



2020 Q3 Making Friends for God: Lesson 11 Sharing the Story of Jesus

by Lori Atkins

SABBATH

When you think about witnessing...telling people about Christ...how does it make you feel? Excited? Nervous? Grateful? Afraid? Obligated? Reluctant? Why?

One of the founders of the Adventist church advises us:

“The Lord has said, “Ye are My witnesses.” Isaiah 43:10. But all who are called to be witnesses for Christ must learn of Him, that they may be efficient witnesses. As children of the heavenly King, they should educate themselves to bear testimony in a clear, distinct voice and in such a manner that no one may receive the impression that they are reluctant to tell of the mercies of the Lord. – CT 243.1

From Saturday’s lesson, “Witnessing is sharing what we know ***about*** Jesus.” I’m glad this is more fully explained in the next sentence, because we have learned here that there is a significant difference between knowing ABOUT swimming – the physics, the techniques, the strokes – and actually getting down in the water and actually swimming. We may know a lot ABOUT some public figure – a politician, a celebrity, an athlete – but how many of us really truly KNOW them.

The next sentence says, “It is letting others know what He means to us and what He has done for us.”

Are some bells ringing or electrons firing...doesn’t this sound like a description of one of the three prongs in our integrative evidenced based approach – experience! Witnessing is sharing what we know OF Jesus...what we have experienced in a trust relationship with him. It is not trying to prove what we believe is right or showing that others’ beliefs are wrong...that does not make for a winsome witness.

“Our sharing about Jesus must come from a heart that has been healed by His mercy and grace, and transformed by His love and truth. Then other people will see how the truth we believe has impacted and changed our lives. This is the best reason why we must live what we believe. Truth presented in the context of a changed life makes all the difference.”

That same author agrees...see what you think about this:



“Successful Ways of Witnessing for Christ—Not all can go as missionaries to foreign lands, but all can be home missionaries in their families and neighborhoods. There are many ways in which church members may give the message to those around them. One of the most successful is by living helpful, unselfish Christian lives. Those who are fighting the battle of life at great odds may be refreshed and strengthened by little attentions which cost nothing. Kindly words simply spoken, little attentions simply bestowed, will sweep away the clouds of temptation and doubt that gather over the soul. The true heart expression of Christlike sympathy, given in simplicity, has power to open the door of hearts that need the simple, delicate touch of the spirit of Christ. -- AH 485.1

What about the this question addressed in last week’s class...are we the Lord’s messengers...and are you comfortable with that label...and of course Tina’s ability to voice what most of us are thinking but afraid to say.

For those who did not hear that exchange last week, Dr. Jennings read a quote from Mrs. White that said,

“This message I am given to bear, as the Lord’s messenger...and asked us if we could make that same claim – of being the Lord’s messenger...if not, why not? Jesus said that as the Father has sent me, so He is sending us. I found this quote that helps to explain why and how we can be effective messengers for Him...spoiler alert, it’s not because of us. “Have not your energies been quickened by the blessing that God has bestowed upon you? Has not the truth been more deeply impressed upon your soul? Can you not see more clearly its relative importance to those who are perishing out of Christ? Since the manifest revealing of God’s blessing, are you witnessing for Christ more distinctly and decidedly than ever before?

The Holy Spirit has brought decidedly to your minds the important, vital truths for this time. Is this knowledge to be bound up in a napkin and hidden in the earth? No, no. It is to be put out to the exchangers. **As man uses his talents, however small, with faithfulness, the Holy Spirit takes the things of God, and presents them anew to the mind.** Through His Spirit God makes His word a vivifying power. It is quick and powerful, exerting a strong influence upon minds, **not because of the learning or intelligence of the human agent, but because divine power is working with the human power. And it is to the divine power that all praise is to be given.** – 8T 55



SUNDAY

Jesus: The Basis of Our Testimony

Sunday's lesson talks about our extreme makeovers – not a home remodel...or some new makeup or a hairdo – but in the ways we are different before we encounter Christ and after we have been changed by His Spirit. What are some of those differences...can we list some?

Dead in our trespasses and sin – terminal versus healed, renewed, and transformed to be like Christ in heart, mind and character.

