

Why Witness?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *James 5:19, 20; Luke 15:6; Zeph. 3:17; John 7:37, 38; 1 Tim. 2:3, 4; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15.*

Memory Text: “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Timothy 2:3, 4, NKJV*).

God's great longing is for all people everywhere to respond to His love, accept His grace, be transformed by His Spirit, and be saved into His kingdom. He has no greater desire than our salvation. His love is boundless. His mercy is measureless. His compassion is endless. His forgiveness is inexhaustible. His power is infinite. In contrast to the heathen gods, which demanded sacrifices, our God has made the supreme sacrifice. No matter how much we desire to be saved, God longs to save us more. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Tim. 2:3, 4, NKJV*). His heart's longing is for your salvation and mine.

Witnessing is all about Jesus. It is about what He has done to save us and about how He has changed our lives. It is about the marvelous truths of His Word, which tell us about who He is and the beauty of His character. Why witness? When we understand who He is and have experienced the marvels of His grace and the power of His love, we cannot be silent. Why witness? While participating with Him, we enter into His joy of seeing people redeemed by His grace and transformed by His love.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 4.

Providing Opportunities for Salvation

God provides opportunities daily for people everywhere to know Him. He moves upon their hearts through His Holy Spirit. He reveals Himself in the beauty and complexity of the natural world. The vastness, order, and symmetry of the universe speak of an infinite God with limitless wisdom and infinite power. He arranges circumstances or providences in our lives to draw us to Himself.

Although God reveals Himself through the impressions of His Spirit, the glories of nature, and acts of providence, the clearest revelation of His love is found in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. When we share Jesus with others, we provide them with their best opportunity to be saved.

Read Luke 19:10 and compare it with James 5:19, 20. What does Luke's Gospel teach about Christ's purpose in coming to earth? How do we cooperate with Christ in His work of saving the lost?

According to James, "He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death" (*James 5:20, NKJV*). The book of Romans amplifies this thought. In Romans 1 and 2, both the Gentiles who have seen God's revelation in nature and the Jews who have received God's prophetic revelation in Scripture are lost without Christ. In Romans 3–5, the apostle reveals that salvation comes by grace through faith alone. In Romans 6–8, he describes how the grace that justifies each believer also is sanctifying grace. In Romans 10, he states that " 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved' " (*Rom. 10:13, NKJV*), and he then points out that none can call if they have not believed, and they cannot believe if they have not heard, and they cannot hear unless someone tells them (*Rom. 10:14, 15*). We are God's links in the plan of salvation to reach lost people with the glory of the gospel.

We do not witness to give people their only chance to be saved. We witness to give them their *best* chance. What is our role in God's plan of redeeming the human race? Think about this, too: How many people have heard the gospel from your own lips?

Making Jesus Glad

Has anyone ever asked you, “How is your day going?” Or, “Is everything all right with you today?” What if you asked God those questions? “God, how is Your day going?” What kind of response do you think you would receive? Possibly it would be one like this: “My day has been extremely difficult. Tears filled My eyes at one thousand refugee camps filled with cold, hungry, crying children. I walked the streets of the world’s crowded cities and wept with the homeless and destitute. My heart breaks over abused women and frightened children sold into sexual slavery. I witnessed the ravages of war, the devastating effects of natural disasters, and the painful agony of debilitating, deadly diseases.” Would you respond back by asking, “But God, is there anything that makes You rejoice? Is there anything that brings joy to Your heart? Is there anything that makes You sing?”

Read Luke 15:6, 7, 9, 10, 22–24, and 32. How do these stories end, and what do these endings tell you about God?

All heaven rejoices when the lost are found. In a world filled with disease, disaster, and death, we can bring joy to the heart of God by sharing the “good news” of salvation with others. One of the greatest motivations to share Christ’s love is the knowledge that witnessing brings joy to the heart of God. Every time we reveal His love, all of heaven sings.

