

Lesson 8: Finding Friends from House to House

Introduction In previous lessons, we emphasized that our network of relationships is our most effective mission field. If this is true, then why should we spend time going from house to house, meeting new people, and speaking with strangers in their homes? On the surface, the two ideas may seem to be in conflict. But after doing this lesson, we will see that they go hand in hand.

Why go from House to House? There are good reasons for going from house to house. The main one being that there are people in our neighborhoods, who we don't know and are open to God. This means that the Holy Spirit is working on them and that God wants to bring them in touch with one of His followers. Ellen White described it this way:

Quote #1 "All over the world men and women are looking wistfully to heaven. Prayers and tears and inquiries go up from souls longing for light, for grace, for the Holy Spirit. Many are on the verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in. (*Acts of the Apostles, S. 109*)

This hasn't changed. There are also people in your neighborhoods, who are yearning for more than this life can offer them; people, who see that the world is spinning out of control; people, who want God to work on their hearts and are thankful for spiritual impulses!

God has expressly said that we should go to people instead of waiting for them to come to us. Our mission orders start with the word, "Go!" This doesn't just mean to people in faraway countries, it also means to the people in our neighborhoods. It goes without saying that many Adventists don't even know who they could invite to a small group, an evangelistic series, or to a Bible study because they don't have very many non-Adventist friends .

Basically, the work from house to house isn't any different than our work in our network of relationships. It is just simply another way to proactively get to know new people and to win them as friends. As soon as personal contact has been established, they belong to our personal network and all the points discussed in the lessons "Winning Friends" apply.

Ellen White on House to House work Ellen White often spoke about the responsibility we have for the people in our vicinity and appealed that we visit them in their homes. Please read through the following quotes and mark the central statements!

Quote #2 "Wherever a church is established, all the members should engage actively in missionary work. They should visit every family in the neighborhood, and know their spiritual condition." (*Christian Service, p. 12*)

Quote #3 "Of equal importance with special public efforts is house-to-house work in the homes of the people. In large cities there are certain classes that cannot be reached by public meetings. These must be searched out as the shepherd searches for his lost sheep. Diligent, personal effort must be put forth in their behalf. When personal work is neglected, many precious opportunities are lost, which, were they improved, would advance the work decidedly." (*Christian Service, p. 113*)

Quote #4 "Among the members of our churches there should be more house-to-house labor, in giving Bible readings and distributing literature." (*Christian Service, p. 113*)

Quote #5 “House-to-house laborers are needed. The Lord calls for decided efforts to be put forth in places where the people know nothing of Bible truth. Singing and prayer and Bible readings are needed in the homes of the people.” (*Christian Service, p. 114*)

Quote #6 “Many will be called into the field to labor from house to house, giving Bible readings, and praying with those who are interested.” (*Christian Service, p. 141*)

Quote #7 “We are to give the last warning of God to men, and what should be our earnestness in studying the Bible, and our zeal in spreading the light! Let every soul who has received the divine illumination seek to impart it. Let the workers go from house to house, opening the Bible to the people, circulating the publications, telling others of the light that has blessed their own souls.” (*Christian Service, p. 143*)

Quote #8 “In every city that is entered, a solid foundation is to be laid for permanent work. The Lord’s methods are to be followed. By doing house-to-house work, by giving Bible readings in families, the worker may gain access to many who are seeking for truth. By opening the Scriptures, by prayer, by exercising faith, he is to teach the people the way of the Lord.” (*Evangelism, p. 457*)

Quote #9 “My brethren and sisters, there are souls in your neighborhood who, if they were judiciously labored for, would be converted.” (*Evangelism, p. 114*)

Many more statements from the inspired pen of Ellen White could be listed here. She appealed with great urgency to the church members to visit people in their homes in order to win them for Jesus. She knew that there were many people, who couldn’t be reached in any other manner.

But how? But how can we work from house to house and find open people and win them as friends? Below we will examine several principles, which will determine if we experience this work with joy or frustration.

Principle #1 Be aware that you meet unique people, who are loved by God

The people we meet in our neighborhoods are usually strangers to us. But God knows them. He knows everything about their life, their joys, their worries, and their hopes. They are unique and precious individuals, who are loved by God. When we are aware of this, it helps us meet new people with the right attitude. In addition, it motivates us to get to know these people, even when it is difficult for us.

Principle #2 The work from house to house is serving people

When we meet people in their homes our goal isn’t to just bring them information about the Bible. We also want to recognize and meet people’s needs, just like Jesus did. When we go from house to house we will meet people who need help. We all need to be alert, willing to listen, and have a big heart in order to help people to the best of our ability.

