



Q
2008

JULY-SEPTEMBER

*Agents
of Hope:*
**God's Great
Missionaries**

**A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults**



<http://cq.adventist.org>

Agents of Hope: God's Great Missionaries

JULY—SEPTEMBER 2008



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This Quarter's Illustrator



Erica J. Scott was born in New York City. She was raised there and in Trinidad and Tobago. In 2005, she graduated with a degree in Graphic Design from Southern Adventist University in Tennessee. She currently lives in New York.

Erica has been interested in art since she was a child, when she scribbled drawings in her family's Bible Story books. She plans to continue to improve her artistic talents, and to pursue a career where she can use those talents to glorify God.

Getting the most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
 - "**Introduction**" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
 - "**Logos**" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
 - "**Testimony**" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
 - "**Evidence**" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
 - "**How-To**" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
 - "**Opinion**" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
 - "**Exploration**" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference–approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

For Such a Time as This: The Apostle Paul



**“Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God”
(Rom. 15:17, NIV).**

An Apostolic Traffic Lesson

INTRODUCTION

Acts 22; Gal. 1:10–17, 20–24

No U-turn Allowed. That's the one traffic sign that irks me the most when driving around the Miami area. Once my classmates and I planned to go out to dinner to celebrate the completion of our classes. We all hopped into our cars and proceeded to a restaurant in the neighboring town. Somehow I got separated from the group. I knew that if I could turn onto the avenue I had just passed, I could catch up with the others. Rather than cut off traffic, I drove on. However, no U-turns were allowed on that street, and several streets that followed only permitted right or left turns. I never made it to that dinner, because I could never turn back to join my friends.

Fortunately, our Christian walk is not that way. Our God of grace allows us, and even encourages us, to make U-turns when we're going the wrong way.

One example is Saul. His hometown, Tarsus, was a city of international commerce and diverse cultures. He studied under Gamaliel, "a famous Hebrew Scholar."¹ This sharp young legal mind even longed for the day he could be a part of the Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin.² Little did he know he would be using his legal skills to defend Christianity. Saul's U-turn happened en route to Damascus on a "Christian hunt." On that road, he encountered Jesus Himself (Acts 22:5–8). He wanted Paul to make a U-turn in his thinking and in his profession (10–16).

There are three observations from the early glimpses of Saul's life that are worth mentioning: (1) No matter how you appear to others today, everyone has a dark side. We are all sinful by birth, nature, and choice, and we are spiritually blind. (2) Regardless of what we've done, we're not beyond hope. (3) Though our past is soiled, we can find a new beginning with God. Christ transformed Saul, gave him a new name, and made him a new creation. It's never too late to start doing what's right.³

This week we'll delve into Paul's life to learn more about how we can follow his example in mission. Thank God for U-turns!

Thank God for U-turns!

1. *The SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 402.

2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit*, p. 6.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 14.

How to Be an Extraordinary Missionary

LOGOS

Acts 9:1–9; 22:3–5, 25–29; Rom. 12:2; Phil. 3:1–11

The biblical record of Paul's missionary journeys never fails to inspire. I spent three years overseas as a missionary, and during that time I frequently turned to his story for encouragement. When I felt overwhelmed or discouraged, I'd think, *This is nothing compared to what Paul faced as a missionary.*

What made Paul such an extraordinary missionary? The answer is the focus of today's lesson.

More Than Qualified (Acts 9:1–9; 22:3–5; 25–29; Phil. 3:1–6)

Even prior to his conversion, Paul served as a missionary as he shared his zeal for Jewish law by persecuting and imprisoning followers of the Way. He believed he was doing God's will, and he dedicated his life to this work. But his zeal wasn't enough. He was still confronted on the road to Damascus where Jesus asked him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4, NASB).

What matters most to you?

Even before this life-changing incident, Paul was a brilliant student of Hebrew Scripture. He was trained by Gamaliel, "a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people" (Acts 5:34, NIV). Yet this knowledge, like his zeal, meant nothing. He also appears in the biblical record as a natural leader. He described himself in Philippians 3:5 as a Pharisee. Ellen White tells us he was a member of the Sanhedrin,* which means he had significant influence in Jerusalem. Yet again, this ability was meaningless.

One might argue that his zeal, knowledge, and leadership were beneficial to his ministry after his conversion. He obviously used these gifts God blessed him with to minister to others. He would have been foolish not to. But read what Paul says about these gifts: "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:7, NIV).

What Matters Most (Phil. 3:7–11)

Paul's résumé seems to tell us that he was more than qualified for a life of ministry. He was zealous and well educated, and he had strong leadership capabilities. But read what he said about all this in Philippians 3:8. When Paul wrote in this verse about knowing Christ, he was not referring to knowledge gained by sitting in a class or reading a book. He was referring to a knowledge that transforms lives.

Koine Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written, has two words that can be translated "to know." One word is *oida*, which literally means "to see with the mind." When translated "to know," *oida* refers to an abstract knowledge. The other word is *ginosko*, which is a knowledge one gains only from experience. Paul used *ginosko* in Philippians 3:8, 10. So, when he said he wanted to "know Christ," he meant he wanted to live a life in which he experienced a relationship with Christ. He wanted to experience "the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10, NIV). He wanted to experience Christ's life.

It's easy to look at Paul and think, *He had it all. He was zealous, intelligent, and a natural leader. No wonder he was so effective!* But then we miss the point. Paul's experiential relationship with Christ and his desire to understand more of His life is what made Paul an extraordinary missionary.

Live What You Learn (Rom. 12:2)

What matters most to you? You may not serve overseas, but if you share Christ with others through your words, your music, or your example, then you're a missionary. And as a missionary, it's important to ask yourself, *What matters most to me?*

What do you depend on when you share your testimony with others? What do you depend on when you study the Bible with a new Christian?

Are you experiencing Christ's life now? Are you experiencing His power? His fellowship? If not, ask to make His life real to you. Don't read the Bible the same way you read other books. As you read it, ask yourself, *What promise is God asking me to trust today? What is God asking me to give to Him today? How is He asking me to step out in faith?* Make it a point to daily live what you learn. If you allow Him, God will draw you into an experiential relationship with Him. And through this relationship, He will transform your life.

REACT

1. What talents or abilities do you depend upon for success in your career or in your ministry? Do you feel you depend more upon your talents or abilities than on Christ and His power?

2. Do you know Christ? If not, what's preventing you? How can you overcome these obstacles and have a deeper relationship with Him?

**Sketches From the Life of Paul* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1883), p. 16.

God's Vision, Our Mission

TESTIMONY

2 Cor. 4:3-7

As Paul searched the Scriptures, he learned that throughout the ages “ ‘not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence.’ 1 Corinthians 1:26-29. And so, viewing the wisdom of the world in the light of the cross, Paul ‘determined not to know anything, . . . save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.’ 1 Corinthians 2:2.”¹

“I was shown that God would accomplish a great work through the truth if devoted, self-sacrificing men would give themselves unreservedly to the work of presenting it to those in darkness. Those who have a knowledge of the precious truth and who are consecrated to God should avail themselves of every opportunity

where there is an opening to press in the truth. Angels of God are moving on the hearts and consciences of the people of other nations, and honest souls are troubled as they witness the signs of the

“What will be the end of all these things?”

times in the unsettled state of the nations. The inquiry arises in their hearts: What will be the end of all these things? . . . All men and women who are Christians in every sense of the word should be workers in the vineyard of the Lord. They should be wide-awake, zealously laboring for the salvation of their fellow men, and should imitate the example that the Saviour of the world has given them in His life of self-denial, sacrifice, and faithful, earnest labor.”²

REACT

1. Paul had a dramatic conversion experience that radically changed his life. How would you change and reprioritize your life, your way of thinking, and your education if you were “determined not to know anything . . . save Jesus Christ and Him crucified”?

2. What are some things that are holding you back from giving yourself unreservedly to presenting the gospel to others?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 127, 128.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 202.

What Are You Waiting For?

EVIDENCE

Mark 16:19, 20

How did Paul, who had breathed “murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” (Act 9:1, NIV), become the most compelling apologist for Christ? As incredible as it may appear, Saul (Paul) had an encounter with Christ that transformed his perspective. During a brief “rendezvous” on the Damascus Road, he was compelled by the “evidence” to yield to the promptings of the Spirit; and like Isaiah (6:8), he responded by being willing for God to send him. Afterward, like a skillful lawyer, he presented Christ as the only hope for sinners. When asked to defend himself before King Agrippa, Paul declared unashamedly, “I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven” (Acts 26:19, NIV).

Jesus confronts each of us, and like Paul, we must respond—one way or another. Jesus’ order is unambiguous. “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19, NLT). Fulfilling this command is part of our job description as disciples of Christ. And we are to do so with joy and vigor, knowing full well that people are perishing for lack of truth.

It’s your turn and mine. We can’t plug our ears and lock up our consciences against the fact that we are living at the crossroads of the

most breathtaking event to occur since the creation of our world. Jesus is returning, and He wants us to be heralds of His coming.

When all is said and done, we must ask ourselves, What’s the best indicator of our commitment to God? Attending church and being involved with church business is good. But it is not enough of a reflection to those around us who want something stupendous, something that will transform their lives. This vision that one day—soon—Christ will return to take us to heaven with Him must be so strong a motivation that, like Paul, we also will become agents of hope to the world. The lives we help to save may well be ours! This is our time.

This is our time.

REACT

1. When Jesus said His disciples were to go on soul-winning missions for Him, what did He actually mean? In what ways may you be an integral part of this mission to wrest souls from Satan’s grip?

2. If you are preoccupied with something that is hampering your contribution to Christ’s overall mission, what should you do so you can be more like Paul?

How to Be Better Witnesses for Christ

HOW-TO

Acts 22:3–5; 25–29; Rom. 7:19–25; 11:1; Phil. 3:2; 2 Pet. 1:3–8

Have you ever been totally wrong about something, yet behaved as though you were totally right? The apostle Paul was wrong about what God required of him to the point that he persecuted Christians. When he met Christ on the road to Damascus, both he and his life's mission were transformed. Likewise, when we meet Christ, He transforms our lives and our purpose. We need to ask the following two questions: (1) How did Paul demonstrate the transformation that occurred in his life? (2) How can that help us fulfill our purpose as Christians? Indeed, Paul's example can help us be better witnesses for Christ:

1. *Surrender yourself to be used by God.* Paul gave his life and all the resources he had to teach others about Christ. He gave away the comforts of an ordinary life to do something extraordinary for his Master. We should also allow ourselves to be instruments in Christ's hand in all circumstances so we can help others believe in Him.

God's promises are sure.

2. *Share your testimony.* Nothing can be more exciting than helping someone see a true example of God's power through our own personal experience. Such was the case with Paul: "As he was sent from city to city for his trial, his testimony concerning Jesus, and the interesting incidents of his own conversion, were related before kings and governors, that they should be left without excuse concerning Jesus."* Likewise, we should make it a habit to share our encounters with Jesus, just like the apostle Paul.

3. *Place all your confidence in God.* Our worldly achievements cannot help us in the battle against evil. By nature we are so connected with sin that we can only overcome sin by the power of Christ (Rom. 7:19–25). We can resist temptation and gain victory only by resting all our faith in His power to save.

4. *Believe God's promises.* God's promises are sure. By believing His words, we grow in our relationship with Him. Such growth will show in our attitudes and actions. Our witnessing work will also bear much more fruit in our own transformation (2 Pet. 1:3–8).

REACT

1. Why do you think testimonies are so effective in helping others to see Christ?
2. Take a step back. Do you think people see you as being Christlike? Why or why not?

*Early Writings, p. 207.

Our Greater Purpose

OPINION

2 Pet. 1:3–8

Serving as a missionary teacher in Taiwan was a rewarding time in my life. But it was also filled with numerous challenges; for example, being assigned to teach elementary school physical education even though I'd never quite mastered the basics of baseball!

During this time, I purchased Cece Winans' latest CD. I was especially inspired by a song entitled "Just Like You, Jesus." In this piece, Cece sings, "I wanna walk like You / I wanna talk like You / I wanna live like You / Just like You Jesus. I wanna pray like You / Wanna love like You / I wanna look like You / Just like You Jesus".¹ On days when I questioned my decision to become a missionary, this song reminded me of my greater purpose—to reflect Christ's character to my students.

Similarly, all of us have a mission to reflect Christ's character to those with whom we come in contact. This is no easy task when we consider all of the stressful situations we are in and all the different types of people those situations involve. However, the Lord has promised that if we seek Him through the spiritual disciplines (prayer, worship, etc.), He will give us the strength to persevere in our quest to be more Christlike in our thoughts and actions.

"I wanna look like You."

In 2 Peter 1:3–8, Peter gives us a recipe for cultivating Christian growth. Starting with faith as a base, add virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and charity in equal measure. In its own way, each quality is essential for our spiritual development. We must daily seek the Holy Spirit's help in the development of our spiritual life. While God provides the power to run our lives, we choose the direction.² Developing these eight qualities will enable us to continually move forward and to focus upward. As these virtues flourish, we will overcome the temptation and corruption found in the world.³ We may also partake of God's blessings for this life and for the life to come. Finally, in diligently striving to be more like Jesus, we will be compelled to serve others and to spread His good news.

1. Cece Winans, *Throne Room* Sony, 2003.

2. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on 2 Peter." Retrieved November 9, 2007 from <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/2peter.pdf>.

3. Ibid.

Friday
July 4

How's Your Serve?

EXPLORATION

Acts 9:3–6; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 12:1, 2; 2 Tim. 3:1–4, 8

CONCLUDE

No matter how sincere our profession of faith, until we meet Jesus, it's entirely possible to have been sincerely wrong. This was the conclusion Saul came to when He met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul's spiritual and legal training, his keen leadership skills, his zealousness for Judaism were useless to God until he encountered Jesus. Following his conversion, Paul delivered his body to Christ, a living sacrifice, determined to share the good news of salvation with all whom he met. The circumstances of our conversion may not be nearly as dramatic as Paul's, but the extent of that conversion will be measured in part by our labor for the lost.

CONSIDER

- Surfing the Internet for a map of the area in Syria where Paul met Jesus. Notice that Paul ministered where he first met Jesus. You don't have to go to another country to be a missionary.
- Researching the missionary journeys of Paul to identify the number of miles he traveled during his entire ministry. What does this say to you about Paul's passion for sharing Christ?
- Memorizing 1 Corinthians 12:1, 2. These two verses capture the heart of Paul's approach to ministry.
- Witnessing to someone today by a kind word, a thoughtful deed, or a prayer—all of which should mention Jesus.
- Organizing a prayer walk in your community. March down each street, pausing to pray at each corner for the salvation of every person.
- Reading Romans 1:20 and observing nature around you. Why did Paul include this idea in his message to the Romans?

CONNECT

The Acts of the Apostles, chap.12.

Martin Luther King Jr., "Paul's Letter to American Christians" sermon, *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration From the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.*

“All Things to All People”: Paul Preaches to the World



“I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22, NRSV).

Cultural Relevance in Gospel Sharing

INTRODUCTION

1 Cor. 9:22

In your culture, how do you greet a friend? With a warm embrace? With a kiss on both cheeks? With a casual handshake? With a nod of the head? With a wink of an eye? Practices such as this vary from culture to culture. The same could be said of many other parts of culture. Consider, for example, wedding celebrations, food choices, pastimes, and entertainment.

Cultural differences must be taken into account when sharing the gospel with all the world. What could be a relevant way of presenting the gospel in Asia might not work in parts of Europe or Africa. When I was volunteering in East Timor, I learned that it was better to share the gospel with groups of people rather than one on one. However, in Australia, I have a number of contacts who dislike group Bible studies. I have a friend in the United States who does some of his Bible studies by phone. And I'm told that in some cultures in Africa, women and men don't want to study the Bible together.

**It's important to understand
cultural preferences.**

To effectively share the gospel, it's important to understand cultural preferences and ways of thinking.

It has to be made clear though that we don't have to be drunk in order to win the drunkards or be a

criminal to reach out to the thieves or murderers. Nor do we have to be an imam to win Muslims. In other words, we don't have to be what we should not be in order to share the gospel in culturally relevant ways.

We can't wait for people to come into the church and accept Christ as their Savior. We have to take Christ to the streets and the fields. We must bring Him to sit under the coconut or gum trees, by the seashore and the desert. We are to bring Him to all people, regardless of their cultural background.

The apostle Paul didn't only preach to the Gentiles, he also preached to the Jews. He also preached to the Romans, to the Ephesians, to the Corinthians, and to people in many other places. Surely he had to vary his ways of presenting the same relevant message to different cultures and circumstances. This could be what he meant when he wrote that he was "all things to all people" (1 Cor. 9:22, NRSV). This week we will explore how Paul did this and learn how we can adapt it to our present times.

Pondering Paul's Philosophical Perspectives

EVIDENCE

Acts 17:18–34

Greece had brought its civilization, its learning, and its many gods to the Roman world. As Paul entered into this climate of intellectual curiosity, the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers challenged him to defend his theology.

Stoic thought is based on the concept that humans can attain happiness and perfection by aligning themselves to reason and natural law. Through self-control, fortitude, and emotional detachment, Stoics can think clearly and live unaffected by the natural currents of life. In Stoic philosophy, God was the universal reason, the natural lawmaker, and the provider of order.

In contrast, the Epicureans had little use for God. They proposed that the world and everything in it happened as a result of random motion and specific combinations of atoms. Because Epicureans felt that personal contentment and happiness were most important in life, they shunned pain and fear, while promoting virtue and self-control. They also had no belief in the afterlife. This is probably why many of Paul's listeners started scoffing when he described the resurrection of Christ (Acts 17:32).

How could Paul present the gospel in a relevant and attractive way to these two groups of people?

He did what many great speakers do.

He did what many great speakers do. He spoke to them first from their own knowledge and understanding and then related it to what he wanted them to hear. Paul spoke to them on Mars Hill. He had obviously been to the temples and knew of the Unknown god and the Greek's deep fascination with the divine. He quoted from their poets. For the Stoics, he began with an explanation of natural law and God's integral role in creating the universe. What he said made sense, and there were three reactions: (1) those who scoffed, (2) those who were intrigued but did nothing, and (3) those who believed. Paul had shared with all so that some might be saved—and some were.

REACT

1. How are the philosophies of the Stoics and Epicureans similar to attitudes held by certain groups today?
2. Using Paul's example, how can we reach out to those groups?

Monday
July 7

Paul Preaches to the World

LOGOS

Acts 11:19–26; 13:16–42; 17:18–34; 1 Cor. 9:22, 23

“I have become all things” (1 Cor. 9:22, NRSV)

Many people make significant changes in their lives at one time or another. But few can match the change Paul made. He was a leading Pharisee early in adulthood. Then he changed drastically, becoming a Christian and joining with the people he had been hunting and killing when he was a Pharisee.

Paul was a tentmaker by trade, a theologian by passion, and a preacher by necessity. He was shipwrecked, imprisoned, beaten, and stoned. He was in danger from rivers, bandits, storms, and people of numerous countries and religions—including his own. Paul knew what it was to be high and low, loved and hated, heard and ignored. Paul was a man of extremes.

“To all people” (1 Cor. 9:22, NRSV)

Paul also had the unique ability, due to his origins and allegiances, to mingle with many people groups. He was a true Israelite and a Roman citizen. Fluent in both their languages, he was able to present himself as either. He studied the Hebrew law under Gamaliel, a well-known rabbi,

**Paul was a man of
extremes.**

and was brought to the Christian faith by a vision of the risen Jesus.

Paul managed his familiarity with people well. He traveled widely, participated in local customs, and spoke intelligently about local religion, politics, and trade. Paul was in the practice of using his similarities with others to bridge the gap between them.

“That I might by all means” (1 Cor. 9:22, NRSV)

When the gospel was sufficient, Paul would proclaim it. However, when he could see that the locals needed philosophical massaging, he would connect with them in ways that even today’s Christians would shy away from. Speaking to the men of Athens Paul plucked the line “We are his offspring” (Acts 17:28, NIV) from the introduction of Aratus’s *Phaenomena*—a major work of an ancient Greek poet (circa 315 B.C.)—and applied it to Jesus.

How do you think today’s church leaders would react to such “misquoting” in evangelism? You can be sure Paul was attacked from all sides. Thus his defense

of himself—that he was willing to use “all means” to accomplish the gospel commission—was well founded.

“Save some” (1 Cor. 9:22, NRSV)

While Paul spent a lot of time in public proclamation, much of his success as a soul winner was found in personal relationships. He would never have been accepted in the ranks of the apostles if it hadn't been for Barnabas, who stood up for him in front of the fearful apostles and proclaimed the works, sermons, and commitment of Paul as a follower of Jesus. If Barnabas had been unwilling to risk his reputation and wager his influence on Saul-the-Christian-killer, Paul-the-apostle might never have been born.

“I do all this for the sake of the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:23, NIV)

Paul had a strong sense of self. He supported himself while ministering, wrote letters with strong conviction (13 of which are included in the New Testament), and doggedly proclaimed his position as an apostle. Yet, when he was present among people he asked very little for himself and spoke gently.

He had an even stronger sense of the gospel—ultimately being killed in defense of Christ. He understood that all his learning, leading, and languishing would be useless if Jesus Christ was not proclaimed in every message, letter, plea, and action. Paul knew what he should do—what he desperately wanted to do—yet he was disrupted in his obedience by numerous influences that led him astray. Paul's example allows us to see the power the gospel has for our first conversion to Jesus and then the daily reconversion as we again place our hearts in our Savior's hands.

“That I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:23, NIV)

Paul got his strength from Christ's example. He saw Jesus, “who for the joy set before him endured the cross” and lived likewise. Paul's eyes were ever fixed “on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2, NIV). Paul knew he would share, one day, in the blessings of Jesus' kingdom.

REACT

1. Where are you the most comfortable sharing your faith? How could you create more opportunities to be in such situations?
2. What interests or hobbies do you have that could be used as secular connectors?

"A Tact Born of Divine Love"

TESTIMONY

Acts 17:15–34

"Around [Paul] gathered poets, artists, and philosophers,—the scholars and sages of Athens, who thus addressed him: 'May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? . . .'

"In that hour of solemn responsibility, the apostle was calm and self-possessed. His heart was burdened with an important message, and the words that fell from his lips convinced his hearers that he was no idle babbler. . . .

