

Jesus Bade Them, “Follow Me”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *John 10:1–5, 16; Luke 9:2; Rev. 14:6, 7; Luke 19:1–10; Acts 26:11–27; Rev. 3:20.*

Memory Text: “But they [the sheep] will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice” (*John 10:5, NIV*).

In A.D. 362, Roman emperor Julian launched a campaign to revive paganism. Christianity was taking over the Roman Empire, and he and the pagan leaders were worried. Julian’s advice to a prominent pagan priest expresses his concern and gives a clue as to why Christianity was growing so rapidly: “I think that when the poor happened to be neglected and overlooked by the [pagan] priests, the impious Galileans [Christians] observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence. . . . [They] support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us.”—Quoted in Rodney Stark, *Cities of God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), p. 31.

The Romans had counted on Christianity’s fading away when their leader, Jesus Christ, died. Instead, record numbers of Roman citizens were following Jesus. How did *they* explain this “problem”? Jesus’ followers were demonstrating His love through meeting the basic needs of those around them. That’s what Jesus did when He was here, and that’s what His followers are to do as well.

No wonder, then, that when given the offer to follow Jesus, so many did.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 10.

They Know His Voice

Read John 10:1–5, 16. How do these texts illustrate the importance of why we, as Jesus’ representatives, must form positive and loving relationships with people in our communities as we seek to lead them to Jesus? How can we help them learn to hear His voice?

The whisper of a friend is more powerful in drawing people to Jesus than is the shout of a stranger. When we make friends who learn to trust us, the Good Shepherd (*John 10:11, 14*) can work through us to help these people hear, know, and follow His voice.

It is, of course, important that we know Jesus’ voice ourselves before we can help others know it as well. We need divinely given discernment to distinguish between the cunning voice of Satan and Jesus’ voice. Indeed, we must never forget the reality of the great controversy and that we have an enemy who works with great stealth to keep people from coming to a saving relationship with Jesus.

Nevertheless, we can be powerful conduits who help people know the voice of Jesus. He speaks through nature (even despite the ravages of the Fall), providential circumstantial workings, the influence of the Holy Spirit, godly people, and His Word. (See Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 85–91.) As we ourselves come to know and obey that voice, we can be guides to others, as well. The last thing we want to be is, as Jesus once warned, the blind leading the blind (*see Matt. 15:14*).

Why did Jesus have such compelling power to draw people to Him? It is because His example of unselfish giving of Himself is hard to resist. When we, His body, set selfishness aside and take on the nature of a servant, letting Him live out His life within us, others will be drawn to the call of the Christ in us.

As the Good Shepherd’s representatives, we must reflect the characteristics of His ministry when we bid people to follow Him. Authenticity in word as well as genuine service that reflects Jesus’ sacrificial love opens the ears of those whom we serve and breaks down barriers between the community and the church.

What are concrete ways that you can help others hear the voice of the Shepherd?

We Are to Seek

Read Luke 19:10, Mark 1:17, Luke 9:2, and Revelation 14:6, 7. What is one key point that all these texts have in common? That is, what are they telling us to do?

For years a Seventh-day Adventist congregation prayed, “Lord, please draw the people in our community to our church and to You”—as if our church is a giant magnet that will magically draw people in. Yes, sometimes people do walk into our churches, searching for God, all with no apparent effort on our part.

But what is your church to do when years go by and no one from the community walks through your doors? If you merely focus on praying for people to come, you are not following Jesus’ method for winning souls. He mingled, socialized, and sought out people to save. “We are not to wait for souls to come to us; we must seek them out where they are. . . . There are multitudes who will never be reached by the gospel unless it is carried to them.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 229.

Various metaphors illustrate this idea of seeking:

1. The shepherd leaves the 99 sheep that are in the fold to seek for the one who has wandered away (*see Matt. 18:10–14*). Jesus is telling this story in the context of His admonition to nurture and protect “little ones” from sinning. The “little ones” could be literal children or immature Christians. If they wander back into the world, we, like Jesus, are to seek for them and lovingly bring them back to Him.

The point here, as in the texts above, is similar: we are to be proactive in seeking the lost. We need to make an effort to reach out to them. Though, on occasion, it happens that someone walks in off the street and says, “Teach me about God, about salvation, about truth,” that’s generally not the norm, is it?

