, "How beautiful it would be if you would be baptized with your sons. I want to invite you to be baptized." The father responded, "I would like that." His questions had vanished as he listened week by week and caught a vision of Jesus. As we cooperate with Jesus, following His methods, He touches hearts and draws people to Himself.

**JESUS APPEALED TO THE HEART (John 3:1-21).**

As you study Jesus' interview with Nicodemus, recorded in John 3:1-21, what three major truths do you find Jesus emphasized? From this passage analyze Jesus' method of appealing to an individual heart.

Consider the kind of person with whom Jesus was speaking. Nicodemus was (1) a Pharisee; (2) a ruler of the Jews, a member of the Sanhedrin. Therefore, Jesus could expect that Nicodemus was convinced that salvation was obtained through the performance of good works. He could also expect that, even if Nicodemus were impressed with His teaching and healing ministry, he would have deep doubts based on Pharisaic ideas of the Messiah and His work.

Notice that, although Nicodemus' opening statement implied doubt about Jesus' Messiahship, Jesus did not attempt to argue the point. He went right to the heart of Nicodemus' spiritual need. Nicodemus needed to be born from above—transformed by the Holy Spirit. Only by that means could he experience salvation and enter the kingdom of God. Thrown off balance, Nicodemus expressed doubt about the possibility of new birth. But Jesus did not stop to argue. He quietly explained the invisible, transforming work of the Holy Spirit. (See verses 6-8.)

Next, Jesus explained why it is possible for the Holy Spirit to change hearts. The cross makes it possible for any believer to be born again and to receive the gift of eternal life. (See verses 13-18.)

Third, Jesus underlined the importance of works "wrought in God" (verse 21, RSV). The cross makes it possible for believers to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, resulting in works acceptable in God's sight.

Four principles for soul-winners emerge from the passage: (1) Be aware of the person's background; (2) speak directly to the heart's need; (3) don't become involved in argument; (4) present the cross and its results for the believer—the gift of the Holy Spirit and a manner of life approved by God.

**Did Jesus succeed in winning the allegiance of Nicodemus? What does the record reveal about Nicodemus' later attitudes and commitments? John 7:50-52; 19:39, 40. What lesson for soul-winners is emphasized by Nicodemus' belated response to Jesus' heart appeal?**

JESUS CREATED A THIRST FOR SALVATION (John 4:1-42).

Answer the following questions regarding Jesus' interview with the woman of Samaria:

How did Jesus arrest her *attention*? John 4:7-9.

How did Jesus foster her *interest*? Verses 10-12.

How did Jesus give her a *desire* for the water of life? Verses 13-15.

How did Jesus bring *conviction* to her heart? Verses 16-24.

How did Jesus inspire her to *action*? Verses 25-29.

Attention, interest, desire, conviction, action are the five responses Jesus sought from the woman of Samaria. We can follow His method, cooperating with the Holy Spirit, who engenders these five responses.

"The worker for Christ should not feel that he cannot speak with the same earnestness to a few hearers as to a larger company. There may be only one to hear the message; but who can tell how far-reaching will be its influence? It seemed a small matter, even to His disciples, for the Saviour to spend His time upon a woman of Samaria. But He reasoned more earnestly and eloquently with her than with kings, councilors, or high priests."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 194, 195.

What were the immediate results of Jesus' witness to the woman of Samaria? John 4:28-30, 39-42.

Like the ripple created by a stone cast into a lake, so the ripple effect of faithful witness to one person can result in many others finding the Saviour. The Samaritans gathered about Jesus and learned for themselves that He was the Messiah and their Saviour from sin.

What results have you seen from your tactful, earnest witness to one person?

*Tuesday*

*January 18*

**JESUS RESTORED GROSS SINNERS (Luke 8:1, 2).**

What special ministry did Jesus perform for Mary Magdalene? Luke 8:1, 2; 10:38-42.

*The Desire of Ages* identifies Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus with Mary Magdalene (see pp. 559, 568). In her home town, Bethany, a Pharisee named Simon led her into the sin of immorality. (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 566.) Evidently she left home and went to live in the town of Magdala, near the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. She responded to Jesus' teaching and joined other women who accompanied Him on His second Galilean tour.

"Mary had been looked upon as a great sinner, but Christ knew the circumstances that had shaped her life. He might have extinguished every spark of hope in her soul, but He did not. It was He who had lifted her from despair and ruin. Seven times she had heard His rebuke of the demons that controlled her heart and mind. She had heard His strong cries to the Father in her behalf. She knew how offensive is sin to His unsullied purity, and in His strength she had overcome."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.

Returning to Bethany, Mary was blessed by Jesus' personal teaching when He visited her home.

**How did Jesus exonerate Mary's act of anointing His head with perfume, washing His feet with her tears, and wiping them with her hair? Matt. 26:6-13; Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-9.**

Judas objected to Mary's expensive act because of his greed. Simon the leper, whom Jesus had healed, secretly objected because she was a notorious sinner. "Simon had led into sin the woman he now despised."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 566. Jesus defended Mary. Her action would be known worldwide throughout history. By means of a parable, Jesus demonstrated to Simon that his sin was greater than hers; and her sins were forgiven. (To read more about Mary, see the story in John 20:11-18.)

**Have you considered the influence of a judgmental spirit toward sinners? (Compare Rom. 8:1 with Matt. 7:1-5.) If we would be instruments in winning souls, we must be willing to accept with love those for whom Jesus is working.**

JESUS WON HEARTS BY HEALING BODIES (Matt. 10:7, 8).

What kind of ministry did Jesus combine with preaching and teaching? Matt. 9:35.

The Greek verb *sozo*, usually translated "to save," is used a number of times in the Gospels to mean "to heal." (See Matt. 9:22; Mark 6:56; 10:52; Luke 8:50; 17:19.) The healing ministry of Jesus is an illustration of His power to save from sin. After forgiving the sins of the paralytic who was let down through the roof (Luke 5:18-20), Jesus answered the critical thoughts of the scribes and Pharisees by asking: "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?" (Luke 5:23, RSV). He added: "'But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the man who was paralyzed—I say to you, rise, take up your bed and go home.' And immediately he rose before them" (Luke 5:24, 25, RSV). Jesus clearly stated that His act of healing was an evidence of His power to forgive sins.

When Jesus sent His disciples out to preach, what else did He command them to do? Matt. 10:7, 8.

"On the green hillslopes of Galilee, in the thoroughfares of travel, by the seashore, in the synagogues, and in every other place where the sick could be brought to Him, was to be found His hospital. In every city, every town, every village, through which He passed, He laid His hands upon the afflicted ones and healed them. Wherever there were hearts ready to receive His message, He comforted them with the assurance of their heavenly Father's love."—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 17, 18.

"The way in which Christ worked was to preach the word, and to relieve suffering by miraculous works of healing. But I am instructed that we cannot now work in this way; for Satan will exercise his power by working miracles. God's servants today could not work by means of miracles, because spurious works of healing, claiming to be divine, will be wrought. . . . Sanitariums are to be established, and with these institutions are to be connected workers who will carry forward genuine medical missionary work. . . . This is the provision the Lord has made whereby gospel medical missionary work is to be done for many souls."—*Medical Ministry*, p. 14.

**JESUS' CALL TO SERVICE (Luke 18:18-30).**

Why did Jesus ask the rich young ruler to give up all his wealth? Luke 18:18-22; Matt. 6:24-34.

Note the direct manner in which Jesus responded to this young man. First, Jesus wanted him to recognize that He is the Messiah (Luke 18:18, 19). Second, He wanted him to understand that, in fact, he had not been observing the commandments in a manner acceptable to God. The one thing the young man lacked was the saving love of Christ in his heart (verses 20-22). If he had been willing to receive Christ without reservation, he would have been willing also to give up his wealth and become one of Christ's direct fellow workers. Jesus invited him, as He had invited His other disciples, "Come, follow me" (verse 22, RSV). What a privilege he turned down for the sake of retaining his wealth and worldly influence!

**What principles for winning souls can we glean from this story?**

1. Jesus did not compromise His integrity for the sake of attracting a rich disciple. It would have been so easy for Jesus to regard the young ruler's money and influence as a welcome asset to His cause. But this would never have saved the young man, and it would have compromised the integrity of Christ's mission.
2. In a direct manner, Jesus attempted to convey to the young man the message that love to God and man is the very basis of acceptable commandment-keeping and service. Lack of such love in the heart of one who attempts to obey His law amounts to legalism.
3. Jesus was not denying the importance of life's necessities. He wanted the young man to recognize that his abundant wealth had become his god. Only by relinquishing it in an act of total heart surrender to Christ could he have eternal life.
4. Christ seeks collaborators who are willing to sacrifice all for the salvation of their fellow human beings. Only as we forsake all our idols can we be God's instruments to appeal to the hearts of others.

**Does Christ ask everyone to give all their wealth before entering His service? (Compare Luke 19:8.) Should we be willing to give all if He should ask us?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study John 6 as an example of Jesus' approach to people who sought Him for the wrong motives. Notice how, in the process of relating to them, He emphasized the heart of the gospel. Read "Nicodemus" and "At Jacob's Well" in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 167-177, 183-195.

**Every believer is a missionary.** The woman of Samaria "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."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When Jesus worked for individuals, did He have any more guarantee than we do that His efforts would be successful? Why should we give the same attention to an apparently unpromising prospect as to one who seems ready to receive the truth with enthusiasm?
2. Didn't Jesus take a risk in carrying on a one-to-one conversation with the woman of Samaria? Suppose you are witnessing to a person of questionable reputation and are criticized by those who think you are keeping bad company. How would you handle that?

**SUMMARY:** Only as we work to win people as Jesus did can we fulfill His commission. In His private interviews, Jesus appealed to the person's heart need; He did not stop to argue theological points; He presented the cross and its results—the transforming work of the Holy Spirit and the resulting works that glorify God. Though not every soul responded positively, Christ's method was faultless.

# What Is Friendship Evangelism?



## Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 1:35-50; 2:1-11; James 1:19; Col. 4:3; Acts 18.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" (Ecclesiastes 4:10, NIV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** "Friendship evangelism is simple, practical ways to share the language of caring with people around you—to let them know that God loves them, that hope is not lost."—Monte Sahlin, *Friendship Evangelism* (Siloam Springs, Ark.: Concerned Communications, 1990), p. 6.

**LOVE IN ACTION WINS FRIENDS.** A pastor's wife visited a woman whose kitchen was so dirty and cluttered it was impossible to see the floor. She offered to help the woman clean up. She spent the day removing the rubbish and garbage from the house and washing the floors.

When the woman's husband came home from work, he asked, "What happened?" His wife replied, "Well, the Seventh-day Adventist pastor's wife came and spent the day with me. She helped me clean the house. She's coming back tomorrow. She says she'll help me clean every Friday for a while. Besides that, we're going to learn how to eat different food, and we're going to church."

Practical helpfulness led to friendship and Bible studies, and there came a day when that family was baptized. Kindness opens hearts to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and to acceptance of the truths of God's Word.

**WHAT IS FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM? (John 1:35-50).**

Notice how the number of Jesus' first disciples was increased as friend influenced friend. John 1:35-50.

Jesus drew two disciples to Himself. One of the two, Andrew, brought his brother Simon to Jesus. The next day Jesus also called Philip to follow Him. "Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida" (verse 44, NIV). Could it be that Andrew and Peter had paved the way for Philip to come to Jesus? Philip contacted his friend Nathanael and expressed confidence in Jesus (verse 45).

"This is the pattern throughout the New Testament, from person to person to person. Today it is called 'networking.' Networks are the full range of relationships that you have, the people you talk to every day. This includes the people at the office or shop where you work, the people you know at the supermarket or gas station, your neighbors down the street, your doctor, barber or beautician, optician, mechanic, insurance agent, etc. Maybe you don't know all their names. Many of them are not active in any religion."—Sahlin, *Friendship Evangelism*, pp. 1, 2.

It is estimated that two-thirds of adult converts come into the Adventist Church primarily because of the influence of a friend or relative. There are five steps that people take in becoming members of the church:

- 1. Awareness:** They discover that the church exists and learn what it stands for.
- 2. Interest in spiritual things:** Because of circumstances in their lives, the Holy Spirit is able to speak to them.
- 3. Evaluation:** They go to church, to a Bible study, or to an evangelistic meeting to see what it is like. In the first few minutes they decide whether they are comfortable in the situation.
- 4. The trial period:** The interested person or new believer will consciously or unconsciously put the church on trial before making a settled commitment.
- 5. Adoption into the church:** The new member comes to feel like an accepted part of the church family.

Considering the above steps, how would you explain why some new members did not remain long in your church?

## LEARNING TO CARE (John 2:1-11).

The early chapters of John's Gospel depict Jesus as a deeply caring person who did all He could to bring happiness to others and to relieve their suffering.

How do the following Bible stories indicate Jesus' care for others? What principles can you draw from these stories that should guide us in our witnessing for Him?

John 2:1-11 \_\_\_\_\_

John 2:13-21 \_\_\_\_\_

John 4:46-54 \_\_\_\_\_

John 5:1-18 \_\_\_\_\_

John 6:1-15 \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus was a social person; He attended a wedding and, when the hosts were embarrassed because the supply of wine ran out, He made more from water.