Quote #10 “Deeds as well as words of sympathy are needed. Christ prefaced the giving of His message by deeds of love and benevolence. Let these workers go from house to house, helping where help is needed, and, as opportunity offers, telling the story of the cross. Christ is to be their text. They need not dwell upon doctrinal subjects; let them speak of the work and sacrifice of Christ. Let them hold up His righteousness, in their lives revealing His purity.” (*Christian Service, p. 113*)

Quote #11 “Those who engage in house-to-house labor will find opportunities for ministry in many lines. They should pray for the sick, and should do all in their power to relieve them from suffering. They should work among the lowly, the poor, and the oppressed. We should pray for and with the helpless ones who have not strength of will to control the appetites that passion has degraded. Earnest, persevering effort must be made for the salvation of those in whose hearts an interest is awakened. Many can be reached only through acts of disinterested kindness. Their physical wants must first be relieved. As they see evidence of our unselfish love, it will be easier for them to believe in the love of Christ.” (*Christian Service, p. 113*)

Quote #12 “Our Saviour went from house to house, healing the sick, comforting the mourners, soothing the afflicted, speaking peace to the disconsolate. He took the little children in His arms and blessed them, and spoke words of hope and comfort to the weary mothers. With unfailing tenderness and gentleness, He met every form of human woe and affliction. Not for Himself, but for others did He labor. He was the servant of all. It was His meat and drink to bring hope and strength to all with whom He came in contact.” (*Christian Service, p. 114*)

Principle #3 **Make people part of your network**

The people that you meet going from house to house should not just be simply viewed as contacts or interests. If you want to win them for Jesus, then they have to become your friends. This is why you need to make them part of your network. Write their names down, pray for them, win their hearts and give them spiritual encouragement. Everything that you learned in the lessons “Winning Friends”, how to win people’s hearts and how you can win them for Jesus, needs to be applied here. Take time to look over these lessons again.

Principle #4 **The responsibility for different areas should be divided up**

It is important to divide the area, which the church is responsible for, into smaller territories and give the responsibility for those territories to families, small groups, Sabbath school classes, and individuals who will adopt the area. Your discipleship group can also take over the responsibility for a certain area.

If there is an interest file, church members can take over the responsibility for those people in their area and continue to minister to them. Obviously, this doesn’t mean that church members can’t take care of their friends, who live outside of their area. It would be ridiculous to not continue nurturing friendships that they have already built up.

Principle #5 **Use the right method.**

Just as a farmer can’t always use the same methods, we also have to adapt our methods according to the situation. There are many methods we can choose from. Here are a few:

a) Letter boxing (where this is legal)

Letter boxing means that we distribute evangelistic material in mail boxes. These include:

- Invitations to events
- Coupons for different offers
- Signs of the Times
- Booklets and books
- Information flyers about the Hope Channel

This kind of distribution operation does have the disadvantage that the material is often not noticed and ends up in the trash. On the other hand, many more homes are covered with this method. Experience shows that there are people, who find these materials appealing and respond to them. In addition, this method of mission work is much easier and we can motivate more church members to “take a walk for Jesus”. What is important though is continuity. Experience shows that many people have to find a flyer multiple times in their mailbox before they notice it. So it is better to work through a smaller area several times than to work through a large area only once.

b) Delivering information material personally

If you personally deliver the materials mentioned above to the people in the house, you won't be able to cover as many homes. But you will know that the material was received. In addition, the personal contact makes it possible to get to know people, to answer their questions, and to have encouraging experiences you can share with others doing the same work.

c) Conducting surveys

Conducting surveys is a good way of starting a conversation with people. The aim is to find people as quickly as possible who want to get to know the Bible better. Surveys are short, concise, and get to the point quickly. One advantage of this strategy is that we don't lose a lot of time with people who aren't interested because they won't want to take part in the survey.

First, we make a short, friendly introduction: “Hello. My name is This is We are from the local Seventh-day Adventist church and are conducting a survey in our area. Would you please help us by answering a few short questions?”

Sometimes people ask: “Why are you conducting this survey?” You can give a very honest answer to that question. “As an Adventist church we want to be in touch with the people in our community. We want to know what people think and how we can help them. This survey helps us break the ice and understand their needs.”

The survey questions can be formulated in different ways according to the situation. It is also advisable to adapt them to current events. It is important that the questions be kept short and simple. The following are examples of questions that have proven to be valuable:

- Do you believe in God? (yes/no/no opinion)
- Do you believe there is life after death? (yes/no/no opinion)
- In your opinion, who was Jesus?
 - God's son
 - Saviour
 - Prophet
 - Just a good person
- Do you have a Bible in your home?

