

Title: Agents of Hope: God's Great Missionaries

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

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AGENTS OF HOPE: GOD'S GREAT MISSIONARIES

by:

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Agents of Hope

Swede Ingmar Bergman told a story about a knight named Antonius Block who kneels in front of a confessional to confess his sins. He does not realize until later that he is talking to Death—a shadowy, robed character—rather than a priest. Block declares that he is seeking not faith, not suppositions, but knowledge.

“I want,” he says, “God to stretch out His hand toward me, reveal Himself, and speak to me.”

Death says back that perhaps there is no God, that there is only nothing.

“Then,” says Block, “life is an outrageous horror. No one can live in the face of death, knowing that all is nothingness.”

Today millions live in the face of such nothingness. They have no faith in God, no hope in anything past the world around them. No wonder, then, that so many focus on the comforts of this life, seeking solace in pleasure and the various worldly distractions. The Christian faith—which calls upon us to “fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on

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what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18, NIV)—is foreign to them.

As Christians, we are God's agents to bring these people hope, to show that there is a God who loves and cares for them, to show that although life has many outrageous horrors, it is not ultimately an outrageous horror but that God will finally make all things right.

The Bible gives us many inspirational stories of God's agents of hope. In this quarter's lessons we will focus on some of these outstanding missionaries; on whom they were and what they did in seeking to bring others to a saving knowledge of the Lord of salvation.

Ellen G. White tells the story of a man nearly chilled to death in deep snow. He was about to give up struggling for his life when he heard the moans from a fellow traveler nearby. His first impulse was to rescue the other man. When he found him, he rubbed the man's frozen limbs. He finally got him to his feet and carried him through the drifts to safety.

Then "the truth flashed home to him that in saving his neighbor he had saved himself also" by quickening "the blood

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which was freezing in his own veins."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 319.

The point? A healthy church is a church focused on mission to others. Sharing God's love with the community brings fresh life and energy into the church.

It would be a mistake this quarter to study these biblical agents as interesting historical figures and leave it at that. Rather, we need to catch the inspiration of their lives and focus on our mission to this dying world. There is nothing more refreshing, or more life-giving, than reaching out to others.

Our prayer is that this quarter's lessons on biblical agents of hope will lead us into a renewed commitment to share God's love with our neighbors and friends and in mission fields around the world. In so doing, we may just find that we have entered into a whole new dimension in our Christian lives.

Gary Krause, an Australian born to missionary parents in Fiji, is director of the Office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference. He is married to Bettina, and they have one daughter, Bethany Grace.

TE-3Q-2008-01-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *Romans 15:17*

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize that Paul was especially chosen and equipped for a special ministry.

Feel: A desire to use the gifts and talents the Lord has given us for His service.

Do: Inspire each class member to build a discipleship program into his or her lifestyle that will allow time for developing and using their God-given gifts and talents.

Learning Outline:

I. Paul the "Zealot" (Gal. 1:14, 1 Tim. 1:12-14). See also in Friday's lesson a quote from *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 214.

A. How do you explain that Paul, before and after his conversion, was always a religious zealot?

- B. Indicate some of the ways in which Paul's conversion experience changed him from one kind of zealot into another kind?

II. Life and Salvation Through Christ (1 Cor.

2:2)

- A. Why does this week's lesson categorize Paul as a man of like passions" as ourselves?
- B. In your own words, summarize Paul's concept on the role of Jesus in the Christian faith.

III. Themes of Hope (1 Tim. 6:11)

- A. Why would a "zealot" Jewish-trained rabbi such as Paul be called to take the gospel to non-Jewish people?
- B. Read Revelation 14:6, 7. Do you see any parallels between Paul's calling and this message?

Summary: If Paul could do it, we can do it! His unique background prepared him for a unique mission. Our personal background prepares us for some unique mission as the Lord shows it to us.

TE-3Q-2008-01-Learning Cycle**STEP 1-Motivate**

Have you ever felt that your inadequacies disqualify you to serve God in any meaningful way? Maybe it's a personality defect that you struggle with. You have a short temper or you procrastinate. Perhaps you look at other people who seem to have more marketable talents. You're not as smart as Stephen Hawking. You're not as attractive as Angelina Jolie or Brad Pitt. Or perhaps your past life shames or embarrasses you. You've done things and been places that forever disqualify you from running for president or being successfully nominated for a high position in your nation's government.

As it turns out, none of these things matter to God. God specializes in taking our weaknesses and making them into strengths.

Based on this, ask class members to talk about things they have done or have happened to them that seemed to be negatives but became positives.

(Alternative: If this is too personal or revealing, ask for examples from the Bible, history, or the news.)

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Confidence in Christ

(Review Rom. 15:17 with your class.)

Paul spends a large part of Romans systematically deconstructing any reasons his readers might have for faith in themselves and their future. Gentiles are almost uniformly pagans and degenerates dooming themselves to destruction. Jews are almost as bad, possibly worse because they fail to live up to their own standards and add hypocrisy to an already long list. What is there to hope for then?

“Paul’s glorying was not in himself but ‘through Christ Jesus. . . .’ He recognized that he has nothing

whereof to boast. . . . but that as a minister of the gospel he did all things in and through Christ"—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p.645.

Consider This: Why is it so natural for us to look to our own presumed personal qualities or external factors when we really should be focusing on God and the valid sense of confidence and self-worth that He wants to give us through Christ? How might one remind oneself of this in one's daily life?

■ *How do the following verses elaborate on the confidence we are given in Christ? 2 Cor. 10:17, Phil. 4:13.*

II. Christ Here and Hereafter

(Review 2 Cor. 1:20-24 with your class.)

Consider This: Our faith in Christ and His plans for us are not some silly fantasy about an imaginary superhero in the sky. What has He already done for us to make

Himself worthy of our trust?

"That is, through Christ. All the promises of God became incarnate in Him, they met their fulfillment in Him. He is thus the evidence of the reliability of all the divine promises made to the fathers. . . . The Christian faith is an absolute certainty."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p.832.

"Through Christ the promises are proved reliable, and through His people are they proved efficacious. Through the life and ministry of Paul in particular the name of God was being glorified."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p.833.

III. The Cross

(Review 1 Cor. 1:18 with your class.)

This verse indicates that what would have been regarded as most shameful and difficult about the Christian message Paul preached was really the most central fact of Jesus' life and ministry.

Consider This: To people who don't understand Christ's ministry or what He came to save us from, the concept and image of the Cross might seem wholly depressing, but it's also the only chance we have, because there the Lord did what was needed for us to have the hope of salvation.

IV. Themes of Hope

(Review Eph. 2:8-10 with your class.)

Consider This: What is missing from many people's experience of salvation in Christ?

This verse teaches us that salvation does not mean that Christ saves us and simply walks off, leaving us to do whatever we were doing before. On the contrary, we are being sanctified, in a very real sense re-created to be what we were meant to be in the first place. How do we experience this promise of sanctification in our lives on a daily basis?

V. Themes of Truth

(Review Thess. 4:13-15 with your class.)

Consider This: For all his emphasis on grace and the centrality of Christ, His perfect life, and His sacrifice, Paul apparently thought it was very important that his readers have precisely the correct information on what happens after death, the end of time, etc. Why does Paul think these things are important? How do they fit in with our message to the world?

STEP 3—Practice**Thought Questions:**

- ❶ How was Paul's background a hindrance or disadvantage to him in the path he later took? In what ways was it an advantage? A disadvantage?

- ❷ What false notions, cultural conditioning, and prejudices did Paul have to overcome? What about ourselves? In what ways has our background, education,

and culture worked against us? How can we overcome these barriers?

Application Questions:

❶ One thing most people know about Paul is that he changed his name from Saul. Why do you think he changed it?

❷ One thing that is often emphasized about Jesus is that He did not emphasize His rights, accepting unjust treatment and death. What example does Paul give us here? When is it legitimate for us to fight aggressively for our own rights?

Witnessing

As we see how Paul allowed God to use his unique talents, personality, and life history, how can we make use of our own uniqueness, flaws and all, to call people to Jesus?

STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Ask class members to share ways in which God has shown Himself to them in different circumstances.

Paul had a particularly interesting conversion experience. But it could be argued that all conversion experiences are interesting in their way. Write yours down. Be prepared to share it with others, either in group settings or one on one. How is it similar to, or different from, those you have heard about from other people? How was God uniquely preparing you for service to Him? No matter how different the circumstance might have been, what things did the various experiences have in common with each other?

Do you know yourself as well as you could? Which aspects of your personality and temperament help you in your Christian life, and which hinder you? Find out.

It goes without saying that Paul was a man of prayer. Pray for God's guidance in your service to Him and mean it. Be prepared to follow it.

Paul's path led him to join with the people he initially hated the most. Do you have any prejudices or negative first impressions of individuals or groups you might want to put aside? Think about it.

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

TE-3Q-2008-02-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *1 Corinthians 9:22*

The Student Will:

Know: Indicate to the class some of the ways in which Paul adapted the Christian message to the contemporary culture.

Feel: The importance of adapting the presentation of the message without changing the message itself.