"With hand outstretched toward the temple crowded with idols, Paul poured out the burden of his soul, and exposed the fallacies of the religion of the Athenians. The wisest of his hearers were astonished as they listened to his reasoning. He showed himself familiar with their works of art, their literature, and their religion."¹

With "a tact born of divine love, he carefully drew their minds away from heathen deities, by revealing to them the true God, who was to them unknown."²

The "worker of God needs
strong faith. . . ."

"In every effort to reach the higher classes, the worker of God needs strong faith. Appearances may seem forbidding, but in the darkest hour there is light above. The strength of those who love and

serve God will be renewed day by day. The understanding of the Infinite is placed at their service, that in carrying out His purposes they may not err. Let these workers hold the beginning of their confidence firm unto the end, remembering that the light of God's truth is to shine amid the darkness that enshrouds our world."³

REACT

1. How important is tact in connecting effectively with people to share the gospel?
2. Why are people who are more educated and "upper class" more difficult to reach with the gospel?
3. How can you reach out to "upper-class" people in your community?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 236, 237.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

Being a Relevant Witness

HOW-TO

Acts 11:19–26; 13:16–42; 17:18–34

Alister McGrath tells about his friend's stamp-collecting hobby. His friend, he says, "is perfectly capable of telling me everything I could possibly want to know about the watermarks of stamps issued during the reign of Queen Victoria by the Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Tobago. And while I have no doubt about the truth of what he is telling me, I cannot help but feel that it is an utter irrelevance to my life."*

Christianity strikes many people the same way. They see no need for a religion that is over two thousand years old. As Christians, the argument is not so much about the relevance of the gospel but more about how the gospel is presented. A look at the early Christian church can teach us a lot about making the gospel message relevant to our contacts.

1. *Share the gospel with everyone*, not only the people you think are the "right" people. Jesus' sacrifice was for everyone (see Acts 11:20).

2. *Make a resounding difference*.

Even when persecution was rife, stories filtered through about the spread of the gospel. Celebrate changed lives (see Acts 11:19–22).

Celebrate changed lives.

3. *Be prepared to send helpers*. And remember to accept help from other Christians (see Acts 11:22).

4. *Act kindly*. What you do and how you treat people will mean much more than the words you speak (see Acts 11:24).

5. *Plan to stick around*. Develop relationships (see Acts 11:26).

6. *Learn from the past*. Knowing your Christian heritage helps you to own the present (see Acts 13:16–42).

7. *Be familiar with the gospel*. Be prepared to debate. There is nothing more off-putting than trying to have a discussion with a person who repeatedly says "It's in the Bible" or "I live by faith." It's OK to argue for the gospel (see Acts 17:18–34).

8. *Preach the gospel, preach the gospel, preach the gospel* (see Acts 11:19–26; 13:16–42; 17:18–34).

*Alister McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Modern Myths* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993), p. 73.

OPINION

Acts 17:30

There are scores of good churchgoers and pastors who decry the need for making any “adjustments” to the “pure gospel” in their efforts to reach people. From where I worship, however, the “pure gospel” is nothing if not love; and the face of love is our concern, interest, and efforts toward saving those we meet. The way we love individuals ought to vary.”

Christ’s full love must be seen by those in the workplace, the streets, the clubs, and in our churches. It won’t suffice to spread His love “thinly” in places we think meet with the disapproval of Christ or His church. Jesus met people from and in all walks of life; and they were drawn first to His love and then to His standards.

Rubel Shelly of Woodmont Hills Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A., preached the following: “The church that survives thrives, and changes lives will be the church that knows how to respond to its time and place. It will understand its culture and respond appropriately to it. It will not adopt its culture,

“ ‘One, two, Velcro my shoe. . . .’ ”

but it will comprehend it and engage it. It will not conform to its culture, but it will enable its members to respond to it with the compassionate heart and perceptive mind of Jesus Christ.

“In a cartoon featuring Nancy and Waldo, Nancy was jumping rope and repeating a rhyme: ‘One, two, Velcro my shoe; three, four, revolving door; five, six, computer chip . . .’ Waldo interrupted her and said: ‘Nancy, that’s not the way the rhyme goes.’ Nancy replied, ‘I know, but these things have to be updated from time to time.’”^{*} Are churches dying because they don’t know what Nancy knows?

Being “all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22, NRSV) is all about love—to all people. The face of God’s love is indeed the “pure gospel,” undiluted, persuading “all people in the world to change their hearts and lives” (Acts 17:30, NCV).

REACT

1. Why do some groups/individuals link a change in methods with heresy?
2. Will those who don’t attempt to become “all things to all people” be held accountable?

^{*} Ruth A. Daugherty, April 2, 2006. “The Church and Xtreme Social Holiness Today.” Retrieved June 12, 2007 from <http://www.stpaulshelena.org/templates/System/details.asp?id=31435&PID=341673>.

Experiencing Their World

EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 9:22, 23 (compare several versions)

CONCLUDE

Our world is one of many cultures, people groups, and nationalities that need to hear the story of Jesus in ways they can understand. As Christians, we must make the gospel relevant and engaging to those who haven't heard about its life-giving and life-changing power. Paul used both his Jewish and Roman citizenships to his advantage as he sought to relate to others how Christ changed his life. When we do the same, we will find that sharing Christ isn't scary, but a natural outpouring of our excitement of being one of His children.

CONSIDER

- Writing your testimony several ways to reach different types of people. Practice what you will say and condense it so you can share Jesus in less than three minutes.
- Meeting with your local church board and discussing how the worship service can become more relevant to young adults. Work to find a common ground that the majority can feel comfortable with, and find ways to implement the ideas that are formed.
- Interviewing people in the neighborhood around your church. Design a questionnaire that asks questions such as who they think Jesus is; what they believe the world faces in the future; and what they believe people need to have true happiness. Offer them the opportunity to participate in a small group discussion at your church to help them find answers to their questions.
- Learning about a people group in your country that you know nothing or little about. What are their customs and culture? How would you develop ways of telling them about Jesus? How can you relate your life experiences to them in a meaningful way to share Christ?
- Composing a song with the theme of being all things to all people and at the same time being a Christian.
- Role-playing the interaction between Paul and his audience on Mars' Hill. How are the points that Paul made applicable to secular societies today?

CONNECT

The Acts of the Apostles, chap. 23, particularly pages 236–242.

Deena Bartel-Wagner, Spencerport, New York, U.S.A.

John the Baptist: Preparing the Way



“I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he’ ”
(Matt. 11:11, NIV).

Doing the Dirty Work

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 3:1–3

Two years ago, I had the experience of working with a team of volunteers from my girlfriend's church in Loma Linda, California, U.S.A., on a Habitat for Humanity project in New Orleans. We were there seven months after Hurricane Katrina had left the area under 12 feet of water. Our job was to “muck” houses—tearing out dry-wall, insulation, furniture, appliances, and anything else left inside.

The houses still had as much as 8 inches (approximately 30 centimeters) of wet mud covering the floors. We spent 8 hours a day in the heat with little ventilation shoveling this mud and throwing out ruined personal belongings onto enormous piles in front yards. When we were done, there was nothing left of the houses but the studs, plumbing, and electrical wiring.

This was the first stage in preparing such buildings to eventually become homes again. Soon another group would come in and disinfect the framing of the houses and treat them for mold. Later, construction crews would start the actual rebuilding.

We never met the owners of the homes we worked on, and we are unlikely to ever see the end result of the process we began—the process of giving the houses a new life.

However, we all experienced a great sense of pride and satisfaction in knowing what we were helping to accomplish. One day the restoration will be complete, but it could not have happened without the dirty work (and I do mean dirty!) required at the beginning.

So it was with John the Baptist. He was called to do the “dirty” work, to prepare the way for a Greater One to come. John started the process by clearing out the muck in people's lives, by calling them to repentance. While he baptized some, for many others he simply planted the seed to be further cultivated and harvested by Jesus Himself. John lost his own life before he could see the culmination of his work, but his early missionary work was essential to the ministry Christ would undertake while on this earth.

God has a mission for each of us to share Christ with others. We may not always see the results of our efforts; but He calls us just the same, and we need to be ready to heed that calling.

**He was called to do the
“dirty” work . . .**

Sunday
July 13

A Witness with Power and Spirit

LOGOS

Matt. 3:13, 14; 14:1–12; 28:19, 20; Luke 1:5–17; Col. 2:8; Rev. 14:6–12

Prep Work (Matt. 3:1–4; Luke 1:5–17; Col. 2:8)

Being compared to Elijah means filling some rather large shoes. How about having that expectation placed on you before you were even born? But when God has a special work for us to do, He always provides everything we need to complete the task.

God made sure John the Baptist had godly parents, and He made it clear to them how they were to raise John. Although the Bible doesn't have much to say about his childhood, judging from the way John turned out, his parents must have done as the Lord instructed.

As John became a young man, he had to decide which university he would attend. I wonder what people thought when he turned down his scholarship to the seminary and headed out of town. "There was a great work appointed for the prophet John, but there was no school on the earth with which he could connect. His learning must be obtained away from the cities, in the wilderness. The Old

How clear is our voice?

Testament Scriptures, God, and the nature which God had created, were to be his study books."¹

We don't need to drop out of school, quit our jobs, forsake our families and friends, or become vegetarians and wander the banks of a wilderness river like the Amazon or Yukon. But we do need to guard against worldly influence. We need to choose an environment and activities that will give us time to commune with God. Aligning ourselves with His purpose takes more than keeping the Sabbath. It takes a lifetime of concentration.

Tellin' It Like It Is (Matt. 3:7–12; Luke 3:3–18)

There were no fancy orations, no dissection of the finer points of theology. Instead, John used simple, direct language. John felt no need to rework his sermon just because someone from the conference office was going to come by. He had spent enough time with God to be able to clearly discern right from wrong, and he wasn't timid in pointing out the difference.

Something about John's preaching got people's attention. They came from everywhere to hear him, and many heeded his words. What makes our preaching seem a little anemic at times? Maybe merely saying the words is not enough.

Maybe we would be more convincing if our words, actions, and attitudes were consistent with our message. Only with Christ in our hearts will we be able to speak firmly, yet with the compassion needed to convict souls.

Faithful Service (Matt. 14:1–12; John 3:25–30)

John recognized when he had fulfilled God's calling and was willing to move on to the next phase of his life. He didn't need a plaque from the church commemorating his dedicated service. Pointing others to Christ was his reward (John 3:29). Ultimately, his unwavering service to God cost him his life.

Today, our bond with Christ needs to be so strong, our character so deeply rooted in Him, that we can remain faithful messengers no matter what. "The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for right though the heavens fall."²

Now It's Our Turn (Matt. 28:19, 20; Rev. 14:6–12)

The gospel commission makes it clear that Christ's followers have work to do. The message preached by John the Baptist needs to be proclaimed like never before. Ready or not, Christ is coming—again. And this time it's final!

There aren't many barriers to getting the message out. Satellite technology has made communication possible nearly everywhere. Most computers can access a world of information via the Internet. Even with increased security measures, travel within and between countries and continents has never been faster or easier. (See Luke 3:5.)

The greatest remaining barrier to the world hearing the three angels' messages may well be us. How clear is our voice? Can we be understood? Do we have anything worthwhile to say? In other words, how effective is our witness?

REACT

1. How can we have the power and spirit of Elijah?
2. Of what/whom do your daily words, actions, and attitudes bear witness?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1115.

2. *Education*, p. 57.

John: The Least and the Greatest

TESTIMONY

Mal. 3:1

John the Baptist's ministry left us a unique example of what our own ministries should look like. Three aspects deserve careful reflection: (1) his training, (2) his actual ministry, and (3) its aftermath.

In an era of moral decline, "[God] called him to the desert, that he might learn of nature and nature's God . . .

". . . It was his choice to forgo the enjoyments and luxuries of life for the stern discipline of the wilderness. Here his surroundings were favorable to habits of simplicity and self-denial."¹

"Startling and stern, yet full of hope, his voice was heard from the wilderness, [Matthew 3:2 quoted]. With a new, strange power it moved the people. The whole nation was stirred."²

When considering the aftermath of John the Baptist's work, one would think that he "deserved" a better fate. But we're offered the following perspective.

"The whole nation was stirred."

"Looking in faith to the Redeemer, John had risen to the height of self-abnegation. He sought not to attract men to himself, but to lift their

thoughts higher and still higher, until they should rest upon the Lamb of God. He himself had been only a voice, a cry in the wilderness. Now with joy he accepted silence and obscurity, that the eyes of all might be turned to the Light of life."³

Not only did he fulfill his mission, but he left a legacy for generations to follow. "In the dungeon, on the scaffold, in the flames, men and women through centuries of darkness have been strengthened by the memory of him of whom Christ declared, 'Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater.'"⁴

REACT

1. What factors made the masses listen to John?
2. What determines the success of your ministry?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 101.

2. *Gospel Workers*, p. 54.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

4. *Education*, pp. 157, 158.

The Grand Preparation

EVIDENCE

Matt. 3:3; John 14:1–4

Jabos had received a scholarship for postgraduate studies in Belgium. This meant he would have to leave Kenya soon after marrying his wife, Wilker. The air at the departure lounge was tense as he prepared to board the plane for the two-year study program. None other than Jabos understood the agony in his dear wife's heart. Soon it was boarding time, and Jabos bid her goodbye.

Luckily, Jabos' scholarship provided for a family reunion; and soon after getting to Belgium, he started making arrangements for this reunion. While the immigration procedures were going on, a baby was born. Jabos let his new church know about his wife's coming and their child. The women in his church helped him prepare for the baby's arrival.

The Sabbath before Wilker was to arrive, three families accompanied Jabos to his apartment for a last-minute check to ensure that everything was OK. The following Sunday, the church pastor and some church members accompanied him to the airport to receive his family. The

Wilker was not on board.

plane landed; but Wilker was not on board. She had missed the connecting flight from France. The next flight was due in about an hour, which to Jabos seemed like an eternity. Finally the flight landed, and Wilker walked to the arrival lounge with the baby. It was a wonderful reunion after about a year of separation. In the meantime, church members had prepared a great party at Jabos' apartment to celebrate the joy of this great reunion.

Unlike Jabos, John the Baptist had a tough assignment of preparing the path for Jesus. John perfumed his assignment with courage and humility. Now we have been assigned a task similar to John's. It must have been a difficult time when the disciples beheld Christ ascending to heaven and they wondered how they would face the future without Him. But Christ has promised that He will return soon to take us home (John 14:1–3). A grand reunion and great banquet await all those who will daily endeavour to walk and live according to God's will. Are you planning to be there?

Wednesday
July 16

I Miss John!

HOW-TO

Matt. 3:1; 11:11

"The greatest want of the world is the want of men—who will not be bought or sold, . . . men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall!"

Surely John the Baptist personifies this quote. Jesus described John as the greatest man ever born (Matt. 11:11). His contemporaries even confused him for Elijah, who called sin by its name and displayed great faith. Like Elijah, John the Baptist called sin by its right name. When Herod Antipas divorced his wife and married his brother's wife, Herodias, John did not call it an affair, as many in our generation would. He referred to it rightly as adultery, and it cost him his life.

Unlike many of today's celebrity televangelists who thrive on telling people "pleasant things" to numb their conscience (Isa. 30:10), the message of John the Baptist was (and still is) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2, NIV). He did not mince words even for the religious class. To them he said, "You brood of vipers! . . . produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:7, 8, NIV).

Adventists would do well to emulate John.

At this time of great moral decadence, Adventists would do well to emulate John the Baptist's life of love, firmness, and moral character. Our time and mission is no different from that of his. His time was short,

and the paths had to be made straight for the Lord. Whenever I consider that the Lord is soon to return but that millions are unprepared, I miss John!

What made John the Baptist's ministry so effective, and what can make our ministry just as effective? Here are three suggestions: (1) *Discipline*. John was a man of impeccable moral character and integrity. He preferred life in the wilderness on a diet of locusts and honey to the luxury of the city life. (2) *Courage* and (3) *humility*. He was courageous in his presentation of truth, and he "sought not to attract men to himself, but to lift their thoughts higher and still higher, until they should rest upon the Lamb of God."²

REACT

How can you live more simply in order to have the courage of John the Baptist?

1. *Education*, p. 57.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 179.

The Robbery

OPINION

Matt. 3:1–3, 5, 6; 2 Cor. 5:18–6:2; Heb. 3:7–15

It's noon hour at the bank, and many people are waiting in line to deposit their checks, check their balances, and balance their accounts. They are wondering why it's taking so long, whether they'll be able to make it back to work on time, and thinking about all that remains to be done in their day.

But what's this? The doors have suddenly opened. Masked figures in black stream into the bank, wielding semiautomatic weapons and screaming, "Everyone get on the floor!" It's a robbery! Women scream, grown men cry, children clutch at their parents. The robbers move rapidly, as one of them barks out orders. "Gabriel, secure the exits. Elijah, prepare the way. John, give the revelation!"

A tall figure steps into the center of the people huddling on the floor. He opens his mouth to speak. "Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Take heed, my brothers and sisters, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief. Repent! The kingdom of heaven is at hand. In these next five minutes, pray, and reconcile yourself to God, we adjure you! Five minutes and five minutes only, and then the fate you have chosen becomes reality. The timer starts now."

**What will the outcome be?
Is any of this real?**

Silence hangs in the air as people reflect on their lives, the choices they've made, the decision that now lies before them. What will the outcome be? Is any of this real? The clock ticks slowly, five minutes, five seconds, three, two, one. . . .

The timer beeps. The masked men rush out, and all is still. People are left alone with their thoughts. Slowly, one by one, they rise to their feet, confused. What just happened? A police officer bursts through the door. "Is everything all right in here? Someone pressed the panic button. We've put out an APB on the men we saw leaving the bank. Was anything stolen?"

The people look around at each other curiously, smiles beginning to appear on some of their faces. Something has indeed been taken. But in that taking, a gift has been given. Perhaps the greatest gift of all.

REACT

1. Did a robbery really take place? If so, what was stolen? And what was the gift?
2. What role do we play in sharing the message of salvation?

Friday
July 18

Unselfish Witness

EXPLORATION

Matt. 14:1–12; Luke 3

CONCLUDE

John the Baptist spent 20 years in the wilderness preparing to be a witness regarding what God had done for him and the importance of “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4, NIV) in preparation for the One who was to come. For the crowds who heard John, it was good news. Today every Christian who has a testimony of what Jesus has or is doing for them is, like John the Baptist, a powerful witness. The key is, we have to open our mouths!

CONSIDER

- Sketching a picture of John baptizing his cousin, Jesus, the Son of God. As you imagine the scene, also sketch the immediate surroundings.
- Creating a monologue that can be given by someone dressed like John the Baptist. Block a quick on-stage costume change to modern dress, and write a personal testimony and witness, warning the audience of His second coming. Arrange to give this presentation during Sabbath School or some other youth meeting.
- Composing a song for the next General Conference session that uses the words in *Education*, p. 57: “The greatest want of the world is the want of men [and women]. . . .” (See Wednesday’s lesson for the complete text.) You may also wish to add American Sign Language symbols for each word or phrase.
- Pretending you were a news reporter at the scene of the end of John the Baptist’s life. What headlines will you use? What facts need to be included?
- Confessing and repenting of any known sin. If you have not been baptized as Jesus was baptized, or if you feel the Holy Spirit calling you to be rebaptized, then make plans to be baptized by immersion in the near future.

CONNECT

Philip Samaan, *Christ’s Way of Reaching People*; David Farmer, *Power Witnessing*.

The Son of God Among Us



“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1, NIV).

Time to Be Called Out

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 23:12

I remember it well. It was a Sunday, and I was with my best friend. During the past two months God had called me out from my home city and brought me to a Christian couple that gave me a job, a place to stay, and an environment in which I could see life differently.

I was not a Christian nor was I raised with Christian beliefs. As far as I knew, life was mine until I burned it out. I did whatever I wanted to find satisfaction, but never really got it. So when I figured that I had done everything under the sun, God called me out.

I moved in with this couple, and went to work—16 hours some days, on my knees banging hardwood floors down into new homes. You see, God had to break me down. I was like a wild horse, and stubborn like a mule. I had been broken physically, and I was in excruciating pain. Then my best friend said to me, “Why don’t you ask Jesus to heal you?”

That night, lying in bed, I would never have asked Jesus to do that if God had not broken me. I was too smart for this Jesus stuff.

But I did ask, and the next morning I was out of pain, physically. I attributed

I was like a wild horse . . .

some of this to coincidence, but I was also smart enough to let go and let God heal me if He was ever going to use my life. From then on, Jesus was more real to me than my whole

life had ever been. In the pulpit, the pastor spoke to me, but it was actually God, not the pastor. He said things to me that had plagued me for decades, that removed the garbage from me. He said things that you would expect if the King of the universe were to speak to you. I can’t deny it. He answered my life questions. There was no mysticism, no magic, no fear or trembling. Instead, Jesus came to me like a father comes to his broken son.

Was Jesus among us two thousand years ago, and is He here today? The answer is a resounding Yes! The proof is found in asking Him to share with you that He died to give you everything. As you study this week’s lesson, listen to what He is saying to you. Don’t be too smart for that Jesus stuff.

Who Cares?

EVIDENCE

John 1:14

These days it seems as though we have more things to be thankful for than any previous generation. So why are we finding ourselves in deeper and deeper despair?

According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control's 2004 report, more than 30,000 people in that country took their lives by suicide in the year 2002. That same year, more than 130,000 people were hospitalized after a suicide attempt. Drug use and teen pregnancy is rising at an alarming pace in our society.

Why do we, who have so much, find ourselves lacking so much hope? Where can we find the hope for the present and future?

The answer is Jesus. When His created beings didn't worship Him, He didn't just abandon them. Rather, He saved them, and therefore us, from eternal death by becoming one of us and dying the second death of eternal separation from God. That same Jesus also wants to hear our little problems in life. He will comfort us if we are hurting from a broken relationship with a special friend. He knows that we are worried about passing finals, getting a job, or our newborn being healthy. In Luke 12:7 He tells us that He cares enough

He didn't just abandon them.

about us to know how many hairs are on our head. And whenever we are in despair and in need of a friend, Jesus will give us rest from the world of trouble (Matt. 11:28).

Knowing that Jesus cares for us will help us live a happier and more fulfilling life. According to the Department of Health and Human Services in the United States, people who regularly attend religious meetings have significantly lower rates of cigarette, alcohol, and drug consumption.* And the November 2005 issue of *National Geographic* magazine states that Adventists live longer, healthier lives than non-Adventists. Living according to Jesus' principles will enrich your life here on earth as well as in heaven, because He cares about all of us.

REACT

How can we convince others who do not have the same faith as ours that Jesus died for everyone?