Read Zephaniah 3:17. What is our Lord’s response when we accept His saving grace?

Imagine this scene. As the result of your witness some man or woman or boy or girl accepts Jesus as his or her personal Savior. All of heaven bursts forth in rapturous song, and our mighty Savior rejoices over that individual with singing. What can be more rewarding, more fulfilling, than knowing your witness brings joy to the heart of God in a world of sadness?

Growing by Giving

The Dead Sea marks the earth’s lowest elevation. At 1,388 feet below sea level, it ranks as the world’s lowest sea. The river Jordan flows out of the Sea of Galilee and winds its way through the Jordan Valley until it dead-ends in the Dead Sea.

The hot, dry climate, with the intense sunlight and desert conditions, causes the water to evaporate quite rapidly. Since the Dead Sea’s salt and mineral content is 33.7 percent, little survives in its waters. There are no fish, no plants, only some microbes and bacteria at the bottom.

In our Christian lives, if the grace of God that flows into our lives does not flow out to others, we will become stagnant and all but lifeless like the Dead Sea. As Christians, that’s not how we are to live.

Read John 7:37, 38 and Luke 6:38. When believers receive the refreshing streams of living water from Christ, what is the natural result?

“God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ’s, we must share in His work. In order to enter into His joy,—the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice,—we must participate in His labors for their redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 142.

“Those who would be overcomers must be drawn out of themselves; and the only thing which will accomplish this great work, is to become intensely interested in the salvation of others.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 207.

We grow as we share with others what Christ has done in our own lives. Considering all that we have been given in Christ, what but only the most abject selfishness could keep us from sharing with others what we have ourselves been given? If we fail to share our faith, our spiritual life will become as stagnant as the Dead Sea.

What have been your own experiences in witnessing to others, praying with others, and ministering to the needs of others? How have these experiences impacted your own faith and walk with the Lord?

Faithfulness to Christ's Command

Loyalty to Christ requires a commitment to do His will. It necessitates obedience to His commands. It results in a heart that beats with His heart in saving the lost. It places priority on the things that He prioritizes.

Read 1 Timothy 2:3, 4 and 2 Peter 3:9. What do these passages tell us about the heart of God? What is His priority?

God is passionate about saving people. There is nothing more important to Him. It is His earnest desire that “all” be saved and “come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4, NKJV). He is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* indicates that the Greek word used for “willing” in this passage is *boulomai*, which expresses “the inclination of mind, as ‘to want’ or ‘to desire.’ ” The commentary then makes this insightful observation on the little word “but.” The Greek word for “but” is *alla*. It is used here “to emphasize the contrast between the misinterpretation of God’s nature, namely, that He might be willing for some to perish, and the truth that He wishes all to be saved.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 615. Christ’s command for each one of us to participate in His mission as witnesses of His love, grace, and truth is an outgrowth of His desire for all humanity to be saved.

Read Acts 13:47 and compare it to Isaiah 49:6. To whom did this passage initially apply? How does the apostle Paul use it?

There are times when an Old Testament prophecy has more than one application. Here the apostle Paul takes a prophecy that referred first to Israel and prophetically to the Messiah (see Isa. 41:8, Isa. 49:6, and Luke 2:32) and applies it to the New Testament church. For the church to neglect or minimize the command of Christ is to fail in the purpose of her existence and miss her prophetic calling to the world.

What are the dangers to the church, even a local church, if it becomes so inwardly focused that it forgets what its purpose is to begin with?

Motivated by Love

This week we have focused on answering the question, “Why witness?” We have discovered that as we share our faith, we have the joy of cooperating with God in His mission to the world. Our witness of His love provides people with greater opportunities for salvation, since they can see more clearly His grace and truth.

At the same time, witnessing also is one of God’s means of helping us grow spiritually. A failure to share what Christ has done for us and to minister to others strangles genuine spiritual life.

