

Lesson 6: Winning Friends for Jesus (Part 3)

Introduction In the last lesson we looked at how we can reach people's hearts and win their trust. This is the key to winning people for Jesus. Regardless of how we get to know people, they will accept our testimony only after they learn to trust us.

It was the same way with Jesus. He won their trust by mingling with people, showing interest, and helping them. But Jesus didn't stop there. He never separated His various relationships with people from proclaiming the gospel. As soon as He had won a person's trust, He told them about God and invited them to follow Him. This was His real goal, which He always kept in view. He came to save people and to save them for eternity. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10) If Jesus' only intent was to heal people and give them a better earthly life, He wouldn't have had to become a human. He could have easily done that from heaven.

In the same manner we don't want our friends to just trust *us*, but rather to trust *God*. If our friends are really dear to our hearts, it is quite natural that we have a desire for them to accept Jesus and receive eternal life through Him. Thus we are going to look at how we can be spiritually driven in our relationships and lead our friends step by step to Jesus.

Principle #1 **You need a clear identity, which distinguishes you from others.**

If you want to lead a person to Jesus, you must have an identity in Him, which distinguishes you from people who don't follow Jesus. Jesus made that unmistakably clear in the Sermon on the Mount. He compared us to salt and the light of the world. (Matthew 5:13-16) For light and salt to make a difference they have to be different from their surroundings. Otherwise they would be useless. Paul wrote: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...." (Romans 12:2) As Christians we need courage to be different. What we *are* has a greater influence on people than what we *say*. People that know you watch you closely. Especially if they know that you are an Adventist. They want to know if your faith makes a real difference in your life. When they see that your faith makes you no different, they won't place much value on your testimony. But if they see that your faith positively changes your character, they will give it some thought and will wish for the same changes. That which persuades people the most to follow Jesus is the example of people, who follow Jesus in a consistent and appealing manner. Naturally, being different shouldn't be an end in itself, to put ourselves above other people. In many areas of life, we should be just like the people who we want to reach, so that no unnecessary barriers are created. Let them see that you are a normal person and not a superior saint. They should see that your faith changes your life positively and makes you happier, more confident, more patient, more merciful, etc.

Quote #1 "Now that Jesus has ascended to heaven, His disciples are His representatives among men, and one of the most effective ways of winning souls to Him is in exemplifying His character in our daily life. Our influence upon others depends not so much upon what we say as upon what we are. Men may combat and defy our logic, they may resist our appeals; but a life of disinterested love is an argument they cannot gainsay. A consistent life, characterized by the meekness of Christ, is a power

in the world." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 141)

Quote #2 "We are not to elevate our standard just a little above the world's standard, but we are to make the distinction decidedly apparent. The reason we have had so little influence upon unbelieving relatives and associates is that there has been so little decided difference between our practices and those of the world." (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 146)

Quote #3 "No occasion should be given to unbelievers to reproach our faith. We are considered odd and singular, and should not take a course to lead unbelievers to think us more so than our faith requires us to be." (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 456)

Principle #2 **Live out your faith naturally!**

Some Adventists are ashamed of their faith and live in two worlds. One world is the church; the other is their work, school, or university. They hardly tell anyone about what they experience at church or with Jesus. Whoever lives like this can't win anyone to Jesus. It is important that we don't live in two worlds but live out our faith naturally in our daily lives. Let your relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues, fellow students, etc. know that you are a Christian and an Adventist and that your faith is the most important and beautiful thing in your life. They need to see that your faith is a natural part of you, like your name, your family, and your nationality.

There are many different situations in our daily lives where we can bear witness to this. Here are a few examples:

- Always pray before you eat, even when your non-believer friends are there.
- When you hear that someone has a problem, try to help them and let them know that you will be praying for them.
- When someone enthusiastically tells you about what they did on the weekend, share enthusiastically what you experienced at church.
- Keep your eyes open during a conversation for opportunities to tie in answers that you have found through your faith in God.

Quote #4 "We should speak of Christ to those who know Him not. We should do as Christ did. Wherever He was, in the synagogue, by the wayside, in the boat thrust out a little from the land, at the Pharisee's feast or the table of the publican, He spoke to men of the things pertaining to the higher life. The things of nature, the events of daily life, were bound up by Him with the words of truth. The hearts of His hearers were drawn to Him; for He had healed their sick, had comforted their sorrowing ones, and had taken their children in His arms and blessed them. When He opened His lips to speak, their attention was riveted upon Him, and every word was to some soul a savor of life unto life. So it should be with us. (*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 338-339)

Principle #3 **Understand where the other person is spiritually.**

Just as a doctor has to make a thorough diagnosis before he can treat his patient correctly, we need to first understand where a person is in their spiritual development before we can properly deal with them. We already saw the following illustration in lesson 2. It shows where people are in their relationship to God.