Jesus drove the greedy merchants out of the temple court, partly because He was concerned for the poor sinners who were being financially exploited.

Moved by compassion, Jesus healed the dying son of a "royal official" and, thereby, won a convert.

In the same spirit of concern, Jesus healed an invalid who had suffered for 38 years.

Jesus did not send His hearers home without providing for their physical needs.

**Religion in action.** "The world will be convinced, not by what the pulpit teaches, but by what the church lives. The minister in the desk announces the theory of the gospel; the practical piety of the church demonstrates its power."—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 16.

"Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow me.'"—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Are you following Jesus' method of witnessing in your church? in your personal relationships with others?

## LEARNING TO LISTEN (James 1:19).

What is one effective way of winning the trust and friendship of other people? James 1:19.

It is not possible to assist people in bearing their burdens without being willing to listen to their needs. We often think of witnessing as verbalizing our beliefs and convictions. But the beliefs we are sharing at a particular moment may not meet the immediate needs of the person to whom we are speaking. We cannot know the most effective approach to that person's heart unless we are willing to listen to his or her concerns. Jesus was a good listener and a keen observer of people's struggles.

"It takes a lot of patience, faith, time spent on our knees, time spent in practice and self-discipline to become an instinctive, caring listener. But that's what the Scripture is asking us to do. The language of ministry is the ability to listen in a deep, significant way to other people."—Sahlin, *Friendship Evangelism*, p. 13.

Study the practical-godliness emphasis given in Isaiah 58 in the description of true fasting:

**Verse 6** "Loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke . . . set the oppressed free and break every yoke" (NIV).

**Verse 7** "Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" (NIV).

**Verses 9, 10** "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday" (NIV).

**Verses 11-14** The Lord's blessing is for those willing to serve others in these ways. "You will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings" (verse 12, NIV). Such service is associated with true Sabbathkeeping (verse 13), and leads to genuine fellowship with God (verse 14).

What might your willingness to listen and encourage do for a suffering person?

## LEARNING TO SHARE (Col. 4:3).

"It may be hard for you to believe that you could be comfortable telling someone at your place of work or among your relatives how they can accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. If you become a caring listener, you will find that those opportunities come to you. You will not have to go and find them. If you become a good listener, opportunities will be thrust upon you when you have to share the Good News of Christ because people will ask you."—Sahlin, *Friendship Evangelism*, p. 19.

**When you need an answer to share with someone, from what source will that answer come? Col. 4:3; Luke 12:12.**

When Paul was a prisoner in Rome, he prayed that God would open the door for him to witness to others. When our personal fellowship with Christ is vital and meaningful, we have something to share. He opens doors for us so that we can pass on the "good news" of His saving power. Paul wanted to proclaim "the mystery of Christ." This is the mystery of what Christ is willing to do now for the individual who accepts His sacrifice on the cross. This is "the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26, 27, NIV).

**How did the Lord answer Paul's prayer? Acts 28:30, 31; Phil. 4:22.**

"Even in Nero's household, trophies of the cross were won. From the vile attendants of a viler king were gained converts who became sons of God. These were not Christians secretly, but openly. They were not ashamed of their faith. . . . Not by Paul's sermons, but by his bonds, was the attention of the court attracted to Christianity. It was as a captive that he broke from so many souls the bonds that held them in the slavery of sin."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 463, 464.

**Do you pray for the Lord to open doors for you to share your faith? What is the heart of the message you share?**

**THE FRIENDLY, EVANGELISTIC CHURCH (Acts 18:1-4, 7, 8, 19, 24-27).**

Note the instances recorded in Acts 18 of friends influencing friends for the gospel:

**Verses 1-3** Paul made friends with Aquila and Priscilla and worked with them.

**Verses 7, 8** Paul established a church in the home of his friend Titius Justus. That home church attracted Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and many others.

**Verses 19, 24-27** Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. They befriended Apollos, took him to their home, and taught him about Christ. Apollos moved to Corinth and shared the good news that Priscilla and Aquila had given him.

**Rom. 16:3-5** Later Priscilla and Aquila moved to Rome and established a friendly church in their home.

In the process by which the knowledge of Christ was taken from Jerusalem to Rome, friendship-networking was one of the most important influences.

**How did the apostolic church grow in numbers? Acts 1:15; 2:41-46; 4:4; 5:14.**

**What is a friendly church?** A friendly church fosters fellowship, sharing with the needy, eating together, Bible study, and united prayer. A friendly church has small fellowship groups that draw people into their circle. By fellowshiping in their homes, the early Christians attracted many new believers. A friendly church grows because people want to hear about the faith of friendly people.

The members of a friendly church focus on outreach to others in the community; they are not insular and inbred, unaware of people's needs. They make earnest attempts to make friends with people in the community around them. Motivated by Jesus' love for others, they offer services to the community designed to improve the quality of life of their neighbors and friends. A friendly church is a Spirit-filled church that obeys all Jesus' instructions and unselfishly cooperates with Jesus in relieving human misery.

**How can your local church become a more outgoing, friendly church? What kind of reorganization is necessary within the church so that your congregation can have a greater impact on the people around you?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** What do these Bible texts tell us about the kind of caring necessary to touch lives in a powerful way?

Jer. 31:3 \_\_\_\_\_

Song of Sol. 8:7 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Cor. 13:8, 13 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 15:11, 20-23, 32 \_\_\_\_\_

Read "Caesar's Household" in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 461-468.

"He whose heart is fixed to serve God will find opportunity to witness for Him. Difficulties will be powerless to hinder him who is determined to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. In the strength gained by prayer and a study of the word, he will seek virtue and forsake vice. Looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of the faith, who endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, the believer will willingly brave contempt and derision. And help and grace sufficient for every circumstance are promised by Him whose word is truth. His everlasting arms encircle the soul that turns to Him for aid. In His care we may rest safely, saying, 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.' Psalm 56:3. To all who put their trust in Him, God will fulfill His promise."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 467.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Analyze the outreach efforts of your church in the past few years. Were they successful? Why, or why not?
2. Think of your personal impact on the lives of people who are not members of the church. Have your words and actions been such that others would be drawn to your faith and to your church? What improvements could you make?

**SUMMARY:** Friendship evangelism involves friends influencing friends for Christ, friends who in turn influence their friends. This networking program emulates the method of soul-winning used by Christ and the apostles.

# What Is the Most Important Decision?



## Sabbath Afternoon

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matt. 11:28-30; 2 Cor. 7:9-11; 5:17; Ex. 32:26; Luke 12:8.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:28, 29).

**KEY THOUGHT:** When people accept doctrinal and prophetic truth before accepting Christ, they have a new set of opinions, but their hearts remain unchanged.

**THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION** for every person is the decision to surrender the life to Christ. There are three major decisions involved in coming to Jesus for salvation: (1) to believe in Him as a personal Saviour; (2) to confess past sins and to trust Christ for power to keep from sin; (3) to serve Christ in everything.

We need to know how to help men and women decide for Christ. In the right manner and at the right time, we must ask men and women to accept Jesus. Imagine a literature evangelist going from home to home showing his books, telling people how valuable the books are, but failing to ask for an order. When we have befriended people and established a level of trust, we should ask the question "Have you come to the place in your spiritual journey where you have accepted Christ as Saviour and Lord?"

INVITE SURRENDER TO JESUS (Matt. 11:28-30).

What is Jesus' comforting promise to all people in every age, in every culture? Matt. 11:28-30.

The world is full of people struggling for survival. Many poor people are so burdened with the need to make a living and many of the rich are so frustrated with the emptiness and meaninglessness of their existence that they seek some remedy, some exciting distraction. The popular relief is pleasure in its many varied forms—sex, alcohol, drugs, entertainment, fashion. For some people even crime is an attractive distraction.

Those "who labor and are heavy laden" (Matt. 11:28, RSV) are all sinners struggling with the apparently uncontrollable demands of their fallen nature. Jesus offers relief, and He has chosen those who have found relief through His power to take to others the good news of the spiritual rest He offers.

Note how John emphasized both the importance and results of believing in Jesus:

**John 1:7-9, 12, 13** Jesus has light for all humanity, and the light of salvation for those who believe in Him.

**John 3:16, 36; 5:24** The gift of eternal life begins in the here and now for those who believe in Jesus.

**John 11:25** Even though those who believe in Jesus should die, Jesus will raise them on the resurrection day.

**John 17:20-23** Jesus wants His believing people to be united in love so that unbelievers may know that they too are loved and can have salvation through Christ.

In some countries of the Orient the statement that many roads reach to the top of the mountain means that there are many ways to reach eternal life. Christians reject that idea. The Bible teaches that there is only one way of salvation—trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Acts 4:12.)

How do you feel regarding the responsibility that God has given every believer to ask others to accept Jesus as their Saviour? What steps can be taken if a person feels ill at ease doing this?

**THE NEED FOR REPENTANCE AND CONFESSON (2 Cor. 7:9-11).**

**What is repentance? 2 Cor. 7:8-11. From where does the gift of repentance come? Acts 5:31; 2 Tim. 2:25.**

Repentance is genuine sorrow for sin and turning away from it. "The Bible does not teach that the sinner must repent before he can heed the invitation of Christ, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Matthew 11:28. It is the virtue that goes forth from Christ, that leads to genuine repentance. . . . We can no more repent without the Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 26.

**What specific things did David long to experience again as he prayed for forgiveness? Ps. 32:1, 2; 51:1-14.**

Because Christ is so willing to forgive our sins and, in the process, transform our lives (1 John 1:9; Isa. 1:16-18), we should be willing to confess our sins to Him and, when possible, to ask forgiveness of those we have wronged. "Confession will not be acceptable to God without sincere repentance and reformation. There must be decided changes in the life; everything offensive to God must be put away. This will be the result of genuine sorrow for sin."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 39. (See Eze. 33:15; 2 Cor. 7:11.)

**Forgiveness through Christ.** Acts 13:38, 39 establishes that forgiveness is available because of Christ's death upon the cross. Forgiveness is identified with justification. What does Christ do for us when He forgives our sins? In speaking of His ministry, Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1, 2. The Greek of Luke 4:18 may be translated: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor; He has sent Me to preach *forgiveness* (release) to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, *to send forth the oppressed in forgiveness* (liberty)." Christ's forgiveness is release from spiritual captivity. (See Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:13, 14; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 114.)

Our experience of Christ's forgiveness should inspire us to reach out to others so that they too may have the peace of knowing that their sins are forgiven.

## LIVING FOR JESUS (2 Cor. 5:17).

What immediate change occurs in the lives of those who surrender to Christ? 2 Cor. 5:17, 21; 1 John 2:29; 3:7.

Christ forgives their sins and credits their account with His perfect righteousness (Rom. 4:22-25.) As part of God's saving act, the righteousness of Jesus is also bestowed upon the believer by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 10). Born-again Christians are able to do works that in God's sight are righteous because they have received the gift of Christ's righteousness (1 John 2:29). Even though they remain fallen human beings with tendencies toward sin (1 Cor. 9:27; Gal. 5:17), they are now walking by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) and are "led by the Spirit" (verse 18, RSV). Christ is living out His life through them (Gal. 2:20). In this sense they are "righteous, as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7, RSV).

When we truly love Jesus, what will be our response to His will, as expressed in His law? John 14:15; Rom. 8:1-4.

"The condition of eternal life is now just what it always has been—just what it was in Paradise before the fall of our first parents—perfect obedience to the law of God, perfect righteousness....

"We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us.... If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned.

"More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 62, 63.

Are you able to explain the simple steps in the salvation process to an interested person? Perhaps it would help to practice on your fellow Sabbath School class members or individually with a family member or a friend.

**A CALL FOR DECISION (Ex. 32:26).**

What decisive question did Moses ask after Israel had turned from the Lord by making a golden calf and dancing around it? Ex. 32:26.

A crisis had come in the camp of Israel. The people were practicing the lifestyle of the Egyptians. Men and women today are absorbed with the things of the world. The pull of traditional religions, of secular life, and of worldly attachments and pleasures is so strong that many find it difficult to place faith in Christ. The question needs to be asked "Who is on the Lord's side?"

**Study other calls for decision and their results:**

**Joshua 24:14, 15, 24-28** \_\_\_\_\_

**1 Kings 18:21, 38, 39** \_\_\_\_\_

**Acts 2:36-41** \_\_\_\_\_

**Acts 26:25-29** \_\_\_\_\_

As Christ's representatives, we are presenting the Elijah message today (Mal. 4:5, 6), calling men and women to leave the Baal worship of their culture and generation and to follow the true and living God. In every relationship with a nonbeliever the time comes when we must appeal for a decision.