* "Religious Involvement and Substance Use among Adults," The National Survey on Drug Use and Health Report, March 23, 2007. Retrieved November 13, 2007 from (<http://www.drugabusestatistics.samhsa.gov/2k7/religion/religion.cfm>).

Monday
July 21

Whistleblower Walks the Talk!

LOGOS

Matt. 23:23; John 1:29, 12, 40, 41; Mark 9:12

Authenticity and Consistency (Matt. 23:23)

A *whistleblower* is someone who calls attention to problems before they cause great damage. Jesus was a *whistleblower* when He exposed corruption in the temple and among religious leaders. The Gospels show Jesus' authenticity in stark relief against surrounding hypocrisy. While the religious leaders said one thing and did another, He walked His talk, faithfully putting His words into action. The only certainty with hypocrites is their inconsistency. They say one thing while doing just the opposite! In speaking against their hypocrisy, Jesus noted the Pharisees' commitment to tithing. However, He also called for consistency and commitment to more important issues like justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matt. 23:23).

In this situation, Jesus was an agent of hope. Yet, "the Pharisees thought themselves too wise to need instruction, too righteous to need salvation, too highly honored to need the honor that comes from Christ." So Jesus turned to fishermen, prostitutes, and tax collectors. Their changed lives

Jesus was an agent of
hope.

are evidence that they believed Jesus was who He claimed to be.

The Dividing of Time and Opinion (John 1:29; 7:12, 40, 41; Mark 9:12)

By His birth Jesus divided time. By His claims He divides opinion. Jesus' family, friends, followers, and detractors all had an opinion about Him. Then as now, public opinion was divided. John 7:12 identifies Jesus as a "good man" and conversely as one who deceives people. Some identify Him as a Prophet, others as the Christ, and still others say this cannot be so (John 7:40, 41).

Everyone who encounters Jesus must determine the validity of His message and their response to Him. John the Baptist and Mark authenticated Jesus by referring to ancient prophecies found in Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, which Jesus would soon fulfill (Mark 9:12; John 1:29). Sadly, the prophecy of rejection continues to be fulfilled today.

Luke, writing with the benefit of hindsight, was more concerned about recent predictions than ancient ones, recalling after the resurrection what Jesus had predicted about His trial, death, and resurrection (Luke 9:22; 18:32, 33; 24:7). Luke is satisfied that Jesus indeed "walked the talk."

Paul, initially a hostile witness, accepts Jesus as authentic, concluding He is “now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9, NIV).

After hearing what others said, Jesus asked His disciples, “‘But what about you? . . . Who do you say I am?’” (Matt. 16:15, NIV). The disciples had been His constant companions for a year or more and had observed evidences of His divinity, so Peter replied unequivocally, “‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matt. 16:16, NIV).

But what if Jesus were to ask you who you say He is? His question does not ask who do you *know* or who do you *think* Jesus is? *Knowing* and *thinking* are cognitive functions and are entirely internal events; but *saying* who He is means communicating, sharing that knowledge and those thoughts with others. By your *words* and *actions*, who do you say Jesus is?

Atheists believe there is no God. Jews see Jesus as a nationalistic Jew whose preaching angered the Romans, and they subsequently executed him.² Muslims see Jesus as a great prophet.³ Scoffers question the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection and make Him a mere mortal.⁴ However, few are as qualified to comment on Jesus’ identity as Dr. E. M. Blaiklock, former professor of classics at Auckland University. He writes, “I claim to be an historian. My approach to classics is historical. And I tell you that the evidence for the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ is better authenticated than most of the facts of ancient history.”⁵

What does your life say about who Jesus is?

REACT

Why is it easier to say with words than actions who Jesus is?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 279.

2. Katz, L. (2007). “Who was Jesus?” Retrieved April 11, 2007, from <http://judaism.about.com/od/beliefs/a/jesus.htm>.

3. Wolfe, M. (n.d.). “Jesus Through a Muslim Lens.” Retrieved April 11, 2007, from <http://www.islamfortoday.com/wolfe2.htm>.

4. Oser, S. (August 15, 1994) “Historicity of Jesus FAQ.” Retrieved April 11, 2007, from http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/scott_oser/hojfaq.html.

5. McDowell, J. (July 13, 2002). “Evidence for the Resurrection.” Retrieved April 11, 2007, from <http://www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/josh2.html>.

Tuesday
July 22

Who Made the Top Ten?

TESTIMONY

Matt. 20:25–28

"In the estimation of heaven, greatness of character consists in living for the welfare of our fellow men, in doing works of love and mercy."¹

"When Jesus said of the widow, She 'hath cast in more than they all,' His words were true, not only of the motive, but of the results of her gift. The 'two mites which make a farthing' have brought to God's treasury an amount of money far greater than the contributions of those rich Jews. The influence of that little gift has been like a stream, small in its beginning, but widening and deepening as it flowed down through the ages. . . . Her example of self-sacrifice has acted and reacted upon thousands of hearts in every land and in every age."²

"[Abraham's] own example, the silent influence of his daily life, was a constant lesson. . . . In his household there was not one law for the master and another for the servant; a royal way for the rich and another for the poor. All were treated with justice and compassion, as inheritors with him of the grace of life."³

**"What are we giving for
Him?"**

"Christ has left us a wonderful example of self-sacrifice. He pleased not Himself, but spent His life in the service of others. He made sacrifices at every step, sacrifices which none of His followers can ever make,

because they have never occupied the position He occupied before He came to this earth. He was commander of the heavenly host, but He came here to suffer for sinners. He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that through His poverty we might be made rich. Because He loved us, He laid aside His glory and took upon Him the form of a servant. He gave His life for us. What are we giving for Him?"⁴

REACT

If you ranked the influences in your life, would Christ make the top ten?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 613, 614.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 616.
3. *Reflecting Christ*, p. 194.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

How to Find Jesus in Everyday Life

Wednesday
July 23

HOW-TO

John 1:4, 5, 10-14

With everything that's happening in the world, it's a miracle that some mornings we can find the strength to face the day. This is why it's so essential for people to recognize that even though Jesus returned to heaven, He continues to be with us. Knowing this makes it much easier to face each new dawn and to relish the opportunity to live it.

Unfortunately, remembering that Jesus is with us is not always easy. Work, school, family, finances, and other demands of life, all play a part in keeping our minds and bodies occupied. We need to take a breath and stop to focus on what's truly important. Once we've done that, tackling stress not only becomes easier but begins to take on a certain insignificance when we see it in light of Jesus' life.

To help yourself find reminders of Christ's presence in everyday life, practice the following:

1. *Build a strong relationship with Jesus.* The closer you are to Him, the easier it will be for you to recognize the miracles He is performing in your life. Meditating daily on His Word and praying often will help you to solidify your relationship with Him (Ps. 119:97, 105; Eph. 6:18).

**Even within the hardships,
God plants seeds of hope.**

2. *Expect small blessings to have a big impact.* A phone call from a friend or a favorite song played on the radio at just the right time can be signs of His presence just as much as huge, over-the-top signals. (1 Kings 19:10-13).

3. *Focus on the good things in life.* Every day we are bombarded with tragedy from the morning paper to the evening news, making it easy to lose sight of what is good in life. Even within the hardships, God plants seeds of hope. Do not forget to nurture those seeds (Phil 4:8).

When you remember to practice these three things, the joy in life takes over. Anger, bitterness, and resentment wash away, and in their place come joy, happiness, and fulfillment. Knowing that there are signs of Jesus around you everywhere is the biggest thrill you can experience.

REACT

Why is it so easy for even the most faithful Christians to overlook what Jesus is doing for them in their lives?

Thursday
July 24

A Messenger to the Deaf and Blind

OPINION

John 1:10–14

The Son of Man was here on our planet, a missionary to us all. He came to die on the cross so that we could have eternal life. Many people saw Jesus on earth. They became His disciples and His friends. We know He was here because the Bible tells us so in John 1:10–14: “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

“We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (NIV).

He is calling us to go home with Him, if only we would believe He is the Son of God, our Savior. John 3:16 says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (NIV). But many in the past and today claim deafness and blindness. We look the other way when we see evidence that Jesus is the

“You can’t handle the truth.”

Son of God, because, as Jack Nicholson said in the film *A Few Good Men*, “You can’t handle the truth.”

As a student missionary in Pohnpei, Micronesia, I experienced being a stranger in a new place. But unlike Jesus, I was blessed with friendly faces and open arms from people such as my host family. I was a teacher, and my students could see I was there, right in front of them, standing in their classroom, teaching them math, science, reading, and about Jesus’ love for them. When I left Pohnpei, they told others that I had been there. The truth that I was there is a fact, just as Jesus was here on earth, preaching and teaching and inviting us to accept Him.

REACT

1. How does the fact that Jesus died for us on the cross make Him more real to us today?
2. What can you do in your life to make Jesus real to those around you?

A Work in Progress

EXPLORATION

John 1:1–18

CONCLUDE

Most historical biographies are written about remarkable people after they've died. In some respects, this is true of Christ in that He was a historical figure who lived in time and space. In another sense, however, Christ's biography is still being written. The best part is that we all have a role in the continuing story . . . and we know how the story ends!

CONSIDER

- Charting the different ways people view Christ. Be sure to include the category you fall into.
- Keeping a list of all your blessings—big and small—for one day. Also include your reactions to each blessing.
- Comparing different views of Christ that you've held at different times in your life and reflecting on whether you're happy with how you view Him at this particular point in time.
- Researching historical evidence regarding the life of Jesus.
- Listening to various songs about Jesus and identifying what the songs focus on and what they neglect. What would you include or exclude if you were to write a song about Him, and why?
- Writing your own biography of Jesus by having people answer the question, "Who do you say Jesus is?"
- Reflecting on who you say Jesus is and on how your actions do or do not reflect this assertion.

CONNECT

Douglas Beyer, *Basic Beliefs of Christians*, chap. 4; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, book 2, chap. 3; Max Lucado, *Next Door Savior*; Max Lucado, *He Chose the Nails*; Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, chaps. 5–10.

Jesus and His Disciples



“So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows’ ” (Matt. 10:31, NIV).

Not Alone

INTRODUCTION

Ps. 145:18

In December 1999, a team of Seventh-day Adventist evangelists embarked on a crusade to a town of idol worshippers. This town had been noted for murdering people who tried to bring in any new forms of worship.

When these men prayed to the Lord and requested whether they should go to this town, God's answer was, "The Adventist message to all the world in this generation." They were encouraged by these words and set off on their journey.

As soon as the evangelists began preaching the Word of God in this town, the people began persecuting them. The town's people beat the evangelists and destroyed their possessions. But none of these attacks stopped the evangelists. The wonder of it all was that whenever the people tried to kill any of the servants of the Lord, a mighty hand would save them. And after two weeks of the crusade, many people accepted the faith.

The Lord, who has commissioned us to spread the gospel, assures us that He is with us always (Matt. 28:20). The "Lord's faithful servants will receive the bitterest persecution from false teachers, who will not hear the word of God, and who prepare stumbling blocks to put in the way of those who would hear. But God's people are not to fear. Satan cannot go beyond his limit. The Lord will be the defense of His people. He regards the injury done to His servants for the truth's sake as done to Himself."^{*}

But none of these attacks stopped the evangelists.

The Lord, who sent the disciples to all the world and through all types of hardship, was with them and helped them to triumph. The Lord was with the Reformers in the Dark Ages and helped them to stand victorious. This is the same Lord who will be with us and make us champions of His course. He will carry us on His shoulders when the road is rough.

Let us then stand up for Jesus as faithful disciples of the Cross. Let us lift high His banner, from victory to victory. And let us always remember that He will never leave us lonely, until every enemy of His Word is forever vanquished.

This week, we will study Jesus and His disciples, and what it means to witness for Him.

^{*}*Maranatha, The Lord Is Coming*, p. 191.

Sunday
July 27

Living Witnesses of the Kingdom

LOGOS

Matt. 10:16–23, 27; Acts 17:30; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15

Generation after generation, the gospel has been carried forth by many agencies. John 3:16 states that Christ came to offer salvation to all who believe in Him. Thus the spread of this good news is timeless and unlimited by boundaries. It was for this purpose that many patriarchs and prophets, apostles and disciples, lived a selfless life.

Among the numerous agents of hope enumerated in the Bible, the disciples of Christ were the group that received guidance concerning the spread of the gospel by the Savior Himself. It is necessary to study the instructions Christ gave them if we want to be living witnesses of the gospel. Today, let's look at a few of the instructions and principles of witnessing that Christ dealt with.

It Takes a Daily Walk (Matt. 10:27; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15)

The disciples of Jesus learned the art of witnessing at the feet of the Master. They heard the Savior preach the message of hope to the hopeless. They saw Him give sight to the blind. And they heard Him expound sound biblical truths to the undiscerning. They stayed with Him throughout all of His toils on the Judean plain. As a result, they gained some level of confidence that freed them from fearing

There is nothing in us of ourselves by which we can influence others for good.

the great Jewish scholars of their day.

The life of Christ spoke irrevocably to them about His message. His life was the pattern they were to follow. Thus "they taught what they had learned of Jesus."¹ It was as Christ instructed them, "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs" (Matt. 10:27, NIV).

No one can be a messenger of God without knowing the message. We can become living witnesses of the gospel only by staying close to Jesus each moment of our lives. "A daily, earnest striving to know God, and Jesus whom He has sent, would bring power and efficiency to the soul. The knowledge obtained by diligent searching of the Scriptures would be flashed into memory at the right time."²

Your Weakness Counts Not (Acts 17:30)

Once the disciples accepted Jesus' invitation to be channels of the gospel, their

weaknesses were strengthened by Him who called and sent them. John and his brother James were known to be quick tempered (Mark 3:17) and Peter was tribulistic (Acts 10:1–33); however, all the men became great tools in the hands of the Creator.

Christ came not for the righteous but to save sinners (Matt. 9:13). Once we are saved, we desire to tell others that they too can find pardon and joy in Christ. With our weaknesses in the hands of Jesus, we are best suited to proclaim the hope the world yearns for. There is nothing in us of ourselves by which we can influence others for good. If we realize our hopelessness and need of divine power, we shall not trust ourselves. The angels of God are appointed to watch over us if we put ourselves under their guardianship.

Sheep in the Midst of Wolves (Matt. 10:16–23)

Another instruction that Christ gave His disciples was that they should exercise the greatest tact and thoughtfulness as they attempt to share the gospel with all types of people.

They were not to engage in foolish arguments with unbelievers (1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:23). Witnessing is not persuasion that may end up in arguments. Rather, it is telling others what God has done for you. It is the Spirit of God alone that convinces hearts to follow Christ. Therefore, Christ taught the disciples to exhibit the highest level of wisdom in carrying out their duties as agents of hope. Be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16).

There was no doubt that the disciples had the everlasting gospel that quenches the thirst of a parched soul. They sat at the feet of the Savior Himself, but none of their words or work could have effected a great deal of change in the lives of fallen humanity if they would not have employed tact and speech in good season (Prov. 15:23).

Again Christ instructed His disciples not to endure unnecessary persecutions but to escape. “When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another” (Matt. 10:23, NIV). He Himself exemplified this principle in Luke 4:28–32 when He left Nazareth for Capernaum after the people in Nazareth forbade Him to teach there.

REACT

1. Which of the instructions and principles mentioned in today's lesson have you found to be most helpful, and why?
2. How can you then use the instructions and principles in your life?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 349.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

Faithful Witnesses for Christ

TESTIMONY

Matt. 10:32, 33

As Jesus taught the people about salvation, they “listened to the words of mercy flowing so freely from the lips of the Son of God. They heard the gracious words, so simple and so plain that they were as the balm of Gilead to their souls.”¹ Later, Jesus would entrust the disciples with these words. Today, we are Jesus’ disciples, and the call to confess Him before others is also our call.

But we must remember that he “who would confess Christ must have Christ abiding in him. He cannot communicate that which he has not received. The disciples might speak fluently on doctrines, they might repeat the words of Christ Himself; but unless they possessed Christlike meekness and love, they were not confessing Him. A spirit contrary to the spirit of Christ would deny Him, whatever the profession. Men may deny Christ by evilspeaking, by foolish talking, by words that are untruthful or unkind. They may deny Him by shunning life’s burdens, by the

pursuit of sinful pleasure. They may deny Him by conforming to the world, by uncourteous behavior, by the love of their own opinions, by justifying self, by cherishing doubt, borrowing trouble, and dwelling in darkness. In all these ways they declare that Christ is not in them.”²

**“A spirit contrary to the
spirit of Christ would deny
Him”**

“In order to confess Christ, we must have Him to confess. No one can truly confess Christ unless the mind and spirit of Christ are in him. If a form of godliness, or an acknowledgment of the truth, were always a confession of Christ, we might say: Broad is the way that leadeth unto life, and many there be that find it. We must understand what it is to confess Christ and wherein we deny Him. It is possible with our lips to confess Christ yet in our works deny Him. The fruits of the Spirit [Gal. 5:22, 23] manifested in the life are a confession of Him. If we have forsaken all for Christ, our lives will be humble, our conversation heavenly, our conduct blameless. The powerful, purifying influence of truth in the soul, and the character of Christ exemplified in the life, are a confession of Him.”³

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 365.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 357.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 303, 304.

The Task of All

EVIDENCE

Matt. 10:8–10

All through Scripture, the most important task ever assigned to woman or man is the work of spreading the gospel. But in today's world, many evangelists, especially many television evangelists, have profited greatly through their ministry, so that their greatest interest appears to be the mansions they live in instead of the souls they are to win.

In developing countries, it's rather common to see a man or woman preaching the word of God on buses. Even some who have no jobs have chosen to do this in order to take money from people's pockets. But Christ instructed His disciples not to ask for collections—money, food, or clothing—in return for the gospel they preached. Because they had freely received, they were to freely give (Matt. 10:8–10).

Peter, James, John, and Andrew had their own jobs before they met Jesus. And the Bible makes it clear that Peter was a married man, because he had a mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14). Nonetheless, when Jesus called them, they did not hesitate. They left their assets and followed Him. Furthermore, Jesus desired to help people from all levels of society—the poor and the sick as well as the rich and the degreed. And His call to follow Him also goes to every type of person. Remember, He said, “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven” (Matt. 10:32, NRSV).

Jesus desired to help people from all levels of society. . . .

REACT

1. If you are not a pastor, think of specific ways you can spread the gospel as you go about the activities of your daily life.
2. What is your most valuable possession? Are you willing to give it up in order to follow your Savior and Lord?
3. Jesus did not consider one person, or one group of people, “better” or more “valuable” than another. With that in mind, is there someone, or a group of people, you are not fond of? Ask God to help you with this feeling and to show you how you can better show them His love.

Wednesday
July 30

Disciples for Christ

HOW-TO

Matt. 10:32, 33

As a teacher, I understand what it means to be trained in order to share the gospel. I also understand the importance of keeping myself up-to-date with the subject I teach. The disciples were taught by the greatest Teacher of all time, and their subject was salvation. He commissioned them to go into all the world, preaching and teaching the gospel and baptizing people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Christ extends this same commission to us. He says through His words in the Bible and through the Holy Spirit, "I call upon you because you are my modern disciple." But in order to fulfill this commission faithfully, we must have a strong relationship with Him. "A daily, earnest striving to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, would bring power and efficiency to the soul. The knowledge obtained by diligent searching of the Scriptures would be flashed into the memory at the right time. But if any had neglected to acquaint themselves with the words of

Christ, if they had never tested the power of His grace in trial, they could not expect that the Holy Spirit would bring His words to their

Live as Christ lived . . .

remembrance. They were to serve God daily with undivided affection, and then trust Him."¹

So in order to be disciples of Christ we should do these *daily*:

1. *Seek* the Lord through prayer, Bible study, and meditation on God's Word.
2. *Accept* the great commission to share the gospel with all whom we come in contact.
3. *Trust* the Lord to help us do and say the right thing at the right time.
4. *Live* as Christ lived, blessing others through kind words and deed so they will see Him in us.

As we daily strive to be disciples, let us bear in mind that the Lord said, "As you confess Me before men, so I will confess you before God and the holy angels. You are to be My witnesses upon earth, channels through which My grace can flow for the healing of the world. So I will be your representative in heaven."²

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 355.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 357.

First Love; True Love

OPINION

Rev. 2:2–5

As one of the first disciples to be addressed by Christ with the command to follow Him, Philip did not readily believe (John 1:43). His introduction of Jesus to Nathanael as Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, depicts that Philip was not yet convinced of Jesus' divinity (John 1:45).¹ Why was this so? Why are many church members today living as though they are not convinced of Jesus' divinity?

Is it because they have left their first love? While we believe our doctrines are correct, and while we hate false doctrine, Christ says this is not enough. Christ's solemn warning in Revelation 2:2–5 demands that we awaken from our sleep to follow Him. When we forget that He was and is to be our first love, it doesn't really matter what information we harbor in our hearts as truth.²

We have a sacred message to share. The messages of the three angels are not theory. Rather they are the solemn truth of God for these last days (Rev. 14:9–11). We must bring to the attention of the world the commandments of God and the importance of faith in Jesus (Rev. 14:12). We should speak words of kindness and do loving acts of service that reveal Christ's character. We receive God's grace in order to freely give. The new commandment He gave to us is to love one another as Christ has loved us. Such love will show everyone that He is our first and true love (John 13:34, 35).³

Christ says this is not enough.

REACT

Recall how you felt when you first accepted Christ. Compare or contrast this first love to how you have felt lately about Him. What can you do to strengthen your relationship with Him?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 292, 293.

2. *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 370.

3. *In Heavenly Places*, p. 168.

Living in Jesus

EXPLORATION

Matt. 10:32; Mark 5:19

CONCLUDE

When we are living in Jesus, we will be telling others about Him in word and action. Excitement will be seen in our faces. We will witness to others of the great things God is doing for us. Each day we will spend time in prayer, Bible study, and sharing. We will have new and precious experiences to share of how God has worked in our lives.

CONSIDER

- Interviewing an evangelist, missionary, or pastor. Were they persecuted as they witnessed for the Lord? Share one of their experiences with the class.
- Role-playing giving a Bible study on God's love for us. Then find a neighbor that you can share it with. Be sure to include examples of God's love for you.
- Observing three evangelists. Find Bible verses that describe the witnessing methods they use.
- Making and decorating a sign inviting people to church or to Vacation Bible School.
- Meditating on Matthew 10:32, 33. In your prayer journal, plan ways you can confess God before your peers.
- Writing music for 2 Timothy 2:15. Teach it to your class and to a Bible study student.
- Outlining new ways you can witness, and trying one of them.