Witnessing places us in touch with the heart of the One who longs for all humanity to be saved. It is a response of obedience to His command. In today’s study, we will examine the greatest motivation of all for witnessing.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, 18–20. What motivated Paul to experience trials and tribulations for the sake of the gospel? How can this same motivation prompt our service for Christ?

The apostle Paul was motivated by love. There are things you will do for love that you will do for no other reason. When the apostle declares, “The love of Christ constrains us,” he is speaking an eternal truth. The word “constrains” means “to urge, to impel, to control, or to highly motivate.” Thus, the love of Christ controlled Paul’s actions and motivated his witness. With undaunted purpose and singleness of mind, he shared the plan of salvation throughout the Mediterranean world.

“Love must dwell in the heart. A thoroughgoing Christian draws his motives of action from his deep heart-love for his Master. Up through the roots of his affection for Christ springs an unselfish interest in his brethren.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 425.

When we truly recognize the immense sacrifice Christ has made for us, we are overwhelmed by His love and compelled to share with others what He has done for us.

The One who created all creation (the galaxies, the stars, the angelic host, the entire cosmos, and other worlds) was the One who died on the cross for us. How can this astonishing truth not create in us a love for God and a desire to share that love?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “God’s Purpose for His Church,” pp. 9–16, in *The Acts of the Apostles* and “Go Teach All Nations,” pp. 822–828, in *The Desire of Ages*.

The New Testament church faced the danger of failing to understand the purpose for its existence. Ellen G. White describes this danger: “The persecution that came upon the church in Jerusalem resulted in giving a great impetus to the work of the gospel. Success had attended the ministry of the word in that place, and there was danger that the disciples would linger there too long, unmindful of the Saviour’s commission to go to all the world. Forgetting that strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service, they began to think that they had no work so important as that of shielding the church in Jerusalem from the attacks of the enemy. Instead of educating the new converts to carry the gospel to those who had not heard it, they were in danger of taking a course that would lead all to be satisfied with what had been accomplished.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 105.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look carefully at the Ellen G. White quote above, especially the last line. Why must we even today be careful of that same potential danger? In the face of the missionary challenges before us, why would such an attitude be so terribly, even tragically, wrong?
- 2 Why do you think each of the Gospels ends with a similar command? Read Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 24:46–49; and John 20:21. What did this mean to these first-century believers, and what should it mean to us today?
- 3 Can witnessing and service ever become a substitute for genuine spirituality? If so, how, and how can we be careful of that trap?
- 4 In class, talk about the answer to the question at the end of Tuesday’s study, regarding how witnessing and ministering impact your own spiritual growth. What are some things you have learned that can help others? What mistakes have you made that you could help others avoid?
- 5 Dwell on the amazing fact that God loves each one of us individually. How do you understand what this means? How should this, perhaps the most important truth in all the universe, impact how you live?

Stopped at the Airport

By GLENN ERNFORD LIE

Only one question will be asked on Judgment Day. I heard it when my international flight landed in Portland in the U.S. state of Oregon.

The U.S. immigration officer glanced at my Norwegian passport and then looked up at me at Portland International Airport. “What are your plans?” he asked.

“I am visiting a friend,” I replied.

“What is the address?” he said.

“I don’t know,” I said. “But she is going to meet me here at the airport.”

The immigration officer didn’t look pleased that I didn’t know the address.

“So, where did you meet her?” he said.

“At a college outside London.”

“What did you study there?”

“Theology.”

The immigration officer studied my face.

“Are you a believer?” he said.

“Yes.”

He looked down at my passport in his hand and then back at me.

“So, why are you saved?” he said.

The answer tumbled out of my mouth. “Because Jesus died for me,” I said.

The immigration officer looked at me.

“Good answer,” he said. “You may enter.”

I smiled and entered the United States.

The significance of the conversation struck me as I walked to the baggage claim area. Only one question will be asked on Judgment Day: Why are you saved? The answer is found in 1 John 5:11–13, which says, “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (NKJV).