If we urge too strongly for a decision before the person is ready, we run the risk of closing the door on a potential believer. On the other hand, if the person is ready to make a decision, and we fail to sense it and ask for it, the crucial moment may go by and the person may not be as receptive again. Because a person is not asked to join the body of Christ, he or she may feel not wanted or "not good enough." To be sensitive to the readiness of a soul requires listening carefully to the individual and listening prayerfully for the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

**How can you be sure you are asking for decisions in the correct manner? Analyze the factors that lead people to make positive decisions. Apply these factors to decisions for Christ.**

## CONFESSING CHRIST (Luke 12:8).

What encouragement are we given to let others know about our faith in Christ and to invite them to accept Him? Rom. 10:9; 1 John 4:13-16.

Paul links salvation with heart response to Christ and verbal acknowledgment that He is our Lord. John sees a close relationship between the Holy Spirit living in our hearts and our willingness to testify to Christ's deity and to rely upon His love. How important, then, that daily we make the right decision for Christ and cooperate with Him in inspiring others to accept Him.

How do we ask for decisions? After our relationship has become one of mutual trust and confidence, we may ask, "May I ask you a question?" They will say yes. The question is "Have you accepted Jesus as your Saviour and Lord?" There generally will be four types of response: (1) Yes, I have; (2) No, I have not; (3) I am not sure; or (4) What do you mean? We must be prepared to follow up on each of these responses.

We ought not to be discouraged if people do not respond the first time we ask them to accept the Lord. When a non-believer says no to a call to accept Christ, it is not no forever, but just for that moment. The Holy Spirit is able to prepare the heart for a positive response later. You have fulfilled an important task. You have prompted the person to think about Christ's claims on his or her life.

At a lay congress in the Far East a man asked a missionary whether he remembered him. He had attended the missionary's meetings 10 years earlier. He had now been a church member for three years. When the missionary asked, "What brought you to a decision for Christ?" he responded, "It was the appeal you made 10 years ago. I was never able to get the conviction out of my mind that came to my heart when you made that appeal. For seven years I lived with that conviction. Then I made my decision."

Even when appeals receive no immediate response, they have a vital impact on the mind and heart of the listener.

The decision Christ wants every believer to make is to acknowledge Him publicly by inviting others to become His disciples. What is God's promise if we acknowledge Him before others? Luke 12:8.

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study the role of the Holy Spirit in preparing hearts for the gospel message and in preparing those who are to present it to them. Acts 10.

**Present Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.** "Present the plain 'Thus saith the Lord' with authority, and exalt the wisdom of God in the written Word. Bring the people to a decision; keep the voice of the Bible ever before them. Tell them you speak that which you do know, and testify that which is truth, because God has spoken it. . . .

"Talk to souls in peril, and get them to behold Jesus upon the cross, dying to make it possible for Him to pardon. Talk to the sinner with your own heart overflowing with the tender, pitying love of Christ. Let there be deep earnestness, but not a harsh, loud note should be heard in the voice of one who is trying to win the soul to look and live. First have your own soul consecrated to God. As you look upon our Intercessor in heaven, let your heart be broken. Then, softened and subdued, you can address repenting sinners as one who realizes the power of redeeming love. Pray with these souls, by faith laying them at the foot of the cross; carry their minds up with your mind, and fix the eye of faith where you look, upon Jesus, the Sin Bearer. Get them to look away from their poor sinful selves to the Saviour, and the victory is won."—*Evangelism*, p. 296-299.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is it important to lead a person to Christ before presenting the distinctive aspects of the Advent message?
2. Suppose you appeal to people with whom you have been studying to accept Christ and they refuse. What would you do next?

**SUMMARY:** The most important decision for persons to make is the decision to accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. By coming to Him in surrender, they receive from Him the gift of repentance. When they confess their sins, they are forgiven and transformed in heart and begin living for Jesus. Our task is to study the best time and method of inviting them to accept Jesus.

# How Do We Teach as Jesus Did?



*Sabbath Afternoon*

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 10:1-18; Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43; 16:13-19; Luke 10:25-28; 24:27, 44.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:28, 29, RSV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Jesus applied the most effective teaching techniques. We can be successful teachers of the Word if we follow His methods.

**JESUS IS THE MASTER TEACHER.** Jesus did not present a mixture of possibilities and leave the people to separate truth from error. He did not lecture on the law as did the scribes. "Their custom was to dwell upon the obscurities of the law, and the result of their reasoning was a jargon of absurdities, which neither the learned could fathom nor the common people understand."—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 236. Jesus was not concerned to establish a scholarly reputation or to have people admire His genius.

Jesus spoke to people's hearts; He sought to address the longings of their souls. With the complete assurance that His teaching was truth essential for the salvation of His hearers, Jesus spoke with divine authority.

This week's lesson presents five simple teaching techniques Jesus used—techniques that will give such life and saving vitality to our teaching that nonbelievers will be led to the point of decision.

**JESUS BEGAN WITH THE PEOPLE'S FAMILIAR ASSOCIATIONS (John 10:1-18).**

Jesus led the minds of His listeners from the common experiences and situations of daily life to acceptance of divine truth. He knew the needs, interests, prejudices, and longings of the people He was teaching. He led them from the mundane to the spiritual, from the natural to the supernatural, from the carnal to the morally pure, from the struggles of the present to the security of eternity.

**How did Jesus illustrate His tender care for His people?  
John 10:1-18.**

Jesus contrasted His role as the "good shepherd" (verse 11) with the subversive attitudes and actions of those who attempt to mislead the "sheep."

"Jesus found access to the minds of His hearers by the pathway of their familiar associations. . . . In a beautiful pastoral picture He represents His relation to those that believe on Him. No picture was more familiar to His hearers than this, and Christ's words linked it forever with Himself. Never could the disciples look on the shepherds tending their flocks without recalling the Saviour's lesson. They would see Christ in each faithful shepherd. They would see themselves in each helpless and dependent flock."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 476.

**In the following passages, observe Jesus' method of beginning with the familiar interests, ideas, and attitudes of His listeners:**

Matt. 4:18, 19 \_\_\_\_\_

Matt. 5:21, 22 \_\_\_\_\_

Matt. 5:27, 28 \_\_\_\_\_

Matt. 5:43, 44 \_\_\_\_\_

In giving Bible studies, we should begin with the interests of the people with whom we are studying. Without their being conscious of the method, it is possible to lead their thoughts from that which is familiar to that which the Lord wishes them to accept.

**JESUS ILLUSTRATED WITH REAL-LIFE SITUATIONS  
(Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43).**

Why would Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares be especially captivating to His listeners? Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43.

Jesus described a real-life situation. "In the East, men sometimes took revenge upon an enemy by strewing his newly sown fields with the seeds of some noxious weed that, while growing, closely resembled wheat."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 71. What more effective way to illustrate the work of Satan in bringing into the church those who have not been born again? Jesus was speaking to a farming community.

Notice that Jesus did not immediately explain the meaning of the parable. But the minds of the people were stimulated to think how such a familiar story could illustrate "the kingdom of heaven" (verse 24). Later, when asked, Jesus applied the parable.

The teaching principles that emerge are: (1) illustrate truth by life situations that are familiar to people, and (2) do not tell all you know at one time; give the listeners time to think about what you have already said. Questions will probably follow.

Consider the appropriateness of the following parables for truths Jesus wished to teach:

Matt. 13:33 \_\_\_\_\_

Matt. 13:44 \_\_\_\_\_

Matt. 13:45, 46 \_\_\_\_\_

Matt. 13:47-50 \_\_\_\_\_

Real-life situations that grip people's attention today may include stories about such matters as space travel, environmental protection, disease control, the plight of the homeless, love and acceptance in a racially tense society, and so on.

The best illustrations for Bible studies often come from life's experiences—as long as those experiences are meaningful to the listeners.

**JESUS ASKED QUESTIONS (Matt. 16:13-19).**

From a teaching point of view, why were Jesus' two questions, recorded in Matthew 16:13-15, especially helpful?

What was Jesus aiming to teach His disciples in this passage? Note verses 18, 19. The church would be built upon Him, and He would give authority to His disciples. Why did Jesus ask the general question first, "Who do people say that the Son of man is?" (verse 13, NRSV), followed by the more specific, "But who do you say that I am?" (verse 15, RSV)? The contrast between popular opinion and the disciples' opinion was dramatic. Obviously the church could not be built upon John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or any other prophet. Jesus drew from the disciples their belief that He is the Messiah. Then He emphasized that, because He is the Messiah, the church would be built upon Him, and He would have the right to share authority with His disciples. The two questions set the stage for the message.

Analyze the effectiveness of Jesus' questions recorded in:

**Matt. 17:24-27** \_\_\_\_\_

**Matt. 22:18-22** \_\_\_\_\_

**Matt. 22:41-46** \_\_\_\_\_

**Luke 14:3** \_\_\_\_\_

Teaching is not the same process as preaching or lecturing. Preaching is monologue; teaching involves dialogue. Questions are a vital part of teaching, because they are mind openers. The right question encourages students to think through a problem. Possibly the question will enable them to discover truth for themselves. If not, at least grappling with the question prepares them for the teaching to follow.

In giving Bible studies it is essential to stimulate dialogue by asking questions. Whether the answer given is right or wrong, students can be gently directed to Bible teaching on the subject of the question.

**JESUS KEPT HIS MESSAGES SCRIPTURAL (Luke 10:25-28).**

In an interview with a lawyer, recorded in Luke 10, Jesus used five effective teaching techniques:

**Verse 26** Jesus' question encouraged the lawyer to answer his own question.

**Verse 26** Jesus asked the lawyer for a *Bible answer*.

**Verses 27, 28** Jesus commended the lawyer when he gave the right answer.

**Verses 29-35** Jesus answered a question with a *human-interest story*.

**Verse 36** Jesus gave the lawyer's question back to him, by asking it in relation to the story.

Jesus' question directed the lawyer to the Scriptures. He knew that this man did not believe in Him and would probably not accept His answer as authoritative. But the lawyer did believe the Scriptures. Jesus appealed to Bible authority.

Why did Jesus appeal to the Scriptures in the following instances?

**Mark 12:10** \_\_\_\_\_

**Luke 4:16-21** \_\_\_\_\_

**John 7:37-39** \_\_\_\_\_

"Jesus had nothing to do with the various subjects of dissension among the Jews. It was His work to present the truth. His words shed a flood of light upon the teachings of patriarchs and prophets, and the Scriptures came to men as a new revelation. Never before had His hearers perceived such a depth of meaning in the word of God. . . .

"The rabbis spoke with doubt and hesitancy, as if the Scriptures might be interpreted to mean one thing or exactly the opposite. The hearers were daily involved in greater uncertainty. But Jesus taught the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority. Whatever His subject, it was presented with power, as if His words could not be controverted."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 253.

There is no substitute for Bible authority to establish truth. The Bible must be applied to individual needs.

JESUS TAUGHT THAT SCRIPTURE FOCUSED ON HIM (Luke 24:27, 44).

What evidence do we have that the entire Bible, both Old and New Testament, testifies of Jesus Christ?

John 5:39 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 24:27, 44 \_\_\_\_\_

Rom 1:1-6 \_\_\_\_\_

Rev. 1:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus taught that the Old Testament Scriptures were designed to focus on Him. The New Testament was written by apostles or associates of apostles whose overwhelming desire was to make Christ known.

For there to be spiritual life and vitality in the Bible studies we share with others, Christ must be the center.

How can Christ be recognized as the center and focus of the following Bible doctrines?

1. **The state of the dead:** Jesus promises the gift of eternal life for those who believe (John 5:24). At His second advent, Jesus will raise from the dead those believers who fall asleep in death (John 11:11, 25, 26). This resurrection is possible because Jesus rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:16-23).
2. **The Sabbath:** The Sabbath is the day before the day Jesus rose from the dead (Luke 23:52-24:1). Jesus is the one who sanctifies us (makes us holy; 1 Cor. 1:30). The Sabbath is a sign of this experience with Christ (Ex. 31:13). Jesus kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) and expected His followers to keep it after His death (Matt. 24:20).
3. **The investigative judgment:** Jesus taught that there is a judgment of professed believers before His second coming (Matt. 22:11-14). In this judgment, Jesus is both Judge and Advocate (John 5:22; Dan. 7:9, 10, 13, 14). Those are vindicated who are wearing the robe of Christ's righteousness (Rev. 3:5; 19:7, 8).

Bible studies must be thoroughly Christ-centered. Because the whole Bible focuses on Christ, any Bible presentation should center in Him and point to Him.

**FURTHER STUDY:** Analyze the teaching techniques Jesus used in His interview with Nicodemus: John 3:1-21. Read "Teaching in Parables" in *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 17-27.

"Through the creation we are to become acquainted with the Creator. The book of nature is a great lesson book, which in connection with the Scriptures we are to use in teaching others of His character, and guiding lost sheep back to the fold of God. As the works of God are studied, the Holy Spirit flashes conviction into the mind. It is not the conviction that logical reasoning produces; but unless the mind has become too dark to know God, the eye too dim to see Him, the ear too dull to hear His voice, a deeper meaning is grasped, and the sublime, spiritual truths of the written word are impressed on the heart."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 24.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In preparing a Bible study on tithing, how would you plan to apply the teaching techniques referred to in this lesson?
2. Why is preaching inappropriate for a Sabbath School class? How can a Sabbath School teacher lead his or her class into deep Bible study and also have meaningful discussion?
3. In giving a Bible study to a nonbeliever for the first time, where would you begin? Why?
4. What kinds of illustration do you think are appropriate for a Bible study? Why?