CONNECT

Luke 22:32; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 3:15.

Messages to Young People, pp. 200–202, 370.

Arthur and Denise Blessitt, "How to Witness at Home and Anywhere!"

Retrieved November 13, 2007 from <http://www.blessitt.com/home.html>.

The Compassionate Savior



“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36, NIV).

Everyday Heroes

INTRODUCTION

Luke 10:25–37

Twenty-seven years ago, a South African mother developed concern for a street child rummaging through bins for food in the town of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Taking pity on the disabled waif led to a lifetime of humanitarian work. From then on, Mother Leslie* offered her house to other abandoned children.

Her care made the children comfortable; and they found love and peace in her home. When her house became too small to accommodate more children, Leslie arranged for land through the local chief, and the inspiration of this 60-year-old woman gave birth to a community center that now consists of a day-care center, an old-age home, and a seven-room school named after her. The center currently houses more than 130 abandoned children. In 1999, she was awarded the prestigious president's award for her humanitarian work. Though struggling with diabetes and partial blindness, Leslie—dubbed South Africa's Mother Teresa—can

be happy in knowing that her efforts continue to help society's outcasts.

Two people just passed by the man, who was on the brink of death.

The good Samaritan assisted a man who had been attacked by robbers. Two people just passed by the man, who was on the brink of death. One of these was a priest. He avoided the man by crossing over to

the other side of the road. The Levite who came along also continued his journey without offering help.

Finally, the Samaritan came along. When he saw the injured man, his heart was filled with pity. He sacrificed his oil and wine to soothe the man's wounds. He offered him a ride on his donkey, taking him to the nearest inn, and arranging for the innkeeper to care for him. He even paid the bill. The good Samaritan and Mother Leslie not only boost our knowledge base but provide examples we can copy, for people in need are everywhere.

This week we are studying about the compassion of Christ. How did He minister to individuals and crowds in varying degrees of need? How did His humanitarian work improve the spiritual state of His subjects? Above all, what can we learn from Christ's compassion about spreading the gospel in a world full of varying physical, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds?

*Leslie is a pseudonym.

The “Human” Side of Christ

EVIDENCE

Mark 5:35–42; Luke 2:52; John 1:46

How did Jesus become such a compassionate Savior? To discover the answer to this question, we need to look at the “*Sitz im Leben*”—His true “life situation.”

When Jesus was born, the world was deep in sin, and the community in which He grew up was what we today might call a slum (John 1:46). Thus, Jesus grew up in a place where His character was no doubt severely tested. However, the Bible is clear that as He grew, He developed strong powers of mind and body. He remained placid and patient and exercised compassion that did not sacrifice integrity.

We also read that Jesus did not receive an education from the rabbis, which typically repressed young minds (see *The Desire of Ages*, page 69). Instead, “His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother’s knee.” Today, scientific research shows that when children have a good relationship with their mother, they are better able to show compassion toward others.²

He remained placid and
patient. . . .

The Gospels are full of evidence regarding Jesus’ compassionate nature. Read one such story in Mark 5:35–42. Jesus always acted out of compassion for others. The people He helped the most were like the people He grew up with in Nazareth. They were the people whom the religious leaders of His day considered to be unclean. They were the people whom polite society took every precaution to avoid. Such compassion is true compassion, unspoiled by selfish motives.

REACT

How can you make your personal ministry more compassionate? Why isn’t it possible to be truly compassionate without a strong relationship with Christ?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 70.

2. Institute for American Values, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case of Authoritative Communities* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2003), p. 26.

Monday
August 4

The Compassionate Savior

LOGOS

John 1:14; 3; 4; 9:1-7; Eph. 4:32; 1 John 2:12

Unto Us a Savior Is Born (John 3; 4)

Centuries ago, Isaiah foretold a time of worldwide peace and the coming of a descendant of David who would be the ideal King (Isa. 9:6). The coming of Christ to a world under the curse of sin was to make the plan of redemption complete. It was the intention of God, through His love for humanity, to reconcile humankind to Him. Therefore, through His only Son Christ, God's love was made known to us, grace abounded where sin abounded, and the family of earth and the family of heaven were bound together in bonds of indissoluble union. As we look to Christ as the gateway to our salvation and eternal life, He will empower us to accept His message and to believe that God is truthful. We shall accept spiritual rebirth as part of ourselves, and have faith to help us claim His promises as we fulfill the gospel commission in Matthew 28:16-20.

How Do You Identify? (John 1:14)

Because of the endless mischief of Satan, humanity was swayed off the right path that God had planned for them in the beginning. The nature of the world changed radically, demonstrating the effect of sin on the once beautiful planet. Hatred arose between brothers, and the once-fertile ground became barren while some plants began to produce thorns.

**Who could pay the price to
redeem humankind?**

However, seeing the end from the beginning, God did not tarry in His work of redemption. He looked around at all the heavenly hosts, and lo! Who could pay the price to redeem humankind? It was for this reason that Christ, the incarnate God, the light of heaven and earth, agreed to come down in human likeness. Contrary to the norms of the sinful world, He possessed no beauty that would make people desire Him. It may be difficult for us to imagine how Christ, with His position in heaven, could relegate Himself to the lowest of levels, to bear the pain we bear, and to encounter the problems we do day after day.

Interestingly, it is His character of sympathy, self-sacrifice, and voluntary service that provides an ideal example to help us understand the plan of redemption. He identified with us fallen humans, found Himself in our shoes, and endured pain and suffering the way we do. This means that Christ, suffering under abuse and

insult, provided the best rationale for our work in ministry. His way of association and His method of training should be the hallmark of our service in ministry.

Total Forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; 1 John 2:12)

If there is anything difficult for most people to do, it is to forgive. Many people talk about forgiveness time and again. But they fail to practice it. Forgiveness is part of God's character. He shows His forgiveness to us through His Son Jesus Christ. Truly, if God could apply His law to the letter, our first parents who disobeyed His word in the Garden of Eden would have died on the same day they sinned. The Bible records that God Himself said, "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17, NIV).

However, our Father in heaven forgave all the bitterness, the passion, and the anger and gave His children a second chance to live. Christ intervened by providing His own life to die the second death and by bearing our own sins on the cross of Calvary. The ability to forgive and forget cannot take place in our lives if we don't adopt the style of the Person who initiated it. We should understand that forgiveness of any sin is consistent with God's justice and that only through Jesus, God's mercy was shown to us. But mercy does not do away with justice. The law shows us God's character, and nothing in the law can be changed to meet our fallen state. God cannot change His law, but He could sacrifice Himself in Christ for our salvation. And this He did. Read 2 Corinthians 5:19.

In order to escape the evil plans of Satan, we must emulate the forgiveness God has demonstrated to us through Christ. Let us become tenderhearted and forgive one another, just as God has forgiven our sins for the sake of Christ.

REACT

1. As a Christian, how can you convince those outside of our faith to forgive as Christ forgives?
2. Think of a person you have had a difficult time forgiving. Then consider God's forgiveness toward you. Pray that God will help you to forgive this person.
3. Today's lesson states that Christ's character of sympathy, self-sacrifice, and voluntary service provides an ideal example to help us understand the plan of redemption. How is this so?
4. Consider how your part of the world needs to understand Christ's character. As Christians, we are to be like Him. How can you show your part of the world what your Savior is like?

Christ: An Agent of Hope

TESTIMONY

Col. 1:18

Like us, Christ lived in a world full of challenges. His immediate environment was full of people who did not understand Him and His work. With "their short measuring line, they could not fathom the mission which He came to fulfill, and therefore could not sympathize with Him in His trials. Their coarse, unappreciative words showed that they had no true perception of His character, and did not discern that the divine blended with the human. . . .

"These things made His path a thorny one to travel. So pained was Christ by the misapprehension in His own home that it was a relief to Him to go where it did not exist. . . . None on earth . . . could comprehend His divine mission, or know the burden which He bore in behalf of humanity. Often He could find relief only in being alone, and communing with His heavenly Father."¹

The very way Christ was misunderstood is the same way we may experience rejection and disappointment in our efforts to minister to various communities and individuals. However, whatever conditions and circumstances impede our work, we should allow the Holy Spirit to grow within us the compassion of Christ.

"He is moved with compassion for them."

"Those who are called to suffer for Christ's sake, who have to endure misapprehension and distrust, even in their own home, may find comfort in the thought that Jesus has endured the same. He is moved with compassion for them. He bids them find companionship in Him, and relief where He found it, in communion with the Father."²

Those "who accept Christ as their personal Saviour are not left as orphans, to bear the trials of life alone. He receives them as members of the heavenly family; He bids them call His Father their Father. They are His 'little ones,' dear to the heart of God, bound to Him by the most tender and abiding ties."³

Understanding Christ's experiences make us strong in our work for Him. He is our example, our role model, as we witness for Him in all that we do.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 326.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

3. *Ibid.*

The ABC's of Christ's Ministry

HOW-TO

Matt. 9:36

What formed the character of Christ that made Him excel in ministry? And what can we learn from His character that can help us to be successful?

1. *No-boundary service (Matt. 28:19)*. Christ's work was not limited by boundaries. He sailed the waters and walked on land to accomplish the work He came to do. From Los Angeles to Manila, from South Africa to Denmark, the gospel must be preached across our planet.

2. *Sympathy and compassion (Matt. 9:36)*. Jesus had great compassion and sympathy for all people. He was struck by their felt needs. He provided for their real needs. We also need sympathy and compassion to help us minister to people the way Christ did. We cannot truly win the interest of a person until we are sympathetic to their joys, sorrows, needs, and wants. The same harassed and helpless crowds are still with us in prisons, hospitals, war-torn regions, and regions of the world struck by natural disasters. They are in our own cities and neighborhoods. Do they see Christ in us?

3. *Social kindness (Gal. 3:28)*. We cannot deliver the gospel if we want to pick and choose whom we will share it with. The religious leaders of Christ's time often accused Him of associating with "the wrong kind of people." Like Him, we must be willing to share the gospel with everyone, regardless of their race, color, or creed.

Do they see Christ in us?

4. *Dependence on God and His Word (Heb. 4:12)*. The source of Christ's power always was from God the Father and His Word. Only through such dependence did Christ resist the power of temptation. Therefore, "when assailed by temptation, look not to circumstances or to the weakness of self, but to the power of the word. All its strength is yours." "Jesus rested upon the wisdom and strength of His heavenly father."*

5. *Risk-taking (Luke 2:1-20)*. In a world filled with Satan's dominion, Christ agreed to be "God with us" (Isa. 9:6, 7). He risked His life for our sake. He risked being tempted so we could have eternal life. In our ministry, we must be willing to risk our dearest possessions for His sake. Read Matthew 10:39.

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 123.

Thursday
August 7

More Healing Than Preaching

OPINION

John 9:1-7

In dealing with the man born blind, we notice that Christ's ministry does not consist of preaching alone. He understood His environment and the perils that prevailed at any given time and place. He also knew for sure that it was sin causing all the suffering of the world. Therefore, He devoted most of His time ministering to people and their needs. This method should be the model for our witness today.

In the face of hardship, toil, poverty and human degradation, there are millions of souls yearning for sympathy and little acts of kindness. "In our own families may be souls hungry for sympathy, starving for the bread of life. There may be children to be trained for Christ. There are heathen at our very doors. Let us do faithfully the work that is nearest. Then let our efforts be extended as far as God's hand may lead the way. The work of many may appear to be restricted by circumstances; but, wherever it is, if performed with faith and diligence it will be felt to the uttermost parts of the earth."*

**This is the essence of the
gospel work.**

No matter who you are, whatever you do, or where you live, there is something you can do to draw a soul to Christ. Look around, and you will see those who will count on you as

a stepping-stone to finding their way to Him. If we obey Christ's command to go into all the world (Mark 16:15), we will lift up our eyes to regions beyond, clothe ourselves with His character, and tear away the wall of partition dividing prejudice, just as He did in His ministry.

The same Christ who imparted His life to the sick and the afflicted, and who proclaimed deliverance to the captives of Satan, is the same Christ who commissions us to go into the entire world. He is always there for us to the end of time. Let us heal the world of its spiritual disease as well as its physical maladies. This is the essence of the gospel work—to restore the sick, the helpless, and the afflicted, to take hold of our Savior's strength as the living force that transforms all.

REACT

1. Based on this week's lesson, define *compassion*.
2. Christ exercised compassion in the face of great odds, especially poverty. If someone is born into a rich family and knows nothing about suffering, how can that person still be compassionate?

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 822.

Concrete Compassion

EXPLORATION

Matt. 9:36; Heb. 4:15, 16

CONCLUDE

Christ's whole life was characterized by compassion. Every act from the moment the Word became flesh and dwelt among us to His excruciating death on the cross was motivated by love and sympathy for weak, lost human beings. Even now, Jesus' high priestly ministry is one of sympathy, mercy, and grace. How much more could we reflect His love, reaching out in care, compassion, and understanding to those around us?

CONSIDER

- Reading through the gospels and using a certain color to highlight every verse that speaks of Christ's compassion.
- Supporting a ministry of compassion like sponsoring a child or donating to an orphanage.
- Reading (or rereading) *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom, asking yourself what gave the ten Booms the courage to be compassionate and the ability to forgive after being imprisoned in a concentration camp.
- Sending an encouraging card to someone who needs compassion.
- Writing out the dictionary definitions of *compassion* and *sympathy*. Then paraphrase them in your own words.
- Listening to Michael Card's song "Forgiving Eyes" as you picture the woman caught in adultery experiencing Christ's compassion.
- Acting out one or more of Christ's healings for your Sabbath School class. Focus on portraying the compassion Jesus felt for the people in the story.

CONNECT

Keith Burton, *The Compassion of the Christ*; Vision Video, *Journey Toward Forgiveness*; International Bible Society, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (video).

The Apostle John



“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 4, NIV).

Son of Thunder/Friend of God

Sabbath
August 9

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 4:21, 22; Mark 3:13-17

It has been said many times that there is good and bad in everyone. However, we serve a heavenly Father who invites us to come to Him as we are. As we follow Him, He molds us into His likeness. Read Jeremiah 18:6.

John was a rowdy fisherman called to fish fellow humans from the sea of sin and destruction. His was a life touched by the teachings of Jesus and thereby changed as an example of what His love can do. Jesus had 12 disciples whom He trained to minister to the world. John became particularly close to Him. What qualities made John stand out to Jesus? What can we learn from John?

We have no evidence that prior to following Jesus, John was a calm, peaceful soul. By his very profession we can conclude that He was a crude, haggard man, hardened by many a storm-tossed sea and cold night. In fact, John and his brother were nicknamed the "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). Working on their father's boat, one can imagine that these fishermen were responsible and dedicated to their jobs. Yet when Jesus came to the water's edge that day and called them to work with Him, their response was decisive and immediate (Matt. 4:21, 22).

**But what can be worth
more than eternal life?**

John later wrote that Jesus still calls people. Read Revelation 3:20. This call to discipleship is definite and requires a response of total surrender and commitment. With materialism such a big part of our lives, so many times we ignore God's call and cling to temporal things. But what can be worth more than eternal life?

As this week's study follows John throughout the New Testament, we will see him grow and be transformed. That John remained a strong, bold man is evident in his Gospel writings, in his many letters, and certainly in the book of Revelation. He did not stop being John. However, by following Christ, he grew to be a gentler, kinder John who came to be known as the disciple of love. His transformed life is evidence of how Christ fashions what is unique about us into something useful to fulfill His perfect purpose for our lives.

Will you, like John, allow Christ to transform you?

Sunday
August 10

The Apostle John

LOGOS

Matt. 4:21, 22; Mark 10:35–45; John 15:13; 1 John; 2 John; 3 John

The Invitation (Matt. 4:21, 22)

After His baptism, Jesus officially began His public ministry by choosing disciples. One of the most notable of these disciples was John. He and his brother were also known as the “sons of thunder.” Fishermen by trade, James and John accepted Jesus’ invitation and so left their father’s business to work for Him.

According to Jewish custom, the brothers were to work with their father until he turned the family business over to them. However, by accepting Jesus’ invitation, they indicated that they did not need their inheritance and would make a life for themselves with Jesus. As James and John walked into the unknown, Jesus made them no promises of what the future held as they left behind family, friends, career, a definite future, and a retirement plan (Matt. 8:19, 20). Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it this way, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.”

John invites would-be disciples to live as Jesus lived.

The Challenge (Mark 10:35–38; John 5:30)

For three years, John and the other disciples observed Christ’s healing and teaching ministry, as well as His command over nature. During the final year of this ministry, Jesus spoke often of God’s kingdom, and it was with this in mind that John and his brother approached Jesus with an unusual request. They both desired to sit alongside of Jesus in His kingdom. Jesus responded by asking both brothers two important questions that basically asked the same thing: Are you able to go through the trials that I (Jesus) will have to go through (Mark 10:38)?

When James and John replied in the affirmative, Jesus told them that they would indeed go through the same trials as He. He did not, however, have the authority to decide who would occupy the seats of honor on His left and His right. This demonstrated Jesus’ total submission to His Father’s will (John 5:30). When we accept the invitation to follow Jesus, one of our biggest challenges will be whether or not we trust Him with our past, present, and future.

Called to Serve (Mark 10:35–45)

The disciples heard the selfish request of James and John to sit by Jesus in His kingdom. This request stirred up dissension and mistrust, which led to a con-

frontation. Jesus settled this dispute by introducing a concept that would require a paradigm shift for all of the disciples: Those who will lead must be willing to serve. The leadership paradigm then and even today stresses that leaders are to be knowledgeable, astute, sharp, and even mercenary. Servant leadership, however, requires submission to others regardless of how they treat you. We too struggle with the concept of servant leadership because each one of us desires to be in charge. This characteristic should not be evident among Christ's followers. Those of us who follow in His footsteps should always ask, "What would Jesus do?" Read the answer in Mark 10:45.

Agent of Hope (John 15:13; 1 John 3:1)

It seems that somewhere between Gethsemane, Calvary, and Jesus' resurrection, John was transformed even more. Somewhere along John's journey, Christ was born in Him. In John 13:23 and 19:26, he refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 13:23; 19:26). Four books in the New Testament testify to this change in John's life and perspective. "The depth and fervor of John's affection for His Master was not the cause of Christ's love for him, but the effect of that love. John desired to become like Jesus, and under the transforming influence of the love of Christ he did become meek and lowly. Self was hid in Jesus."² No ordinary person would have thought that John would become such a messenger for the kingdom of heaven. Yet Jesus did. That's the way He views every human. He sees who we can be when we align ourselves with Him.

John invites would-be disciples to love as Jesus loved. Read 1 John 3:1. All of Christ's disciples today should be known for their love and complete submission to His will. Our world is in dire need of individuals who have experienced Christ's transforming grace. We must search our hearts and surrender all to Christ. Only then can we move forward to share the good news of salvation.

REACT

1. How do you respond to becoming a servant or slave in order to be a leader?
2. How should you respond to people who see church positions as the most important aspect of their life?
3. What is the biggest stumbling block to unconditional surrender in your life?
4. Reflect on how you are or are not fulfilling your role as an agent of hope.

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Call to Discipleship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 11.

2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 544.

Because of Jesus' Love

TESTIMONY

1 John 1:5-7; 2:3-11; 3:1, 2

The path John traveled from rowdy fisherman to Jesus' beloved disciple was not a smooth one. Review the following texts: Mark 10:35-40; Luke 9:51-56; and Mark 9:38-40. Yet Jesus loved Him and therefore worked with him.

Because of the love Jesus showed Him, the "lessons of Christ, setting forth meekness and humility and love as essential to growth in grace and a fitness for His work, were of the highest value to John. He treasured every lesson, and constantly sought to bring his life into harmony with the divine pattern. John had begun to discern the glory of Christ,—not the worldly pomp and power for which he had been taught to hope, but 'the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' John 1:14. . . .

". . . John desired to become like Jesus; and under the transforming influence of the love of Christ, he did become meek and lowly. Self was hid in Jesus. Above

all his companions, John yielded himself to the power of that wondrous life. . . . John knew the Saviour by an experimental knowledge. His Master's lessons were graven on his soul. When he testified of the Saviour's grace, his simple language

**"His Master's lessons were
graven on his soul."**

was eloquent with the love that pervaded his whole being.

"It was John's deep love for Christ which led him always to desire to be close by His side. The Saviour loved all the twelve, but John's was the most receptive spirit. He was younger than the others, and with more of the child's confiding trust he opened his heart to Jesus. Thus he came more into sympathy with Christ, and through him the Saviour's deepest spiritual teaching was communicated to the people.

"Jesus loves those who represent the Father, and John could talk of the Father's love as no other of the disciples could. He revealed to his fellow men that which he felt in his own soul, representing in his character the attributes of God. The glory of the Lord was expressed in his face. The beauty of holiness which had transformed him shone with a Christlike radiance from his countenance. In adoration and love he beheld the Saviour until likeness to Christ and fellowship with Him became his one desire, and in his character was reflected the character of his Master."^{*}

^{*}*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 545.

The Great Example

EVIDENCE

3 John 11

Nature is full of examples of young animals that, through the model of their parents, learn the art of survival. For example, as soon as lions are physically mature, they join the pride to learn how to hunt. They study the art of stalking under the most skilled lionesses. To keep out of sight of their prey, the young lions learn how to crouch while they creep as close to their unsuspecting prey as possible. They observe and imitate the lionesses' explosive sprinting and leaping, which enable them to fell animals as large as buffalo. The young lions also learn how to quickly finish the kill by blocking their prey's trachea with their sharp incisors, effectively suffocating it.

After a time, the once immature lions become fully capable of catching some of the largest, fastest, and strongest animals on earth. Like lions, we too must seek to imitate our heavenly Parent in order to survive and grow. By imitating Christ, John learned how to grow the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23) rather than the weeds of the world.

Before sin, humans communed face to face with the Creator of the universe. They were perfect and lived a sinless life. After sin, humanity's ability to faithfully and earnestly follow God was seriously eroded. As a result, humanity is unable to survive any aspect of life without a Savior.

They study the art of stalking under the most skilled lionesses.

Thankfully, God Himself came in the form of Jesus not only to show us how to live but to die the second death for us. Jesus' life was an expression of good and a rejection of evil. Because of His sinless life, death, and resurrection, we, like John, can be transformed into His likeness.

Thankfully, God Himself came in the form of Jesus not only to show us how to live but to die the second death for us. Jesus' life was an expression of good and a rejection of evil. Because of His sinless life, death, and resurrection, we, like John, can be transformed into His likeness.