Do: Figure out some ways to do the same thing in presenting the Advent message to people.

Learning Outline:

I. "All Things to All People" (*1 Corinthians 9:22*)

A. How do you do that?

B. Read Paul's sermon in Acts 13:13-41 and his sermon in Acts 17:16-31. What's the difference?

C. What happened in the new church in Antioch in Syria that had never happened before in the young Christian church?

II. Keeping the Message Intact (*1 Timothy 4:16*)

A. You heard someone present the Adventist message in an entirely different way than you learned it, and you didn't like it! What made you feel that way?

B. Discuss this question with the class: "Why is it important to keep the Advent message intact even if you present it in a unique way?"

III. Dealing with Athenian Philosophers

Case Study: Your friend is a secular person indifferent to religion. "It's fine for those who like it, but you can take it or leave it." What do you say to this contemporary "Athenian philosopher"?

Summary: If people don't understand what's being said, they won't listen. Paul set an example of how to communicate Christianity in different settings and gave us some good ideas on how to make the Advent message understandable.

TE-3Q-2008-02-Learning Cycle**STEP 1-Motivate**

Jesus said that the truth would set us free. As Christians, we have found that the truth Jesus presented to us and the world did indeed set us free. But that doesn't mean all our problems go away, and one of those problems arises from friends, relatives, or business associates who don't like or appreciate our new lifestyle and worldview.

How did Paul overcome similar barriers in a culture in which much of his message was completely alien to many of his hearers? What can we learn from his experience?

Based on this, ask the class members to describe a situation in which they had to stand up for their faith in an unfriendly environment. How did it go? What did they learn? What mistakes did they make? What might they do differently next time?

STEP 2—Explore**Bible Commentary**

I. All Things to All People

(Review 1 Cor. 9:22 with your class.)

From what we can glean about Paul's career elsewhere in the New Testament, a tendency to compromise was not one of his vices/virtues. It is quite clear that Paul did not advocate any compromise on essentials, and that smooth social interaction was not his primary interest.

"Everything that Paul did, his ready adaptation to the particular society in which he found himself and his willingness to be tolerant and patient toward all men had but one objective—the saving of those who would believe his message."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 734.

Consider This: What do such passages as Acts 9:19–22 or

Acts 13:14-16 say to us about how this approach looks when put into action?

II. Witness to the Athenians

(Review Acts 17:18-33 with your class.)

Consider This: The following commentary explains why Paul's approach to the Athenians differs so much from examples of his preaching and teaching recorded elsewhere in that it is one of the few that do not appeal to Scripture and in fact refers to other literature of the day.

"By quoting from their own literature, Paul illustrated his policy of becoming 'all things to all men' (1 Cor. 9:22). They would recognize that they were not dealing with an uneducated Jew. . . ., but with a man possessed of a culture like their own, and familiar with the thoughts of their poets."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 354.

Why do you think Paul took this approach? How might we need to do something similar in our attempts to reach out to those who don't have a biblical background at all? What good is quoting the Bible to people who don't pay any heed or attention to it?

III. The Sticking Point

(Review Acts 17:34 with your class.)

Paul was able to convince his hearers that his "philosophy" was at least worthy of consideration, up until the point at which he had to bring up (so to speak) the resurrection of the dead.

It is instructive to note that even though Paul was quite willing to adapt his message to his audience, he was not willing to omit important pieces of information to make the parts that remained more palatable. How important that we

learn to do the same thing; that is, to approach people where they are at but not to stop there. We need to bring them along to where they need to be.

Consider This: Acts 17:34 shows us very clearly that the “all things to all people” approach does not justify any effort to alter the truth either actively or passively.

IV. Building Churches and the Church

(Review Rom. 15:18-23 with your class and compare with 1 Cor. 3:6-14.)

Consider This: Paul is quite specific in this passage in regard to his method of spreading the message. Two things stand out: He avoided extraneous matters, speaking only of Christ and His qualities and

accomplishments, and he avoided going to places where someone else had already preached Christ.

■ *What does this say to us today about, for example, our relationship to other Christian churches, or efforts to convince other Christians of our distinctive doctrines?*

In the light of his other writings, it is probably reasonable to assume that Paul is describing his form of evangelism and ministry, not prescribing it for all others in all times and places.

V. Becoming an Example

(Review 1 Thess. 1:6-8 with your class.)

Consider This: Being a witness to God is not just telling people about Him, but giving evidence that you yourself have experienced God.

“The Thessalonian believers were true missionaries. Their hearts burned with zeal for their Savior, who had delivered them from a fear of ‘the wrath to come.’ ”—
Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 256.

Consider This: Nowhere is it suggested that the Thessalonians were such good examples because they were perfect. In his letters to them, Paul makes his share of corrections and suggestions. But the Thessalonians were growing, learning, and sharing their faith.

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

① Most of us have probably heard or been told that we should not study non-Christian philosophies and religions because it is better to become familiar with what we know is true rather than with what we know not to be true. Do you agree?

② What does the fact that Paul is able to find material to support his points in classical Greek literature suggest to you?

Application Question:

In many parts of the world, pastors and church members are departing from the traditions and habits that have defined church for centuries, creating megachurches, seekers' churches, etc. While these have been wildly successful, at least in the sense of drawing big crowds, they also have drawn their share of criticism. How do we determine which church traditions are based upon

principle and which are merely a matter of habit or taste?

Witnessing

How can Paul's methods teach us how to reach out to the larger community in a multicultural, multiethnic society?

Consider This: What aspects of Adventism do you think might particularly appeal to the non-Adventists you know? What parts might that person find objectionable? How can help smooth out these potentially objectionable aspects of our faith without compromising it?

STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Ask class members to describe ways in which they have engaged or could engage segments of society that they are unfamiliar with. Offer the

following suggestions for bringing God's message to a world where many people might not share our traditions and assumptions.

Try This:

- ① Is there another culture or subculture that you are curious about? Learn about it.
- ② Some of the divisions in our larger society are mirrored in the church. Try crossing these divides occasionally. Example: Why not visit a church that is primarily of another ethnic background?
- ③ Develop a friendship with someone whose religious beliefs and/or lifestyle differs from your own.

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

TE-3Q-2008-03-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *Matthew 11:11*

The Student Will:

Know: The content and validity of the comparison between John the Baptist and the remnant church.

Feel: A sincere assurance of belonging to God's last-day people with a special mission to the world.

Do: Develop a plan to spend time participating in a "John the Baptist" ministry.

Learning Outline:

I. A Special Calling (*Luke 1:76*)

A. What are the parallels between John's "special calling" and the "special calling" of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

II. Special Message (*Matt. 11:14*)

A. As a class, review the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the “Elijah message.”

B. There are those who either do not *understand* this message’s importance or do not wish to *recognize* its importance. Why is the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding still valid?

III. Crucial Lessons (*Matt. 3:2*)

A. What did Jesus refer to when He said that the “least” in the kingdom is “greater” than John? (*Matt. 11:11*)?

B. What are some of today’s answers to the people’s question to John in Luke 3:10 “What should we do then?” (NIV).

C. In Colossians 2:8 Paul talked about “hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition. . . .” What contemporary application might that have in your church or personal life?

Summary: John the Baptist was called to prepare the way for Jesus' first advent. His mission parallels that given God's people at the end of time.

TE-3Q-2008-03-Learning Cycle**STEP 1-Motivate**

John the Baptist's life was not an easy or pleasant one by ordinary standards. Not only did his message and way of life put him strongly at odds with much of society, but there was no ego gratification in it. His whole purpose was to prepare the way for Someone else. As far as he knew, when Jesus came he would be forgotten, or at most a footnote. And yet, John the Baptist was not forgotten. Not by his fellow humans, not by Jesus, and not by the Bible.

Ask class members to describe any instances in which they felt that their efforts to serve God or follow God's will seemed to be failing. What did they learn from these experiences that could be of value to others?

STEP 2—Explore**Bible Commentary****I. Preparing the Way**

(Review Matt. 11:11 with your class.)

In his time, John often was compared to Old Testament prophets. Jesus here points out that he was in fact much greater and more fortunate, in that his whole purpose was to announce the coming of the kingdom of heaven in the person of Christ. Any of the prophets of the Old Testament would have given anything for the certainty that they would not only be the ones to predict this happening imminently but would live to see it themselves.

Conversely, he was not quite as fortunate as those who actually would live to see Jesus' ministry fulfilled in His death, resurrection, and ascension.

Consider This: We live in the time after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension and thus know things that completely eluded Jesus' own apostles and followers when He walked the earth. Therefore according to Jesus Himself, we are "greater" (more privileged, actually) than John the Baptist or any of the others who didn't live to know about the death and resurrection of Jesus. What do you think of this idea? Are we really more privileged than these people?

Also, what advantages do we have over them in terms of seeing a lot of prophecy fulfilled that they, in their own time, didn't?

II. Responding to the Call

(Review Luke 1:80 with your class.)

Consider This: The Gospels make clear that John was called to his ministry long before he even existed. But he didn't merely wait for things to "fall into place." Look at Luke 1:15, Luke 1:80, and Matthew 3:2.