Hard hearts of stone versus soft hearts of flesh...hearts that were at enmity and distrust toward God are now trusting, open, seeking truth, and in agreement with Him.

Slaves to our sinful condition and carnal natures versus free with a new spiritual nature. Attached and striving for the things of this world versus having the things of this world cut away through circumcision of the heart – which can manifest itself sometimes in dramatic changes in behaviors, habits, likes/dislikes...and sometimes in more subtle shifts in motives, methods, and attitudes.

Our fearfulness and selfishness are replaced with love, other-centeredness, and fearlessness – evidenced by a change in the methods we use – we move from methods of control, coercion, manipulation, and punishment...to kindness, honesty, liberation, we speak the truth in love and leave people free.

Ephesians 2:1-10, *The Remedy*: “As for you, you were terminal and dying in the distrust, fear and selfishness² in which you used to live when you followed the survival-of-the-fittest principle of the world instituted by the ruler of the kingdom of the air—the intelligent being whose principles are now at work in all those who reject truth, love, and freedom.³ All of us also were born infected with this destructive survival-of-the-fittest principle and at one time gratified its selfish and unhealthy desires and thoughts. Like the rest of humanity, we were born infected with this principle which — if not removed — would result in our self-destruction.⁴ But because God is love, because he is merciful, gracious, forgiving, patient and kind, and because he truly loves us,⁵ he removes the infection of distrust and selfishness and heals us through Christ. It is because God is gracious, loving and kind that you have been healed and set right with him.⁶ God raised the human race from its degraded and detestable state through Jesus Christ's victorious life, and humanity again occupies its seat in God's heavenly counsel—in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord—⁷ in order that the amazing truth of God's gracious character may be showcased for all eternity through the love expressed to us in Jesus Christ.⁸ It is only because of God's grace that



you have been healed through trust—and you did not create this trust yourself, but it was established through the evidence of God’s character revealed in the gift of Jesus Christ.⁹ This is not by some human work—No way!—so there is no room for anyone to boast.¹⁰ We are God’s special creation brought to existence by Christ Jesus to showcase his character—his living law of love—which was always God’s design for us.

One of the founders of the Adventist church puts it this way in this familiar quote from a book called *Christ’s Object Lessons*:

“This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us... When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged with His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. [This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness.] – COL 311.4

If you have seen any of the “extreme makeover” shows, you know there is not an overnight transformation...there is *work* involved, a lot of work, effort...but whose work? Is this before and after transformation God’s work? My work? Our work?

God’s work: His work is to procure the remedy – from the foundation of the world to the promise of the redeemer, to ensuring a way was kept open for the Messiah to come, to having fear and selfishness war it out in his humanity, giving Himself in love, and ultimately overcoming the infection, developing a perfect human character, and offering that to us as a free gift.

Our work: trust Him, open the heart to him, and when His spirit pours His love into our hearts to receive it, to assimilate, it to agree and cooperate with Him.

“Herein is revealed the outworking of the **divine principle of cooperation, without which no true success can be attained. Human effort avails nothing without divine power; and without human endeavor, divine effort is with many of no avail. To make God’s grace our own, we must act our part.** His grace is given to work in us to will and to do, but never as a substitute for our effort.” --LHU 193.4

“There are two grand forces at work in the salvation of the human soul. It requires the cooperation of man with the divine agencies-- divine influences, and a strong, living, working faith. It is in this way only that the human agent can become a laborer together with God. The Lord does not sanction in any one of us a blind, stupid credulity. He does not dishonor the human understanding,



but, far from this, He calls for the human will to be brought into connection with the divine will. He calls for the ingenuity of the human mind, the tact, the skill, to be strenuously exercised (!!) in searching out the truth as it is in Jesus... Ye are labourers together with God.” -- OHC 310.5

So how can salvation be wholly of Christ and no work of ours, and yet require *our* work of cooperation? Think design law and it all becomes clear. We are born in a terminal condition, out of harmony with and divergent from God’s design. Christ, and Christ alone, took this condition upon Himself, and by the exercise of His human will, cured the condition procuring a remedy for all humanity. He lived a life in perfect harmony with God and thus developed a perfect human character.