REACT

1. How does the life of Jesus Christ provide us with what we need to ultimately be transformed into His likeness?
2. Describe the maturation process of Christians and how at each step God allows certain tests to refine and perfect Christian character.
3. Where might you be in this process, and what do you need to keep from getting stranded in that spot?

Christian Faith Is Sign Language

HOW-TO

John 13:35; 1 John 3:11–20

It is formed not with our mouths so much as with our bodies and our lives.¹ This expressive, experiential understanding of Christianity is a theme John derives from Jesus. He gave the world the right to judge the authenticity of our Christian faith by the quality of our love (John 13:35).² The gospel changes our thinking, but unless the world sees the expressive sign of our love, we have failed. Maybe we “love” from a distance with our money, our expertise, rather than meeting another person heart to heart.

We are given the command to love, but it grows from small beginnings as we see people differently and allow ourselves the gift of appreciating their uniqueness.

1. *Make peace with yourself.* Abandon the burden of having to appear perfect. People either compare themselves unfavorably to you and/or wonder what you are hiding. Either creates distance. You are a work in progress³ that God has promised

to complete. Life will be easier when you can learn to live with and to love broken people.

2. *Really see.*⁴ We’ve learned to share a journey with human beings without allowing them to be more

than generic “passengers.” Experiment with really looking at people, recognizing them as “someone” with a story, as someone who is on the same journey you are on. Wonder at the internal being of each passenger rather than distracting external images.

3. *Be there with me.* The English poet John Donne wrote, “No man is an island.” In other words, we’re all in this together. It doesn’t matter if we’re intelligent, adorable, or strong. What does matter is if we’re here for each other now, so that we’ll be there with each other when we reach heaven.

1. Leonard Sweet, *Learn to Dance the Soul Salsa: 17 Surprising Steps for Godly Living in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 2000), p. 17.

2. Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1992), p. viii.

3. Brennan Manning, *Above All: He Took the Fall and Thought of Me* (Mobile, AL: Integrity Publishers, 2003), p. 71.

4. Ravi Zacharias, *Cries of the Heart: Bring God Near When He Feels So Far* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Publishing, 1998), p. 154.

“Action! Not-a-Bag-a-Mout”

OPINION

1 John 3:18; 4:7, 8

In Jamaica, my homeland, it's often said, “Action! Not-a-bag-a-mout.” Translation? “Do it! Don't just say it.” This is the message the apostle John spent his life trying to share. In 1 John 3:18, he wrote, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (NKJV). Daily, we talk about love, learn the theories of love, listen to stories of love, watch films about love, read books about love, and even sing about love. But we fall short of showing love.

John's message enforcing Jesus' instructions to love one another was for the early church. But it stands today as one of the most relevant messages for our church. It's so potent that the apostle went on to say in 1 John 4: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (verses 7, 8, NKJV). Therefore, the love we show or fail to show others is a direct reflection of our personal relationship with God. So let's all take some time to evaluate the health of our connection to the Most High and the health of our church today.

“Action! Not-a-bag-a-mout.” Yes, love is action. It's personal, so if we don't get to know our brothers and sisters in Christ we won't succeed in loving them. Love is a warm attachment. So if we don't create a warm environment in our families, communities, and churches, we'll fail to create love. Love is a deep affection, so deep that Jesus was bruised, abused, and scorned for us. So deep that He cried and died for us. His sacrifice is the prime example of love. Is it not ironic then that one of our greatest shortcomings is loving one another and showing it?

Our church is a giving church that always seeks to alleviate the needs of those in the mission field by sending our offerings, food, clothing, and missionaries overseas. All this is beautiful, except there are mission fields in our own churches and neighborhoods that are suffering because love is lacking there. The good news is that it's not too late to start the action!

His sacrifice is the prime example of love.

REACT

1. How can you genuinely show more love to those around you?
2. What can you do to help others genuinely show more love?

Standing the Test of Time

EXPLORATION

John 21:20–22

CONCLUDE

John was the only apostle not to be martyred, living a long life even after his exile on the Island of Patmos. While martyrdom has its challenges, how much more so does living one's faith through years of trial and persecution, the death of friends, and unfulfilled expectations? Just as Jesus admonished Peter when asking about the other disciple, we must all follow Jesus individually—what He chooses to require of others is not our concern. What an example John provides for each of us as we write our own biographies each day.

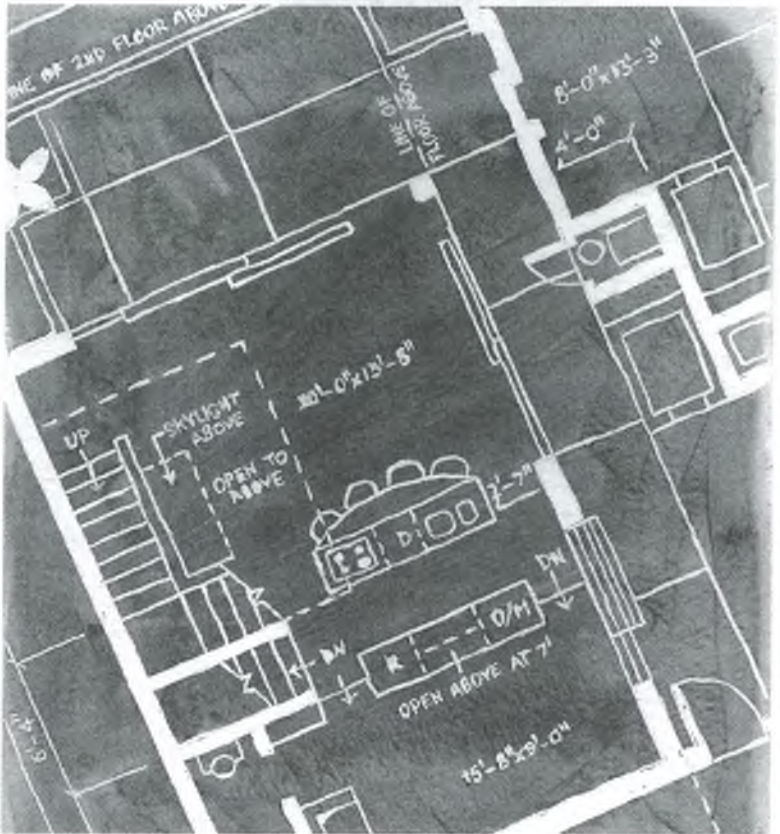
CONSIDER

- Making a timeline of what you know of John's life and can gather from his writings, noting his spiritual development at different points.
- Comparing/contrasting John with the other disciples, noting how God used John's unique qualities.
- Listening to the song "He's Alive" and imagining if you would have reacted more like Peter or John upon discovering the empty tomb.
- Reflecting on the transformations in your own spiritual history and your current openness to further transformational experiences.
- Brainstorming concrete ways to demonstrate love to others, then putting the ideas into action.
- Role-playing with others ways in which you can better follow Christ's example in everyday situations.
- Developing and performing a skit depicting the spiritual development and transformation of the apostle John, followed by a discussion of his example and/or implications for believers today.

CONNECT

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*; William Steuart McBirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, chap. 6.

From Folly to Faith: Peter



“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’ ” (John 6:68, NIV).

I Can See It Now!

INTRODUCTION

Ps. 127:1

Sometimes we're extremely good at certain things. But does this mean we know it all or that we can do those things completely on our own?

Sam watched his son Jonathan design a model home. Sam was well-known for his house modeling skills, and he had taught many of the highly respected names in the business. Jonathan had walked in his footsteps and had already begun to come up with some interesting new designs. As Sam stood there looking on, his experienced eye could see some flaws in the new design Sam was currently constructing.

"Jo, I don't think this is going to work if you place it this way." His comments were met with a hard stare.

"Dad, please. I know my stuff, and you know I know my stuff. I know you were good in your day, but I don't need you to advise me on how to do these things. Your ideas are a bit outdated."

**The supposedly outdated
mind had become his savior.**

Although the flaw in Jonathan's design was obvious to Sam, he simply left the room, leaving Jonathan to explore his skills.

Two days later Jonathan took his model to the committee where the chairperson immediately commented on the very flaw Sam had pointed out. Although they explained to Jonathan what it was, he still couldn't see it. The committee told him they would approve his model only if he would correct the flaw. He left the meeting dejected and arrived home only to meet his father in the door.

"Jo, how did it go down there? Did they approve your model?"

"These people are ancient-minded, just like you are, Dad. They're seeing the same flaw. Why can't they see that it's a new, perfect model?"

"Son, I was telling you so three nights ago, but you wouldn't listen. Look at this. . . ." As his father explained what the flaw was, Jonathan finally understood and saw sense in what everyone had been saying. Then he realized that his own pride was preventing him from seeing what his weakness was.

"Dad, can you please help me with this? I can see it now, but I really don't know how to fix it."

"Sure! My pleasure, son!" And together they worked. The supposedly outdated mind had become his savior.

This week, let's learn that even if we have been Christians all our lives, we cannot make it without God guiding and directing our lives.

You Can Do It Too!

EVIDENCE

Luke 22:32

As a new Christian, Peter felt he could do no wrong. Jesus appropriately named him 'petros,'* meaning a rolling or insecure rock. He loved Jesus but underestimated the power of the devil. When Jesus spoke of His suffering and death, Peter rebuked Him, saying that these things wouldn't happen. Read Jesus' reply in Matthew 16:23. Jesus realized that the devil was speaking through Peter and, therefore, rebuked him.

As new Christians, we often feel invincible. We've just fallen in love with Jesus and can't see how we could possibly hurt Him; but we do, as did Peter. One minute we're revved up for God, ready to "walk on water" with Him. The next thing we know, the boisterous wind terrifies us and our faith fails (Matt. 14:22-32). Jesus knows that Satan desires to have us, and just like He told Peter, He says to us, "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32, NIV).

Today, we remember Peter for his dedication to Christ, but he had problems like we do. Though he didn't offer to wash Jesus' feet, he couldn't understand why someone so powerful would want to wash his

(John 13:2-9). He was willing to die for Jesus one minute, then swear he didn't know him the next. Peter's life was a rollercoaster ride. But he pressed on. When he saw the look in Jesus' eyes after he denied his Lord, Peter knew he couldn't hurt Him again (Luke 22:61, 62). His point of conversion had come. Jesus knew that Peter was hurting, so when He rose from the grave, He let Peter know He had forgiven him (Mark 16:7).

After this point, Peter's life was one of total commitment to God, so don't be dismayed if you fall. Press on, you can do it too.

Peter's life was a rollercoaster ride.

REACT

Had not Peter seen that look from Jesus, would he be the Peter we know today? Be able to explain your answer.

* J. H. Mier, *What Catholics and Protestants Should Know* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1953), p. 23.

Misguided Zeal?

LOGOS

Acts 2:14–40; 3; 5:1–11; 1 Peter; 2 Peter

Peter the Man (Luke 5:8)

As a child, I saw Peter as this boisterous disciple with misguided zeal. However, he must have been a devoted man, for he “left everything” to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11, NIV).

Peter must also have been a man of absolute surrender. When Jesus told him, “Launch out into the deep” he did so, even though he knew, that after toiling all night, there would be no fish there.

Furthermore, he must have been a man of great faith, for when he saw Christ walking on water, he begged the Lord to let him come to Him. Then at Jesus’ command, he stepped out of the boat and walked on water (Matt. 14:28, 29).

Proleptic Peter (John 1:42; Acts 2:14–40)

Peter was among the first set of disciples to follow Jesus. His brother Andrew introduced Him to Christ. From then on, Jesus was his master. “The eye of Christ rested upon him, reading his character and his life history. His impulsive nature, his loving, sympathetic heart, his ambition and self-

confidence, the history of his fall, his repentance, his labors, and his martyr death—the Saviour read it all.”

Peter was the powerful leader of the early church the moment Christ saw him, even though for Peter himself this was a future persona.

Progressive Peter (Luke 22:31, 32)

In our instant society, no one is interested anymore in the process. The quick fix is the way to go. “Time is money,” some will tell you. Jesus, however, understood quite well that the process of conversion takes time. We expect that our new converts will automatically change to saints the moment they come out of the baptismal waters. But Christ assured His impulsive disciple with these words: “When you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:32, NKJV).

“Weakness is the big idea of the gospel.”

Powerful Peter (Luke 22:31, 32; Acts 3; 5:1–11; 1 Peter; 2 Peter)

We reach our full potential only in Christ. Peter didn't understand until after the cock had crowed that self must be buried in Christ in order to gain the victory. His acknowledgement of his weakness enabled him to tap into the power that comes only from Jesus Christ.

"Weakness is the big idea of the gospel, which makes it good news for us who are not terribly healthy, happy, or holy. God's servant leaders are intended to call God's people to repentance and faith. And what better way for God to do so than to first transform the leaders, who are the people who need grace even more than those they teach, encourage, and guide?"²

Another writer said, "The more honest you are the more of God's grace you get."³

What Christ did for Peter, He can do for you. All we need to do is be honest with ourselves and with God so that we can grow from strength to strength like Peter.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 139.

2. D. B. Alexander, *Leading With a Limp* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: WaterBrook Press, 2006), p. 54.

3. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), p. 176.

Trials: The Refiner's Instrument

TESTIMONY

1 Pet. 1:6, 7

September 30, 1999, always comes back to me with a shudder. It was the day I was diagnosed with a bronchial infection. I was to leave high school for a period of eight months to undergo treatment. "What's happening to me?" I questioned. I had just received admission to the school and now I was to leave. My whole world was crashing.

It was then that someone read 1 Peter 1:7 to me: "That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (NKJV).

I believe that was just what Peter had in mind when, in the later years of his ministry, he was inspired to write to the believers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

"His letters were the means of reviving the courage and strengthening the faith of those who were enduring trial and affliction, and of renewing to good works

those who through manifold temptations were in danger of losing their hold upon God."¹

In fact, "these letters bear the impress of having been written by one in whom the sufferings of Christ

and also His consolation had been made to abound; one whose hope of eternal life was sure and steadfast."²

Peter assures us that "God's care for His heritage is unceasing. He suffers no affliction to come upon His children but such as is essential for their present and eternal good. . . . All that He brings upon His people in tests and trials comes that they may gain deeper piety and greater strength to carry forward the triumphs of the cross."³

Ellen White further admonishes that "all should learn that [trials are] a part of the discipline in the school of Christ, which is essential to purify and refine [God's children] from the dross of earthliness."⁴

Hence, trials prepare us for the sure inheritance in the earth made new. Other than that, what else can we hope for?

1. *Reflecting Christ*, p. 361.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 362.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 578.

Trusting God's Promises

HOW-TO

2 Pet. 3:9

As humans, we are sometimes quick to insist on one thing, yet later do just the opposite. Peter was like that. But God wants us to be consistent, to keep the promises we make to Him. Peter's faith in God's power to save strengthened with the years, until he had proved beyond question his love for Christ.

Since his reinstatement after his denial of Christ, Peter unflinchingly braved danger and showed noble courage in preaching a crucified, risen, and ascended Savior. On our own, we are weak. We need the promises of God to keep us strong. The reason God gives His promises in the Bible is to show us that He is able to keep them. He is an all-knowing God, and He is willing and able to save us.

Here are some steps on how you can help others to trust in God's promises:

1. *Keep God in your heart (1 Pet. 3:15)*. Keeping God in our hearts makes it easier for us to communicate with others, to tell them about God and His second coming. Anybody who has God in their heart is destined to win souls for Him.

2. *Help others to cast their cares on Him (1 Pet. 5:7)*. God is the greatest Problem Solver. He alone can handle all the many problems we face. Helping others give their problems to God enables them to trust His promises.

God is the greatest Problem Solver.

3. *Watch unto prayer (1 Pet. 4:7)*. Prayer is what keeps us connected to God, and being connected to Him makes it easier for us to trust His promises. We need to remember to pray always and to help others who are weak to become strong.

REACT

1. Considering all the turmoil going on in today's world, how can God's promises be meaningful and also fulfilled?

2. Do you think that God's promises are sufficient? Be able to explain your answer.

Give Up Self; Commit to Christ

OPINION

Ps 37:5

When we look at Peter, most of us realize that he struggled with his Christianity, boasting of his faith, yet falling short. And this is why Peter's life story is significant to me. My walk with Christ has been similar, a fluctuating course of Christian highs and lows. On numerous occasions I have told myself as well as God that I'm not going to do this or that, only to fall short soon after. Like Peter, I'm usually sincere when I make those promises. So what's the problem, then? *Self-reliance*.

While we may have pure, just intentions to do what's right, if we try to do right in and of ourselves, we'll fail instead. I believe Peter was sincere when he pledged his commitment to Jesus, stating, " 'If I have to die with You, I will not deny You! ' " (Mark 14:31, NKJV). He meant every word, yet when the situation presented itself, he did just the opposite.

How many of us are the same, making promises to God, yet repeatedly breaking them? Peter fell, but some time later, he realized that his success as a Christian required him to give up relying on himself and to depend on Christ as his sole source of strength and, therefore, of his success. When he committed his life fully to Christ and to the power of the Holy Ghost,

My walk with Christ has been . . . a fluctuating course of Christian highs and lows.

he truly began working for God (Acts 2:41). This is also our hope and the key to our success. Ellen White wrote, "The humble worker who obediently responds to the call of God may be sure of receiving divine assistance. To accept so great and holy a responsibility is itself elevating to the character."*

If we choose to be like Peter in his early days of relying on himself, we'll surely fail. But if we rely on God's grace and power through His indwelling Spirit, heaven will be our reward.

REACT

1. In what ways has self-reliance affected your walk with God?
2. What practical steps can you take to correct this problem?

**Christian Service*, p. 100.

Under Construction

EXPLORATION

Mark 14:29–31; 16:7; Luke 22:61, 62

CONCLUDE

Grace is the most important gift God has bestowed upon fallen humanity. He didn't communicate it to us through some edict from His throne. He hand delivered it through Jesus! Jesus aimed the transforming power of God's grace at Peter, a loquacious braggart who knew little of his own powerlessness, and even less about God's love. Peter's denial of Christ, Christ's refusal to deny him, and his eventual restoration to ministry signal to us that we must trust God not only to overcome self but also to fulfill His destiny for our lives.

CONSIDER

- Surveying the final scenes before Jesus' crucifixion found in Matthew 26 and 27, Mark 14 and 15, Luke 22 and 23, and John 18 and 19. Tally the number of verses that mention Peter's betrayal as opposed to any that mention the silent betrayal of the other disciples. Why is Peter so prominently featured?
- Reading John 21:15–19. Write two paragraphs to complete the following statement: "If God asked me whether or not I loved Him, here's how I would respond . . ."
- Listening to "Were It Not for Grace" by recording artist Larnelle Harris, from his *First Love* CD. Try to imagine your life without God's grace, and then thank Him for His unfailing love.
- Contacting the chaplain of a nursing home or hospital near you. Ask him or her how you might go about visiting elderly patients in long-term care who rarely get visitors.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 73.

Beth Moore, *Get Out of That Pit* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

Pillar of Mission: Peter



“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NIV).

Be a Peter! Do Not Hesitate

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 16:18

Peter was earnest, courageous, and organized. He was a man of action with pronounced extremes, marked virtues, and serious defects. He was warmhearted, generous, bold, and daring. He was also boastful, impulsive, and reckless. In a moment of crisis he could prove to be alert, yet cowardly and vacillating. Often, no one could ever be sure which side of his character and personality would prevail (see the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, p. 844). All of this made him a man of contradictions. Jesus, however, could look inside Peter's heart and read his motives. Therefore, Jesus knew the potential Peter had.

Peter often did not hesitate to rush into the Lord's bidding. What reaction does Jesus receive today when He repeats to us the call to work for Him? No doubt some of those answers might be, "When I graduate, Lord" or "When I've found a job, I'll work for you" or "After I'm finished planning my wedding."

But today the world contains approximately seven billion people, many of whom need to hear the gospel. We are not to hesitate in heeding God's call. The Holy Spirit will see that the seeds bear fruit. As

**All of this made him a man
of contradictions.**

we make ourselves available for this global assignment, the Holy Spirit will fill us with power. Other things we need for success will be provided.

It is God Himself doing His work in us, using us as instruments. When He calls upon us, let us not make excuses for why we can't accept the challenge. Rather, let us thank Him for making us channels of His love to reach others with His message. Our achievements in making disciples for God are through His grace and love.

"All over the field of Christ's labor there were souls awakened to their need, and hungering and thirsting for the truth. The time had come to send the tidings of His love to these longing hearts. To all these the disciples were to go as His representatives. The believers would thus be led to look upon them as divinely appointed teachers, and when the Saviour should be taken from them they would not be left without instructors."*

As you study this week's lesson, ask God to show you the potential He sees in you.

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 351.

Becoming a Pillar of Mission

LOGOS

Matt. 14:22–33; 16:15, 16, 18; 26:47–54, 69–75; Mark 8:31–33; John 13:1–9;
Acts 5:12–15; 10; 1 Pet. 5:2–4

We can learn much about how Jesus deals with sinful humans by following the life of Peter, by observing how this impetuous, boastful, and overly confident disciple became a loving, humble servant of Christ and the early church.

Peter: A Short Bio (Matt. 14:22–33; 26:47–54, 69–75; Mark 8:31–33; John 13:1–9).

Peter (also known as Simon) was one of the original 12 apostles. Peter was originally from Bethsaida, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. He was married, and with his brother, he fished for a living. His home was in Capernaum. When Jesus called Peter to be an apostle, He gave him the added name *Cephas* (Aramaic) or *Peter* (*Petros* in Greek), names which in English are rendered as “Rock.” Along with James and John, Peter was one of the main apostles whom

Jesus chose to be present during important moments of His ministry.

Peter was impetuous, boastful, and overly confident. He wanted to walk on water. In addition, he rebuked Jesus for what seemed to

him negative thinking, and he refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet at their last Passover supper together. He denied knowing Jesus during one of Jesus’ trials, and he hastily drew a sword when Jesus was being arrested. When Jesus asked him, “‘Who do you say that I am?’” Peter boasted, “‘You are the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of the living God’” (Matt. 16:15, 16, NKJV).

He was always ready to correct others.

The Path to Pillarship, Part 1 (Luke 5:1–11)

After first meeting Jesus, Peter and the other disciples traveled with Him throughout Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, and Samaria. All along the way, they witnessed Jesus perform miracle after miracle and associate with the outcasts of society. But some of them, including Peter, had not completely given up their life as fishermen. Once, after teaching a multitude that consisted of many types of people, Jesus instructed Peter to launch his boat and cast his net. Even though the disciples had caught nothing the night before, and even though they were greatly discouraged by John the Baptist’s imprisonment and the religious leaders’ biases

against Jesus (see *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 244–261), Peter did as Jesus commanded. And to his amazement, the net filled with so many fish, it started to break.