When we think about how open a person is, it is important to understand that openness develops in three areas. Openness to...

- us as people
- God and the Bible
- the church

Not until a person is open in all three areas can a person be led to baptism. So consider in which of these areas a person is already open.

- If a person isn't open to us personally, then building up a relationship has the highest priority so that trust can grow and so we can better understand where they are spiritually.
- If they already trust us, but the person isn't open to God or the Bible then it is important to nurture the relationship, to invite them to things which meet their needs, and to carefully give spiritual impulses.
- If someone is open to God, the Bible, and us then it is important to offer Bible studies and to invite them to a Bible study group or evangelistic meetings. The goal is to lead them to Jesus and to gently acquaint them with the Adventist message.
- If a person is open in all three areas, then we may bravely offer them studies for baptism.

People move through this cycle on their way to Jesus at different speeds. Some decide very quickly, others need years to reach a decision. But speed also is not uniform. It can change very quickly. Times of change like crises, moving, loss, and unemployment can cause people to be suddenly open to spiritual matters. Pay especially attention to people that are in such situations and approach them openly!

In this context it is also important to understand the faith and philosophy of people. If we want to win Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists, or atheists to the Adventist

message, then we need to understand what constitutes their faith and what obstacles are between them and a decision to be baptized. Only when we understand them can we meet them in a tactful and winning manner. Even when their faith and philosophy goes against ours, we may never speak disdainfully or derogatorily about it. A person's religious beliefs deserve to be treated with respect.

Principle #4 Pray for your friends.

In lesson 7 of module 2 (Intercession) we considered in detail how important it is to pray specifically for our friends. Intercession makes a big difference! We have the promise that God, on the basis of our intercession, will intervene in the lives of our friends.

Write the names of your friends in your prayer list and write specific requests next to their names. Pray that God will lead the circumstances in your friends' lives in such a way that they will be spiritually open and progress in their journey to Jesus. Ask God to open your eyes to the opportunities when you can give them spiritual guidance.

Praying together with others for our friends is a special blessing. For example, you could get together with two other church members and pray for the salvation of your friends. Each of you can also pray daily for these people. Once a week pray together. A discipleship group is a naturally good opportunity to pray for people who God has laid close to your heart.

Quote #5 "Through much prayer you must labor for souls, for this is the only method by which you can reach hearts. It is not your work, but the work of Christ who is by your side, that impresses hearts. ... " (*Evangelism, p. 341*)

Quote #6 "Why do not believers feel a deeper, more earnest concern for those who are out of Christ? Why do not two or three meet together and plead with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another?" (*Testimonies for the Church, vol. 7, p. 21*)

Principle #5 Seek fellowship!

Relationships grow when we spend time together. Genuine Christian fellowship creates an atmosphere in which people can open up spiritually. That is why it is important that we actively look for opportunities to nurture fellowship with people who we want to win for Jesus. There are many possibilities:

- Invite people to your home! Eat together and talk about topics which are meaningful to your friends. Pray openly before the meal, show interest, tell about yourself, and ask good questions. Thus opportunities will easily arise in which you can speak about spiritual things. If it is appropriate pray together with them before you go your separate ways. Personal prayer has moved many people, who have never experienced this kind of prayer before.
- When people give you an invitation, accept their hospitality.
- Seek opportunities for mutual leisure activities.
- Make short, spontaneous visits, take part in their lives, and give spiritual guidance.

Quote #7 "Go to your neighbors one by one, and come close to them till their hearts are warmed by your unselfish interest and love. Sympathize with them, pray with them,

watch for opportunities to do them good, and as you can, gather a few together and open the Word of God to their darkened minds. Keep watching, as he who must render an account for the souls of men, and make the most of the privileges that God gives you of laboring with Him in His moral vineyard. Do not neglect speaking to your neighbors, and doing them all the kindness in your power, that you “by all means may save some.” (*Christian Service, p. 116*)