This is our Remedy. We cannot do this; we can only choose to partake of what He has developed in our behalf. But the partaking is not the developing.

Christ came to the earth as man, he lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a godly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. -- DA 762.2 adapted

Note how the justification happens, according to this passage? It is by becoming a partaker of the divine nature, by partaking of Jesus in a trust relationship, and receiving a new heart and right spirit through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are set right in heart and mind, justified.

MONDAY

The Transformative Power of Personal Testimony

Monday’s lesson presents 2 real life examples who experienced extreme makeovers – James and John, the brothers who were originally known as the “Sons of Thunder,” but were transformed and changed because of their close relationship with Jesus.

The quarterly says a couple of things so well here, I have to point them out. Jesus’ way is the way of love, not combative force. In the presence of Jesus’ love, John’s impetuosity and anger were transformed to loving-kindness and a gentle, compassionate spirit. In John’s first epistle, the word love appears nearly 40 times; in its various forms, it appears 50 times.

“There is an eternal principle of the universe (what would another term for ‘an eternal principle of the universe’ be?). Ellen G. White states this principle well in these words: ‘The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love;



and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened.”—{DA 22}.

TUESDAY

Telling the Story of Jesus

This lesson points out some of the inexperience and lack of qualifications of Christ’s first missionaries/evangelists. These were not His disciples or long-time followers, but rather two gentlemen, aka “madmen”, who experienced healing and liberation from demon possession. These were men who had likely never heard Jesus preach even one sermon, had never sacrificed at or even been to temple services, they certainly had not attended seminary or memorized the Torah or Old Testament scrolls.

So what in the world would they have to share with people, what deep spiritual insights could they possibly have to impart? They shared the Jesus they knew because they had experienced Him for themselves.

“Their changed lives were living proof that Jesus was the Savior. These men told what they knew, what they had seen, heard, and felt of Jesus’ power. This is what everyone can do whose heart has been changed by God’s loving-favor.”— DOA, 340

So how can this be? How effective and what difference can my witness actually make? Do you feel Unfit? Incapable? Ill-equipped? How can I improve my skills in this area?

“Well, in this work, as in every other, **skill is gained in the work itself**. It is by training in the common duties of life and in ministry to the needy and suffering that efficiency is assured. **Without this the best-meant efforts are often useless and even harmful. It is in the water, not on the land, that men learn to swim.**” – AH 490.2

What law is being described here?

Listen to this one:

“It is God’s purpose to manifest through His people **the principles of His kingdom**. [What is another word for “principles”?] That in life and character they may **reveal these principles**, He desires to separate them from the customs, habits, and practices of the world.... – AH 519.3

Wonderful scenes are opening before us; and at this time **a living testimony is to be borne in**



the lives of God's professed people so that the world may see that in this age, when evil reigns on every side, there is yet a people who are laying aside their will and are seeking to do God's will—a **people in whose hearts and lives God's law is written**. – AH 519.4 [These are individuals, not a denomination!]

And if we have any young folks watching or listening out there, lest you think that being God's messenger and witness doesn't include you, think again! Listen to what this author says about it:

“When heavenly intelligences see that men are no longer permitted to present the truth, **the Spirit of God will come upon the children**, and they will do a work in the proclamation of the truth which the older workers cannot do because their way will be hedged up.

In the closing scenes of this earth's history many of these children and youth will **astonish people by their witness to the truth**, which will be borne in simplicity, yet with spirit and power. They have been taught the fear of the Lord, and their hearts have been softened by a careful and prayerful study of the Bible. In the near future many children will be endued with the Spirit of God and will do a work in proclaiming the truth to the world that at that time cannot well be done by the older members of the church.

Our church schools are ordained by God to prepare the children for this great work. Here children are to be instructed in the special truths for this time and in practical missionary work... **By them God's message will be made known and His saving health to all nations**. – AH 489

THURSDAY

Something Worth Testifying About

What's the “something” that's worth testifying about...and what makes it worth it?

Is what most of Christianity believes worth testifying about?

Is some heavenly legal proceeding where you are declared righteous even though you're not worth testifying about?

Is having your medical records altered to say you're well...while you're still dying of a terminal disease...worth testifying about?