Until then, not one of the disciples had “entirely forsaken their former employment. . . . But now Jesus called them to forsake their former life and unite their interests with Him.”* Once again, only this time completely and totally, Peter accepted Jesus’ call to become a fisher of men.

The Path to Pillarship, Part 2 (Matt. 16:15, 16, 18; Acts 5:12–15; 10)

Before Christ returned to heaven, He restored Peter to the ministry and gave him the work of nurturing the early church. This work would require great care and tenderness along with much patience and perseverance. Peter would be ministering to those who were young in the faith, educating them to also be useful in Christ’s service. Until now, Peter’s negative character traits had not allowed him to be particularly qualified to do this or even to understand the importance of learning from Christ how to do so. But this was the work which Christ now called him to. And for this work, Peter’s own experience of suffering and repentance had prepared him.

How the Savior nurtured Peter taught him and the other disciples how to nurture the early church. It taught them to meet sinners with patience, sympathy, and forgiving love. Although Peter had denied his Lord, not once, but three times, the love that Jesus showed him never faltered. This love showed Peter and the other disciples how to care for the thousands of new converts who would soon enter their ranks. As he remembered his own weaknesses and failures and how Jesus dealt with them, Peter would learn how to deal with others who sought salvation.

REACT

1. Outline the path Peter took in order to become a pillar of mission.
2. From that outline, write three or four principles of discipleship Peter learned along the way.
3. Now reflect upon your own journey to becoming a pillar of mission. How has God led you in the past? How is He leading you now? How has He dealt with your weaknesses and failures, and what has that experience taught you about how to nurture others?

* *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 248, 249.

Obeying Even When You Don't Understand

TESTIMONY

Acts 10

Perhaps the story of Peter's obedience to "doubt nothing" (Acts 10:20) and to share the gospel with Cornelius, a Gentile, is the best example of the apostle having become a pillar of mission. Ellen White had this to say of Peter's example of obedience in visiting Cornelius:

"To Peter, this was a trying command, and it was with reluctance at every step that he undertook the duty laid upon him; but he dared not disobey. . . .

"In obedience to the directions just received from God, the apostle promised to go with [the men sent by Cornelius]. On the following morning he set out for Caesarea, accompanied by six of his brethren. These were to be witnesses of all that he should say or do while visiting the Gentiles; for Peter knew that he would be called to account for so direct a violation of the Jewish teachings."¹

Upon arriving at the home of Cornelius, Peter "preached Christ,—His life, His miracles, His betrayal and crucifixion, His resurrection and ascension, and His work in heaven as man's representative and advocate. As Peter pointed those present to Jesus as the sinner's only hope, he himself understood more fully the meaning of the vision he had seen, and his heart

**"To Peter, this was a trying
command. . . ."**

glowed with the spirit of the truth that he was presenting."²

Cornelius and his household were baptized, and from them, "a wide-spread work of grace was carried on in that heathen city."³

Today, "God calls for earnest, humble workers, who will carry the gospel to the higher class [such as people like Cornelius]. There are miracles to be wrought in genuine conversions,—miracles that are not now discerned. . . . If those who are workers together with Him will be men of opportunity, doing their duty bravely and faithfully, God will convert men who occupy responsible positions, men of intellect and influence. Through the power of the Holy Spirit many will accept the divine principles.

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 137.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 138, 139.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

O-be-dience

EVIDENCE

1 Pet. 1:13–15

What did God require of Peter in order for him to become a pillar of mission? Obedience and self-control, not in and of himself, but through faith in God's promises and by His grace.

"As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Matt. 4:18–20, NRSV). Obedience and self-control? Yes. But through faith in God's promises and by His grace.

Peter asked Jesus to let him walk on water. See Matthew 14:22–32. Obedience and self-control? Perhaps at first. But what happened when Peter began to sink? What happened to his faith in God's promises and grace?

When you seek to know God's will, your part is to believe that God will guide and bless you. You might mistrust yourself, lest you misinterpret His teachings and His biddings. But make sure that even this mistrust becomes a subject of prayer that His Holy Spirit will lead you to understand and "interpret aright His plans and the working of His providence."^{*}

**What happened to his faith
in God's promises and
grace?**

We are to stand firm as a rock to the principles of the Word of God, remembering that He is with us to give us strength and to meet with faith each new experience with which He presents us. Let us ever maintain in our lives the principles of faith and grace so that we may go forward from strength to strength in the name of the Lord. Let us cherish as precious the work the Lord has been carrying forward through His commandment-keeping people, and which, through the power of His grace, will grow stronger and more efficient as time advances.

REACT

1. Look again at the title of today's lesson. How is the way in which it is written help us to understand the nature of true Christian obedience?
2. When have you asked God to let you "walk on water" only to discover that your faith did not allow you to maintain the experience? How did your failure help you to grow in your relationship with Him?

^{*} *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 6, p. 225.

HOW-TO

Acts 5:29; 1 Pet. 3:8, 9

As a pillar of mission, Peter stands for truth coupled with courage in speaking for God. The vested interest of the priests brought immediate warning that they would not tolerate the apostle's preaching that Christ had arisen. Yet Peter remained obedient to a higher Power. Read Acts 4:19, 20 and Acts 5:29.

How had Peter become such a firm pillar for God's work? Here are three possibilities:

1. *Peter learned that one of the most important parts of being a Christian is service to others.* This is a central principle in God's work. The Savior not only prophesied Peter's weakness in the denial, but his influence in the church during the rest of his life when He told Peter: "When you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32, NKJV).

2. *Peter learned that true leadership also benefits those who lead.* As we study the apostles' work in the early church, we find that they emphasized and lived love as much as Jesus did. For Peter, love was far more than a polite greeting to fellow members at church. It was the daily cultivation of compassion, courtesy, and empathy for each other instead of returning

**This is a central principle in
God's work.**

"evil for evil, or railing for railing" (1 Pet. 3:9).

3. *Peter learned that being Christlike has special meaning.* As one of the first 12 disciples, Peter witnessed firsthand the Master's strength in suffering. Setting the example for us all, Jesus did not angrily blame His oppressors. Whoever follows Him must exercise the same self-control when wronged (1 Pet. 2:21-23).

No otherworldly, haloed saint, Peter was always at the center of action—risking mistakes, suffering criticism and even persecution. But he had learned from Jesus how to respond, and after the Crucifixion he testified courageously for a third of a century, emulating Jesus in His manner of living and dying. His speeches and letters deserve repeated reading, for Peter's greatest message is a life of commitment and courage.

REACT

Read again the three points above. As you do, consider carefully how each one can help you to become a pillar for Christ.

Follow Me

OPINION

John 21:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4

Peter is one of the apostles of Christ who best exemplifies the most human of traits. There is no doubt he had great faith and love for Christ. Many times in the Gospel accounts, we witness Peter's zeal for Jesus, yet also experience his weaknesses and faults, fears and anxieties, and perhaps even at times, his doubts.

Ultimately, Peter's life must be measured by his success in carrying out the final instructions of the Lord. Consider the time after Christ's resurrection when He repeatedly asked Peter whether he loved Him. Perhaps Peter's threefold denial was purged by his threefold declaration of love for his Master, when he exclaimed in exasperation, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You" (John 21:17, NKJV).

How many of us are like Peter! We are interested in the affairs of others, anxious to know their duty, while we are in danger of neglecting our own responsibilities. Let us look instead to Christ and follow Him. We shall see mistakes in the lives of others. Their character defects will be obvious. On this earth, humanity always will be encompassed with infirmity. Only in Christ do we find perfection.

In beholding Him, we shall become transformed into loving and lovable Christians who reflect their Lord and Savior.

Peter had been restored to his apostleship, but the honor and authority he received from Christ did not give him supremacy over any one or any thing. When wondering about another disciple, Peter asked, "But Lord, what about this man?" Jesus replied, "If I will that he [the other disciple] remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me" (John 21:20-22, NKJV).

Peter was not honored as the head of the church. Rather, the favor that Christ had shown him in forgiving his denial and entrusting him with caring for the church, along with Peter's own faithfulness in following Christ, won for him the confidence of church members. He had much influence in the church. And the lesson that Christ had taught by the sea of Galilee carried Peter throughout the rest of his life.

How many of us are like
Peter!

Friday
August 29

The Mission You've Chosen to Accept

EXPLORATION

Ps. 96:3; Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 4:13

CONCLUDE

Peter was a pillar of mission. We, as Christians, are called to be pillars of mission in our communities. Our job is no less important than Peter's. We are called to tell the story of Jesus to those around us who do not know Him. To do less is to negate our mandate as Christians and to deny Christ, the same as Peter did the night before the Crucifixion. We are called to make disciples, teaching and leading them to Christ. This is our mission. If we've been baptized, then we acknowledge that we've accepted the mission. It's time to fulfill our orders.

CONSIDER

- Listening to or singing Steve Green's song "The Mission." How do these words impact your vision to do mission work in your circle of influence?
- Designing a photo collage depicting what you feel called to as your mission. Share your collage with your Sabbath School class.
- Discussing with your Sabbath School class ideas on how to expand mission. Choose at least two of the ideas to practice either individually or as a group for six months. At the end of that time, reassess your impact of mission.
- Researching how many baptized Seventh-day Adventists there are in your home division. Calculate how long it would take—if each member introduced one person to Christ during the next 12 months—to reach the entire population of your division.
- Sculpting a scene that depicts the mission of the church and those it reaches out to with the story of Jesus.
- Interviewing members of your church family. Ask them what they are doing for their mission in life. Share results in some form with the congregation.

CONNECT

The Acts of the Apostles, chap. 14.

Stephen Gaukroger, *Your Mission, Should You Accept It . . .*, chap. 3.

Women of Mission



“ ‘Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little’ ”
(Luke 7:47, NRSV).

Mary, Mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, Mother of John

INTRODUCTION

Luke 1:1–2:66

It's intriguing how the plan of salvation, which starts in the Old Testament, unfolds in the New Testament. Two women, one a virgin and the other barren, who in most societies today would be considered social misfits, were used by God for salvation's mission. Even during their time, a barren woman was a social misfit. Elizabeth, the woman who was barren, begot a son in whose birth many rejoiced, a son who would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17, NIV). John the Baptist, born from this woman, spread the good news of the coming Messiah, turning many people to God. Though Elizabeth is mentioned only in Luke 1, it's clear that as a priest's wife, she played an essential role in building John the Baptist's character.

Mary, a virgin, became pregnant before she ever had intercourse. What a disgrace this could've been if it hadn't been God's way of bringing about our salvation. When the message that she would be giving birth to the Savior was presented to her, she wondered at the possibility. However, she willingly gave herself to God, saying, "I am the Lord's servant" (Luke 1:38, NIV). After Jesus' birth and the shepherds' visit, Mary understood God's will, and she "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19, NIV).

**These women were fore-
runners to the mission of
God's church today.**

As any loving mother, Mary was worried when Jesus, at the age of 12, stayed behind at the temple in Jerusalem. Expressing her worry when she found him, she said, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you" (Luke 2:48, NIV). Mary continued to be part of Jesus' life and ministry, and she understood who He was. At a wedding in Cana, she put the responsibility on Jesus to provide wine when it ran out, and she ordered the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do in that regard. So we see that Mary was not only there when Jesus performed His first miracle, she also set the stage for it.

Though the stories of Elizabeth and Mary are brief, these women were fore-runners to the mission of God's church today. This week, we will study the lives of other women in the New Testament, who share with Mary and Elizabeth the distinction of having walked and talked with Christ while He was on earth. We will also look at a modern-day female prophet. Whether you are male or female, ask as you study this week's lesson how their faith can help your faith to grow.

God's End-Time Prophet

EVIDENCE

2 Chron. 20:20

Just as God gave the children of Israel a prophet for every different era they lived in, so God gives us the same gift today. Ellen G. White bears a message that is appropriate for all of God's children living in today's world. One day, the Lord asked her to present a message at a prayer meeting. But because she was in poor health and only 17 years old, she was afraid. However, she asked the Lord for courage to present the message, and she was able to do so.

Throughout her ministry, some people argued that she was not a prophet of God, and they put her to the test. When she was in vision in one of the prayer meetings, she did not breathe for a long time. People at the meeting put a mirror near her mouth and nose to see if she was breathing. There was no moisture on the mirror to indicate that she was. She did not breathe for such a long time that people wanted to call a doctor.

Today, we can also look at the biblical test for a prophet and see that according to this test she qualifies. Following are some of the qualifications of true prophets:

One day, the Lord spoke to
her.

1. True prophets do not lie. Their predictions will be fulfilled (Jer. 28:9).
2. True prophets prophesy in the name of the Lord, not in their own name (2 Pet. 1:21).
3. True prophets do not give their own private interpretation of prophecy (2 Pet. 1:20).
4. True prophets point out the sins and transgressions of God's people (Isa. 58:1).
5. True prophets warn God's people of His coming judgment (Rev. 14:6, 7).
6. True prophets edify the church, counseling and advising it in religious matters (1 Cor. 14:3, 4).
7. The words of true prophets will be in harmony with the words of the prophets who have preceded them (Isa. 8:20).

REACT

If you haven't read anything written by Ellen White or have had her writings forced upon you in negative ways, then try reading her book *Steps to Christ*. Here she outlines in 13 chapters God's plan of salvation.

LOGOS

Luke 8:41–55; John 4:1–40

Twelve Long Years (Luke 8:43–48)

Two essential aspects were required for the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. First, she had to have faith; and second, she had to act on that faith. She not only had to believe she would be healed if she reached out and touched the hem of Jesus' garment, she also had to physically touch the hem of His garment.

Nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37), and our extremity is God's opportunity. This woman had spent all her money on doctors in search of healing. But she was not healed until she reached out to the Great Physician. The shortest distance between a problem and a solution is often the distance between our knees

and the floor. No problem is too big for God to solve.

The shortest distance between a problem and a solution is often the distance between our knees and the floor.

“ ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name’ ” (John 15:16, NIV). The woman's great faith resulted in a great miracle.

A Twelve-Year-Old Daughter (Luke 8:49–55)

Jairus anxiously asked Jesus to heal his one and only daughter. He was the ruler of the synagogue, and he knew that Jesus was the only man who could restore her health.

A servant from Jairus's house thought it was too late when he pronounced, “ ‘Your daughter is dead,’ . . . ‘Don't bother the teacher any more’ ” (Luke 8:49, NIV). But God is never too late. In fact, He's always on time. Just like when the children of Israel were stuck between an angry Egyptian army behind them and the Red Sea in front of them (Exod. 14:21, 22), God made a way for a young woman where there was none.

The Woman at the Well (John 4:1–40)

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, it would have been acceptable for Him to ignore the woman, because He was a Jew and she was a Samaritan, and the two groups did not get along. But Jesus looked past the tribal

conflicts and saw only a thirsty woman. Likewise, we should not judge people by the color of their skin, by the language they speak, or by the clothes they wear. We should look past all outward appearances and see only their need for a Savior. Jesus used this woman, who was despised by the disciples, to help an entire city learn about Jesus

What About Us?

We are quick to tell our friends about the latest Hollywood celebrity gossip, but reluctant to share with them about God and the living water only He can provide. But let us remember that God does not call the qualified but rather qualifies the called. When Jesus calls us to duty, our first reaction is to see our deficiencies; but if we place those deficiencies in His nail-pierced hands, He can use us as a powerful tool.

Whether we are young or old, healthy or ill, from a hated minority or a loved majority; whether we are male or female, our witness for God can be powerful.

REACT

1. Does God see some roles in the ministry as background roles, or does He see all roles as equally important? Explain your answer.
2. God uses pastors in a powerful way to spread the gospel. Name five other occupations that God can use to spread the Word just as effectively.
3. Make a list of other women in the Bible (both Old and New Testament) who help us understand God's love and salvation. Which ones speak to you personally, and why?

Tuesday
September 2

"Never Had She Heard"

TESTIMONY

John 4:1-40

Yesterday's lesson dealt with in part the woman at the well. Ellen White reflects upon this woman with these words:

"As the woman talked with Jesus, she was impressed with His words. Never had she heard such sentiments from the priests of her own people or from the Jews. As the past of her life had been spread out before her, she had been made sensible of her great want. She realized her soul thirst, which the waters of the well of Sychar could never satisfy. Nothing that had hitherto come in contact with her had so awakened her to a higher need. Jesus had convinced her that He read the secrets of her life; yet she felt that He was her friend, pitying and loving her. While the very purity of His presence condemned her sin, He had spoken no word of denunciation, but had told her of His grace, that could renew the soul. She began to have some conviction of His character. The question arose in her mind, Might

"Never had she heard such sentiments from the priests."

not this be the long-looked-for Messiah? She said to Him, 'I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things.' Jesus answered, 'I that speak unto thee am He.'

"As the woman heard these words, faith sprang up in her heart. She accepted the wonderful announcement from the lips of the divine Teacher.

"This woman was in an appreciative state of mind. She was ready to receive the noblest revelation; for she was interested in the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit had been preparing her mind to receive more light. She had studied the Old Testament promise, 'The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken.' Deut. 18:15. She longed to understand this prophecy. Light was already flashing into her mind. The water of life, the spiritual life which Christ gives to every thirsty soul, had begun to spring up in her heart. The Spirit of the Lord was working with her.

"The plain statement made by Christ to this woman could not have been made to the self-righteous Jews. Christ was far more reserved when He spoke to them. That which had been withheld from the Jews, and which the disciples were afterward enjoined to keep secret, was revealed to her. Jesus saw that she would make use of her knowledge in bringing others to share His grace."*

**The Desire of Ages*, pp. 189, 190.

"But, But, But . . ."

HOW-TO

Acts 20:24

Mission life doesn't just belong in far-off, exotic places. It isn't just for people with training and qualifications. We all have excuses, but the lives of some of the women in the Bible make these excuses obsolete:

1. *But nobody asked me.* Many people say they would get involved if only someone asked them. But God doesn't always want us to wait. Sometimes we need to take the leap of faith ourselves. The woman in Luke 8:42-48 could have continued in her misery, complaining that Jesus never noticed her. However, she had faith. So she didn't sit around waiting for Jesus to "notice" her.

2. *But I'm not "holy" enough.* Many times we use our past misdeeds as an excuse to avoid ministry. The woman Jesus spoke to at the well (John 4:1-40) would have been considered one of the most unqualified of people to share the gospel. Yet Jesus is not about excuses, because He can forgive our past. And He can change our lives so that others who know our past can see His amazing grace and power.

3. *But I haven't been a Christian long enough.* The gospel will not travel if left up to the "experienced" or "qualified" ones. Lydia is a beautiful example of a new convert's will-

ingness to step right in and be involved. Read Acts 16:14, 15, and notice that there is no time reference in this passage. "She was baptized . . . and she asked us . . ." If a woman who has just accepted Christ as her Savior is immediately asking to be involved somehow, should that not work for all of us? At times, our churches seem too concerned with experience and youth, whether physical or spiritual.

4. *But . . . (insert own excuse here).* "I can't be a missionary. I've got to finish school." "I have a job." "I've got too many responsibilities." Consider Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:1-4, 24-28; Rom. 16:3-5). Aquila didn't say, "I'm sorry. I can't assist in spreading the gospel because I have a wife I'm responsible for." Likewise, Priscilla made no excuses. There was work to be done, and they got in there and did it. Yes, they had a business and the responsibilities which it entailed. However, nothing was going to stop them from working for God.

Take some time to seriously consider what excuses you've been giving God and your church. In light of these women's stories, do your excuses still work? What can you do to overcome the fears that might be driving them?

Do your excuses still work?

OPINION

John 4:1–30

Long ago in some villages, people used to manually dig graves to bury their loved ones. This process was painstaking and tiring. Due to pressure to finish the work before sunrise, reports were occasionally received that people had dug a grave that was too deep for them to pull themselves out of.

This situation reminds me of the woman at the well. Surely she was once a sweet little girl. As she grew up, she must have started experimenting with dating one boy, and then more and more boys. My view is that her excuse for her behavior was merely that she was experimenting with life. By the time she realized what she was doing, she felt she was beyond hope. In her village, no one wanted to associate with her because of her reputation. When she met the Savior, she already had been married five times.

Even though she had developed an I-don't-care attitude, Jesus could sense that she had dug a hole too deep to pull herself out of. Still, she longed to be saved.

**Surely she was once a sweet
little girl.**

As Jesus talked with her, she discerned that He was a prophet and her Savior. She immediately went to inform others about the water of life she had found. Thus she became a woman with a mission—sharing the

good news with others as soon as she was saved. As a result, many people in her village were saved.

From time to time, we might hang out with the wrong crowd whose influence may turn us away from the Lord. Or we might make wrong choices that cause us to develop wrong habits, which in turn ultimately form bad characters, such that we cannot discern between right and wrong. We need to realize our situation while we still have time on our side and present ourselves to the living Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Before probation closes, let us learn a lesson from the woman at the well.

REACT

1. Has your lifestyle gone too far from where the Lord intended it to be? What can you do about it?
2. Do you believe in the cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb of God? All you need is to believe that His grace is sufficient for you.

Called and Qualified for Service

Friday
September 5

EXPLORATION

John 4:1–20; 8:2–11; 12:1–7; 20:11–18

CONCLUDE

All of the women covered in this lesson have high-impact testimonies. What's really great, though, isn't limited to what they were saved from, but what they were saved to! God has a real place in His service for *all* who come to Him. He doesn't disqualify us based on age, gender, ethnicity, or income level. There is a place for children and women in mission; and no church or tradition can hold back the tide of events that will follow when a life is willingly given to Jesus for service. As a woman, I find confidence in this emphatic biblical fact and claim the promise as revealed through each of the women highlighted in this lesson.