**SUMMARY:** In His teaching, Jesus directed minds from their habitual interests and understandings to contemplation of divine truths. He used illustrations from nature and from life's experiences. He involved His hearers in discussion by asking questions. His teaching was scriptural and centered in His own saving ministry. For our Bible teaching to be effective, it must copy Jesus' method.

# How Does Jesus Want People to Live?



## Sabbath Afternoon

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Matt. 5:15-17; 28:19, 20; Col. 2:6; 1 Cor. 4:1, 2; Rev. 12:17.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14, RSV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** God wants us to emulate Jesus and to do whatever He commands.

**WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?** As we discovered in Lesson 6, the first and most important decision we should lead people to make is to surrender their hearts to Christ, allowing Him to transform them by the inner work of the Holy Spirit—the new-birth experience. The next step is for us to fulfill the other aspects of Jesus' great commission: "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20, RSV).

The born-again Christian wants to know what Jesus teaches and how He wants him to live. Because the whole Bible is a testimony to Christ (Luke 24:27, 44), inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16), we must lead interested people to understand and accept Bible teaching. Using Jesus' teaching method, outlined in Lesson 7, we can now simply and systematically present each beautiful part of the Advent message. The order in which we present the doctrines and prophecies of God's Word will depend on the level of understanding and spiritual growth of the person or persons with whom we are studying.

*Sunday*

*February 13*

MAINTAIN CONSTANT FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS (Col. 2:6).

How is the new-birth experience maintained? Col. 2:6; Gal. 5:16-18, 25; 2 Cor. 4:16.

The Christian life begins when we surrender our hearts to Christ and invite Him to transform us by the Holy Spirit. Paul reminded the Galatians that they had begun with the Spirit (Gal. 3:3). His presence in the heart is Christ's presence, and Christ's presence is righteousness in our hearts (Rom. 8:9, 10; Eph. 3:17). Because righteousness is the qualification for eternal life (Matt. 25:46; Heb. 12:14), we have the gift of eternal life when we have Jesus living within by the Holy Spirit (John 3:36; 1 Cor. 1:30).

We maintain this wonderful new life in Christ as every day we renew our commitment to Him. As we began, so we are to walk, by the power of the Holy Spirit. (See Rom. 15:16; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:1, 2.)

"To follow Jesus requires wholehearted conversion at the start, and a repetition of this conversion every day."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1113.

"None are living Christians unless they have a daily experience in the things of God and daily practice self-denial, cheerfully bearing the cross and following Christ. Every living Christian will advance daily in the divine life. As he advances toward perfection, he experiences a conversion to God every day; and this conversion is not completed until he attains to perfection of Christian character, a full preparation for the finishing touch of immortality."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 505.

So that the Holy Spirit can continue His sanctifying work for us, what two daily activities are essential? (1) Matt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; (2) 2 Tim. 2:15; Rom. 15:4.

No love relationship can be maintained without constant communication. Our fellowship with Jesus depends on our being willing to speak with Him and allowing Him to speak with us. It is essential to have a time every day for prayer and Bible study.

From your own experience, explain what Jesus does for you as you pray and study His Word every day.

**KEEP ALL THE COMMANDMENTS (Matt. 5:17-20).**

**What evidence do we have that Jesus wants His people to keep all of the Ten Commandments?**

**Matt. 5:17-20** We are not even to think that Jesus came to abolish the law. He came to fill God's commandments with meaning by demonstrating how we are to keep them. The person who teaches that God has abolished any of His commandments will have no part in His kingdom. Christ replaced the ceremonial aspects of the law that pointed to the Messiah with the reality of His death, resurrection, and heavenly ministry in the sanctuary above. (See Heb. 8:1-7.)

**Matt. 24:20** Jesus did not change the Sabbath command to have it refer to the first day of the week instead of the seventh day. Jesus observed the seventh-day Sabbath (Luke 4:16) and instructed His followers to continue observing it after His death (Matt. 24:20). Christians are to observe the fourth commandment, as they observe the other nine.

**Luke 18:18-20** Jesus instructed the rich young ruler to keep the Ten Commandments, and He listed a few of them so that the ruler would know to which ones He was referring. This does not imply that Christians are not to obey the commandments Jesus did not mention. Jesus knew that the young ruler was not keeping these commandments, because he lacked love for God and total commitment to Him. The young man was trying in his own strength, and failing.

**John 14:15** (Compare John 15:10.) Jesus' commandments are the Father's commandments, because Jesus and the Father are One. (See John 10:30; 14:8-11.) Jesus said, "The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works" (verse 10, RSV). Jesus wants us to obey Him because we love Him.

**What do the following texts teach regarding the place of the Ten Commandments in the life of the Christian? Rom. 3:31; 7:7; 8:3, 4 (compare James 2:10-12; 1 John 2:4; 5:1-4).**

According to the above Bible passages, where is the power found to keep God's commandments? How is it obtained?

## JOIN THE REMNANT CHURCH (Rev. 12:17).

By what two characteristics does Jesus identify His remnant, last-day church? Rev. 12:17.

The two characteristics of the remnant church are clearly stated: It is the church that (1) keeps the commandments of God and (2) has the "testimony of Jesus."

We have seen that Jesus wants His followers to keep all of God's commandments. But what is the "testimony of Jesus"? When John fell at the feet of the angel who was speaking to him, the angel said, "See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). Who were these "brethren" who, like the angel, had the spirit of prophecy? The parallel passage, Revelation 22:8, 9, answers the question. The "brethren" were the prophets. Prophets have the spirit of prophecy. They receive direct revelations from God to impart to His people.

Will there be true prophets in the last-day church? Joel 2:28-32; Eph. 4:11-14; 1 Cor. 1:4-7.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the spirit of prophecy was manifested in the life and work of Ellen G. White (1827-1915): "One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."—*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*, 1992, p. 7.

Be able to explain why a new believer should belong to the remnant church: (1) Christ adds members to His church (Acts 2:47); (2) Christ loves His church supremely and is preparing her for His second advent (Eph. 5:25-27); (3) we are instructed to fellowship regularly with other church members (Heb. 10:25); (4) Christ calls others to join His church (Rev. 18:1-4) so that there "shall be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16, RSV).

**BE FAITHFUL STEWARDS (1 Cor. 4:1, 2).**

The Greek word translated "stewards" in 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2 (KJV, RSV) means "managers." Jesus wants us to depend upon Him for power to manage our lives. He wants us to live as He did so that others can receive His good news of salvation. We are to utilize carefully our time in His service. (See Ps. 90:12; Eph. 5:15, 16; Col. 4:5.) Christ will increase our talents and our capacity to employ them if we use them for Him. (See Matt. 25:14-30.)

**What does the Bible teach about stewardship of money?**  
**Mal. 3:8-11; 1 Cor. 9:13, 14.**

God devised the tithing principle as a means of supporting priests (ministers, pastors) who are called to full-time ministry for the people. Because pastors cannot depend on secular livelihood while ministering, the people for whom they minister are to support them. (See Num. 18:23, 24.) Note that we bring the tithes to the "storehouse" (Mal. 3:10) as an act of worship. We are not to give tithes to particular pastors, but to the church, which distributes the tithes equitably. Giving a tenth of our income to favorite pastors or projects denies the biblical tithing principle. God directs His children to present a tenth of their income for the support of the church's ministry.

"The portion that God has reserved for Himself is not to be diverted to any other purpose than that which He has specified. Let none feel at liberty to retain their tithe, to use according to their own judgment. They are not to use it for themselves in an emergency, nor to apply it as they see fit, even in what they may regard as the Lord's work."—*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 247.

**Why is stewardship of health important? 3 John 2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.**

Because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, we should partake only of health-giving food and drink. Since drugs—including tobacco, alcohol, and caffeine—are harmful to health, we should not use them. The diet given in Eden (Gen. 1:29) is acknowledged today as promoting health. This involves a diet low in sugar, low in fat, and high in fiber. (See *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, pp. 373-416.)

**FULFILL JESUS' COMMISSION (Matt. 28:19, 20).**

Jesus invites each new believer to unite with other believers in taking the gospel to the world. Not all have the same talents or spiritual gifts, but all are offered the privilege of using their abilities in service for Christ and humanity.

**In what ways can you cooperate with others in fulfilling Christ's great commission recorded in Matthew 28:19, 20?**

Lesson 5 describes friendship evangelism. We all have friends, neighbors, acquaintances, and relatives to whom we can witness for Christ. We can offer encouragement and help in times of need. We can give literature, give Bible studies, cooperate with our local church in conducting evangelistic meetings, Revelation seminars, and other kinds of seminar designed to instruct people and relieve their suffering.

Some can open their homes to friends willing to study the Bible. Some can visit the sick, the imprisoned, or the lonely. Some can take part in van ministries, designed to reach people on the street and to provide assistance to the homeless.

There are many personal ministries in which believers can engage. The kind of ministry you choose will depend on your talents and spiritual gifts, your interests and profession, and the approach that will most likely influence your friends.

**What wonderful promise does Jesus give to those who witness for Him? Matt. 10:32 (compare 1 John 2:23; Rom. 10:9).**

"Jesus is calling for many missionaries, for men and women who will consecrate themselves to God, willing to spend and be spent in His service. Oh, can we not remember that here is a world to labor for? Shall we not move forward step by step, letting God use us as His helping hand? Shall we not place ourselves on the altar of service? Then the love of Christ will touch and transform us, make us willing for His sake to do and dare."—*Colporteur Ministry*, p. 18.

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study the special relevance of the message to Sardis for those who are cooperating with Christ in preparing themselves and others for the Second Advent: Revelation 3:1-6.

Read "Prepare to Meet the Lord," *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 123-126.

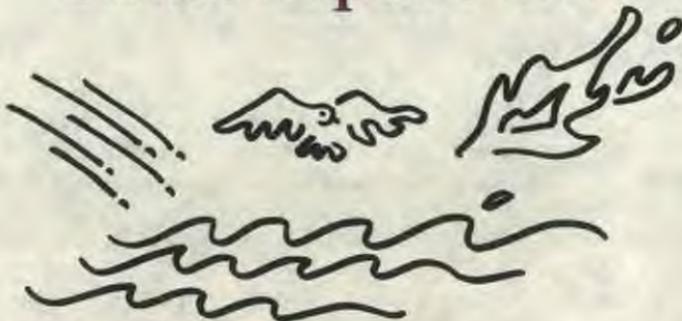
"A form of godliness will not save any. All must have a deep and living experience. This alone will save them in the time of trouble. Then their work will be tried of what sort it is."—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 125.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is it not too great a sacrifice to give up something or someone for Christ? Compare the things Christ has done for you with the things you have given up for Him.
2. What are the practical advantages in keeping the Ten Commandments? How do these commands protect our health and happiness?
3. How may you and your church congregation be more effective in leading persons to commit their lives to Christ and His will?
4. How can you encourage members of your family to live the life of victory in Christ?

**SUMMARY:** Living as Jesus wants us to live begins with total heart surrender to Him. Then obeying His commandments is a pleasure. Realizing that salvation is Christ's free gift to those who have faith, we do not keep His commandments in order to save ourselves, but because we love to please Him, and because His law is for our happiness and well-being. It is a joy to be part of Christ's remnant church because it provides us a spiritual home and family. We respond to Jesus' call for faithful stewards because our lives are much happier when Jesus manages them. What a privilege is ours to work with Jesus for others who need His love and our fellowship!

# In What Ways Does Christ Baptize Us?



*Sabbath Afternoon*

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 3:13-17; 20:20-23; John 1:12; 3:5; Rom. 6:3-5.

MEMORY TEXT: "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16, RSV).

KEY THOUGHT: The baptism of the Spirit *makes* us Christians; water baptism *proclaims* us Christians; trials *test* us as Christians.

WHAT QUALIFIES US TO BE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH? Is membership merely a matter of being accepted by a local congregation? Is being a member of the church the same as being a member of a club? Does a person just decide to belong to a particular group of religious people, and then apply for membership as he or she would to any secular organization?

People are qualified to be members of the church if they are born-again Christians, committed to doing Jesus' will in everything. People are baptized because they have had this experience and accepted this commitment. Water baptism does not *make* a Christian; it publicly declares that a person *is* a Christian.

Church membership follows baptism because committed Christians who have declared their commitment publicly want to have fellowship with others who have made the same commitment. They want to be part of the family of God.

**THE BAPTISM THAT MAKES US CHRISTIANS (John 1:12).**

When do we become children of God? John 1:12. What does the Lord bestow upon us when we become His children? Gal. 4:6.

When we receive Christ, believing in Him, allowing Him to live out His life through us, we become children of God. At the point at which we believe, we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. "He who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:8, RSV). The Spirit in us is Christ in us, and we experience "the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" because we are "filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:16-19, RSV). So the Holy Spirit qualifies us for Christian life here and now, and qualifies us to spend eternity with Jesus.