Why are you saved? With the assurance of salvation, you can reply with confidence, “Because Jesus died for me.” In return, you will hear the sweet words, “Good answer. You may enter.”



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Key Text: *Luke 15:1–7*

Study Focus: *Zephaniah 3:17; John 7:37; 1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15.*

Part I: Overview

Deep within the heart of God is His desire for all peoples to be saved in His kingdom. There is nothing He desires more than for each one of us to personally experience the joy of salvation and live eternally with Him. He has unleashed all the powers of heaven to redeem us. Jesus came to earth to reveal the Father’s measureless love to humanity, live the perfect life we should have lived, bear the condemnation of our sins on the cross, and die the death we should have died.

In Christ, we see what the Father is really like. Jesus dispels the myth that God is unloving. Millennia ago, Lucifer, a being of dazzling brightness, misrepresented the character of God. Jesus came to set the record straight. God is not a vindictive judge or a wrathful tyrant. He is a loving Father who wants all His children home as soon as possible.

Witnessing is all about God. It is participating in His mission. It is sharing His love with others. It is revealing in our lives and speech His gracious character. As we witness to others, we enter life’s greatest joy and grow to be more like Jesus. Service starves selfishness to death. The more we share God’s love, the more our love for Him increases.

Part II: Commentary

Have you ever asked yourself the questions, “Why should I share my faith? Isn’t God doing everything He can to save people without my witness? Does witnessing make any difference at all in an individual’s personal salvation?”

It is true that God reveals Himself in a variety of ways. He is not limited to our witness. David states, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard” (*Ps. 19:1–3, NKJV*). The design, order, and symmetry of the universe reveal a Designer God of infinite intelligence.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in each of our hearts creates within us a desire to know God. This longing for eternity within each one of us is powerful evidence of the existence of God. Then, of course, there are those unusual providences each of us experiences that cause us to

reflect on the reality of God's presence. Each time we experience love when we do not deserve it or an unexpected kind act, we tangibly see a revelation of God's character. God is constantly seeking to draw us to Himself in multiple ways.

If this is true, then why witness? Why not let God do His job and be done with it? Why not step back and let nature, as David says, do the job of declaring the glory of God? Nature gives us mixed messages. Although it reveals God's infinite complex design, it also can reveal destruction and devastation in hurricanes, floods, forest fires, typhoons, and other natural disasters. Thousands die suddenly. What does this say about God and the great controversy between good and evil? Nature presents both good and evil, but it does not reveal the reason good and evil exist.

Neither can the providences of life nor our own longings provide a satisfactory explanation for the existence of good and evil. It is true that there is a longing for God in each one of us; but it is also true that we have a sinful, fallen nature, and we find a battle within. We may know right, but we do not have within ourselves the power to do what is right. Likewise, providences in our lives reveal a God who cares, but there are many things that happen in our lives that remind us that we live in a world of good and evil. Thus, the question persists, Why is there good and evil in the world? What is their origin, and what is the fate of humanity? Neither nature, the providences of life, or our longings within can address this question in a satisfactory way as witnessing to others through God's Word can.

The reason we witness is not to give people their only chance at salvation. God can save them in multiple ways without our aid. The reason we witness is twofold.

First, we witness because the love of Christ overflows from our hearts to others, and we want them to have the best possible chance for salvation. The clearest revelation of God's character is not in nature, the providences of life, or our longings within. Each of these are evidence of God's existence, but they do not clearly portray His loving character. The clearest revelation of God's character is found in the life of Christ as revealed in Scripture. Sharing God's Word with others, opening the Scriptures to them, and explaining the great truths of the Bible reveal who He is and provides the best chance for each person to know and understand His love and truth. In the cosmic conflict between good and evil, the Scriptures present the ultimate answers to the great questions of life.