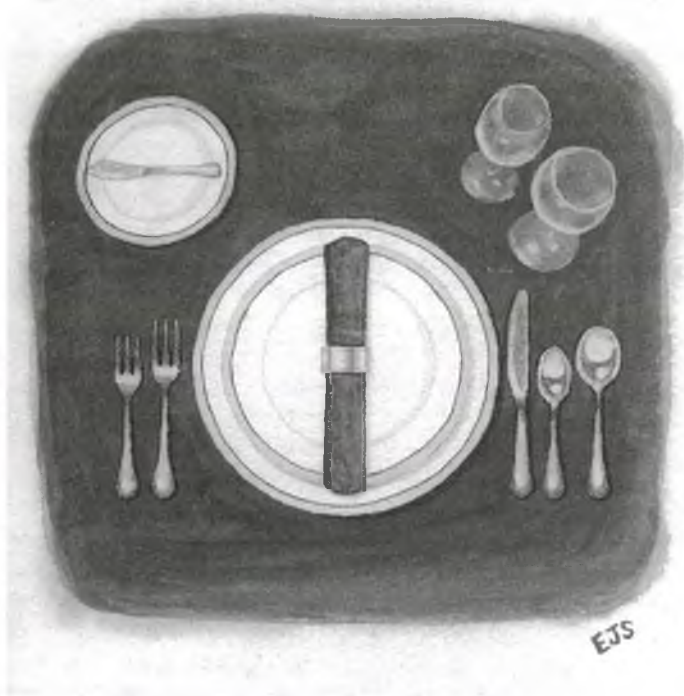
CONSIDER

- Drawing or painting a portrait of Mary Magdalene. Choose one scene (John 8:2–11; 12:1–7; 20:11–18) and use color to communicate the contrast of her life before and after meeting Jesus.
- Putting a modern-day media “spin” on the events following Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. You are the reporter. Using John 4:1–20 for your insights, write the questions you would ask this woman if you were to interview her. Then, write her responses to your questions. Give the newscast “interview” as a sermon to a youth meeting.
- Journaling your own encounter with Jesus—about that moment you personally were convinced of your need for a Savior and responded to His grace given for you on Calvary. What has Jesus saved you from? What has He saved you for? Have you asked Him to give you a sense of mission and calling, and are you following that path He has put you on?
- Praying and asking God to show you how you can be of practical service to Him in your church and community. Ask your pastor, an elder, or the Community Services leader how you can best serve.

CONNECT

Adriel D. Chilson, *They Had a World to Win*.

In a Pagan Land: **Daniel** and **Company**



“But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way” (Dan. 1:8, NIV).

Away From Home

INTRODUCTION

Daniel 1

Through God's loving mercy, I and my family had the chance to immigrate and live a new life abroad. Preparation was quite tedious as the departure day grew near. We had to sell many of our belongings since we could not bring much with us. We also had to buy many items that would equip us for winter. Coming from a tropical country meant we would have to adjust to four seasons.

We also had to show the embassy that we are fit to immigrate. I had to prove that I could work through licensure in my field of endeavor. We also had to prepare ourselves to leave loved ones behind. And immigrating also meant leaving the church I had known since childhood, and starting over financially. We experienced excitement and fear over all these factors involved in moving to another country—excitement for the opportunity of a new life and fear for the unknown.

In Daniel 1, we read that Daniel and his three friends were suddenly caught in a situation where they were unwillingly taken away from their homes. They were in Babylon not as immigrants, but as captives. They could make no preparations whatsoever for this move. They had no time for good-byes, no chance to pack a few favorite items. All they could carry was their faith in God.

**All they could carry was
their faith in God.**

Upon the king's order to Asphenaz, the chief of court officials, Daniel and his friends were among those chosen to serve in the king's palace. The criteria for being chosen were as follows: (1) from the royal family or nobility; (2) handsome young men without physical defect; and (3) aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed and quick to understand.

Everything changed in the lives of Daniel and his friends, even their names. The environment changed and probably the weather too! They probably had to dress like the Babylonians and learn their language and customs for a three-year training period. They were served royal food and drink, which were not in accordance with the diet the Lord prescribes for His people. Yet Daniel and his friends witnessed for the Lord! The ten-day test with healthy food and drink, combined with faith in God, resulted in healthier and better nourished bodies, plus ten times more wisdom than the rest.

Daniel and his friends may have been abruptly uprooted from their homeland, but no one could take away their God. As you study this week's lesson, ask yourself if you would dare to be a Daniel.

Sunday
September 7

Witnessing Equals Practicing One's Faith

LOGOS

Exod. 20:4; Dan. 1:12; Matt. 5:14-16; 1 Cor. 10:31

Witnessing Through Diet (Dan. 1:12)

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah would not eat the food served to them from the king's table. From their childhood days, no unclean food had entered their mouths. Their bodies were used to the healthy food their parents had served them. Also, they did not indulge in bountiful feasts or royal all-you-can-eat tables. They knew their style of eating was healthier, and they were willing to be tested with such a diet for ten days. Whether they would look worse or better than the other young men who ate from the king's table would be the basis of comparison.

Asphenaz and the guard whom he appointed to the four young Israelites were amazed, pleased, and convinced with the results of the test. They were amazed to see a diet that was better than the king's. They were pleased to see that these four experimental young men did not grow worse in appearance, or else they would have had to answer with their lives. And they were convinced that the Israelites' diet was better.

**He wanted to be treated
like a god.**

Because of these men's diet, Babylon was able to observe healthier and better nourished young men. These men were healthier not only physically, but mentally as well.

Nebuchadnezzar found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom.

Witnessing Through Praise (Daniel 2)

In Daniel 2, Daniel and his friends suddenly found themselves facing execution together with all the wise men of Babylon. But because these young men had gained favor in the eyes of the Babylonians, the king granted a delay. During this time Daniel and his friends pled for God to reveal the dream Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten. God was there to listen, and He revealed the dream to Daniel. When He did so, Daniel praised God (Dan. 2:19-23). He went to Arioch, the executioner, to save the wise men of Babylon, and then he was brought before the king. To him Daniel said, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (Dan. 2:27, 28, NIV). Thus, he acknowledged his God and introduced his God's great power to the king, government officials, and all the wise men of

Babylon. On that day, Nebuchadnezzar discovered the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and the Revealer of mysteries.

Witnessing Through Obedience and Allegiance (Daniel 3)

King Nebuchadnezzar decided to make a golden image like the one in his dream. It stood 90 feet high and 9 feet wide, and the king commanded all to bow down and worship it. Surely the second of God's Ten Commandments must have been ringing in the minds of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they heard of Nebuchadnezzar's construction project (Exod. 20:4, 5), for when the time came to obey the king's command, only the three young Hebrews remained standing. Thus, they boldly proclaimed their obedience and allegiance to the One True God. For them, it was better to die at the hands of men than to turn from God. The king's fury was manifested through a furnace that was heated seven times hotter than normal, but that also was matchless against God's capacity to save.

The Babylonian kingdom and all nations of that time marveled and witnessed the power of God over death. Nebuchadnezzar, and some of his officials, even caught a glimpse of the Son of God who visited the three Hebrews in the inferno.

Witnessing Through Prayers (Daniel 6)

King Darius of Media-Persia was so hasty in signing a decree that he could not eat and drink that night. This decree that did not permit anyone in his kingdom to pray to any god or man for 30 days was so enticing to him! Fresh from his victory over the powerful kingdom of Babylon, he felt the glory coursing through his veins. His ability to think and reason was overshadowed with pride. He wanted to be treated like a god—a god who deserved to be worshiped for 30 days!

But alas! He had forgotten about his best confidant—Daniel—who prayed to the true God three times a day. He was as true to his God as he was true to his duty. He was the best administrator amongst the three who managed 120 satraps. The very Daniel whose exceptional qualities were intended to sit over the whole kingdom next to the king. But Darius was left with no choice but to throw him in the lions' den!

At the first light of dawn, the king and his royal guards witnessed the true power of God over the fierce lions. Daniel was safe, without even a scratch. Then that heathen king called Daniel the servant of the living God. Once again, Daniel was a good witness and an agent of hope to a worldly kingdom.

REACT

1. In what ways are you witnessing for the Lord?
2. Is it easy or difficult to practice your faith? Explain your answer.
3. Consider how, or even if, people around you are blessed by your witness.

Introducing Christ to Others

TESTIMONY

Daniel 2; 3; Rom. 16:25–27

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing dream about the future. But because of God, Daniel was able to reveal and interpret the meaning of this dream. From the crowning glory of the kingdom of Babylon, as represented by the golden head of the image, many other inferior kingdoms would rise and overthrow each other, until such a time when Christ's eternal kingdom (represented by a rock that symbolized Christ) would strike the feet of the image and crush the whole of it. This was probably the first encounter that the king had with Christ.

What a marvelous opportunity for Daniel to give the king a Bible study! And that he did. But still the king wanted to make an image like the image in his dream. Still, he expected people to worship this image. Still, the three Hebrew men stood firm, not knowing God would save them. For this, they were thrown into the fierce fire.

Ellen White tells us how he felt when he noticed that the three Hebrew men were actually surviving the flames:

“How did that heathen king know what the Son of God was like?”

“From his royal seat the king looked on, expecting to see the men who had defied him utterly destroyed. But his feelings of triumph suddenly changed. The nobles standing near saw his face grow pale

as he started from the throne and looked intently into the glowing flames. In alarm the king, turning to his lords, asked, ‘Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? . . . Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.’

“How did that heathen king know what the Son of God was like? The Hebrew captives filling positions of trust in Babylon had in life and character represented before him the truth. When asked for a reason of their faith, they had given it without hesitation. Plainly and simply they had presented the principles of righteousness, thus teaching those around them of the God whom they worshiped. They had told of Christ, the Redeemer to come; and in the form of the fourth in the midst of the fire the king recognized the Son of God.”*

**Prophets and Kings*, p. 509.

Giving What You Received

EVIDENCE

Matt. 5:16

"There are two seas in Palestine. They are both different. One is called the Sea of Galilee. It is a large lake with clean fresh water from which you can drink. Fish and people swim in it. It is surrounded by green fields and gardens. Many people have built their homes near it. Jesus sailed across it many times.

"The other big body of water is called the Dead Sea, and it really lives up to its name. Everything about it is dead. The water is so salty that you would get sick from trying to drink it. It has no fish. Nothing grows along its banks. No one wants to live anywhere near its unpleasant smell.

"The interesting thing about both these bodies of water is that the same river flows into both of them.

"So what makes the difference? Just this—one receives and gives; the other receives and keeps.

"The Jordan River flows into the top of the Sea of Galilee and out the bottom. The lake uses the water and then passes it on for others to use.

"The Jordan River then flows into the Dead Sea and never gets out again. The Dead Sea selfishly keeps it only for itself. This makes it dead. It gets and never gives."*

**We should be like the Sea
of Galilee.**

God's everlasting message is like the Jordan River that flows to each and every one of us. However, most of us turn out to be like the Dead Sea. We just receive the message and don't bother to share it to others. We should be like the Sea of Galilee. Many fishes, plants, and people benefit from it. When we receive God's message of hope, we should appreciate His goodness and share it with others. Remember that His mercy and love are overflowing. No individual can contain all of it. We should distribute it to our family, friends, relatives, neighbors, and community.

Jesus once said that we are the light of the world. We must shine before those we meet. Daniel and his friends did not hide their light from the Babylonians and Medo-Persians. Through their thoughts, words, and actions, they faithfully showed the way to the living God.

* John Marsabelle, *1,000 Stories You Can Use* (Chicago, Ill., Society of the Divine Word, 1987), pp. 1, 2.

Just Like Brother Daniel

HOW-TO

Daniel 6; 1 Cor. 10:31

In Daniel 6, Daniel was alone in being thrown in the lions' den. Death would have been sure. But like his three friends who were tested in the fiery furnace, Daniel came out alive and unharmed.

In verse 5, the administrators and satraps could not find any fault with Daniel. So they decided to attack his faith in God.

How can we become effective witnesses like Daniel? Here are some points to ponder:

1. *Know our God (John 6:35–40)*. Talk to Him every day. Listen to what He has to say. Trust Him in all circumstances, and put Him as your number one priority. Knowing Him is being faithful to Him even unto death. Daniel knew the God he was serving!

2. *Do your best in all things (Dan. 6:3)*. If you are a student, be the best student you can be. If you are a carpenter, build the best house you can. If you are an artist, paint the best pictures you can. If you are a doctor, be the best doctor you can. If you are a government official like Daniel, serve with integrity. The quality of your work is a way of witnessing to others. So always give it your best!

3. *Be truthful (Dan. 6:4)*. As in Daniel's time, the world is watching us in all the things that we do. It wouldn't matter if a certain person smokes at the corner or goes to work on a Sabbath. But for a Seventh-day Adventist to smoke or go to work on a Saturday is a big issue! We should be true to our beliefs even if being true means we suffer.

4. *Be responsible (Dan. 6:4)*. Daniel's foes were just waiting for him to commit one negligent act. But they finally realized just how responsible he was. He had a great sense for duty and was sure to accomplish everything under his care well. God gave us responsibilities to ourselves, our families, our community, and to our church. Let's keep these responsibilities as faithfully as Daniel kept his.

Just like a compass needle faithfully points to the north, we must faithfully point to God to give directions to the lost!

The quality of your work is a way of witnessing to others.

Drips of Living Water

OPINION

John 4:10

Once, our kitchen faucet was dripping badly, but we didn't have the rubber washer to fix it. So until we could get one, we put a basin under the drip to make use of the water that was leaking out. The faucet seemed to be dripping just a little bit—hardly anything at all. But we left the basin under the faucet the whole night, and in the morning it was overflowing with water!

I believe that the Christian experience is like this basin. We simply have to catch the spring of living water every moment no matter how small an amount it might be. We should always be ready to accept God's seemingly small invitations and appreciate His blessings, however small they might seem. It might be sunshine beaming on our face or a soft tap or short embrace from a friend telling us that God cares for us. It could be a good sermon given or an inspiring Sabbath School class that gives us the strength to endure the trials of another week. Moreover, the drips may come from participation in small prayer groups, vesper meetings, Vacation Bible Schools, medical rallies, or Bible studies.

All of these seemingly small amounts of spiritual water will fill the basins of our souls, which will eventually be overflowing! Sooner or later, we will feel that we can't hold on to all the goodness that our great

God is giving us each day! Then we will notice ourselves overflowing with God's love. We will automatically share it, witnessing for our God, because we are overflowing with His grace.

Let us continually ask the Holy Spirit to fill us each day, so that our eyes, ears, hearts, and minds will be in tune to appreciate God's goodness and to answer His calling each day.

In the morning it was overflowing with water!

REACT

1. Compare the Christian experience of Daniel and his friends to the basin slowly being filled with water.

2. Now consider your own Christian experience. How much does it compare or contrast to the basin slowly being filled by water droplets until the basin overflows?

Friday
September 12

Salt of the Earth

EXPLORATION

Matt. 28:19, 20

CONCLUDE

Like Daniel and his friends, we live in a foreign land. The world may seem lost, people may feel empty, morals may seem to be deteriorating, and the pressure and cares of this world might be clouding the conscience. But let us remember that we have a mission to accomplish. We have a divine message to share. We have a divine calling. We are to be the salt of the earth. We need to stand for our faith and be ambassadors in spreading God's love. May we retain the saltiness until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

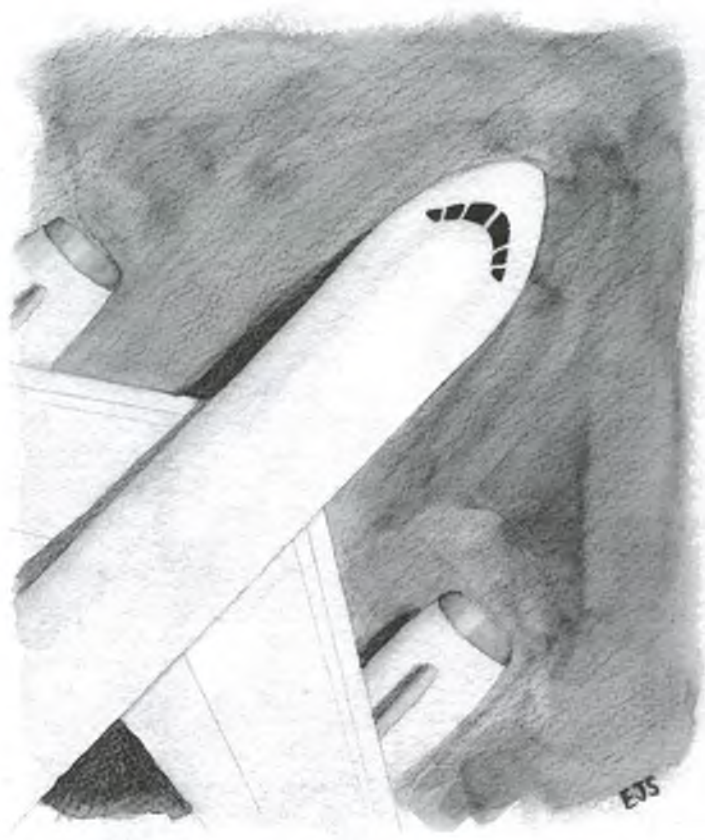
CONSIDER

- Arranging an interview with an evangelist or pastor. Ask where they receive their inspiration from to witness for God.
- Reviewing the spiritual gifts you have. Make a list, and check the gifts that remain unused for the Lord.
- Taping an on-the-spot dialogue between you and a friend about your conversions.
- Planning a special visitors' day at your church and inviting a friend to attend with you.
- Visiting your local municipal office to ask for a calendar of events. Choose an event to help with.
- Making a collage of pictures titled Witnessing Like Daniel. Include pictures taken at church functions that involved witnessing.

CONNECT

Ronald Allan Knott, *Over and Over Again*.

Gifted for Service: Philip



“When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said”
(Acts 8:6, NIV).

Power Through Surrender

INTRODUCTION

Acts 8:6

As he walks into the city, the wind whips the dust into his sunburned face. This traveler is thirsty, tired, and a bit nervous as he enters this foreign land. However, his determination diminishes any apprehensive feelings he may be having as he remembers that he is on a mission. He is relying solely on the tattered scrolls in his hand and his faith in Him. This traveler, known by most as Philip, had been driven from his hometown and sent on a mission to spread the gospel of Christ to nations who had yet to hear of it.

The idea of what Philip was doing may not seem to us like an exciting or life-changing event. Today, pastors and evangelists preach the gospel all the time. But when we look deeper into the story, the full extent of his sacrifice and the power bestowed upon him because of it becomes clearer. "When they were scattered by persecution, they went forth filled with missionary zeal. They realized the responsibility of their mission. They knew that they held in their hands the bread of life for a famishing world; and they were constrained by the love of Christ to break this bread

**Imagine walking the streets
of an unfamiliar land.**

to all who were in need. The Lord wrought through them. Wherever they went, the sick were healed, and the poor had the gospel preached unto them."¹

Imagine walking the streets of an unfamiliar land, and as you walk you come upon a crowd of people. Some of the people are crying, some are even screaming with fear. You push through them to see why these people are so hysterical. And there lying in the middle of the crowd is a man, covered with dirt. His clothes are torn and stained with his own blood. He is mumbling words of an unknown tongue while his eyes roll and sweat drips from his brow. He is possessed! Philip may have encountered other scenes like this one, for "unclean spirits . . . came out of many that were possessed with them."² But Philip, having been given a mission by the Lord, was able to cast out demons.

This week you will learn more about Philip's journey and how through his surrender to the Lord he was awarded with great power. As you study, consider how your surrender to God can enable you to do His will.

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 106.

2. *Ibid.*

Are You Complacent or Courageous?

EVIDENCE

Acts 8:1, 4-6

Philip was one of the seven deacons (Acts 6:2-5), who were to lighten the apostles' load. The church blossomed under the new system. Then the years of initial success were over. Stephen was stoned, and many other Christians were arrested and killed.¹ "To scatter His representatives abroad, where they could work for others, God permitted persecution to come upon them. Driven from Jerusalem, the believers 'went everywhere preaching the word.'²

What of Philip? He left Jerusalem, and everywhere he went, he told people about Jesus. The gospel was to be preached to the world. Philip was a part of this. In the face of persecution and threat of death, he and many others chose to serve God. Shaken out of the complacency that had started to grip the church, they spread the good news of Christ. Through Philip, God's work in Samaria continued forward at a great rate. "When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. . . . So there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:6, 8, NIV). Philip's work continued all along his way to Caesarea and by proxy to many other places, most notably Ethiopia by the eunuch he met on the road to Gaza (Acts 8:26-40).

**"I pledge allegiance to the
Lamb."**

The persecution that forced the spread of the gospel by brave people such as Philip continues in our time. Each day Christians are called to stand up for Jesus in their homes, jobs, everyday lives, and sometimes even in church. In 2001 *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* was rewritten and updated to include events from the twentieth century, stories of people who gave all they had for God. As Christians, it is our duty to be able to say, "Till the trumpet sounds on that final day let us proudly stand and boldly say, I pledge allegiance to the Lamb,"³ then follow through.

REACT

1. What are some ways you can avoid growing complacent as you serve God?
2. How can your troubles at work or school help you share the good news of Jesus?

1. John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (Gainesville, Fla.: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 2001), p. 5.

2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 105.

3. Ray Boltz, "I Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb" *Allegiance*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Records and Music, 1994).

Monday
September 15

A Deeper Look

LOGOS

Acts 6:3; 8; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–11, 27–31; 1 Tim. 3:8–12

Philip? You mean that guy who had the Bible-study-to-go with the Ethiopian? There's more to his story? Delving into the Word, I learned that there certainly is more. Let's start at the end and work our way backward.

The End Result (Acts 8:4–13, 26–40)

Jesus had commissioned His followers to preach the gospel in Samaria (Acts 1:8). Philip took on this call when the believers were dispersed from Jerusalem due to persecution. This was not an easy assignment. The Samaritans and the Jews had a longstanding hatred of each other. But because Philip was able to put this aside through the power of God, absolutely incredible things happened through and for him.

So what made Philip so special? Was he educated in the top synagogues of his day? Did he graduate summa cum laude with his doctorate in theology? What made him so effective in the cause of Christ?

“ ‘Vacations are such a hassle.’ ”

The Qualifications (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:8–12)

The Bible does not tell us much about Philip's qualifications for the ministry, but what it does tell us is strikingly significant. We are told that Philip was a man of “good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3, NKJV).

As one of the first deacons or servants in the church, Philip was to have a personal experience with God. This was reflected in every area of his life. “The same goes for those who want to be servants in the church: serious, not deceitful, not too free with the bottle, not in it for what they can get out of it. They must be reverent before the mystery of the faith, not using their position to try to run things. Let them prove themselves first. If they show they can do it, take them on” (1 Tim. 3:8–10, *The Message*).

Philip was to serve others. The burden of preaching the Word was so great on the apostles that they could not meet the practical needs of the church members, particularly the marginalized women. The seven deacons who were chosen were responsible to regulate the fair distribution of bread to them.

How does being qualified to administrate over food serving translate into serving the Bread of Life to an important foreign official and thus change the course of history for an entire country? Simple. The qualifications needed are the same.