**To what are we introduced when we are baptized by the Holy Spirit? 1 Cor. 12:12-18, 27.**

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (verse 13, RSV). The gift of the Spirit makes us members of the "body" of Christ. That "body" is the church of Jesus Christ, spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12.

It is possible to be a member of a church but to lack the Holy Spirit in your heart. Then you do not belong to the body of Christ, even though your name is listed as a church member.

Anyone who genuinely belongs to the body of Christ wishes to have fellowship with other members of the body of Christ. John Donne's statement, "No man is an island," is appropriate when we discuss the Christian church. One of the most important teachings of the New Testament is that those in whose hearts the Holy Spirit is dwelling will fellowship together—because they are parts of Christ's body that cannot live separately from the other parts.

**The only initiation that makes us Christians is provided by the Lord Jesus Christ. When we receive Him, He grants us the baptism of His Holy Spirit, and we become members of His spiritual body. Because Christ is now living out His life through us (Gal. 2:20), we want to do whatever He asks of us. Have you received the baptism that makes us Christians?**

**THE BAPTISM THAT PROCLAIMS US CHRISTIANS (Rom. 6:3-5).**

**When believers are baptized, what truth are they proclaiming they believe? Rom. 6:3-5; 1 Cor. 15:1-4.**

Water baptism declares to the church and the world that the candidates have received Christ as Saviour and Lord. As they enter the waters of baptism, they are declaring, "I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins, rose again, and lives in heaven as my Mediator." (See 1 Tim. 2:5; 1 John 2:1; Heb. 8:1, 2.)

**Water baptism declares that the candidate enjoys an experience. What experience? Gal. 2:20; 3:27 (compare 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:11, 18, 22).**

Each candidate for water baptism declares to the church and the world: "I believe that Christ has given me His presence by the Holy Spirit. Through Christ, I have died to sin, have buried the old life, and have risen to new life in Christ."

Baptizing people when the old sinful life is still ruling is tantamount to burying them alive. Before baptism, the old sinful life must die with Christ; then the born-again believer is raised to "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Water baptism dramatizes the burial of the old life that has died and resurrection to new life with Christ.

**What resolve does the baptismal candidate publicly express? Phil. 3:13, 14; Heb. 12:1, 2 (compare Luke 9:62; 2 Peter 2:20).**

The public resolve of the baptismal candidate is, "By Christ's grace, I resolve to press on toward total victory over sin, allowing Christ to complete in my heart that work He has so well begun." (See 1 Peter 1:15, 16.)

Baptism is not some kind of initiation rite. It is a public avowal that the Holy Spirit has initiated the believer into fellowship with Jesus Christ. When Jesus asks you to enter into the experience of water baptism as a public testimony of faith in Him, are you willing to respond positively? (See Mark 16:16.)

**WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED? (John 3:5).**

Does the Bible teach that infants should be baptized? Is baptism for adults only?

**What did Jesus command in regard to baptism? John 3:5; Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:16.**

Jesus commanded those who believe in Him to receive water baptism. And He commanded believers, having taught others the gospel, to baptize them (Matt. 28:19). Water baptism is practiced by the church because Jesus asked us to practice it. He said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). You are not one of Jesus' friends if you refuse to follow His commands.

**In references to baptism in the book of Acts, who are mentioned as the ones baptized?**

Acts 2:41 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 8:12, 13 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 8:36-38 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 9:17, 18 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 10:47, 48 \_\_\_\_\_

Infant baptism is not taught anywhere in Scripture. The New Testament records that people are baptized in water because they have already been born of the Holy Spirit. But the spiritual significance of the new-birth experience was gradually de-emphasized in the early church, and the performance of rites and ceremonies as a means of attempting to earn God's grace became more common. Thus it was incorrectly assumed that baptism is the act by which candidates are born of the Spirit. The next step was infant baptism. There is no evidence of infant baptism in the Christian church before the last quarter of the second century A.D. It was not a general practice until the fifth century.

**In light of the biblical explanation of water baptism, why is infant baptism ruled out?**

*Wednesday*

*February 23*

**WHAT IS THE BIBLE METHOD OF BAPTISM? (Matt. 3:13-17).**

Was baptism in Jesus' day and the apostolic era performed by sprinkling, pouring, or by placing the candidate under the water (immersion)? Study the following passages:

**Matt. 3:13-17** \_\_\_\_\_

**John 3:23** \_\_\_\_\_

**Acts 8:36-39** \_\_\_\_\_

The two Greek verbs meaning "to baptize" used in the New Testament (*baptizo* and *batpo*) both mean "to dip" or "to immerse." When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, He was dipped under the water; it was baptism by immersion. John baptized at Aenon because "there was much water there" (John 3:23). He would not have needed much water for sprinkling or pouring. Philip and the Ethiopian both went down into the water and came up out of the water (Acts 8:38, 39).

To what is baptism likened in Scripture? Col. 2:12 (compare Rom. 6:3-5).

The only method of baptism that adequately illustrates its meaning is baptism by immersion. Paul spoke of believers "having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12, NIV). Just as Jesus died, was buried, and rose again, so believers have died to sin (Col. 3:3). Then they are buried in the water of baptism and raised to new life in Christ. Only baptism by immersion could adequately illustrate that experience. The New Testament knows of no other method by which believers were baptized. The earliest Christian churches had baptismal tanks in which the candidates were immersed in the water.

You may ask the person with whom you are studying, "Are you willing to be baptized in the same way Jesus was?" Even though He was spiritually perfect, He was baptized "to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). To set us an example, Jesus was baptized by immersion. Now He asks you to follow His steps by being baptized in the same manner. Are you ready to do that?"

*Thursday*

*February 24*

**THE BAPTISM THAT TESTS US AS CHRISTIANS (Matt. 20:20-23).**

**What baptism did Jesus predict for His disciples? Matt. 20:20-23.**

It is a mistake to imagine that once you have given your heart to Christ life will be rosy and unruffled. Jesus never promised that. For His disciples, Jesus predicted suffering and death. Paul stated that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Peter urged Christian believers to rejoice at being permitted to suffer for Christ's sake (1 Peter 4:12-14). The evil one is seeking to destroy our faith. He will use any means he can devise to drive us away from Christ. He will work through human beings, some of whom may be friends and relatives, to deprecate our religious faith and drive us back to our former lost state.

The promises of the Lord to protect us from evil in the midst of such trial and persecution are really wonderful. He says, "I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20, NIV). "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5, NKJV). The Bible teaches that nothing happens to us for which God has not made provision. (See Rom. 8:28.) When we are tempted to give in, we have the assurance, He "is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24). And when we fall, He is able to restore us. (See Gal. 6:1.)

**What should be our attitude when our faith is tested?**  
**1 Peter 4:12-16. What is awaiting the believer who by faith in Christ endures the test? Rom. 8:18 (compare 2 Tim. 2:12; Matt. 10:32, 33).**

Christians who walk by faith in Jesus, allowing Him to direct their lives and give them righteousness and peace, have the thrilling assurance of present salvation in Christ (John 3:36) and a place in the heavenly kingdom (Matt. 25:46). There is no comparison between the sufferings of the present time and the happiness and peace that Christ is preparing for those who trust Him. Even in the midst of trial Jesus wants each of us to have peace unlimited. (See John 16:24; 17:13.)

**Will you commit yourself to remaining true to Christ despite the baptism of tribulation that will come to you?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study other passages in Acts that refer to baptism. What do they tell us about the candidates for baptism? Acts 16:14, 15, 31-33; 18:8. When is rebaptism necessary? Acts 19:1-7.

Read "The Baptism," *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 109-113.

"The glory that rested upon Christ is a pledge of the love of God for us. It tells us of the power of prayer—how the human voice may reach the ear of God, and our petitions find acceptance in the courts of heaven. By sin, earth was cut off from heaven, and alienated from its communion; but Jesus has connected it again with the sphere of glory. His love has encircled man, and reached the highest heaven. The light which fell from the open portals upon the head of our Saviour will fall upon us as we pray for help to resist temptation. The voice which spoke to Jesus says to every believing soul, 'This is my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.'"—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 113.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can you make the baptisms in your church more meaningful to the candidates and their loved ones?
2. What can you and your church do to provide more fellowship for new church members who need to feel part of the church family?
3. The Bible teaches the great importance of baptism. Why then did Paul thank God that he had baptized only a few? (See 1 Cor. 1:12-17; compare John 4:1-3).
4. In the light of the lessons so far, what steps would you take to lead a person to the point of asking for baptism?

**SUMMARY:** The baptism that makes us Christians precedes the baptism that proclaims us Christians. Water baptism does not make Christians; it publicly declares that the candidates have previously received Christ as Saviour and Lord. The Bible teaches that believers in Christ should be baptized by immersion. Through the baptism of tribulation that comes in one way or another to all believers, Christ has promised His sustaining presence. The kingdom of glory awaits the victor.

# What Is the Value of Fellowship?



## Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 2:42-47; 2 Cor. 8:1-7; Phil. 1:3-5; 2:1-5; 1 John 1:3, 6, 7.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7, RSV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Unless new church members receive spiritual nurture, they may soon leave the church. A vital part of this nurture involves fellowship with others who are enjoying fellowship with Christ.

**WHY DON'T THEY STAY?** Why do new members sometimes leave the church after a short time? Sometimes blame is attributed to the evangelist or the person who gave the Bible studies. Often the new member has never felt fully accepted into the church family. There is a tendency for the established members to form a club that the new member cannot break into. Established church members may give attention to their circle of friends, forgetting that the new member feels like a pauper in the palace.

Another factor is that, because new members have only just begun to grow, sometimes their lifestyles do not entirely conform to those practices accepted by established members. Before the new members have settled into an entirely new church home, they are made to feel like prodigals, and the result is a tragic loss of souls.

**FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST (1 John 1:3, 6, 7).**

**What is the relationship between fellowship with Christ and fellowship with other believers? 1 John 1:3, 6, 7.**

A man in his thirties, a single parent, accepted Christ and the Advent message, was baptized, and joined the church. Each week he went to church with his small son, but the church members gave them little attention. His emotional needs and those of his little boy were sadly ignored. He came and went each week hardly noticed. Instead of inviting him to their homes and taking a genuine interest in his son, church members generally ignored them. Soon he stopped attending church, and before long he was no longer a participating member.

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7, RSV). If we are not enjoying fellowship with one another, someone is not walking in the light. Are church members who ignore the needs of other church members walking in the light?

Fellowship with Christ involves fellowship with others who are filled with the Spirit. The Spirit in one heart responds to the Spirit in another heart, and believers contribute to one another's happiness and spiritual growth.

**What does Christ wish to share with us? Phil. 3:8-11; Heb. 10:32-36.**

The Greek word translated "fellowship" (Phil. 3:10 and 1 John 1:3, 6, 7) is *koinonia*, used 20 times in the New Testament. It has a number of related meanings: association, communion, fellowship, close relationship, generosity, fellow-feeling, gift, participation, sharing. The idea of sharing is inseparable from the idea of fellowship. Jesus shares His righteousness with us when we believe in Him (Phil. 3:9). He wants us to "share his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10, RSV)—not because there is some morbid reason why we should suffer, but because suffering and sacrifice are inevitable if others are to be saved. This is why Paul commended the believers for entering into the sufferings of others (Heb. 10:32, 33).

**In what ways does your fellowship with Christ result in sharing with others?**

**FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS (Phil. 2:1-5).**

What does "fellowship of the Spirit" (Phil. 2:1) do for Christian believers? Phil. 2:1-5.

A missionary reports that in one part of his mission field almost the entire membership of the church, involving hundreds of people, was replaced over a seven-year period. The former members did not all die or move away; many left the church, and new members took their places. Why? One reason was that the former members were not adequately nurtured. It is one thing to bring large numbers into the church, but quite another thing to provide them the spiritual sustenance to help them grow spiritually.

If we all apply the principles taught in Philippians 2:1-5, each church member will contribute to the spiritual health of fellow church members. There will be unity of love and belief. Humility and generosity will reign supreme. No one will feel exalted above his or her brothers and sisters.

Paul's counsel in verse 4 is translated by the RSV: "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." This happens when believers have the mind of Christ (verse 5) by the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts (verse 1).

**What is the place of sharing in the lives of Christian church members? Heb. 13:16; 2 Cor. 1:3-7.**

Paul's counsel is not fulfilled only by giving generous offerings. People have spiritual and emotional needs. They are craving friendship, understanding, someone willing to listen and offer a word of encouragement.

Paul in prison thanked God for His comfort, "so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:4, RSV). Christ's blessings are not to be received and stored up in our hearts to the exclusion of those in need around us. Christ blesses us so that we can bless others.

**In what ways do you think you can be more directly involved in providing fellowship for the brothers and sisters of your local church?**

*Tuesday*

*March 1*

**SMALL GROUP FELLOWSHIP (Acts 2:42-47).**

**How did Jesus demonstrate His respect for the effectiveness of small-group fellowship? Matt. 9:10-13; 18:20; Luke 24:15, 32.**

Jesus trained His 12 disciples by living with them, teaching them privately, and demonstrating for them how to teach publicly. This was small-group fellowship of the first order. God Himself was the teacher and the binding influence in the group.