Quote #8 “By personal labor reach those around you. Become acquainted with them. Preaching will not do the work that needs to be done. Angels of God attend you to the dwellings of those you visit. This work cannot be done by proxy. Money lent or given will not accomplish it. Sermons will not do it. By visiting the people, talking, praying, sympathizing with them, you will win hearts. This is the highest missionary work that you can do. To do it, you will need resolute, persevering faith, unwearied patience, and a deep love for souls.” (*Christian Service, p. 117*)

Quote #9 “To all who are working with Christ I would say, Wherever you can gain access to the people by the fireside, improve your opportunity. Take your Bible, and open before them its great truths. Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart. By being social and coming close to the people, you may turn the current of their thoughts more readily than by the most able discourse. The presentation of Christ in the family, by the fireside, and in small gatherings in private houses, is often more successful in winning souls to Jesus than are sermons delivered in the open air, to the moving throng, or even in halls or churches.” (*Christian Service, p. 122*)

Principle #6 **Actively seek conversation!**

Relationships grow through genuine conversation, which doesn't only revolve around superficial, impersonal things. This kind of communication includes authentic listening with the wish to really understand the other person and the willingness to speak openly about yourself. It creates trust and also opens the door for deeper questions, for example about faith. But it is important not to try to desperately direct every conversation towards spiritual topics. If we do that, people will feel like “conversion-victims” and won't have the impression that they can converse normally with us.

Pray that God will open the door for a spiritual conversation. Paul wrote to the Colossians: “...meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside, redeeming the time.” (Colossians 4:3-5) Paul knew that God had to open the door for spiritual conversations and firmly believed that God would do it. The doors for such a discussion aren't opened by intelligence, the power of persuasion, or human techniques, but by God's spirit and the decision of your friend. Sometimes the door opens for a short time. We have to be prepared for this moment so that we can say something encouraging and life changing.

Start your questions with things that are important for the person. Ask questions about their work, their family, their hobbies, and their needs. Show genuine interest in their life and their questions. At the right moment, when the situation is right, ask good questions that encourage the person to think deeply. Here are a few examples:

- Did you grow up in a Christian family?

- Do you believe there is a God?
- What do you think will happen to our world?
- Do you believe that there is something beyond the grave?
- Do you think it would be good if there was life after death?
- Have you ever read the Bible?
- Did you know that the Bible says something about the present time?
- Did you know that the Bible contains many fulfilled prophecies?
- Imagine God exists. Would you think that He was good?
- What would God have to be like in order for you to gladly believe in Him?
- Can you imagine that there is a God, who knows you and loves you?
- Have you ever asked yourself why there is so much suffering in our world?

With these questions you can steer the conversation in a spiritual direction. If a person reacts negatively to such a question, don't go any further and don't show that you are disappointed. But if you feel a spiritual openness, give a short explanation about how your faith in God has helped you find fascinating answers. Be careful not to say too much. We don't want to overwhelm them with our answers. Just give them something to chew on. If the person makes further inquiries, then you can tell some more.

Principle #7 **Try to connect with your friend's needs.**

When Jesus endeavored to win people for God's kingdom, He connected with people's needs. He took their needs seriously, helped them, and thus showed them that the best solution was to trust God. People have many different needs today, for example:

- security,
- healthy families, marriages, friendships,
- health,
- advice in different life situations,
- comfort and understanding

When you see these needs in your friend's life, take them seriously, show understanding, and as carefully as possible clearly introduce the spiritual alternative. Show your friend that Jesus really has the best answers for all these needs. Tell them, that there is a God, who knows them, loves them, and wants to make them happy. Explain that the Bible has relevant answers that can help us in our lives.

Quote #10 "In Christlike sympathy we should come close to men individually, and seek to awaken their interest in the great things of eternal life. Their hearts may be as hard as the beaten highway, and apparently it may be a useless effort to present the Saviour to them; but while logic may fail to move, and argument be powerless to convince, the love of Christ, revealed in personal ministry, may soften the stony heart, so that the seed of truth can take root." (*Christ's Object Lessons, p. 57*)

Principle #8 **Emphasize your relationship with Jesus.**

When you speak about your faith with your friends, emphasize your relationship with Jesus and all the beauty that you have thereby experienced. Show them through your life that your faith in Jesus is the most beautiful thing in the world and that it makes you happy. Share experiences you have had with God, give your

personal testimony (more about this in the next lesson), tell them about answered prayer or things you have discovered in your personal worship. Thus people will see that you are a genuine Christian and that your faith makes a positive difference in your life.