2. “Christ’s method” of reaching the lost “will not, cannot, be without fruit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 144. Are we, however, focusing only on the “low-hanging fruit”—people who already share our Christian worldview, such as Christians of other denominations? What are we doing about reaching the “hard-to-reach fruit”—secular people, atheists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, et cetera? Historically, people with Christian worldviews find Adventism relevant, but we must do a much better job of sharing Jesus with faith groups that have other worldviews.

The Bridge

Sometimes a church will have community service outreach programs in areas of health, family, personal finance, conflict management, et cetera, and might ask: What is the bridge to bring them to the “Follow Me” stage? We rather should ask, *Who* is the bridge? Answer: You are! “The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470. Churches that are successful in keeping inquiring visitors engaged from event to event and program to program are blessed with members who genuinely love God and are eager to nurture lasting friendships.

On the flip side, church members who are careless in their approach to visitors, or even lethargic toward them, can have a very negative impact on your church’s outreach. “The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 371.

Read Luke 19:1–10. Why did Zacchaeus find it necessary to climb a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus? What spiritual lessons should we take from this story?

Imagine what might have happened if those who were blocking access to Jesus there in Jericho had paid attention to Zacchaeus’s keen interest in coming close to Jesus and had lovingly invited this “sinner” to the feet of the Savior.

Those of us who are part of the “crowd” around Jesus must be so “infected” with His love for struggling, sinful humanity that we become “contagious” Christians. If we are deeply aware of God’s love and grace for sinners like us, we will passionately seek those outside of the crowd who are short in spiritual stature and caringly usher them to Christ.

How do you act toward new faces in your church? Do you make an intentional effort to talk to them? Or do you ignore these people, thinking that someone else can minister to them? What does your answer say about yourself and what might need to be changed?

The Bidding

Jesus and His disciples healed people *and* then turned their minds to eternal issues. (See Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 20.) Evangelist Mark Finley reminds us that not to introduce God to people is spiritual malpractice. Jesus' method of evangelism was to touch people at their points of greatest need. This is medical missionary work. Christ was not content only to heal them physically and do nothing else. The goal is eternal life in Jesus. Medical missionary work may not start with bidding those whom we know to follow Jesus, but it should get there eventually. Out of our love for people, we will long to offer them *everything* that Jesus offers.

But you may say, "I will take care of the first part of Jesus' method, but I don't do the bidding 'follow Me' part. That's not my gift." If you do the first part, you may surprise yourself by automatically sharing Jesus—and it will be so natural, so much easier, because you did the "groundwork" in the soil of their hearts.

As you become better acquainted with the people you serve, be alert for opportunities to talk about faith and about what the Lord means to you. Seek for opportunities to bring up spiritual topics. Ask your new friends about their family, their occupation, and their religion, which opens the way to share your personal testimony.

In fact, personal testimonies can be the most powerful way to witness, because they can also be the least threatening. You aren't overtly preaching; you are simply telling a story, and we all should have our own personal story about what Jesus has done in our lives.

Read Acts 26:11–27, the apostle Paul's telling of his personal testimony to King Agrippa. What can we learn from this for ourselves in seeking to witness to others about Jesus?

Notice the various stages. Paul told about what he was like before he knew the Lord. He then told about his actual conversion experience. And Paul then told about what God had done in his life since then. Then he made an appeal.

Though our stories might not be as dramatic as Paul's, what is your own story with Jesus, and how can you learn to share it with others when the time is right?

Seek and You Shall Find

Read Revelation 3:20, Matthew 7:7, 8, and John 1:12. In what ways are these three passages related, and what are they saying to us about what it means to seek and to find the Lord?

These texts together show that people must ask and seek and be open to receive Jesus. At the same time, Revelation 3:20 depicts Jesus as standing at the door and knocking so that a person will open the door and let Him in.

These ideas are not contradictory. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord is working on the hearts of people, drawing them to Him, even if people aren't necessarily aware that this is what is happening. They are often seeking for something that life itself doesn't offer them. What a privilege to be there to point them in the right direction and to help them better understand just what it is that they are looking for.