"God does not force the will of His creatures. . . . It remains for us to choose whether we will be set free from the bondage of sin, to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 43-44.

III. The Elijah Message

(Review Matt. 11:14 with your class.)

Elijah is one of the most compelling prophets in the Bible. Like John the Baptist and Jesus, he wasn't much of a writer. All the surviving material concerning him is about—not by—him. Yet, his message didn't require much writing. It was the message of the whole Bible before and after his time, stripped to essentials: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

Consider This: Out of all the prophets, Elijah was the one most associated as an individual with the hope for the end of days. Why do you think this is the case?

IV. Repent and Change

(Review Matt. 3:2 with your class.)

Consider This: In John's message, it could be suggested that the repentance was to be followed by action. How is our faith revealed by our behavior?

"James contends that 'faith' which does not result in good 'works' is worthless. Genuine faith is obvious to others from the 'works' it produces; its existence does not rest on mere personal testimony."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 520-521.

V. Tradition

(Review Col. 2:8 with your class.)

Consider This: What exactly is tradition, and why might it be harmful to one's spiritual life?

When we speak of tradition, it might help to know exactly what we mean by the term. According to the online Wikipedia, "the word tradition comes from the Latin word *tradition* which means 'to hand down' or 'to hand over.' However, on a more basic theoretical level, tradition(s) can be seen as information or composed of information. For that which is brought into the present from the past, in a particular societal context, is information. This is even more fundamental than particular acts or practices even if repeated over a long sequence of time. For such acts or practices, once performed, disappear unless they have been transformed into some manner of communicable information."—
"Tradition," *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tradition>.

Consider This: It is clear that tradition in Jesus' time was much more than "things we do over and over" as we tend to think of it today. As such, it became a substitute for God for many people, especially as it touched upon the relationship between human beings and God. We can assume that this was the major point of the antipathy to "tradition" we find in the New Testament.

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

① John and his message were obviously attractive to many people. What was it about him and his teaching that drew some and repelled others?

② Can justification by faith be found in John's message? If so, where?

Application Questions:

① John was sure of his calling. Can we be sure that God does have a distinct calling for each of us? How might we find it?

② Is there anything in our lives/society today that exerts a force comparable to that exerted by the “traditions of men” in the New Testament era?

Witnessing

How can we call people to make the changes necessary in their lives? Is it enough to introduce them to Jesus and allow the rest to follow?

STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Ask class members to share ways in which God has guided them in their spiritual lives. Offer the following suggestions for claiming God’s help in becoming

the people He intends for them to be and to act on what they learn.

- Take a day, a weekend, or an hour to shut out the distractions and listen to God's voice. Set aside a special time and—ideally—a place to communicate with God and have Him communicate with you.
- The next time you are tempted to indulge in instant gratification, maybe you should skip it just this once. Do something else with the money: for example, like give it to a person or cause who really needs it.
- Reconcile with somebody. If you were in the wrong, admit it and fix it.
- Inform yourself. Take action or speak out on a social issue that concerns you. Pray for the situation and people involved.

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

TE-3Q-2008-04-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *1 John 1:1*

The Student Will:

Know: Have the absolute assurance that what is said about Jesus in the Bible is true and accurate.

Feel: An admiration and attachment to Jesus as the only Savior of humanity, and a true Hero to be emulated.

Do: Make a list of ways in which you feel you are “imitating” Jesus and compare it to what we learned in this week’s lesson.

Learning Outline:

I. A well-known European theologian made the following statement. Discuss this statement in your class. What are its implications? “Our system

[calendar dating] does not proceed from an indicial point, but from a center; . . . It takes as the mid-point an event that is open to historical investigation and can be chronologically fixed. . . . This event is the birth of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." John 1:1-14.—Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time, The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, Rev. Ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964) p. 17.

II. How do you explain the titles of Wednesday's and Thursday's lessons, "Exposing the Hypocrites," and "Loving the Hypocrites"? What does that have to do with a lesson about Jesus? Matthew 23:13, 23:37.

III. How do you explain Ellen White's statement in Friday's lesson "We may do much in a short time. . . ."

Summary: Even the most commonly used secular calendar systems divide time by the birth of Jesus. His ministry and plan of salvation are the only true hope of humanity.

TE-3Q-2008-04-Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Who was Jesus Christ? Was He just a great teacher? Just a prophet? The Son of God? Divinity in the flesh? Most important, what is He to you? Is Jesus your Savior? Is he your example? Is He your Lord? What evidence do our lives give that reveal just how we view Jesus?

Ask your class members to describe how their understanding of and relationship to Jesus has changed or progressed over the years.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. God With Us

(Review 1 John 1:1 with your class.)

When humankind was first created, we walked with God; that is, God was able to manifest Himself to us in ways that He doesn't now. Sin caused alienation from God, which over the centuries and millennia became deeper and more pronounced, until it was assumed to be the natural order of things. Sin, death, alienation, sickness, unhappiness, fear, instability, war, and so forth are so common we just assume that's the way things are supposed to be. But that's not how it was supposed to be. No, not at all.

And Jesus came to change all this. He was God in the flesh, here, once again, so we could see Him, talk to Him, and know what He is like. Most important, He came in order to give us all a chance to start over, and to have a new beginning now and for eternity.

Consider This: How do the following verses assure us of Christ's continuing love and care for us?

John 14:18-20, Luke 1:11.

II. Who Was Jesus?

(Review Luke 24:7 with your class.)

Consider This: How did Jesus' life and teachings find their fulfillment in His death?

"As the inspired apostle John beheld the height, the depth, the breadth of the Father's love toward the perishing race, he was filled with adoration and reverence. . . . Through transgression the sons of man became subjects of Satan. Through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the sons of Adam may become the sons of God."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 15.

III. In the Beginning Was the Word

(Review John 1:1-14 with your class.)

John 1:1-14 leaves no room to doubt that Jesus was God in every sense imaginable. He was eternal and was the means by which the universe and the earth were created.

“John 1:1 is probably the clearest assertion of the deity of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. It contains three brief but profound statements that complement each other by correcting the misunderstandings that would arise if any one of the three were examined in isolation from the others. . . .”—Jon Paulien, *John*, (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1995) p. 42.

Consider This: John 1:1-11 is, it cannot be denied, an astounding series of statements. Look at John 1:14-18. What do these texts add?

IV. The Human Jesus

(Review Luke 15:1-2 with your class.)

Consider This: In Jesus' time, people who considered themselves or aspired to be "holy" associated only with other holy people. This was a matter of ritual purity, and to do otherwise was nearly unthinkable. While we as Christians do not have formal ritual purity standards today, are there places or people we regard as too dangerous or damaged to bother with?

"Shepherds, the scribes ruled, could never really purge themselves from ritual pollution because they handled animals continually, and were thought to rob their masters. Women had dubious value as religious examples, despite the scriptural mention of Deborah, Miriam, and others. Yet a shepherd and a woman are the very ones whose desperate search, and exuberant joy upon finding, display God (Luke

15:4-6, 8, 9).”—Walter Scragg, *The God Who Says Yes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1987), pp. 86-87.

V. Hypocrisy and Hypocrites

(Review Matt. 23:13 with your class.)

Consider This: Jesus, as the above text suggests, didn't take hypocrisy lightly. Why do you think He was so uncompromising in regard to it?

“This hypocrisy [of the Pharisees] Christ declared would bring them the greater damnation. The same rebuke falls upon many in our day who make a high profession of piety. Their lives are stained by selfishness and avarice, yet they throw over it all a garment of seeming purity, and thus for a time deceive their fellow men. But they cannot deceive God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 614.

Consider This: Who is actually harmed the most by hypocrisy? Hypocrisy is a deadly sin that by definition is hidden, unlike those committed by “decent, honest” publicans and sinners.

In spite of that, God loves hypocrites too much to want them to stay hypocrites. Ask for God’s help to become the real thing.

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

① People want to make Jesus into their own image. How do we sometimes try to squeeze Jesus into a mold we’ve created for Him? Why is that easier to do than we often think?

② How do you think people can claim to admire Jesus while ignoring or discounting the things He said, including the things the Gospels record him saying about Himself?

Application Questions:

① Jesus was known for associating with society's outcasts. As humans, we tend to associate with those most like ourselves, and as Christians we tend to associate with other Christians. How do we reconcile these impulses?

② The Pharisees seemed to hope to achieve perfection and "godliness" without the direct intervention of God. Are we ever guilty of a similar attitude? If so, how so?

Witnessing

There has never been more information about Jesus available, but much of it is incorrect or misleading. How can we help those to whom we witness better understand the truth about Jesus, about who He was, what He was like, and what He has done for us? Why is it so important that we, individually, know Jesus? How much better our witness would be if we truly knew the One in whom we were talking about!

Consider This: Paul stated in Philippians 1:18 that “The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice” (NIV).

STEP 4—Apply

Consider This: Ask class members to share those aspects of Jesus Christ’s teachings, life, and ministry that speak most to them personally. Offer the following

suggestions for renewing or rediscovering the freshness of their relationship with Jesus and possibly conveying it to others.