Willingness to be used of God and a seeking after the Holy Spirit are all He asks of those He will use. A familiar axiom says, “God doesn’t call the qualified, He qualifies the called.” Because Philip was ready to do whatever God asked of him, he found himself being used in ways he could never have imagined.

The Gifts (1 Cor. 12:1–11, 27–31)

Philip’s willingness and desire for the Holy Spirit allowed God to gift him in ways that made him more effective. The Bible tells us about spiritual gifts that are given by God for the edification of others as well as ourselves (1 Cor. 12; Eph 4:11–16). Philip was given the gift of serving, but he was apparently also given the gift of teaching. This gift was not taken into consideration when he was chosen to be a deacon. It was not required in the job description. In fact, it is implied that teaching was the purview of the apostles.

We see Philip’s teaching gift being utilized in the story of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26–35). Here were a minister of finance and a minister of food together studying the Scriptures. The servant to others was the one who could elucidate the Word of God in such a way that an educated high official would readily embrace its truth.

It would serve us well to learn what Philip learned—that nothing supersedes a personal relationship with God. There are things we can leave to other people to experience, then relate that experience to us. There are others we can only appreciate if we experience them for ourselves.

“‘Vacations are such a hassle. . . . I’m going to send someone on vacation for me. When he returns, I’ll hear all about it and be spared the inconvenience.’ Would you do that? No! You want the experience first-hand. . . . Certain things no one can do for you. And one of those is spending time with God. Listening to God is a first-hand experience.”*

Philip was willing to listen to God. He made himself open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He was even transported bodily by the Holy Spirit over a great distance (Acts 8:39, 40)! His open attitude toward the things of God and his unquestioning obedience made him one of the great missionaries of the early church.

This is the same Philip I thought only baptized an Ethiopian. How much more we can find if we take a deeper look. How much more God can do with us if we open ourselves to His Spirit!

REACT

1. How would you respond if you felt God was leading you to help those who hated you?

2. How much time do you spend developing a relationship with God? How can you improve your firsthand experience with the Holy Spirit?

*Max Lucado, *The Devotional Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 2003), pp. 1324, 1325.

Meadows in the Desert

TESTIMONY

Isa. 55:8, 9

“The unselfish labor of Christians in the past should be to us an object lesson and an inspiration.”¹ But yet hundreds, “yea, thousands, who have heard the message of salvation are still idlers in the market place, when they might be engaged in some line of active service. To these Christ is saying, ‘Why stand ye here all the day idle?’ and He adds, ‘Go ye also into the vineyard.’ Matthew 20:6, 7. Why is it that many more do not respond to the call?”² How do you respond?

How do you “teach your goldfish how to shoot a wrist shot at an empty hockey net”?³ Such are the workings of God to our finite minds. So how do we, who are no more capable than a goldfish at hockey, fulfill the command given to us? We must look to “such missionaries as Philip—men who will hear the voice of God and go where He sends them.”⁴

“While Philip was still in Samaria, he was directed by a heavenly messenger to ‘go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza.’”⁵

**“He did not question the
call.”**

A desert. “‘And he arose and went.’ He did not question the call, nor did he hesitate to obey; for he had learned the lesson of conformity to God’s will.”⁶

“An angel guided Philip to the one who was seeking for light and who was ready to receive the gospel, and today angels will guide the footsteps of those workers who will allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify their tongues and refine and ennoble their hearts. The angel sent to Philip could himself have done the work for the Ethiopian, but this is not God’s way of working. It is His plan that men are to work for their fellow men.”⁷

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 111.

3. *52 Sabbath Activities for Teen Groups*, p. 9.

4. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Just Do It!

HOW-TO

Acts 1:8; 6:3, 4; 8:26, 27; 1 Cor. 12:27–31

In a meeting with Nike employees during the late 1980s, Dan Wieden coined the phrase “Just Do It.” It went on to become one of the most effective taglines in advertising history.

If ever a phrase encapsulated the life and ministry of Philip, it would be “Just Do It” (Acts 8:26, 27).

How did Philip, and how can we, get to the point where when the Lord says do, we just do? Here are some suggestions:

1. *Be obedient.* In contrast to biblical examples of those who obeyed eventually (Exod. 3:11; 4:1, 10; Jon. 1:1–3), Philip, with no regard for his success or reputation in saving many, went without question after the one person the Lord sent him to save.

2. *Learn from experience.* “The reason so many make grievous blunders is that they do not heed the teachings of experience. . . . God loves the youth. He sees in them great possibilities for good, if they will realize their need of Christ, and build upon the sure foundation.”*

3. *Put aside prejudices and “conventional wisdom.”* Moses and Zipporah (Num. 12:1), Jesus’ associations with Samaritans and tax

collectors, Philip’s experience with the Ethiopian, segregation, and our obsession with outward appearance are all examples of “judging a book by its cover,” rather than looking “upon the heart and not the outward appearance” (1 Sam. 16:7).

4. *Be equipped.* The Nike ad didn’t imply “just do it” in a pair of ballet shoes or dress shoes. The intent was to have the correct equipment for the activity. Philip’s, and therefore our, equipment for service is what Paul would later refer to in Ephesians 6:10–18 as “the whole armour of God.”

Being full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3) and having all the power that comes with it (Acts 1:8) is only the start. To be continually given to prayer (Acts 6:4), and to have revealed to us what gifts the Holy Spirit has bestowed on us will help us know when and how the Lord calls us to work for Him.

Just as Tiger Woods knows better than to get on a basketball court with Michael Jordan, so we too are reminded that not everyone does everything (1 Cor. 12:27–31). By following these steps and by communing with the Lord through His Word in order to know His voice, we will like Philip be able to “just do it” when He calls.

Be equipped.

*Messages to Young People, p. 163.

OPINION

Rom. 12:7

Clay vessels are magnificent. But a beautiful, useful vessel can sometimes obscure the tedious process of its creation. This process requires first the cleansing and kneading of the clay, then the shaping, and finally the fire. Philip's amazing work in Samaria and the conversion of the Ethiopian are magnificent evidence of God's ability to use any person as a vessel for His purpose. But the magnificent end result can obscure the process necessary to create this vessel. Like the potter creates a vessel, God prepared Philip first by cleansing and kneading his character, then by slowly shaping it, and then by forging it with fire.

Being filled with the Spirit and a man full of faith (Acts 6:5), Philip was ready to serve Christ. Yet rather than call him to proclaim the Word, Philip was called to see to the distribution of food so the apostles could focus on prayer and the word (Acts 6:3, 4). Understanding that the Spirit gives each member of Christ's body different gifts, including the gift of serving (Rom. 12:7), Philip accepted this opportunity to advance the kingdom of God by "waiting on tables." His gift, used for the benefit of the body, molded and shaped him into a vessel for the Master Potter.

But then the fire.

But then the fire.

After the stoning of Stephen, the church in Jerusalem came under great persecution. Forced to leave home, Philip fled to Samaria. There the same Spirit that called him to serve the widows of Jerusalem granted him the opportunity to perform miraculous signs. The truly amazing thing about Philip is that the Bible does not record him refusing to do whatever God wanted him to do. We would do well to take a lesson from his willingness of character. "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."*

REACT

1. Think of a time when you felt you were passing through the fire. How did God shape your character through that experience?
2. What spiritual gifts do you possess?

**The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 111.

Service—Doing It!

EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 12:1–11, 27–31

CONCLUDE

Philip was a doer. He was a take-charge kind of person who chose to daily follow God's plan for his life. Because God knew him to be willing, He gave Philip special gifts to share with humanity, such as the gift of serving and teaching. He didn't question God's directions, but hurried to obey. This is the type of service God wants from us. "Every true, self-sacrificing worker for God is willing to spend and be spent for the sake of others. . . . By earnest, thoughtful efforts to help where help is needed, the true Christian shows his love for God and for his fellow beings."*

CONSIDER

- Watching an ant colony. Observe their hierarchy and how they work together. Share with others how these lessons can be applied to activities in the church.
- Interviewing a leader in a large company. Discuss the leadership plan for the company. How is it like the plan in 1 Corinthians 12?
- Making a flow chart for the leadership of your church. Does it match 1 Corinthians 12?
- Making a diagram of the qualities needed to be a good leader. Find a Bible text to support each one.
- Baking some bread or cookies and sharing them with someone you don't know. Also share with them your love for God.
- Assessing your service goals. In your journal, plot ways you can be of service to others. Try using at least one of these ways each day this week.

CONNECT

Joshua 24:15; Zeph. 3:9; John 12:26; Eph. 6:7.

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, pp. 275, 276; *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 398; *Messages to Young People*, p. 302; *The Adventist Home*, p. 431; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 79–101; *Education*, p. 269.

**Messages to Young People*, p. 302

“Send Me”: The Prophet Isaiah



EJS

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me’ ” (Isa. 6:8, NKJV).

"When Will They Know?"

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 6:8

"I wandered 'cross deserts
And 'cross the vast plains;
I never heard answered
The question I asked in vain;
When will they know, Lord?
When will it be? When will they
Hear, Lord, 'Oh Lord, send me'?"

"And then I looked 'round me
And heard the vast cry;
Then I felt my tears fall
And said, Lord, it is I;
They'll never know, Lord,
It never will be. They'll never
Hear, Lord, 'Oh Lord, send me.'"

"When will they know Jesus,
The man I love?
When will they turn, Lord
From the way they go?
They'll never know, Lord,
It never will be. They'll never
Hear, Lord, 'Oh Lord, send me.'"

"Then I felt my tears fall."

"And now the Lord sends me
To all of the earth;
To tell all the people
They have great worth;
When will they know, Lord?
When will it be? When will
They hear, Lord, 'Oh Lord, send me'?"

"And then they'll know Jesus
When I will say,
'Come, follow Him, People,
He is the way. . . .'"*

*Author Unknown, "When Will They Know?" *Is There No Singing?* p. 33.

Is God Calling You?

LOGOS

Isa. 6:1–10; 49:6; Matt. 28:18–20

A Sense of Call Rooted in Grace (Isa. 6:1, 6, 7)

Before God called him to go on a mission, Isaiah had a rich experience of God's majesty. He was caught up in how wonderful and holy God is. Any idea that God is calling one to do or be something specific must begin with this high sense of God. That is what gives Him the authority to send a person on a mission.

However, God was not only "high and exalted," He also was compassionate and forgiving. One of the angels took "a live coal . . . from the altar" and touched Isaiah's lips, saying, "Your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for" (verses 6, 7, NIV). Isaiah was well aware that on the Day of Atonement, the high priest took coals of fire into the Most Holy Place. The coals from the altar convey a strong texture of grace. An authentic sense of Christian mission is always rooted in both the authority and grace of Jesus Christ. Our Lord loves you enough to die for you and therefore has the spiritual authority to send you as His agent to the world.

"Go on God's errands."

Feeling Free to Go (Isa. 6:8)

When God says, "Whom shall I send? . . . Who will go?," Isaiah—despite his deep sense of inadequacy a little earlier—feels free to answer immediately, "Send me!" (verse 8, NIV). Now he is entirely free to enter into what would become a lifetime calling. Of course, he didn't know all that he was signing up for at that moment, but he didn't care. He simply wanted to do what God wanted done.

That is the freedom that every believer must have in order to follow Christ faithfully. Doubt has its uses. Fear often comes from facts. Shame is inevitable, since we are all sinners. Yet these things must not keep us from following Jesus all the way. We must trust Him so completely that we are willing to echo the words of Isaiah, "Send me!"

"Go on God's errands." That was always my favorite part of the Pathfinder Law. Being sent on a journey with a clear purpose has its own excitement and power, no matter how simple the purpose or how short the journey. Better than keeping score in a game, the effort to successfully attain an assigned goal claims all that is best in one's heart and mind. It encompasses the entire being, giving a sense of identity and meaning to life. A purpose-driven life is a life of powerful richness and fulfillment—the kind of life that everyone is looking for.

An Expanding View of God's Purpose (Isa. 49:6)

Isaiah likely began his journey with a limited idea of the goal God had in mind. He was captive of the language, culture, and theology he was nurtured in from childhood. It all centered on the children of Israel as a special people who had the living God all to themselves. He saw himself initially as sent to "Jerusalem and Judah" (Isa. 3:1), "this people," to open their eyes and ears that they might "turn and be healed" (Isa. 6:10) He might have said that he was a revivalist and not a missionary.

He reminds me of many church members who have told me that they're more interested in nurture ministries than they are in outreach. "Our first duty is to take care of our own." What a self-centered view of life and God's goals! If one persists as a faithful follower of Jesus, sooner or later one is led to leave behind such a narrow view and to find the more expansive view in God's heart.

Further along in Isaiah's journey, he would catch a wider vision. It was "too small a thing" to work just to "restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel." God had a larger mission. "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:6, NIV). God wanted to save all of humanity. That must have been a mind-blower for Isaiah the first time he comprehended what God was really saying!

Are You Willing to Go? (Matt. 28:18–20)

The gospel commission of Matthew 28:18–20 is in many ways parallel to the Isaiah texts in today's lesson. Christ begins by declaring His authority, recently won on the cross. Because He had died to atone for the sins of humanity, His grace was now sufficient to win the whole world. "Make disciples," He commands His followers, "go . . . baptize . . . teach," summarizing what Ellen White labels "Christ's method." She describes how He "mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence." Only then did He invite them to "Follow Me."*

REACT

1. Are you willing to mingle with lost people, demonstrate Christ's compassion, meet needs, and invite your unbelieving friends simply to follow Jesus? That's your mission in life, whether you decide to take it or not.

2. How do you equip yourself to build relationships that will add to Jesus' kingdom?

**The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Personal Ministry = Greater Results

TESTIMONY

Isa. 6:8

"There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit."¹

"Everywhere there is a tendency to substitute the work of organizations for individual effort. Human wisdom tends to consolidation, to centralization, to the building up of great churches and institutions. Multitudes leave to institutions and organizations the work of benevolence;

they excuse themselves from contact with the world, and their hearts grow cold. They become self-absorbed and unimpressible. Love for God and man dies out of the soul."²

**"Christ commits to His
followers an individual
work. . . ."**

"Christ commits to His followers an individual work—a work that cannot be done by proxy. Ministry to the sick and the poor, the giving of the gospel to the lost, is not to be left to committees or organized charities. Individual responsibility, individual effort, personal sacrifice, is the requirement of the gospel."³

"To everyone who becomes a partaker of His grace the Lord appoints a work for others. Individually we are to stand in our lot and place, saying, 'Here am I; send me.' Isaiah 6:8."

REACT

Why is it important that individuals engage in mission, rather than committees or organizations? Should organized groups abandon mission? Be able to explain your answer.

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 143, 144.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

Isaiah—The Real Deal

EVIDENCE

Isa. 1:1; 55:9

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls electrified the Christian world in the mid-twentieth century. Among the ancient copies of biblical writings was one that turned out to be the oldest copy of Isaiah's writings. The 24-foot-long (7.3 m) leather scroll was largely intact and was estimated to date to 125–150 B.C. It is now known as 1QIsa. This scroll supports the contents of the book of Isaiah as it appears today. It also provided a major blow to the theory that more than one writer contributed to this book.

According to the *NIV Archaeological Bible* produced by the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and published in 2005 by Zondervan, "The traditional Hebrew text for the Old Testament is the Masoretic Text (MT). The MT is the Hebrew Bible in use today, and except for 1QIsa and other fragments of Isaiah from Qumran or elsewhere, the oldest known extant copies of Isaiah are all in the MT tradition.

"Though separated by 1,100 years, the MT of Isaiah and 1QIsa show amazing agreement, except in minute details of spelling and minor word variations. 1QIsa demonstrated that the work of generations

**This evidence demonstrates
that God is in control.**

of Jewish scribes who produced the MT is trustworthy. We have every reason to believe that the MT is a reliable copy of the Hebrew Old Testament.

"In addition, the discovery of this text suggests that as far back as the second century B.C. the text of Isaiah was viewed as having only one author. Many critical scholars maintain that chapters 1–39 were written by one author, while chapters 40–66 were composed by one or more different authors. However, chapters 39 and 40 appear in the same column in 1QIsa, suggesting that the ancient copyist viewed these two chapters as having originated from a single author" (p. 1115).

In a time when scholarly theories abound, the discovery of a scroll nearly 2,000 years old authenticated the care with which sacred writings have been copied. Most importantly, this evidence demonstrates that God is in control, and we would do well to listen more closely to His words in Isaiah 55:9, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (NIV).

Victory Strategies for Kingdom- Builders

HOW-TO

Rev. 3:20

God calls us to join His international team to fight against evil. He wants us to enjoy the victory and be champions with Him. But not every request is really a call from Christ. All too often the church asks people to do things that benefit the church, keep the machinery going, but have little to do with the mission of Christ in the world. So ask the Lord, "Is this really my call? Is this the best place to use the gifts and resources You've given me?" And if you begin to feel more and more that the call is from Jesus, then pray for wisdom and strength.

Here are some practical ways to build the kingdom:

1. *Study the needs.* What is the "target group" of your mission, and what are their needs? Authentic, Christlike mission demonstrates the compassion of Christ when we meet people's practical, nonreligious needs. Let's follow His example, not evangelistic traditions.

2. *Find a team.* Christ almost never asks us to go on a mission alone. Authentic mission is always grounded in the Body.

"Is this really my call?"

3. *Mingle.* Spend time with those to whom Christ is calling you. Listen to their songs and stories. Learn the culture and learn to see their culture through God's eyes—with pain and love, not judgment.

4. *Make friends.* The gospel is best shared friend to friend, because bonding comes before believing. Unless you become friends with the people God has sent you to serve, no evangelism is going to happen. You'll know when they're ready to hear the message, because you've become friends and have learned to listen. You'll recognize the God-shaped hole in their hearts when it's revealed.

5. *Make disciples.* Invite them to follow Jesus before you invite them to join the church. Church is a support group for people who have decided to follow Christ.

6. *Open the Scriptures.* Teach others to learn for themselves. If you give people a key text, you will answer today's question, and they'll be hungry again tomorrow. If you teach people to study the Bible, they'll be able to feed on the Bread of Life every day.

REACT

1. What are your priorities: school, work, friends, video games, or God?
2. What can you do to improve your relationship with God?
3. What are some small, practical ways you can positively influence the lives of the people around you?

Who's Calling You?

Thursday
September 25

OPINION

Heb. 1:1, 2

Have you ever felt “called” to do something? An “inner voice” or “power” stronger than you urging you on? I've felt this many times, and usually it involves staying up for one more good show or taking just one more small piece of something tasty.

Then I was called—on the phone—and asked to write about Isaiah. So what do I know about Isaiah? He came from a good family, received a divine ordination as a young man, did some writing that is still read more than 2,000 years after he wrote it, and he died by being sawed in half. Ouch! That sounds rough.

But then again, have I really been listening? Or is being “called” really practical to talk about in this day and age? I mean, what does it really mean to be a Christian in today's terms anyway?

I'd like to think I'm a “sophisticated Christian”—meaning I understand and believe in salvation by grace and I try to balance that with following Jesus' example when He lived on earth. For example, I tithe and give offerings in addition to charitable donations; and when asked by friends/coworkers what I'm doing on Saturday, I explain it's my Sabbath, and I tell them about grace. And this means I don't need an Old Testament prophet to tell me anything because I already wholeheartedly believe in the salvation God has given us through the death of His Son on the cross. I know that by accepting this gift I have the promise of a better hereafter and life eternal. So I've got the “truth” all figured out, and I guess that really makes me more of a Christian.

Yet is being that type of a Christian enough? Is it really all that God wants of me? Are we just supposed to believe and have the truth for ourselves? In reading the prophet Isaiah, I'm realizing that no, it is not. So I urge you to try to answer some of the following questions for yourself.

REACT

1. What does being a Christian mean to you?
2. How can you follow Isaiah's example and be a witness in today's world?
3. How closely do we have to listen to hear God's call?

Stephanie Sahlin Jackson, Kensington, Maryland, U.S.A.

EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 3:6–9; 1 Pet. 3:15

CONCLUDE

Isaiah was only ready to say “Send me” after he had a personal encounter with God. First, God gave him a glimpse of Himself, a vision of His character. Then He came close and touched him in a special way. If you haven’t felt excited and compelled to share Christ with others, maybe that’s your starting point. Search the Scriptures for a solid picture of who God is and how He relates to you. But once you have been touched by the hand of God in a living and personal way, it’s time to get out of the saltshaker and season your world!

CONSIDER

- Ordering “sharing books” from the ABC (<http://www.AdventistBookCenter.com>) and keeping your eyes and heart open for people you can give them to.
- Joining a class, group, or club where you can make friends with people who don’t know the Lord.
- Thinking through what knowing Christ has meant to you personally, so when the time is right you will feel prepared to share your testimony with a friend.
- Encouraging a missionary by prayer, letters, and cards. You can acquaint yourself with some missionaries through Adventist Frontier Missions at <http://www.afmonline.org>.
- Teaming up with a friend or small group of friends to pray for non-Christian friends. Pray for God to begin opening their hearts and to give you opportunities to share His love with them.

CONNECT

Glenn A. Coon, *Path to the Heart*; Steve Case and Fred Cornforth, *Hands-On Service Ideas for Youth Groups*; Kurt W. Johnson, *Face to Face With Jesus* (Bible study guide).

Next Quarter's Lessons

Atonement and the Cross of Christ

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for fourth quarter 2008, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: God's Nature: The Basis of Atonement

Logos: Ps. 139:1–4; Isa. 46:10; John 1:4; Rom. 5:8; 8:37–39; 1 John 5:11, 12.

Memory Text: “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please” (Isa. 46:10, NIV).

Key Thought: God's work of salvation is a self-willed outflow of His very nature; it does not require sinners to persuade Him to love them.

Lesson 2: Cosmic Crisis: The Disruption of God's Established Order

Logos: Gen. 3:4, 5; Job 1:8–11; Isa. 14:13, 14; Ezek. 28:14–17; Rev. 12:7–9.

Memory Text: “He [Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17, NIV).

Key Thought: To show the origins of Satan's fall and how he brought the battle to earth.

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ON THE AIR

Someone predicted 50 years ago that with the advent of television, radio would die out in a decade. It didn't happen. In fact, radio is just as powerful and prevalent today as it was before television. People listen at work, in the car, and in their homes. The Adventist radio networks in North America are growing, with new stations, new programming, and new listeners.

The Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will add new stations across Canada and enhance the radio network in the United States. I want to help make this a reality so that thousands of listeners can hear the Gospel message—some for the first time. For me it's personal.



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