- If yes, how often do you read in your Bible?
- In your opinion, how can a person become a Christian?

These questions are easy to answer and show us where the interviewee is spiritually. The last question is a good transition to telling people how we got to know Jesus and what He means to us. This can be introduced with the following statement: “You know, it was like this for me...” or: “May I briefly tell you how it was for me?” And then give your personal testimony.

Next, you can offer Bible study guides to interested people. “I would like to give you an opportunity to get to know the Bible better. These free Bible study guides cover the most important topics of the Bible. Would you like to receive the first study guide?” If the answer is positive, offer to bring them the next study guide in 1-2 weeks.

Before you take your leave, ask if you may pray for the person. Oftentimes people accept this prayer. Sometimes this is the moment in which you will be invited into the home. It is important to keep the prayer short and personal. You will often see that people are thankful and moved, because they have never experienced someone personally praying for them.

d) Directly offering Bible study guides

Another method is to not use the survey and to directly offer Bible study guides. Make a short and friendly introduction: “Hello. My name is.... This is.... We are from the local Seventh-day Adventist church. We are encouraging people in our city to read the Bible. For this purpose we would like to give you this brochure. (Show the first Bible study guide) May I briefly show it to you?” Then continue as is described in point c).

e) Personal free book offer

Another possibility is to start with a free book offer. Make a short and friendly introduction: “Hello. My name is.... This is.... We are from the local Seventh-day Adventist church. We are currently conducting a free book offer. You may choose one of three books as a gift.” This way the people make two decisions. First, that they want a book and second, *which* book they want. They choose the book that interests them most. You can offer this book also after c.) and d.) You will find that some people who do not want to have the Bible study guides will accept this book offer.

Principle #6

Be flexible

These methods of house to house work have been developed by experienced missionaries and have been successful. But they aren't a rigid formula that we have to follow. We have to be flexible in working with them and adapt our approach according to the situation. Sometimes it is better to just set the methods aside and simply listen to the people.

Principle #7

Do good follow-up work

When the initial contact has been made and we have been invited to visit again with the next Bible study guide, it is very important that we return about a week later. Your focus is now to win their confidence. Everything that we discussed in the lesson

“Winning Friends for Jesus (Part 2)” can be put into practice here. When you bring the next Bible study guide, some will gladly accept it, while others will refuse it. This is normal and it is their right. We simply respect their decision and concentrate on other people, who want further Bible study guides. The ultimate goal is that these visits will result in the possibility of giving personal Bible studies. This could start, for example, by working through the Bible study guide together with the person.

Principle #8 Be persevering and don't let yourself get discouraged

Working from house to house isn't always easy. Sometimes the many refusals can discourage us and decrease our motivation. But Jesus didn't say: “Go to the people when it's easy.” Mission work has always been associated with challenges and temptations. These are hidden blessings by which God wants to change us. So, don't give up when the going gets tough. Be aware that mission work will only be successful when we persevere in our mission work.

Practical Tips In conclusion here are a few tips from personal experience:

- Take a small Bible with you that easily fits in your jacket pocket.
- Pay attention to your conversation and conduct as you near a house! As soon as you are in front of the door, stop talking and prayerfully contemplate the encounter you are about to have.
- Never try to look through the door or a window from the outside!
- If there is no doorbell, then knock several times unobtrusively, but not too quietly.
- If you go around the house to try to find a backdoor, try to go in a manner that can be heard and seen. Never go so quietly that someone behind the house would be surprised, scared, or embarrassed by your sudden appearance.
- Don't stand too close to the door!
- Smile while you are waiting for someone to open the door!
- When someone opens the door take a half step backwards.
- If possible, go with one or two other people. Use each outing as an opportunity to introduce other people to this work. Generally only one person leads the conversation. The others pray silently.
- If possible, a woman should never go alone from house to house!
- Don't stay too long at any one house. Leave while the people are still hungering for more so that they will be glad to see you another time.
- See to it that you keep yourself well-groomed!
- Be familiar with the material that you are distributing.
- Make it clear that you aren't selling anything and that they aren't under any obligations.

God's Promise God has promised to bless our mission work when we take people to heart, whom God loves, in order to reach them with the gospel. He will lead us to the people, on whose heart He is working.

Quote #13 “If the teachers of the Word are willing, the Lord will lead them into close relation with the people. He will guide them to the homes of those who need and desire the truth.” (*Evangelism, p. 434*)

Quote #14 “God is no respecter of persons. He will use humble, devoted Christians, even if they