- Rewrite a favorite story from the Gospels about Jesus, with yourself in the place of the individual that Jesus is interacting with. How would you feel? What would it motivate you to do?
- The next time you pray, really talk to Jesus. Say what is on your mind. How would the Jesus you know from the Gospels respond?
- Don't be a hypocrite. Ask for help from Jesus and others to admit and overcome your faults.
- Asking "What Would Jesus Do?" seemed like a really good idea, until people started wearing it on their T-shirts and not doing it. Try actually doing what Jesus would do. How would your actions be radically different from what they are now?

Invite a class member to close with prayer.

TE-3Q-2008-05-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *Matthew 10:31*

The Student Will:

Know: The essentials of witnessing.

Feel: A desire to witness.

Do: Develop a plan of action for personal witnessing.

Learning Outline:

I. The "Kingdom of God"

A. Here are some statements from well-known sources.

How do these concepts of "kingdom" relate to what Jesus was talking about?

- Martin Luther King: "I have seen the promised land."
- John the Baptist: "The kingdom of God is at hand" (*Mark 1:15*).
- The "Kingdom Age"—the rule of God on earth

defined as control of all social institutions (a contemporary Pentecostal viewpoint).

II. Witnessing Instructions (*Matthew 10*)

A. As a witnessing methodology, what does “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” mean (Matt. 10:16)?

B. Monday’s lesson states that based on Matthew 10:8 these first disciples had “powers” we don’t have. How are we to understand that? Did these powers stop with the original disciples?

III. Whom to Witness to? (*Matt. 10:5, 6; 28:19*)

A. How can you correlate these three verses that seem to contradict each other?

B. What is a “cultural sensitivity” and why is it important? (See Tuesday’s lesson.)

Summary: The original disciples received witnessing instructions based on timeless principles. They work just as well today when properly understood and applied.

TE-3Q-2008-05-Learning Cycle**STEP 1—Motivate****Say to your class:**

Imagine: Jesus comes to where you work (at the office, assembly line, shop, classroom, barn, or company vehicle).

He says, "I'm here to invite you to follow Me and be one of My disciples."

"What, exactly, does that mean?" you ask.

He answers, "It means I want you to help Me build up My kingdom."

"What about my family, my job, my other responsibilities?" you want to know.

"I didn't say anything about leaving town," He says with a smile. "You can still live at home, keep your job, and take care of your family; I just want you to be more deliberate about recognizing opportunities to build up My

kingdom.”

Ask your class:

Does it ever seem as though you don't have what it takes to be among Christ's inner circle? That those who leave home and family to follow Jesus are somehow more dedicated than those who choose to stay behind to tend their family and work responsibilities?

Consider This: Can we fully be Christ's disciples without leaving everything to follow Him? If so, how? Be specific.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. The Kingdom of Heaven Is Near

(Review Matt. 5:3-10 with your class.)

When Jesus gave His disciples the message: “ ‘The kingdom of heaven is near’ ” (*Matt. 10:7, NIV*), He had in mind a kingdom different from what most of us are familiar with. If anything, He had in mind an “upside down kingdom,” where the poor are more blessed than the rich; where the meek are more honored than the powerful; where the persecuted are to be admired more than persecutors (see *Matt. 5:3-12*). What other aspects of Christ’s kingdom are radically different from the common values of today?

Consider This: Which kingdom principles are Christians in your community known for? Or are they simply just part of the regular community, in that their lives are no different from everyone else’s?

Gallup once took a poll in the United States that showed professed Christians aren’t a whole lot different from their nonbelieving neighbors when it comes to basic moral

values. What horrible message should this send to us as those who claim to be followers of Christ?

II. Serving in Christ's Name

(Review Matt. 10:1-10 with your class.)

Two significant words appear in the first two verses of Matthew 10: *disciples* and *apostles*. Although these two words both appear in connection with the Twelve, there is an important difference between the two.

The word *disciple* refers to learners or students; those who put themselves under the guidance or discipline of their master and live by that individual's philosophy.

The word *apostle* (literally, one who is sent) refers to those who have all the authority of the person who sent them. In the common vernacular, it could refer to a slave who had the authority to sign a master's name to a legal document. For the perspective of Jesus' followers, it means that His apostles had all His

authority to “drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness” (*Matt. 10:1, NIV*).

Christ’s apostles thus became His agents in establishing the power and authority of His kingdom. Technically, an apostle served only one generation: an apostle could not, strictly speaking, invite another person to be an apostle of the master; that prerogative belonged solely to the master.

Consider This: In today’s church are there some who are *disciples* and some who are *apostles*? Do we have any authority aside from that which Christ has granted us? How is that authority granted?

III. Snakes and Doves

(Review *Matt. 10:16-20* with your class.)

In the age of sound bites and pull-quotes, the idea of being quoted out of context is a real possibility (just

ask any politician or public personality). How important is it, then, for Christians to speak carefully and diplomatically?

Consider This: While we can't possibly be prepared for every situation we may face each and every day, we can be confident that we won't have to speak or act alone. What comfort can we gain from Jesus' promise: " 'It will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you' " (*Matt. 10:20, NIV*)?

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

❶ While we may not have literally followed Jesus down the dusty lanes of Galilee, we are His disciples every bit as were the Twelve. In what ways does that realization change the way you see yourself? Your congregation?

② Jesus' promise is that as we cooperate with Him in spreading the gospel, He will be with us " 'to the very end of the age' " (*Matt. 28:20, NIV*). What tangible results do you expect from that promise?

Application Question:

Jesus' Great Commission (*Matt. 28:18-20*) has local, as well as global implications. While we can support the taking of the gospel to the entire world, Christ's commission won't be completed until it's completed in our own communities, as well. How might God be calling you—as individuals and as a group—to take the gospel to your community?

Witnessing

We are God's agents for sharing the principles of His kingdom with our community. What aspects of His kingdom principles would you share with the following:

- a single parent?

- a teenager?
- a business person?
- a scientist?
- an immigrant?

Why must we present the truth “differently” to different people? How can we do this without compromising it?

Consider This: Just as advertisers have target audiences and focus their messages to reach them, so should Christians be careful about how they tailor their message to their listeners. One size does not fit all.

STEP 4—Apply

“ ‘A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master,’ ” said Jesus (*Matt. 10:24, NIV*). What,

exactly, do people sign up for when they become one of Jesus' disciples? Why did you decide to follow Jesus?

Consider This: Jesus was a rebel, a renegade, a maverick. The values He came to establish were completely out of phase with those of the religious practitioners of His day. That's why He eventually ended up crucified, humiliated between two thieves.

Reflect on Jesus' story and consider these present-day options. If Jesus had only two hours to visit your community, would He spend it:

- with adults or with children?
- with the pastor or with someone struggling with temptation?
- at prayer meeting or at a sports bar?
- with the "A" students or with the dropouts?
- with the Pathfinders or the gang members?

The question we all have to ask ourselves is, What does it mean to be a disciple now, in this place? Not, What does my church expect? Or, What does my family expect? But, How can I most effectively and creatively live as one of Jesus' disciples?

Invite a class member to close with prayer, asking God to guide each class member in being sensitive to ministry opportunities open to Jesus' modern disciples.

TE-3Q-2008-06-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *Matthew 9:36*

The Student Will:

Know: What “compassion” means in terms of Jesus as a model.

Feel: A desire to personally experience that kind of compassion.

Do: Call for a moment of silence in the class, asking each member to consider personally how “compassionate” he or she really is in terms of this week’s lesson about Jesus.

Learning Outline:

I. The Height and Depth of Compassion (*Luke 11:1-13*)

Talk this case study over with the class to see what comes of the discussion:

- Someone said that their congregation was very “compassionate.” What does that mean? Is compassion simply something we feel or it is something we do? Or both? How can we know if we truly have compassion as Jesus did?

II. The Personal Touch (Mark 1:22, 11:18, 12:37)

A. How is compassion related to a “personal touch”?

B. Ellen G. White remarked that “Men’s hearts are no softer today than when Christ was upon the earth.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol.4, p. 234. How do you deal with such people and still show compassion and a human touch?

III. Components of Compassion (Matthew 11:28, 29)

In what way is forgiveness a major component of compassion?

Summary: Jesus, the compassionate Savior, hated sin and

loved sinners. His method of ministering to people in crowds and individually should be a model for our witness today.

TE-3Q-2008-06-Learning Cycle**STEP 1-Motivate**

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus is described with the words:

"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*).

If Jesus had compassion on the thousands who followed Him all those centuries ago, what does He feel today for the millions who are oppressed, exploited, and marginalized?

Every day headlines scream the details of the horrific destruction caused by natural disasters and the resulting loss of life and property. Television reports chronicle tales of human misery caused by ethnic and religious hatred and intolerance and the widows, orphans, and other refugees displaced by such atrocities. Direct mail appeals solicit financial support for people caught in the endless cycle of disease, poverty, oppression, and exploitation.

When Jesus preached “ ‘the kingdom of heaven is near’ ” (Matt. 10:7, NIV), His deeds of compassion, ministry, and service reinforced His commitment to improving people’s quality of life now, not just sometime in the distant future.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. God With Us

(Review John 1:1-18 with your class.)