If we emphasize doctrines, which are different than theirs, or focus on certain lifestyle questions, people often feel under attack and will react defensively. Even if the lifestyle of the other person doesn't coincide with ours, it is important not to make this the center of attention. Eventually we want our friend to find a relationship with Jesus and realize that his/her life will change for the better. We give the best testimony for our lifestyle when we live it out happily and naturally. Of course, the moment will come when we will talk about the differences in our biblical worldview versus others. But be careful not to tell too much as one time. Give them just enough so that they will gladly ask more questions later. There is the danger of giving so many answers to people's questions that they will never again ask a question.

Quote #11 "The wonderful love of Christ will melt and subdue hearts, when the mere reiteration of doctrines would accomplish nothing." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 826)

Quote #12 "Agree with the people on every point where you can consistently do so. Let them see that you love their souls, and want to be in harmony with them so far as possible." (*Evangelism*, p. 140)

Quote #13 "In laboring in a new field, do not think it your duty to say at once to the people, We are Seventh-day Adventists; we believe that the seventh day is the Sabbath; we believe in the non-immortality of the soul. This would often erect a formidable barrier between you and those you wish to reach. Speak to them, as you have opportunity, upon points of doctrine on which you can agree. Dwell on the necessity of practical godliness. Give them evidence that you are a Christian, desiring peace, and that you love their souls. Let them see that you are conscientious. Thus you will gain their confidence; and there will be time enough for doctrines. Let the heart be won, the soil prepared, and then sow the seed, presenting in love the truth as it is in Jesus." (*Evangelism*, p. 200)

Principle #9 **Connect your friends with other Adventists.**

The more positive relationships our friends have with Adventists, the likelier they are to make a decision for Jesus. Find opportunities to bring your friends in touch with other Adventists. Here are a few ideas:

- Invite them and Adventist friends for a birthday celebration.
- Organize leisure activities and invite your friends.
- Create opportunities, like film evenings, celebrations, an evening for games, etc. and invite your friends.
- If they need help with something specific and a church member could help, bring them together.
- Use every opportunity to introduce them to other Adventists.

Principle #10 **Use our media to pass on our message.**

A very good way to have spiritual influence is by bringing your friends in contact with our media so that they can review it. This can take place in different forms:

- Give or lend good books or magazines.
- Give or lend CDs or DVDs with good lectures or movies.
- Call your friend's attention to our offers on the Internet.
- Call your friend's attention to the Hope Channel.
- At New Year's give them a calendar with Bible texts.

If you do these things, speak enthusiastically so that your friends become really curious.

Principle #11 Invite your friends to evangelistic meetings!

It's important that a church consistently creates opportunities for us to invite our friends. First of all, the care groups create an ongoing opportunity to invite people. There are also need-based programs like cooking schools, marriage seminars, women's breakfasts, health meetings, special church services, and church outings, which are good possibilities for inviting your friends. When they experience their needs being met and at the same time build friendships with other Adventists, they will have taken a big step towards the church. Then when we hold evangelistic meetings, they will accept our invitation much more easily.

Quote #14 "There are many things that persons may do if they only have a mind to work. There are many who will not go to church to hear the truth preached. By personal efforts in simplicity and wisdom these might be persuaded to turn their feet to the house of God. Conviction may fasten upon their minds the first time they hear a discourse upon present truth. Should your solicitations be refused, do not be discouraged. Persevere till success crowns your efforts." (*Christian Service, p. 130*)

Principle #13 Appeal to your friends to follow Jesus.

When you sense that the Holy Spirit is working on your friend and that he/she is open, encourage him/her to make a decision for Jesus. Ask God to create the right moment and then bravely invite your friend to turn his/her life over to Jesus.

Quote #15 "The secret of our success and power will be found in making direct, personal appeals to those who are interested, having unwavering reliance upon the Most High." (*Pamphlet 118, Address to Ministers 2.2*)

Principle #14 Be confident!

How we see people has a big influence on how we treat them. We read that Jesus "saw in every soul one to whom must be given the call to His kingdom." (*The Desire of Ages, p. 151*) We need exactly this attitude when we work with people. See these people as unique, created and loved creatures, which God has made for eternity. We can be sure that God will do everything to save them. And we may do our part in this rescue mission.

If we believe that people aren't open to God at all, then our expectations of reaching others will be low. Of course, not every person will make a decision for God and many people seem uninterested at the moment. But that can change very quickly. We can be confident that because the Holy Spirit is working on people's hearts we can keep praying and working for the salvation of people. God will bless our efforts for other people!