There are a number of examples in the Gospels in which Jesus visited the homes of the people and ate with them. He was an occasional guest in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42); He visited the home of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5); and He ate in the homes of publicans and sinners (Matt. 9:10). Small-group fellowship was an important part of Jesus' ministry. After His resurrection He fellowshipped with His mourning disciples (Luke 24:15, 32; John 20:19-23), offering encouragement, reassurance, and the power of His Spirit.

**How effective were the small-group fellowships developed in the early Christian church? Acts 1:13, 14; 2:42-47; 12:12-16.**

The early Christians often met in homes. In fact, the first churches were home churches. (See Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15.) Believers ate together, prayed together, shared their sorrows and joys with one another, and shared their material blessings with those who had need. In our next lesson we will study how small-group fellowships can be an effective means of spiritual nurture, as well as evangelistic outreach.

Prayer meetings and Bible studies are a great blessing when the group is small. Informal sharing of convictions and concerns provides members of the group with a much-needed emotional outlet and spiritual uplift. Many church members who will never speak in a larger group are more likely to open their hearts in the relaxed atmosphere of a home fellowship.

**Would you like to be part of a small-group fellowship? What steps can you take to make this possible?**

**FELLOWSHIP IN GIVING (2 Cor. 8:1-7).**

How did the apostle Paul describe the generosity of the believers in Macedonia? 2 Cor. 8:1-7.

The New International Version translates verse 4: "They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints." The Greek speaks of "the fellowship of the service which was for the saints." The word *koinonia* may be translated "fellowship," "contribution," "sharing." Though poor, the Macedonian believers entreated earnestly "for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints" (verse 4, RSV) in Jerusalem. Here is a classic example of the fellowship of giving. Believers in one part of the world regarded it as a great privilege to give to distant fellow believers who were perfect strangers. Why? Because "the grace of God" (verse 1) constrained them to contribute.

**What motivated the Macedonians to give so generously? Rom. 15:26, 27; Phil. 4:14, 15. What counsel should lead us to imitate their generosity? Rom. 12:13; Gal. 6:6.**

Fellowship, or partnership in giving, is much needed in the church today. It is reported that there are thousands of Adventist believers in some parts of the world who cannot afford a Sabbath School quarterly, and the church administration does not have the money to provide them. Hymnbooks and Bibles are in short supply in some areas. In several countries our church members are struggling financially. Their efforts to provide schools for their children are hampered by insufficient funds. The fellowship of giving by church members in both home fields and mission fields will do much to alleviate the burdens.

The church is facing unprecedented opportunities to preach the gospel around the world. People are hungry for the message. What a tragedy if we should lose the opportunity to meet the need because of insufficient funds! We pray that the Lord will be able to inspire those with means to facilitate the work in these countries.

To what extent are you involved in the fellowship of giving? What more can you do to assist the church in taking the gospel to all the world?

*Thursday*

*March 3*

**FELLOWSHIP IN MINISTRY (Phil. 1:3-5).**

**Why was the apostle Paul especially grateful for the work of Philippian church members? Phil. 1:3-5; 4:3.**

Church members worked with Paul in the great task of making Christ known. Fellowship in ministry involves cooperation with our church pastors. Alone, they can never finish the work. They need the help of church members in (1) visiting the sick; (2) working for the youth; (3) giving Bible studies; (4) opening their homes for group Bible studies; (5) meeting some of the communities' needs.

For example, one church in California conducts a day-care center, a bakery, and a medical clinic. The church members work closely with the pastors to provide services for the inner-city community. Only because of fellowship in ministry is it possible to conduct such outreach ministry. The result is rapid growth in membership. Such unselfish service has attracted people to the church who otherwise would not have been interested and would not have attended evangelistic meetings.

**How may every believer be involved in the fellowship of ministry? Gal. 6:2, 10.**

**"Every soul is to minister.** He is to use every physical, moral and mental power, through sanctification of the Spirit, that he may be a laborer together with God. All are bound to devote themselves actively and unreservedly to God's service. They are to cooperate with Jesus Christ in the great work of helping others. Christ died for every man. He has ransomed every man by giving His life on the cross. This He did that man might no longer live an aimless, selfish life, but that he might live unto Jesus Christ, who died for his salvation. All are not called upon to enter the ministry, but nevertheless, they are to minister. It is an insult to the Holy Spirit of God for any man to choose a life of self-serving. Ministry means not only the study of books and preaching. It means service."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1159.

**Bearing others' burdens is a delicate way to win their love and loyalty to Christ. Can you describe how you have found joy in this kind of ministry?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Consider the sacrifice Jesus made to enter into fellowship with us: Heb. 2:14-18. Note the blessed privilege that is ours: 1 Peter 4:12-14.

Read "A Message of Warning and Entreaty," *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 298, 299.

"**You are not to come together simply as a matter of form,** but for the interchange of thought, for the relation of your daily experiences, for the expression of thanksgiving, for the utterance of your sincere desire for divine enlightenment, that you may know God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent. Communing together in regard to Christ will strengthen the soul for life's trials and conflicts. Never think that you can be Christians and yet withdraw yourselves within yourselves. Each one is a part of the great web of humanity, and the experience of each will be largely determined by the experience of his associates."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 362.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. A young woman visits your church for the first time wearing heavy makeup, large earrings, and slacks. What should be your attitude to her?
2. A newly baptized brother is sick in the hospital. When you visit him, you find him smoking. How should you relate to him?
3. You are invited to have lunch at the home of a new member of your church. The meal includes meat, which you feel you cannot eat. How do you decline without creating embarrassment and hurting the feelings of the hostess?

**SUMMARY:** If new members of the church are to remain, they must be absorbed into the fellowship of the church family. They must be given the opportunity to grow as they fellowship with Christ and with other believers.

# How Can Every Member Be Active for Christ?



*Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Acts 20:20; 1 Corinthians 12; Rev. 18:1-4.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27, RSV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** The final great outpouring of the Holy Spirit will occur when believers are allowing the Spirit to employ their spiritual gifts for the salvation of souls.

"THE GREAT OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD, which lightens the whole earth with His glory [Rev. 18:1], will not come until we have an enlightened people, that know by experience what it means to be laborers together with God. When we have entire, wholehearted consecration to the service of Christ, God will recognize the fact by an outpouring of His Spirit without measure; but this will not be while the largest portion of the church are not laborers together with God."—*Christian Service*, p. 253.

"If all were willing, all would be filled with the Spirit [Eph. 5:18-20]. 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."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 50.

**SPIRITUAL GIFTS FOR ALL (1 Cor. 12:1-26).**

What are spiritual gifts? Why are they given? List the spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

As mentioned in this passage and related passages, spiritual gifts are special endowments the Holy Spirit bestows upon believers. (Compare Rom. 12:3-11; Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Peter 4:9-11.) Spiritual gifts are not the same as the talents with which one was born or that have been developed over time. Yet spiritual gifts enhance natural talents so that the believer can do a specific work for Christ. The Lord uses people of varied talents and temperaments and bestows upon them spiritual endowments to be used for the spiritual upbuilding of His "body"—the Christian church.

Some are given special wisdom, others knowledge, or faith. Obviously every believing Christian has a measure of wisdom, knowledge, and faith. But Paul is speaking of additional endowments, involving specialized abilities, enabling God's people to make distinctive contributions to the upbuilding of His kingdom. (Compare Rom. 12:3-8.)

**Why should all members of the church feel needed and valuable whatever their spiritual gift(s) may be? 1 Cor. 12:12-26.**

Not only are all believers different in personality and talents but also they have different spiritual gifts. The result is a church that, like a human body, is made up of many vitally important functional parts. If one part does not fulfill its God-given function, the whole body suffers. The doctrine of spiritual gifts is designed to teach that the church's spiritual life and outreach to the world are dependent on all members using the gifts the Holy Spirit has given them.

**What is your spiritual gift? The Holy Spirit is the only one qualified to tell you. Human opinions are often helpful, but not definitive. The Lord will reveal your gift(s) as you pray and devote yourself to His service. The Spirit qualifies those willing to work for souls. Your special qualifications will become apparent as you involve yourself in some kind of ministry for others.**

**THE ROLE OF THE CLERGY (1 Cor. 12:27-31).**

Which of the spiritual gifts listed by Paul qualify people for pastoral leadership in the church? 1 Cor. 12:27-31; Rom. 12:3-8.

Paul does not separate spiritual gifts for clergy from spiritual gifts for laity. As we observed in a previous lesson, the clergy are part of the people of God, not separate from them or superior to them. But some of the spiritual gifts are designed for specialized ministries of the kind conducted by spiritual leaders of the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, healers, and administrators.

**What is the purpose of the gifts bestowed upon these spiritual leaders? Eph. 4:11-16.**

The purpose is not that clergy are to do all the work while the laity relax in spiritual apathy. The Spirit's gifts are "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, 13, RSV). Those with specialized gifts are to train church members to conduct the work of ministry. The gifts of the clergy are to be employed in training others to use their spiritual gifts.

Ministry is the work of the entire church—not just the clergy. The result of ministry is to be spiritual growth for the church, Christlikeness for each church member.

But the result is even more far-reaching. When church members employ their spiritual gifts in ministry, the clergy will have more time to fulfill their calling—the equipping of the saints and the evangelizing of unentered territories. "Instead of keeping the ministers at work for the churches that already know the truth, let the members of the churches say to these laborers: 'Go work for souls that are perishing in darkness. We ourselves will carry forward the services of the church.'"—*Evangelism*, p. 382.

**Do you feel that you are equipped for ministry? What kind of ministry makes the best use of your distinctive spiritual gift(s)?**

*Tuesday*

*March 8*

**SMALL-GROUP EVANGELISM (Acts 20:20).**

What do the following passages have to say about small groups of worshiping Christians?

Acts 16:40 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 20:20 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Cor. 16:19 \_\_\_\_\_

Col. 4:15 \_\_\_\_\_

"The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort is a plan that has been presented before me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members but for unbelievers also."—*Evangelism*, p. 115.

"On such occasions as our annual camp meetings we must never lose sight of the opportunities afforded for teaching the believers how to do practical missionary work in the place where they may live. In many instances it would be well to set apart certain men to carry the burden of different lines of educational work at these meetings."—*Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 82, 83.

"Let the teachers in our schools devote Sunday to missionary effort. Let them take the students with them to hold meetings for those who know not the truth. Sunday can be used for carrying forward various lines of work that will accomplish much for the Lord. On this day house-to-house work can be done. Open-air meetings and cottage meetings can be held."—*Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, p. 551.

*Small-Group Outreach* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 1991). Kurt Johnson describes an effective program of small-group evangelism. The author explains how to begin small groups in a local church, how to conduct them, and how to use them for soul-winning. Groups proving effective are: (1) sharing/prayer group; (2) Bible-study group; (3) nurture (covenant) group; (4) support group; (5) outreach (mission) group, and (6) house group. The book describes the functions of these groups.

Johnson's book concludes: "Why not bow your head in prayer right now and ask God to reveal how you can be a part of His vision for His remnant people?"—Page 90.

**SABBATH SCHOOL NURTURE AND EVANGELISM (Rom. 15:1-6).**

What primary goals for our Sabbath Schools are suggested by the following Bible passages?

Acts 16:13-15 \_\_\_\_\_

Rom. 15:1-6 \_\_\_\_\_

Heb. 3:13 \_\_\_\_\_

Heb. 4:11, 12 \_\_\_\_\_

Heb. 10:23-25 \_\_\_\_\_

"It was in 1852, eight years after the first group of Sabbathkeeping Adventists was formed (in Washington, New Hampshire) that SDA Sabbath school work began. . . . At that time the leaders were focusing their attention on establishing the church members in the faith."—*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 10, p. 1122.

Since then, Sabbath Schools have been established throughout the world with the specific intent of applying the Bible counsel for believers to meet regularly for mutual spiritual edification. Note the major goals of Sabbath School indicated by inspired counsel (see *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*):

1. Small-group Bible study as a means of spiritual nurture.
2. Equipping believers with the necessary Bible knowledge and inspiration for sharing their faith with others.
3. Providing instruction for visitors not of our faith.
4. Inspiring Sabbath School members to pray and contribute means for the church's worldwide mission program.
5. Mutual encouragement of believers who, concerned for one another and for those not of our faith, constitute a spiritual support group. Believers can relate to the joys and trials of others in their group.

Various methods of organizing and conducting Sabbath School are being applied around the world. One method that has proved effective in some areas as an evangelistic outreach program is that described by Calvin Smith in his book, *Church Growth Through Sabbath School Action Units* (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, 1991).

## THE SECOND PENTECOST (Rev. 18:1-4).

What conditions do these passages give for the reception of the Holy Spirit (the former and latter rains)?

## 1. Acts 1:14; Zech. 10:1

"The circumstances may seem to be favorable for a rich outpouring of the showers of grace. But God Himself must command the rain to fall. Therefore we should not be remiss in supplication. We are not to trust to the ordinary working of providence. We must pray that God will unseal the fountain of the water of life."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 509.