One of the fundamental truths of Christianity is that Jesus, Himself fully God, came down to the level of fallen humanity. Theologians call that His “incarnation.” The word in John 1:14 translated “dwelt among us” (John 1:14) literally means that Jesus “pitched His tent” among us. In his paraphrase of the Bible, Eugene Peterson

renders this verse: "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood" (*John 1:14, Message*).

There is, in fact, an Old Testament precedent for what Jesus did in the New Testament. The earthly sanctuary system was set up with the express purpose of allowing God to be close to His people. He told Moses, " 'Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them' " (*Exod. 25:8, NIV*).

Consider This: What does Jesus' incarnation (and the Old Testament sanctuary) say about God's desire to be close to His people? Think about the implications of this idea: The Creator God, the One who made the heavens and the earth, that is, all creation, chose to dwell in a human building. What does this tell us about God's love for us and His willingness to reach down and impact our lives?

II. He Spoke Their Language

Jesus often used parables to describe His kingdom to His

followers. His listeners could easily identify with the everyday events He described—weddings, feasts, farmers, shepherds, fathers and sons, etc.

Unfortunately, the more theologically “sophisticated” we get, the more we debate the finer points about what it means to be a Christian and the less likely we are to be able to communicate with people who may not have the background in Christianity we have.

Consider This: Every specialty has its own vocabulary—carpenters, mechanics, doctors, professors, etc. How can Christians translate the principles of Christ’s kingdom into language that people can understand?

Jesus used parables to describe His kingdom. If you look at today’s technology, do you see any possibilities for spreading the gospel that include, for example, stories told in the medium of film or television?

III. They Responded

While the gospels record several times that Jesus spoke to audiences of hundreds or thousands, there are at least as many times that He spoke to an audience of just one or two. Jesus' conversations with Nicodemus (*John 3*), the woman at the well (*John 4*), the disciples on the road to Emmaus (*Luke 24*), are all examples of when He took time to focus on His followers' individual needs.

Consider This: The intimacy of private conversations often allow for more focused, direct communication. Yet, relationships of this kind take time to develop. Ask your class to suggest what made Jesus so effective in person-to-person conversations.

STEP 3—PRACTICE

Thought Questions:

❶ Even though God spoke often through His prophets, that was not as effective as His Son living and teaching as a man (see *Heb. 1:1, 2*). What does that say about the importance of letting Christ's character be reflected in our lives?

❷ What does it mean to be "in the world" but not "of the world" (*John 17:16*)? How important was it for Jesus to live among those He was trying to reach with the gospel?

❸ When it comes to modeling the values of Christ's kingdom, who is likely to do it better in the longterm: evangelists, who live in a community for a few days or weeks? Or pastors, who live and serve parishes for years? What are the implications for those of us who want to serve our communities?

Application Questions:

❶ Jesus told Philip: " 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' " (*John 14:9, NIV*). How realistic is it to

tell our friends, “Anyone who has seen me has seen Jesus”?

② For generations Adventists have advanced the ideal of moving away from large population centers to live in rural settings. How do you reconcile Jesus’ example, as well as His words, “ ‘You are the salt of the earth’ ” (*Matt. 5:13, NIV*), with that ideal? Are they contradictory? What advantages are there to country living as opposed to urban living? Or vice versa? How can we know what’s the best for us in our own individual circumstances?

Witnessing

Countless options exist for reflecting Christ’s compassion to our communities and to the larger world. Examine the following and discuss their advantages and disadvantages:

- A community-based homeless shelter operated by a consortium of churches

- Adventist Community Services (Dorcas Society)
- A community-funded shelter for battered women
- Stop Smoking classes taught by church members
- Supporting a development organization in a foreign country

STEP 4—Apply

The word *compassion* literally means “to feel with” or “to sympathize with.” It’s not enough to say about a painful situation, “Isn’t that a shame; somebody really should do something about that.” When Jesus saw that the people “ ‘were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,’ ” He told His disciples, “ ‘Ask the Lord of the harvest . . . to send out workers into his harvest field’ ” (*Matt. 9:36, 38, NIV*). We are those workers.

This doesn’t mean that we all have to preach or give Bible studies or minister to the sick. But it does mean that we have all been given gifts for spreading the

gospel and building up God's kingdom. How can we best, in whatever situation we are in, use our talents for witnessing to others?

Consider This: In the final moments of your class, ask each person to share what gift he or she has been given to build up Christ's kingdom. Ask each person for which community or church-based outreach program does he/she plan to use that gift.

Invite a class member to pray that members will find a way to demonstrate Christ's compassion to the community and global needs they're aware of.

TE-3Q-2008-07-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *3 John 4*

The Student Will:

Know: John is the connecting link, physically and spiritually, between the early church and the second generation.

Feel: A desire to see the class develop character traits molded by Jesus as were John's.

Do: Have the class members take a close look at themselves in the light of John's life and accomplishments.

Learning Outline:

I. The Logos: Theology at It's Best (*John 1:1-3*)

A. Outline with the class the various applications of the Greek word *logos* (See Tuesday's lesson).

B. How does John apply this *logos* concept to Jesus? Why do you think John used this particular word when he talked about Jesus some thirty years after His ministry on earth?

II. Called (*Luke 5:1-11*)

Case Study: Imagine yourself as the manager of this “Peter & John Fisheries, Inc.” (*Luke 5:10*), trying to get along with Peter, the militant, armed nationalist matched with John, the hot-tempered ambitious social climber? How would you handle that?

III. Character Refinement (*Mark 10:35-45; 1 John 2:10*)

Case Study: Have the class picture John some years later. How has he changed, what changed him, and how does he now react? Add some Bible texts to illustrate your analysis.

Summary: John let his time with Jesus flow into all his words and actions. His latter life and writings remind us of the primacy of love in the Christian life.

TE-3Q-2008-07-Learning Cycle**STEP 1—Motivate**

Some people read the Bible as if they're cramming for an exam or preparing to play a game of Trivial Pursuit. They fill their heads with lots of details: names, places, chapters, and verses. But that kind of knowledge, while useful on a certain level, does not have the power to transform our lives. Jesus said to those who persecuted Him, " 'You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life' " (*John 5:39, 40, NIV*).

This week's lesson focuses on one of Christ's disciples who, perhaps more than any other, understood Jesus' character of unconditional love and unqualified acceptance of sinners.

Your task as teacher is to remind your class that knowledge about the Bible will take us only so far in

securing our salvation. In the final analysis, only our relationship with Christ will save us and transform us—as it did for John—from being “children of Thunder” to “disciples whom Jesus loved.”

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Startled by Grace

(Have someone read Luke 5:1-11 out loud.)

A few years ago the book *The Tipping Point* appeared on several best-seller lists. In it author Malcolm Gladwell described the process by which a person, idea, or product goes from being practically unknown to sweeping society like wildfire.

It's likely that John, James, Peter, and Andrew knew about Jesus some time before they laid down their

nets to follow Him. It's unwise to drop everything to follow someone we know nothing about. (What parents would encourage their children to marry someone they met that afternoon on a flight from Chicago?)

Consider This: What was it about Jesus and His teachings that captured the attention of these first disciples? Remember, they hadn't yet seen some of His greatest miracles or heard some of His more popular teachings. What role did the miracle of the fish play in their decision?

II. Transformed by Degrees

(Have someone read Luke 9:51-56 and Mark 10:35-45 out loud.)

In the Bible, the only person who lived a perfect life is Jesus. Everyone else had to grow in their spiritual development as they became more like Christ. The fact that we can read in a few verses both their failures and

their triumphs may give some the false hope that transformation is effortless and instantaneous. In fact, spiritual growth requires discipline, patience, and perseverance practiced over a lifetime.

Consider This: Ellen G. White wrote: "The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 57, 58.

Are we more likely to notice spiritual growth in ourselves and others over days, months, or years? What does that say about spiritual growth?

III. Captivated by Love

(Have someone read 1 John 3:1-3 out loud.)

In the Gospels, the names of Peter, James, and John always head the lists of Jesus' disciples. Yet, in John's

Gospel, his name doesn't appear at all. Four times John is identified as "the one whom Jesus loved." John leaned against Jesus at the Last Supper, he was at the foot of the cross when all the other disciples had fled, he was one of the first to visit the empty tomb, and he spent the rest of his life reminding Christ's followers of the importance of love.

Consider This: What does love look like in your life? What form does it take in the life of your congregation?

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

❶ Can you remember when you realized that salvation is a gift that cannot be earned? Describe in one word how you felt when you came to that realization. Why is this such an important truth to remember? How can you help others understand the reality of salvation by faith alone?

② Some transformations seem instantaneous: drunk to sober, addicted to liberated, guilty to guilt-free. But other less dramatic transformations seem to take forever: impatience, quick temper, procrastination, etc. Should we be satisfied with degrees of transformation? If so, how should we measure progress? What are the potential dangers in measuring our progress in these things? At the same time, how can we know if we need to make improvements?