The fact is that, through you, Jesus can knock at the "door" of the lives of the people in your community, and anyone who willingly "opens the door" and receives Him will receive the blessings that come with Him (*Rev. 3:20, John 1:12*). Also, He invites His followers to ask, seek, and knock at His door and receive the "good gifts" of His kingdom (*Matt. 7:7, 8, 11*).

When the Holy Spirit impresses you that someone is ready to "open the door" to Christ, ask, "Would you like to pray with me to receive Jesus Christ and become a member of His family?" The following is a sample prayer that he or she can pray:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name, amen."

We need spiritual discernment to know when the right time is to make an appeal. While there's always the danger of being too aggressive, there's always the danger, perhaps worse, of not being aggressive enough. Sometimes people need a firm and loving push to make a choice for the Lord. Who knows who might be teetering on the edge between two choices: eternal life in Christ or eternal loss?

We do, for sure, have a sacred responsibility.

Further Thought: Read Psalm 77:20, Hosea 11:4, 2 Corinthians 5:11–21. Read Ellen G. White, “Teaching and Healing,” pp. 139–146, and “Help in Daily Living,” pp. 469, 470, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “ ‘This Man Receiveth Sinners,’ ” pp. 185–197, and “ ‘Go Into the Highways and Hedges,’ ” pp. 228–237, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

There was a young man who loved the Lord and who wanted to tell others about Jesus. Articulate, charismatic, he was a powerful witness. People loved to hear him speak. Yet, there was a constant problem: he was always afraid to ask people to make a commitment to Jesus. This surprised other church members, because in every other way he seemed so bold for the Lord, so willing to speak openly about his faith. Eventually, when asked about it, he gave the argument that we saw in Wednesday’s study that this was not his gift. He liked to sow seeds; he would leave it to others to reap the harvest. After a while, though, he confessed that, more than anything else, he was afraid of being rejected. He always felt a bit inadequate as a witness for the Lord (which is a good thing), and thus he was afraid that people would not make commitments to Jesus after he had asked them to do so. Others in the church explained to him that witnessing isn’t about us but about Jesus. We are always going to be imperfect witnesses. Though we can prayerfully and lovingly point them to Jesus, we cannot play the role of the Holy Spirit, who alone can bring conviction and conversion. We, though, are to be the human conduits of the love of Christ to others.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What would you say to someone who said that he or she was afraid to ask others to make a commitment to Jesus?
- 2 John 1:9 reads: “That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (*NKJV*). How does this verse help us to understand that the Lord is seeking to reach every person with salvation?
- 3 How friendly is your church to visitors? What could you do better in regard to how you deal with strangers who walk in the door?
- 4 When was the last time someone off the street simply walked into your church? How did the church respond?
- 5 In class, talk about your own conversion stories. How have you used them, or how could you use them to be a witness to others?

A Changed Heart: Part 1

by AGNES MUKARWEGO and ALITA BYRD, Rwanda

“Why are you all dressed up?” the fish seller in the marketplace asked me.

I looked at my good clothes—not what one normally wore to the market—and wondered what to tell this man, who was a friend of my husband. If my husband knew that I had gone to church, he would be angry. But I could not lie. Finally I told the man, “I came from church to buy my husband’s favorite fish for dinner.”

My home was not a happy one. My husband drank heavily and paid little attention to the children or me. We were poor because he did not work regularly. These problems left me discouraged and searching for anything that would bring me hope. So when I met my neighbor and her friends on the road one day and they began to tell me that God is the answer to all my problems, big and small, I was eager to hear more. But when they invited me to their church on Saturday, I told them I could not go. Saturday was market day, the busiest day of the week.

Before my neighbor and her friends parted, they gave me a Bible. I opened it and began reading as I walked home. I continued reading the Bible at home, and soon I found some precious verses that seemed to speak just to me. I read them again and again.

“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (*Matt. 6:25–27, NIV*).

God knows about my worries! I thought. *If God cares that much about me, He can certainly help me with my problems.*

I decided that I would make time to go to the Seventh-day Adventist church the next Saturday to learn more about the God who did not want me to worry about anything. I got up and dressed before my husband awoke and slipped out of the house.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.