Is getting to spend eternity with a God who will torture you if you don't love Him worth testifying about?

I gotta tell you and I have said before that the traditional legal, penal view of God and Christianity that I was raised in, taught, steeped in...was NOT worth testifying about...not to me, at least...and I didn't...I never told a soul. And now look at me...I'm up in front of a class...I'm on YouTube, permanently ensconced on the internet in perpetuity. What changed?

Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying...as we read earlier, this is **not because of the learning or intelligence of the human agent, but because divine power is working with the human power. And it is to the divine power that all praise is to be given.** I'm talking about what changed in my thinking, in my paradigm(s), in my knowledge about God, and my experience OF God. I thought I would try to just delineate out a few of the most significant shifts that are now worth testifying about...and I know everyone here has some too, so I want to see if you have some on your list that aren't on mine.

The medical healing or healing substitution atonement model – and even the meaning and pronunciation of the word at-one-ment. In contrast to the traditional penal substitution model, which focuses on an angry or “just” God who must be appeased or propitiated, the healing model shifts the focus to the sinner's condition – this carnal nature, this corrupt character that is motivated by fear and selfishness and the drive to survive – this is a terminal condition that is in need of **healing**. Christ cured this disease of fear and selfishness in His humanity, and procured a remedy which He offers as a free gift to all who accept it.

God is the creator and designer – his laws are the laws upon which reality and life are built and designed to operate. Once you embrace this concept and change your “law lens” from imposed rules to design laws, you end up basically having a secret decoder ring or a crystal ball that helps you predict the future...or more often diagnose the past.

Understanding the importance of methods, principles, and character instead of focusing on following specific rules, behaviors, and performance.

The Sabbath – is a sign/flag/banner representing God's government and His methods of truth, love, and freedom versus the flag/banner of imposed/enacted/arbitrary rules requiring force/coercion/punishment.

Entirely new view and appreciation for the investigative judgment and cleansing of the sanctuary doctrines – the investigative judgment is all about God and not us...He has not already gotten through



the “A” names as he works alphabetically through the Lamb’s Book of Life. No, our destiny is determined by OUR judgment of God – do we trust Him? Is He trustworthy? Plus I have a vastly different/expanded understanding of all the sanctuary symbols and the entire service – what/where it is, what it’s made of, what needs to be cleansed, and how it gets cleansed.

Why Christ had to die and what his life, death, and resurrection accomplished. I obviously don’t have time for a complete study of this topic, but search the words “why Christ had to die” on comeandreason.com, and you will get lots more detailed explanations. Very briefly, Christ came to reveal the truth about the Father, which destroys the lies and distortions, and refutes Satan’s accusations about who He is and how He governs. He also came to reveal the truth about Satan’s character, who was shown to be a liar and a murderer from the start. By giving Himself in love all the way to death on a cross, Christ purged the infection of fear and selfishness from His perfected human character, and procured a remedy that he offers as a free gift to us to cure our terminal sin sick condition. Finally, Christ destroyed death by perfectly restoring the law of love – the basis for life – life is the default setting in God’s universe – He restored humanity back into harmony with God’s perfect design...and life was the inevitable result.

The amazing great controversy perspective and the ongoing point-counterpoint battle between good and evil, between God and His accuser, playing out in this theater and spectacle to angels and men – from the Garden of Eden, through the Old Testament, the life/death/resurrection of Christ, right up to today the war is still being waged.

Love cannot exist in an atmosphere without freedom and God. Is. Love. The good news isn’t good news at all if God is like Satan has alleged Him to be.

So what changed? God hasn’t changed...the truth about who He is and His character of love have not changed – they have always been good and have always been true and have always been worth testifying about. What changed is me...He changed me...the truth about who He is continues to change me. This last message of mercy to go to the world – the truth about His character of love is life changing. And this healing atonement model is for real, it is not metaphor, it is not symbolic, it is actual tangible genuine healing, restoration, regeneration, renewal in the heart, mind and character of the believer. He doesn’t want to grant you legal pardon, He wants to heal you and save you...He doesn’t want to declare you to be righteous, He wants to make you righteous – set you right, back in harmony with his perfect design. Our salvation is not legal or transactional, it’s transformational.