Application Questions:

① How did John become known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”? What would have to happen in our lives for that to be said about us?

② “This is love:” wrote John, “not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (*1 John 4:10, NIV*). Selfless love (Greek: agape) gives without expecting anything in return. List at least five examples of selfless love that

do not have anything to do with family relationships (i.e. husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters).

Witnessing

As a class, select an individual, family, or group to whom you can demonstrate God's love. Designate a specific amount of time (a week, a month, a quarter) during which you can do something tangible to meet their material or spiritual needs. Outline a comprehensive, step-by-step plan, along with names, actions, and expected results.

STEP 4—Apply

When John laid down his fishing nets by Galilee's shores, he never could have imagined where his journey with Jesus would take him. That's how it is when we decide to follow Jesus. We may not leave everything to follow Him, as John and some of the other disciples did. But our lives will be changed; how can they not be?

There are two ways to experience Christ's presence in our lives: One is as His agents, reflecting His love in acts of devotion and service to others. The other is by serving Him in the person of the less fortunate, the discouraged, the oppressed. Either way, our path of discipleship will draw us closer to Him.

Consider This: Ask your class members:

- What habits do you have to cultivate to stay in step with Christ? What works for you?
- What's your preferred method of Bible study? Do you study by topic? By book? By memorizing? By reading or consulting different versions?
- What, for you, is the most meaningful way to pray? On your knees in a quiet place? At certain times? In certain places? By keeping a prayer list and recording God's answers?
- In what settings are you most comfortable reflecting God's love, and to whom? How are you known for

demonstrating God's love outside the setting of
your church?

**Close with prayer, asking God to open your eyes, as
individuals and as a class, to better reflect Christ's
love to others.**

TE-3Q-2008-08-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *John 6:68*

The Student Will:

Know: Peter as an activist leader who got things done, but with tendencies to react emotionally more than rationally.

Feel: What it must have taken to mold Peter's character into what Jesus wanted.

Do: Develop with the class a game plan for character development.

Learning Outline:

I. Peter: A Not-too-solid Rock (*Luke 22:32*)

A. What is an "activist" leader? Is that good or bad?

B. Make a list of some of Peter's "not-too-solid" experiences.

C. What's the difference between Peter and John (review last week's lesson)?

D. This week's lesson talks about Peter in the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles. Have the class discuss these three "Peters."

II. Church Leadership: Who Should Be There? (*John 21:15-18*)

A. Ask your class if they would elect Peter as head elder of your church? Why or why not?

B. Which disciple would they elect?

C. Have the class make a list of characteristics they would assume to see in church leaders at any level.

III. Game Plan

Taking John (last week's lesson) and Peter as examples, have the class come up with some specific things that need to be done for characters to be molded according to Jesus' expectations.

Summary: Jesus harnessed Peter's activism and good intentions, and strengthened him in the faith to be a major pillar of the early Christian church.

TE-3Q-2008-08-Learning Cycle**STEP 1—Motivate**

Very few New Testament characters rival Simon Peter in terms of bold actions and outrageous statements. He invited himself to walk with Jesus on the water, he cut off a man's ear, or his initial refusal to let Jesus wash his feet just prior the Last Supper. Often, when Jesus asked His disciples a question, it was Peter who spoke up. With James and John, Peter accompanied Jesus on some of His most outstanding miracles.

Yet often in the sermons that mention Peter, he's treated as kind of a lovable buffoon; someone who speaks and acts before he thinks through the results of his words or actions. The implied message of these sermons is: "Don't be like Peter. Keep your mouth shut and your hands to yourself. It's better to be safe than sorry."

That attitude misses the entire point of his story: Peter's influence in the early church was huge because he

was willing to take risks for Christ. When Peter was converted and transformed, the Holy Spirit used Peter's bold proclamations and brave actions to build up Christ's kingdom.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Peter's Call

(Review Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11 with your class.)

A casual reading of these verses gives the impression that Jesus showed up out of the blue, invited Peter, James, and John to follow Him, and almost on a whim they accepted His invitation.

But even fishermen are more sophisticated than that. We know that Peter was married; what kind of thoughts

must have gone through his mind as he considered leaving everything to follow Jesus?

Consider This: Peter and his fellow fishermen had no doubt heard about Jesus before He showed up and sat in his boat. What effect did the miraculous catch of fish have on those who saw it? What was behind Peter's exclamation: " 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' " (*Luke 5:8, NIV*)? What does that tell us about Peter and about His openness to the prompting of God? Imagine if Peter had thought himself holy enough and religious enough that he didn't need Jesus.

II. Peter's Conversion

(Review Matt. 16:13-20, 16:21-23, 26:69-75, John 13:39 with your class.)

These passages describe situations in which both Peter's character strengths and flaws are revealed. But to

maintain, as some do, that Peter was not truly converted indicates how many of us misunderstand conversion.

Being converted doesn't mean that we'll never again experience failure, any more than being married means you'll never fight with your spouse. Conversion simply means that we're on the Christian pathway. If we fall, as Peter sometimes did, we get back up and get back on the path.

Consider This: What comfort comes from knowing that Jesus can transform us as He transformed Peter? What does Peter's transformation tell us about conversion? Is it an event or a process?

III. Peter's Ministry

(Review Acts 2:1-14, 3:1-12, and 10:1-22 with your class.)

Being a Christian is a learning experience. Peter's experiences with Jesus provided the platform on which he built his ministry to both Jews and Gentiles.

Consider This: For each of the three incidents recorded in the Scriptures above, what was the primary lesson Peter had to learn? Ask your class: How might the Holy Spirit be leading us to be more daring more for God?

IV. Peter's Legacy

(Have someone from your class read 1 Pet. 3:8, 9, 4:7-11 out loud.)

According to tradition, Peter died by being crucified upside down. Apparently, at the end of his life of service to Christ he felt unworthy to die in the same way Jesus did.

Consider This: If, after reading the Scriptures in this section, you had to summarize Peter's counsel to the church in one word, what would that word be?

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

❶ All we know about most of the characters in the Bible is gleaned from just a few verses. Some of the snapshots we have of Peter aren't all that flattering. What would people know about you based on glimpses of your life, seen here and there?

❷ Another thing about Bible biographies is that months and years are compressed into a few verses or chapters. How long does it take for a person's character to be revealed? At what stages is it most likely that character can be altered?

Application Questions:

❶ Jesus' love and patience is highlighted in the stories of Peter's misdeeds and mistakes. In what areas of your life can you see God changing you into someone who more correctly reflects His character? List at least three.

❷ What, exactly, was Jesus doing for Peter when He told him, " 'Feed my sheep' " (*John 21:17, NIV*)? When has Jesus expressed His confidence in you by giving you a responsibility you weren't sure you were capable of?

Witnessing

❶ No question: When Jesus first called him, Peter was a little rough around the edges. Who, in your circle of friends or fellow church members, needs some help polishing out the rough places? What specific activities are you prepared to engage in to see that it happens?

❷ It has been said, "Truth is not so much taught as caught." Peter was a man of action because Jesus was a

man of action; Peter just reflected what he saw in Jesus. What activities or events could you plan, as a group or as individuals, to model Christian virtues for those who are still developing as Christians?

STEP 4—Apply

Ellen G. White wrote: "Sanctification is the work of a lifetime. As our opportunities multiply, our experience will enlarge, and our knowledge increase. We shall become strong to bear responsibility, and our maturity will be in proportion to our privileges"—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 65, 66. The truth of this statement is surely borne out in the story of Peter.

Consider This: There are two ways to look at Peter's story: one, from Peter's perspective, and the other, from Jesus' perspective. Ask your class to respond to these three questions:

- What is it about Jesus that makes you want to dedicate your life to Him and His kingdom, as did Peter? What talents do you bring to this relationship? Why is it important to recognize that no matter what your gifts are, they all come from the Lord?
- As you see yourself from Christ's perspective, what areas of your life need to be transformed? Are you a more faithful follower of Christ today than you were a year ago? Two years ago? Ten years ago? How can you know one way or another?
- What responsibilities are you now carrying that you never imagined would be yours? What larger responsibilities might God have in store for you?

As you close the class with prayer, allow a few moments of silence for God to impress your class members of avenues they might pursue to be of greater service to Christ and His kingdom.

TE-3Q-2008-09-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *Acts 4:13*

The Student Will:

Know: The history and reasons for the development of Peter as a major leader in the early church.

Feel: An attachment to Peter as a worthy example of the kind of people Jesus calls to mission.

Do: Motivate your class to grasp the meaning and be involved in the "wider mission" of the church.

Learning Outline:

I. Peter the Leader (*Matt. 16:18*)

A. Review the Roman Catholic and Protestant ideas about the meaning of this text. *It is very important that your class understand the meaning of this text.* Who is

“Peter,” who is the “builder,” what’s the “rock,” what’s the “church,” and what are the “gates of hell”?

B. What is “Peter’s shadow” talked about in Monday’s lesson and how would you characterize a “Peter’s shadow” in our church?

II. Peter the Jewish Nationalist (Gal. 2:11-14)

Case Study: Your class is the church board in Antioch. Peter and Paul are hard at it. How will you resolve the problem?