Second, we witness because we know that witnessing is one of heaven's means of bringing joy to the heart of God and enabling us to grow spiritually. The more we love Him, the more we will share His

love. The more we share His love, the more we will love Him. As we share the Word of God with others, we ourselves are drawn closer to Him. The life-changing Word not only changes those with whom we study the Bible, but it also changes us as we study with them.

Expanding the Word

The fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel shares three stories about the heart of God. These timeless stories portray a God who is passionate about saving the lost. He is the tireless Shepherd who seeks His lost sheep until He finds it. He is the sorrowful woman who searches her house on her knees to find her precious lost coin from her wedding dowry. He is the anxious Father constantly scanning the horizon for His lost son to come home. In each story when the lost is found, there is joy. All of heaven rejoices when men and women accept the salvation that Christ has so willingly given on the cross.

There are several significant points Jesus makes in the story of the lost sheep. First, God's love pursues the lost. Luke 15:4 declares that the shepherd goes after the lost sheep (*NKJV*). Our God is a pursuing God. He will not let His children go easily. He seeks them wherever they go. He searches for them with a relentless love. The second thing we notice about our passage is that the shepherd goes after the lost sheep until he finds it. God's love perseveres. He does not give up on us easily. We cannot weary Him. He will never give up His search. If a Near Eastern shepherd at the time of Christ lost one of his sheep, it was necessary to either return to the flock with the lost sheep or return with its carcass to demonstrate that he had done everything possible to find it.

Each sheep was valuable to the shepherd. He knew the flock so well that he was immediately aware that one sheep was missing. To Christ, we are not a mass of nameless humanity but individuals created in His image that He has redeemed by His grace.

The last point in this story is that when the lost sheep is found, the shepherd cries out with joy, " 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' " (*Luke 15:6, NKJV*). The Good Shepherd pursues His lost sheep. The Good Shepherd perseveres until He finds His lost sheep, and the Good Shepherd rejoices when He finds His lost sheep. God is not an emotionless God. He is a God who is filled with joy when the lost are found.

In a world of disappointment and sorrow, it brings joy to Christ's heart when we participate with Him in soul winning. When our hearts

beat with the heart of God and our minds are one with the mind of God, united in the single-minded purpose of witness, His heart is filled with unspeakable joy.

Illustration

Have you ever spent hours searching for just the right gift for someone you loved? It may have been for a birthday, anniversary, Christmas, or some other special occasion. When you finally discovered the gift you were looking for, you were thrilled. The gift matched both the person and the event. You could not wait to give it to this special person. When the day finally arrived and this person unwrapped your special gift, he or she was delighted. This person threw his or her arms around you and said, “Thank you so much!”

Who received greater joy from the gift? You or the one you gave it to? Of course, both of you were joyful, but there is a special satisfaction that comes when we give something of value to someone else. Unselfish gift-giving bonds you to another person in a unique way.

When we share the most precious gift of all, Jesus Christ, a joy fills our own hearts. There is a satisfaction deep within that we have made an eternal difference. When an individual that we shared Christ with accepts the truths of Scripture, we make a friend for eternity. There is no greater joy. Ellen G. White states it well: “The spirit of unselfish labor for others gives depth, stability, and Christlike loveliness to the character, and brings peace and happiness to its possessor.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 80. It is still an eternal truth that “ ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ ” (*Acts 20:35, NKJV*).

Part III: Life Application

Think of someone in your sphere of influence who might be receptive to knowing more about Jesus. It might be a son or a daughter, a husband or a wife, a working colleague, neighbor, or friend. Ask God to create an opportunity for you to guide the conversation in a spiritual direction. Don’t feel you have to create an opportunity that does not present itself. Mission is God’s. We do not necessarily create opportunities; God does. We are sensitive to the opportunities God creates and constantly cooperate with Him to walk through the doors He opens.

When a person is in a transition in life, he or she is more open to spiritual realities. This person may be going through a difficult time. Possibly he or