## 2. Acts 2:38, 39; 3:19

"Today you are to have your vessel purified, that it may be ready for the heavenly dew, ready for the showers of the latter rain; for the latter rain will come, and the blessing of God will fill every soul that is purified from every defilement."—*Evangelism*, p. 702.

## 3. Acts 4:32

"Notice that it was after the disciples had come into perfect unity, when they were no longer striving for the highest place, that the Spirit was poured out. They were of one accord. All differences had been put away."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 20.

## 4. Acts 1:8; 22:15

"The disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul-saving. . . . They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37.

## How will God's work in the earth be finished? Rev. 18:1-4.

"The angel who unites in the proclamation of the third angel's message is to lighten the whole earth with his glory. . . . The work will be similar to that of the Day of Pentecost. As the 'former rain' was given, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the opening of the gospel, to cause the upspringing of the precious seed, so the 'latter rain' will be given at its close for the ripening of the harvest."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 611.

**FURTHER STUDY:** On the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit, study the following passages: Joel 2:23, 28-32; Hosea 6:3; 10:12; John 14:16-23, 26; 16:7-15; Luke 24:49.

Read "Pray for the Latter Rain" in *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 506-512.

"As the dew and the rain are given first to cause the seed to germinate, and then to ripen the harvest, so the Holy Spirit is given to carry forward, from one stage to another, the process of spiritual growth. The ripening of the grain represents the completion of the work of God's grace in the soul. By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ."

"The latter rain, ripening earth's harvest, represents the spiritual grace that prepares the church for the coming of the Son of man. But unless the former rain has fallen, there will be no life; the green blade will not spring up."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 506.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Can your Sabbath School class become an effective soul-winning unit? If so, what steps should you take to develop such a program?
2. What other kinds of small group could be developed in your church? Would you be willing to open your home for one of these groups?
3. What does your spiritual gift have to do with the kind of outreach group to which you should belong?
4. Do you have neighbors who might enjoy participating in a small group in your home? How would you go about starting such a group?
5. How does the ultimate gift of the latter rain coincide with the use of spiritual gifts? Will we receive the latter rain if we fail to use our gifts now?

**SUMMARY:** Every member of the church has at least one spiritual gift—the Holy Spirit's special endowment for service. When every member of the church is willing to use his or her gift for Christ, there will be great spiritual revival. One effective way in which spiritual gifts may be used is in small groups designed for Bible study, witnessing, sharing, and fellowship.

# How Did Christians Witness Through the Ages?



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Rev. 2:1-3:22.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent" (Rev. 2:5, RSV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** Immediately after Jesus' death and resurrection, the church presented a faithful witness to the world that is to be emulated by believers today.

**SPIRITUAL DECLINE FOLLOWED BY SPIRITUAL REVIVAL AND REFORMATION.** In the apostolic era, Christian believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, were consumed by the desire to reflect Christ's character to the world. His sacrifice, His righteousness and salvation, and His promised return were the subjects that absorbed their attention and formed the heart of their proclamation.

As time went by and Christ did not come, Christians reinterpreted the gospel in accordance with their own philosophical interests. The New Testament message was blurred, and apostasy was the result. The sixteenth-century Reformation began a process that has been hampered by the unwillingness of popular churches to accept fully the apostolic ideal. The Advent movement is a revival of that ideal, designed to present the true gospel worldwide. Spiritual decline in the Christian church generally will be met by spiritual revival in the remnant church.

*Sunday*

*March 13*

**WITNESS IN THE APOSTOLIC ERA (Rev. 2:1-7).**

What attitude to witnessing did the earliest Christians adopt?

Rev. 2:2, 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Phil. 1:3-7 \_\_\_\_\_

Col. 1:3-8 \_\_\_\_\_

In His message to John on Patmos, Jesus cited the faithfulness of the Ephesian church (Eph. 1:15) as an example of the faithfulness of the church in the apostolic era. The earliest Christians understood the gospel as the story of Christ's death and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4), and the spiritual transformation available to believers (Gal. 2:16; 3:1-3; Col. 1:27; Eph. 3:14-21.) This message was proclaimed in public and in private with such earnestness that "to every nation under heaven the gospel was carried in a single generation."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 141.

"In every city the work was carried forward. Souls were converted, who in their turn felt that they must tell of the inestimable treasure they had received. They could not rest till the light which had illumined their minds was shining upon others."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 579, 580.

What difficulties arose in the first-century Christian church that tended to blunt the effectiveness of the church's witness for Christ? Rev. 2:2, 4-6.

The church was troubled by false apostles—would-be leaders claiming that God had given them special messages for the church. They were, in fact, motivated by the desire for personal notoriety (verse 2). Moreover, the church was afflicted by the influence of unfaithful members called "Nicolaitans" (verse 6). The same class was later identified with the apostasy of Balaam (verses 14, 15). As was Balaam, so these people were guilty of covetousness, hypocrisy, idolatry, and immorality. (See Numbers 22-24.) The first love of the believers tended to wane.

What influences within the church today tend to spoil the effectiveness of the church's witness?

**WITNESS IN THE POST-APOSTOLIC ERA (Rev. 2:8-17).**

What was one of the ways Christians witnessed for Christ in the immediate post-apostolic period? Rev. 2:8-11.

In most instances, second- and third-century Christians were poor in this world's goods. They were obliged to witness for Christ at a time when Christianity was regarded as an illegal religion. They suffered periodic persecution from the imperial Roman power, as well as from local opponents.

The period of church history represented by the church of Smyrna is the immediate post-apostolic period from the end of the first century to the end of the Diocletian persecution. Diocletian's persecuting edicts were enforced for ten years, A. D. 303-313. (See Rev. 2:10, RSV, "For ten days [years] you will have tribulation.")

"The sufferings which they endured brought Christians nearer to one another and to their Redeemer. Their living example and dying testimony were a constant witness for the truth; and where least expected, the subjects of Satan were leaving his service and enlisting under the banner of Christ."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 42.

**What were the circumstances under which Christians were obliged to witness for Christ during the fourth and fifth centuries? Rev. 2:12-17.**

The period of church history represented by the church of Pergamum began with Constantine's Edict of Milan (A.D. 313) that gave Christianity full legal equality with any other religion in the Roman world. Because Constantine professed conversion to Christianity, it became popular to become a Christian. In the period that followed (A.D. 313-538) the medieval papacy rose to power. In this period the church accepted numerous perversions of Bible teaching. It is difficult for believers to witness in times of persecution, but even more difficult in times of popularity and prosperity. (See *The Great Controversy*, pp. 49, 50.)

**How do popularity and materialism affect the church today? Can you suggest ways for the church to counteract the negative results of prosperity?**

Tuesday

March 15

WITNESS IN THE MIDDLE AGES (Rev. 2:18-29).

What encouragement did the Lord give His true followers during the darkest period of church history—the Middle Ages? Rev. 2:18, 19, 24-28. What severe warning did He give to those who rejected Bible truth? Verses 20-23.

The church of Thyatira represented the Christian church during the period A.D. 538 to 1517. In this period church and state were combined. Europe became known as the "Christian Republic." Although maintaining national sovereignty, European countries were loyal to the official state church. The church dictated to secular authorities regarding religious matters, and secular authorities enforced the decrees of the church.

Although the Bible was studied during this period, large numbers of people were denied access to it. Citizens were forced to accept official interpretations of Scripture and religious tradition. Because the church's priests usurped the place of Christ as Mediator between God and humankind, the separation of clergy from laity was accepted as standard church practice. The clergy were regarded as spiritually superior. Their dictates were accepted by church members, and their celebration of the sacraments was regarded as essential to salvation.

Many refused to accept the demands of the established church and, cherishing the Bible, witnessed for Christ, despite the dire consequences. The Waldenses were one such group. In various European countries they witnessed, sometimes secretly, sometimes publicly. Although fiercely persecuted, they preserved their commitment to Christ and His Word and demonstrated for all time that physical suffering need not crush spiritual life. (See "The Waldenses," in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 61-78.)

John Wycliffe (c. 1330-1384), "the morning star of the Reformation," stood bravely for the truth in England and trained a group of witnesses called Lollards. They distributed copies of the Bible that Wycliffe and others had translated into English and influenced a large proportion of the population for Bible truth.

Likewise, John Huss (c. 1372-1415) and his followers, influenced by Wycliffe's teachings, preached salvation through Christ in fourteenth-century Bohemia. Huss was burned at the stake in 1415, but his testimony, and that of his followers, could not be destroyed.

**WITNESS IN THE REFORMATION ERA (Rev. 3:1-6).**

What marred the Christian witness of believers in the period of church history represented by the church of Sardis? Rev. 3:1-3.

The church of Sardis represents the transitional period of Christian church history, from the beginning of the sixteenth-century Reformation (1517) to the beginning of the modern era (1798). Because of the Reformation's influence, the power of the medieval state church was broken in many countries of Europe. But it remained intact in some countries until the late eighteenth century.

The great European sixteenth-century Reformers—Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli—and leading English Reformers—Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley—taught salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. They rejected the medieval idea that human works contribute to the level of one's salvation standing with God. Christ's grace alone was recognized as the means of salvation. (See Eph. 2:8-10.)

Unfortunately, the Reformers and their followers were not united doctrinally or spiritually. Because the Protestant church splintered badly, the effectiveness of Christian witness was seriously undermined. The Lord addressed believers in the Reformation and post-Reformation period: "I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead" (Rev. 3:1, RSV). A spiritually dead church cannot win souls. It can argue endlessly about theology, but its outreach to the world is largely futile.

**What does Christ offer as the solution for spiritual and evangelistic inertia? Rev. 3:4-6.**

Only the righteousness of Christ, received by faith, is the answer to a spiritually ailing church. When we accept Christ's perfect righteousness as counted for us (Rom. 4:22-25), when we accept His perfect righteousness as bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 10), we have the power and motivation for effective Christian witness.

"The message of Christ's righteousness is to sound from one end of the earth to the other to prepare the way of the Lord. This is the glory of God, which closes the work of the third angel."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 19.

*Thursday*

*March 17*

**WITNESS IN THE MODERN ERA (Rev. 3:7-22).**

**What special encouragement did the Lord give to the early Adventists at the beginning of the modern period of church history? Rev. 3:7-13.**

After the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century, the doctrine of the separation of church and state was accepted in some countries of Western Europe. The newly independent United States of America accepted the same principle. Now the message of salvation by faith in Christ, combined with the announcement of His second coming, was preached with renewed fervor. The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed worldwide missionary endeavor and evangelistic outreach unseen since apostolic times.

This was the era of Joseph Wolff and William Miller. (See "A Great Religious Awakening," in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 355-374.) Because the early Adventists believed in the soon appearing of Jesus, they gave the message with power.

**After the disappointment of 1844, what spiritual condition gradually crept into the developing remnant church? What is the solution to the problem? Rev. 3:14-22.**

Spiritual lukewarmness is damaging to evangelistic outreach. In some parts of the world, the church has become comfortable and apathetic. The medieval idea of clergy as the superior spiritual class contributes to the relative inactivity of the laity. The work of soul-winning is left largely to pastors and evangelists, while many church members look on as uninvolved spectators.

"A revival and a reformation must take place, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit. Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the power of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices. Reformation will not bring forth the good fruit of righteousness unless it is connected with the revival of the Spirit."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 128.

**How would you suggest revival and reformation can be brought to your local church?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study the following passages as they relate to the counsel to the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:18):

"Gold tried in the fire": 1 Peter 1:7-9, 18, 19; Gal. 5:6.

"White raiment": Rev. 3:4; 19:7, 8; Gal. 3:26, 27; Phil. 3:7-11.

"Eyesalve": Eph. 1:17, 18; 3:16-19; 1 John 2:27; 4:13.

Read "The Final Warning," in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 603-612.

"Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. . . .

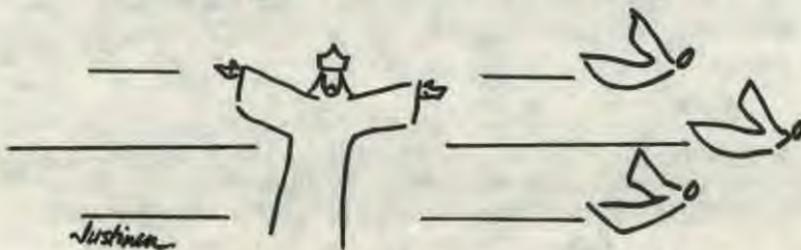
"The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God. . . . Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. List the reasons for the successful evangelistic outreach to the world of the earliest Christians. How can we apply first-century methods to our era?
2. Why is there a dynamic relationship between understanding the gospel and successful outreach to the world? How would you describe the relationship between message and mission? Illustrate from church history.
3. On the basis of Bible prophecy, what repetition of the medieval situation do you anticipate in the modern era? How should witnesses for Christ relate to this repetition of history?

**SUMMARY:** In the history of the Christian church successful soul-winning has been in direct relationship to the spiritual condition of professed Christians. Disbelief and doctrinal apostasy have been associated with failure to witness in Christ's way. When, in the modern church, purity of faith combines with evangelistic zeal, then church members will unite to fulfill Jesus' great commission.

# What Is Christ's Last Message to the World?



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Revelation 14.