III. Peter: A Wider Vision (Acts 1:8)

A. What is Wednesday’s lesson talking about when it says that Peter got a “wider vision”?

B. Have the class write out a statement of how they are/could be involved in the “wider mission” of the church.

Summary: Peter became a major church leader. He allowed

Jesus to redirect his personality toward the mission of the church, even though he had a difficult time dissociating himself from some long-held opinions.

TE-3Q-2008-09-Learning Cycle**STEP 1—Motivate**

Can the Lord use only “perfect” people—or is there room for folk like you and me?

This part of Peter’s story builds on his humanness to show us that God can use just about anyone. Peter swore, denied Christ, even resorted to violence, and yet, he went forth with “the keys to the kingdom” and became a mighty witness for God’s truth and God’s Son, Jesus the Messiah, or Christ.

Peter was a fisherman, unschooled in the higher realms of Scripture, certainly not one who sat at the foot of the rabbis of old. Yet, despite his “rough” background and sometimes “raw” behavior, God’s grace transformed him into an evangelist par excellence.

Ask your class members to think of people whom they’ve known over the years whose worldly experience ill-fitted them for spiritual achievement, and yet these people were

used to reach others with the gospel and the three angel's message.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. I Will Build My Church

(Review Matt. 16:18, and related verses from the lesson with your class.)

Our lesson accurately points out the controversy surrounding the simple words from Matthew. Jesus couldn't be referring to a single, sinful human being as the foundation for the Christian church. If so, why would we have needed a perfect Savior? Instead, Jesus is trying to encourage us, through the example of Peter, that God can

take imperfect people and use them, when surrendered, for great things.

Consider This: What are the needs in your church, your community, your nation that can only be filled, or, perhaps, best be filled, by consecrated people of faith? How can each of us, as fallen people in a fallen world, use the gifts that God has given us in order to build God's church?

II. Simon, Son of Jonah

Consider This: Peter wasn't always called Peter. He was Simon, the son of Jonah, a rough-hewn fisherman. Jesus upgraded his name, calling him a "rock," symbolizing solidity and determination.

Even with a new name—on earth, no less, not just "written down in glory," as the old hymn goes—Peter didn't always live up to the title given him. He feared drowning, he

feared the hostile leaders, he feared the crowd, and he feared the Romans—the latter three with good reason.

Yet, Jesus saw something beyond the present reality to make Peter's future a divine forecast. After the Resurrection, after Jesus appeared to him and both forgave and commissioned Peter, he became a mighty, indefatigable warrior for the faith, this time with only the Word of God as his sword!

What can we discern in those around us, in the family of God, that would make them candidates to help spread the gospel? How can we encourage and help these people develop into what they could be for the Lord?

III. Against the Gates of Hell

“. . .and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”
(*Matt. 16:18*).

So much has come against the church over the years – persecutions, heresies, divisions, false teachings, repressions, forced conversions to other faiths, atheism,

and communism, to name a few. Yet, as Lonnie Melashenko remarked in his December 17, 2006, *Exploring the Word* broadcast, "God has always had a remnant, even in the darkest hours."

Many have tried to crush Christianity, but the church comes back stronger and more vital. Peter succeeded after some of his darkest moments—shouldn't that inspire us to be dedicated soldiers of the cross?

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

❶ What did Peter learn from his attempts at doing things in his own strength, such as taking his eyes off Jesus when called to walk on the water? What lesson did he learn about relying on God's power?

② When new congregations were formed in near and distant places—Samaria or even Antioch—what was the reaction in Jerusalem? They sent more experienced people to help the congregations grow. Today, such calls are made, and answered, on a more local level, but why is this still a good idea?

Application Questions:

① As Peter progresses in his work, some people begin to look to Peter, and not Jesus, as their source (*Acts 5:15*); Cornelius even wanted to worship Peter (*Acts 10:25*). How would you react to those who want to credit you, and not God, for the good things they see in your ministry?

② In *Acts 10:28-41*, Peter learns the importance of treating people whom he might have considered “unclean” as being as much children of God as his Jewish brethren. How can we apply this idea of tolerance, acceptance and understanding in the church? In our daily lives?

Witnessing

There's a lot more to sharing the gospel with others than can be done merely by the printed word, a shortwave broadcast, or even satellite television. All of these are important, even vital in some areas of the world where Christians can't easily travel or work. But in those places where people can share the Good News, how can we help those who hear but don't fully understand, as the Ethiopian eunuch confessed, to grasp the wonder and hope of grace?

STEP 4—Apply

On a clear spring afternoon on the sidewalks of New York some twenty-five years ago, a band of Christians witnessed in the "open air," singing songs, reading Bible verses, and offering prayer to those who needed or wanted it.

"I didn't have a prayer left in the world," Tom Lucas later said in a conversation with this author in 1982, so he raised his right hand and asked for help. That marked the start of Tom's change from a drunkard, a drug addict, and a toothless street denizen into a Christian witness. Tom cleaned up his act and spent his remaining career helping others out of the pit of loneliness and despair that had consumed much of his lifetime.

Consider This: Are there people around us who exhibit some spiritual potential, but somehow fail to reach it? Can we help these people see that God's plan doesn't end with their salvation but only begins there?

If we believe that the church has a specific role to play in spreading the gospel before Jesus returns, *who* will do that? An evangelist? Your pastor? The local conference administration?

The Great Commission of Matthew 28 isn't addressed to church administrators—it's addressed to you and to me. We each, we all, have to move forward in faith to share the good news with others; and we can each encourage those believers around us to "go, and do likewise."

But what if we're the only Christian in our home, our community, even our nation? What can we do then, especially if it is difficult or dangerous to engage in public evangelism?

We can pray. We can pray for those at work in the harvest fields, and we can pray for those who have yet to believe. We can do good to our neighbors, and, carefully perhaps, answer as to why we're doing something for others when most people are too wrapped up in themselves. Peter healed those in need; we can offer spiritual help and healing to all.

TE-3Q-2008-10-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *Luke 7:47*

The Student Will:

Know: The difference between cultural rules and regulations and biblically authoritative rules and regulations.

Feel: A responsibility to make sure all members of society receive the honor and respect they deserve.

Do: Devise some things the class can do to carry out the "know" and "feel" issues above.

Learning Outline:

I. Jesus Breaks the Rules (*see for instance Luke 7:37-39*)

- A. Have the class make a list of ways in which Jesus “broke” cultural rules and substituted biblical principles.
- B. Discuss with the class some contemporary cultural rules in your society that might need to be “broken” when compared to biblical principles; for instance the early church (*Acts 16:14-16*).
- C. If Lydia were alive today in your society, what position might she occupy in the church?
- D. If Priscilla (*Rom. 16:3-5*) came to your church as an evangelistic speaker, how might she be received?

II. “Four Unmarried Daughters Who Prophesied” (*Acts 9:21*)

Have the class discuss the implications of such action. What are the implications for church leadership, authority, and ministry in these few words?

Summary: God’s people today need to make a clear distinction between cultural customs and biblical

principles. Cultural customs are changeable; biblical principles are not. Jesus always focused on biblical principles and the mission of the church.

TE-3Q-2008-10-Learning Cycle**STEP 1—Motivate**

Peter, Daniel, David, Isaiah, Moses, and Paul. The Bible is replete with the stories of men who have done great things for God and with God, and there's no doubt about that.

However, it would be dishonest—even foolish—to minimize the role of women in the Bible. From Eve, through whose seed the Savior Himself was promised, to Sarah, Rebekah, Esther, Mary, Martha, and others, the ministry of women is of inestimable value to God's church and His people.

This lesson explores some of the essential women of the New Testament church, and their impact on the world around them. These women, and countless others, didn't wait for marching orders from a field general or for a committee to meet and agree on their role. Instead, they fulfilled that old bromide about success: "Find a need and fill it."

When discussing this lesson with your class, ask them to remember women in the church who played a key role in their

lives. Remember: Gender is not a prerequisite for being used of God; a willing heart is the only necessary qualification.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Transcending Boundaries

(Review the indicated verses in Luke 7, 8, and 10, and related verses from the lesson, with your class.)

Jesus was nothing if not unusual for His time—and for all time. An observant Jew, He nonetheless reached out to women in all stations of life—even one of “ill repute”—to bring them the good news of salvation. Women supported His ministry, tended to some of His needs, and it was a woman who received the first commission to proclaim the Resurrection.

Consider This: Are there people in your church—in your corner of the world—who can bring useful and helpful things to the world around them, but are held back by prejudice or misunderstanding? What are you doing to help recognize the abilities of these people and to encourage them to be available to God for His service?

II. Bridging the Gap

Consider This: The woman at the well isn't that much different from you and from me—no matter how “good” we may view ourselves. Her sins, not her race or religion, had separated her from God. And, in the person of Jesus, God was right there offering reconciliation.

There is, it seems, one in every town, in every school, even in every church: a person who, for whatever reason, is an “outcast.” Maybe they're not well educated. Perhaps a person has a physical deformity or disability that limits their full participation in some activities.