**MEMORY TEXT:** "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Rev. 14:6).

**KEY THOUGHT:** The mission of Christ's remnant church is the proclamation of the gospel worldwide. Special end-time features of the gospel are contained in the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12.

**CHRIST'S LAST MESSAGE TO THE WORLD** is contained in Revelation 14. The chapter divides naturally into three main sections. The first section (verses 1-5) depicts those who received God's end-time seal, standing before God's throne in heaven. The second section (verses 6-13) goes back to the situation before the second coming of Jesus. This section presents the three messages to which believers respond before they are sealed. The third section (verses 14-20) depicts the second coming of Jesus, when those who were sealed are translated to heaven and those who received the mark of the beast are destroyed.

Those who accept the three angels' messages and live very near to Jesus by prayer and Bible study will be among those taken to heaven with Jesus when He returns. The purpose of our witness to the world is to cooperate with Christ in preparing a people spiritually to meet Him at His advent.

**THE REWARD OF THOSE WHO RECEIVE THE END-TIME SEAL OF GOD (Rev. 14:1-5).**

Where are the sealed believers said to be standing? Rev. 14:1, 3; compare 15:2-4. When are the 144,000 sealed? Rev. 6:17-7:3. What is the seal they receive? Rev. 14:1.

In vision, John saw the sealed believers "on Mount Zion" (Rev. 14:1, RSV). Mount Zion is in heaven: "But you have come to Mount Zion . . . the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22, RSV; compare Rev. 7:15). Revelation 14:1-5 depicts the scene of rejoicing in heaven after the second coming of Jesus. (See John 14:1-3.)

God's last-day living believers are sealed *before* the second coming of Jesus. Revelation 7:1-3 explains that the seal of God is given before the winds of strife are let loose upon our world prior to the second advent of Christ.

The seal that the 144,000 receive is the gift of God's character by the Holy Spirit. They have "his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1, RSV; compare Rev. 3:12; 22:4). God's name and Christ's name are symbols of their perfect character. (See Ps. 8:1; 18:49.) Christ's people receive His character by the gift of the Holy Spirit. (See Eph. 3:16-19; Gal. 2:20; 1 John 3:7.) Even though the Holy Spirit has been available to believers in every age, in a special measure He is given to those who are sealed at the end of time, because they need special power to overcome the "beast and his image" (Rev. 13:11-18).

**What are the character qualifications of those who receive the end-time seal of God? Rev. 14:4, 5.**

The sealed believers have resisted and overcome false religion. They "have not defiled themselves with women" (verse 4, RSV). An evil woman in prophecy represents false religion (Rev. 17:4, 5). The sealed believers are honest, pure, and spiritually faultless (Rev. 14:5), because Christ is reigning in their hearts. Consequently, in the pre-advent judgment their names are retained in the book of life (Rev. 3:5; Dan. 12:1).

**How are you making spiritual preparation to receive the end-time seal of God? How are you assisting others in their preparation for this experience?**

**WHAT IS THE FIRST ANGEL'S MESSAGE? (Rev. 14:6, 7).**

**Identify the four major elements in the first angel's message. Rev. 14:6, 7.**

What is the "everlasting gospel"? The gospel is the good news that Christ died for our sins and rose again (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The gospel includes the good news that, because Christ intercedes for us in the heavenly sanctuary, all our sins can be forgiven (Acts 13:38, 39; 1 Tim. 2:5; 1 John 2:1). The gospel also includes the good news that Christ's perfect righteousness is both counted for us (Rom. 4:22-25) and bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit (1 John 3:24; Col. 1:27; Gal. 3:3). The gospel announces to the world that Christ is coming again to give immortality to His faithful people and to translate them to His heavenly kingdom (Matt. 24:13, 14).

**What three truths are part of the gospel proclaimed by the first angel? How do these truths relate to the gospel as described above? Rev. 14:7.**

How can we give glory to the infinitely glorious God? Jesus gave glory to His Father by His life of sacrifice and service and by His infinite suffering on the cross (John 17:4). Every believer is to witness for Christ by reflecting the glory of His character (John 17:22, 23).

What is the significance of the announcement, "the hour of his judgment has come" (Rev. 14:7, RSV)? This announcement is part of the "everlasting gospel" (verse 6). This judgment takes place before the second coming of Jesus, because the gospel is preached in all the world before He comes. Daniel 7:9-14 depicts the judgment in heaven before God destroys His enemies and establishes the heavenly kingdom (verses 26, 27). In this judgment, the faithful are vindicated (Dan. 7:22), and the book of life is edited (Dan 12:1) on the basis of the spiritual condition of professed believers (Rev. 3:5; 19:7, 8).

We "worship him who made heaven and earth" (Rev. 14:7, RSV) by observing God's Sabbath day as a memorial of His creative works. (See Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Ex. 31:13.)

**How are you presenting this good news of the first angel's message to others?**

**WHAT IS THE SECOND ANGEL'S MESSAGE? (Rev. 14:8; 18:1-4).**

What modern power is designated as "Babylon"? Compare Rev. 14:8 with Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9; Isa. 13:1-11.

Ancient Babylon founded by Nimrod became a symbol of spiritual confusion and rejection of God. The neo-Babylonian Empire, founded by Nebuchadnezzar in the late seventh century B.C. (see Jer. 25:8-14), invaded Palestine three times (605, 597, 586 B.C.), taking the chosen people captive and finally destroying Jerusalem. The Medes and Persians, ruled by Cyrus the Great, conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. (See Isa. 44:28-45:6.)

The book of Revelation alludes to the historical events of the late seventh and early sixth centuries B.C. as examples of events that will occur toward the end of history. Modern Babylon is the false religious system of the last days from which the Lord calls those who wish to serve Him. "Babylon is fallen" means that, because Babylon is alive and powerful, God's people are to come closer to Christ lest they should be taken spiritually captive. "Babylon" (Rev. 14:8) summarizes the three-fold religious union of the last days that opposes God's truth and people. (See Rev. 13; 16:13.) Any church is part of modern "Babylon" that teaches nonbiblical doctrines.

**What final warning regarding Babylon does God inspire His people to give to the world? Rev. 18:1-4.**

"The time will come when those who love God supremely can no longer remain in connection with such as are 'lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.'

"Revelation 18 points to the time when, as the result of rejecting the threefold warning of Revelation 14:6-12, the church will have fully reached the condition foretold by the second angel, and the people of God still in Babylon will be called upon to separate from her communion. This message is the last that will ever be given to the world."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 390.

**Does it help to tell members of other churches that they are part of "Babylon"? What methods can you follow to persuade them to unite with the remnant church?**

**WHAT IS THE THIRD ANGEL'S MESSAGE? (Rev. 14:9-12).**

What three forces must be successfully resisted by those who will be saved when Jesus comes? Rev. 14:9.

Revelation 14:9 could be paraphrased: "Whoever worships according to the dictates of 'Babylon' will not be saved." The "beast" refers to the beast of Revelation 13:1-10. This animal is a symbol of the medieval and modern papacy. The period of 42 prophetic months (Rev. 13:5), or 1260 days, symbolizes the 1260 years of papal supremacy (A.D. 538-1798). The deadly wound (verse 3), received by the papacy in Europe at the end of the French Revolution, has been healing progressively throughout the twentieth century.

The "image" to the beast is formed by the second beast of Revelation 13:11-18. A modern replica of the medieval church-state union will enforce a man-made system of worship worldwide. The heart of this system of worship will be the "mark" of the beast (Rev. 13:16, 17), the most significant sign of papal religion. The sign or mark of God's authority is the seventh-day Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11; 31:13). The distinctive mark of papal authority is the opposite—Sunday observance. On the basis of Revelation 13, it is concluded that modern churches, united with the papacy, will demand that secular authorities around the world pass their decrees. God will exclude from salvation anyone who, by accepting these religious decrees in place of God's law, thus receives the mark of the beast.

What are the distinguishing characteristics of God's people who reject the beast, its image, and its mark? Rev. 14:12.

The Bible teaches that salvation is by God's grace, given to those who have faith. (See Eph. 2:8-10.) Works are not the means of salvation. (See Rom. 3:20-24.) But works—obedience to all of the Ten Commandments—are the expected and inevitable result of faith in Christ. (See Rom. 3:31; 7:7; 8:3, 4; James 2:10-12.)

How can you present the fearful warning of the third angel's message so that it is clearly good news? What is the positive message implied by the negative warning?

*Thursday*

*March 24*

**THE REAPING OF THE HARVEST (Rev. 14:14-20).**

**How does John symbolize the salvation of believers at the second coming of Jesus? Rev. 14:14-16.**

The Son of man bearing the sickle in His hand is Christ, symbolized in this passage as coming to reap a harvest. John's description in Revelation reminds us of Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-30). Referring to the faithful and the unfaithful in the church, Jesus instructed that both be allowed to "grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt. 13:30, RSV).

In His explanation of the parable, Jesus said, "The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels" (Matt. 13:39, RSV). The wheat represents the righteous who are taken to heaven at Jesus' second coming. At that time the righteous dead are raised and translated with the righteous living. (See 1 Thess. 4:16-18.)

**What vivid description did John give of the destruction of the wicked? Rev. 14:17-20.**

"The figure of the two harvests is borrowed from the ancient Palestinian agricultural year, which consisted of two main harvests, the grain harvest and the vintage. . . . Here the vintage represents the wicked gathered for destruction."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 834.

Note the times stipulated by Revelation for the punishment of the wicked: (1) the seven last plagues (Rev. 15:5-16:21); (2) the second coming of Jesus (Rev. 19:17-21); (3) the end of the 1,000 years (Rev. 20:9, 10, 14). The living wicked are put to death at the second coming of Jesus. They will not live again until the end of the millennium, when they will be raised to face the final judgment.

**In presenting these truths, how can you explain that there is no contradiction between the love and justice of God? How can you harmonize God's punishment of unbelievers with the truth of His infinite love for all? Would it be loving for God to give the wicked eternal life?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Study the spiritual characteristics of the dragon (Revelation 12), the beast (Rev. 13:1-10), and the "false prophet" (Rev. 13:11-18; 16:13; 19:20).

Read "God's Law Immutable," in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 433-450.

### MY PLEDGE

Because I realize the command to "go ye therefore and teach all nations" is a special invitation to me to share with others the peace, joy, and love that I have found in the Lord Jesus, I commit \_\_\_\_\_ (1-6 hours) each week to do some kind of personal work for Him. As the Lord gives me strength and health, and as circumstances allow, it is my determination to share the Lord Jesus with others at every opportunity by: giving Bible studies \_\_\_\_\_; visiting the needy \_\_\_\_\_; helping the poor \_\_\_\_\_, widows \_\_\_\_\_, children \_\_\_\_\_; telephoning \_\_\_\_\_; letter writing \_\_\_\_\_; giving (or mailing) missionary literature \_\_\_\_\_; praying for the lost \_\_\_\_\_, for missionaries \_\_\_\_\_, for church leaders \_\_\_\_\_, for the Global Mission program \_\_\_\_\_; other \_\_\_\_\_.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Place \_\_\_\_\_

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. List the positive aspects of the three angels' messages. What do these messages instruct us to believe and do?
2. What do the three angels' messages imply in regard to the mission of the church?

**SUMMARY:** The three angels' messages provide the heart of the church's end-time proclamation to the world. The message of the church is the rationale for its mission. Because Jesus will soon return, we want all to have an opportunity to prepare for that wonderful event. What a grand privilege God gives His children, not only to know about these climactic events but to share them with all people!

## **Lessons for Second Quarter, 1994**

The adult Sabbath School lessons for the second quarter of 1994 deal with the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations.

### **Lesson 1: A Place in His Plan.**

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Jeremiah 1, 2.

**MEMORY TEXT:** Jeremiah 1:7.

**KEY QUESTIONS:** What divine attribute assures us that events do not take God unawares?

#### **OUTLINE:**

Sunday: Jeremiah and His Times (Jer. 1:1, 2).

Monday: Call and Commission (Jer. 1:4, 5).

Tuesday: Two Visions (Jer. 1:11-16).

Wednesday: Revival and Reformation (2 Chron. 34:1-7).

Thursday: Living Fountain or Broken Cistern (Jer. 2:1-3:5).

### **Lesson 2: A Prophet's Pilgrimage.**

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Jeremiah 11:18-12:4; 14:7-9; 16:1-4; 36:1-32.

**MEMORY TEXT:** Jeremiah 10:23.

**KEY QUESTIONS:** How is a Christian's experience like a journey? Why does it involve "unlearning," as well as "learning"? How is a growing experience realized?

#### **OUTLINE:**

Sunday: Preparing the Prophet (Jer 1:1; 15:10).

Monday: The Sensitive Prophet (Jer. 14:7-9).

Tuesday: The Suffering Prophet (Jer. 11:18-23).

Wednesday: The Questioning Prophet (Jer. 20:14-18).

Thursday: The Writing Prophet (Jer. 36:1-3).

### **Lessons in Braille**

The regular Adult Sabbath School Lessons are available free each month in Braille and 16 2/3 rpm records to blind and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact the Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.