Or someone might just be a, well, you know—a sinner—and we can't have that kind in church, can we?

Jesus found someone who didn't like the Jews, and, frankly, whom the Jews themselves didn't like too much. She was a woman in a society in which women weren't always viewed positively. And let's face it, her personal life wasn't anything to be proud of.

Yet, this "woman at the well," whose name we are never told, goes back home and becomes a dynamic evangelist who helps convert many of her neighbors. A woman! A sinner! Someone just like us.

When someone presents themselves for service, how do we react? Do we gracefully accept the help that is offered, or do we measure people against an artificial set of parameters designed to weed out willing servants as much as include them? If the latter, why should we reconsider that attitude?

III. Tentmakers Three

Priscilla, Aquila, and Paul had two things in common: they were all believers, and they were each tentmakers. In New Testament times, tentmaking was a necessary skill: travelers and others depended on tents in a time when there was no Motel 6 or other lodging to make them welcome.

It was a way to make a living and thus help finance the gospel work of that era. Priscilla and Aquila opened their home to others: first to Paul, who joined them in both tentmaking and disciple-making occupations. Then, in Syria, Priscilla helped a Jewish man named Apollos, who became a believer in Jesus. This simple act of charity added one more person to the list of Christ's followers, as well as created someone who later went on to help the church at Achaia to grow.

Are there people with whom we work—or with whom we could work—that could also be used for God's kingdom? Be sure to pray for opportunities to identify such people and for wisdom to respond appropriately.

STEP 3—Practice**Thought Questions:**

- ① A Samaritan woman with a checkered past seems an unlikely candidate for evangelist. Yet, Jesus saw other potential in her. How do you see God reaching out to people today—even unlikely ones—for His flock?

- ② If Jesus' interactions with women demonstrates that old "rules" about how people are to relate can be overridden by God's grace, what does that say to us, today?

Application Questions:

- ① Breaking barriers runs two ways in some of the examples here. Jesus surmounts old prejudices to reach people in need, in this case women and ethnic minorities. What barriers—racial, economic, or class— can we transcend to enlarge our fellowship?

② In the early church, women played a variety of roles and held many different positions. Should we not encourage everyone to do their part in building the church and in witnessing to the world around them?

Witnessing

Jesus' selection of the Samaritan woman was shocking, even scandalous. Her life story didn't reflect a career of piety or even purity. Isn't our obligation in the church to reach those whom the rest of society has forgotten? Who's going to tell the beggar in the street, the single parent struggling to make ends meet, the person at the grocery store about Jesus?

STEP 4—Apply

Some of the greatest spiritual truths were reintroduced to Christianity by a young woman whose formal education ended around the third grade. She'd never gone to college

or seminary, had no advanced degree, and didn't know the original Bible languages.

But Ellen G. White had something more important than a Harvard sheepskin: She had a heart and mind fully surrendered to God. "That I may know Him," was her plea, and in following her own "steps to Christ," she led the way for countless millions to follow.

Consider This: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus," Paul writes in Galatians 3:28 (NIV).

If we are "all one in Christ Jesus," what's the hassle about? Men, women, boys, and girls each have a role to play in advancing the kingdom of God. In short, it isn't who we are—male, female, rich, poor—it's Whose we are. If we truly belong to Jesus and open ourselves to Him, we'll find opportunities for service that we had never expected, at home and perhaps far away.

TE-3Q-2008-11-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *Daniel 1:8*

The Student Will:

Know: What it was that changed Daniel from an unknown prisoner of war into the prime minister of the conquering nation.

Feel: A motivation to follow Daniel's example.

Do: Figure out a plan in your circumstances that matches what Daniel did.

Learning Outline:

I. The Resolution (*Dan. 1:8*)

A. This attitude is apparent throughout the story of Daniel.

B. His three friends had the same attitude (Daniel 3:16-18), as did Daniel himself later in life (Daniel 6:13).

C. What's the difference between taking pagan names, but not eating pagan food? (see Tuesday's lesson).

II. Contemporary Resolutions (*Acts 4:19, 20*)

A. Have the class list some contemporary issues that might parallel those of Daniel's time.

B. What about Seventh-day Adventists in military, governmental, or business positions today?

III. Translatable Principles (*Phil. 4:8, 9*)

A. How does Daniel's attitude translate into specific actions and attitudes in contemporary situations.

B. Have the class discuss these words from Ellen G. White (see Friday's lesson): "In the smallest as well as the largest affairs of life, He [God] desire

us to reveal, . . . the principles of His kingdom."—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 357.

C. Case Study: Have the class devise a case study that involves the principles in this lesson.

Summary: In Daniel four young men, in the face of massive challenges, remain true to principle and to their God. The same should be true of us today.

TE-3Q-2008-11-Learning Cycle**STEP 1—Motivate**

No one can look at the story of Daniel, I believe, without getting a chill up and down one's spine. This is a thrilling story of four young men who could have elected to "go with the flow," but instead held fast to the Lord their God and won promotion and honor for it!

You could argue, perhaps, that the story of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—the Jerusalem four—is in fact the Christian message. Here we find young men totally dedicated to serving God. They won't compromise principles at the dinner table. We see each of the four unwilling to "adapt" their faith to their new situation; telling King Nebuchadnezzar they'd rather die than dishonor God!

God delivers them in the midst of it all. Not everyone today, of course, will face the same earthly success that these four received. People are killed for their faith. But for every believer, there's hope that God is true to His

promises, and that we can trust them, no matter our earthly fate.

May our love for Jesus and the crying needs of the world around us motivate us to “dare” something great for God.

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Preparation Yields Promise

(Review Deut. 6:6, 7 and Deut. 4:9 with your class.)

From their earliest days, young Jewish children are taught not only the commandments of God but also the importance of worshiping Him. The God of Israel describes Himself as “jealous” nine times in the Old Testament *(Exod. 20:5, Deut. 4:24, etc.)* and He wanted His people to remember His deliverance and goodness.

This wasn't because God was lonely or needed approval. He wants only the best for all of us, and He knows that if we keep Him first in our lives, we'll live in a manner that glorifies His name.

That's why young Hebrew men such as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were able to do what they did when they arrived at Nebuchadnezzar's court. Where others might have been overwhelmed by the luxurious surroundings and tempted by the exotic "food" displayed before them, they vowed to remain faithful.

Consider This: It's not just young people who need this kind of training in faith; it's new believers of any age. How can we encourage youngsters, new believers and even those long "in the way" to develop good faith habits?

II. Faithfulness Fulfilled!

Consider This: The ten-day "Daniel diet" paid off. They were stronger and healthier than the others in their

group, and they went to the "head of the class"! Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah got important jobs, because even Nebuchadnezzar saw the value of serving Jehovah.

During the Second World War, a young Seventh-day Adventist Christian, Desmond T. Doss, entered the U.S. Army, but not to fight. He wanted to serve as a medic, but he refused to carry a weapon. Fellow soldiers mocked Doss when he would kneel to pray; they'd even throw their boots at him.

When the going got tough, however, Doss remembered his duty to God and to his fellow man. Under fire in Okinawa, "Doss refused to take cover from enemy fire as he rescued 75 wounded soldiers. . . . lowering [each] over the edge of the 400-foot Maeda Escarpment. He did not stop until he had brought everyone to safety nearly 12 hours later. Doss would later credit knot-tying skills learned in an Adventist youth group, the Pathfinders," read the March 24, 2006, Adventist News Network obituary. For this, Doss became the first conscientious objector to

receive the Congressional Medal of Honor, presented personally by U.S. President Harry Truman.

Consider This: We may never face the challenges of standing before a king and disobeying his command, or the heat of battle. How can we recognize our service opportunities and help others to be ready for theirs?

III. Whatever Happens, We'll Be Faithful

(Review Dan. 3:16-18 with your class.)

There's no hint of any condition—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah knew exactly who'd be the main attraction at this Babylonian cookout!

Are we preparing ourselves, our children, and our fellow believers for any challenges that may lie ahead? How can we help strengthen our faith, and that of others, to be ready to live out what we believe?

STEP 3—Practice**Thought Questions:**

- ① Why was the reaction of the “Jerusalem Four” so automatic? How is it that they were able to, instinctively it seems, know the right thing to do and then do it?
- ② What in obeying the Lord can we do that demonstrates our faithfulness in a winsome way? Do we make our host feel bad when someone puts out an unwelcome dish? Or do we gently handle such issues, trying to be friendly?

Application Questions:

- ① In many societies, it’s relatively easy to follow God’s health and dietary laws. What other precepts of God are tougher to obey in today’s world? How do you handle these situations?
- ② Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah each faced death for obeying God, rather than obeying human beings.

Desmond Doss was ridiculed and harassed during wartime for refusing to carry a gun. Yet, these believers made a deep impact on their societies by refusing to bend to fashion. What can we do that strengthens the faith of others who see our actions?

Witnessing

Perhaps the greatest lesson Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah can teach us is that of the value of consistent Christian witness. As a result, they received honor and promotion in a hostile environment. Today, living for the world six days a week and putting on a "holy face" on the seventh won't impress anyone for very long. But living for God, even when it seems that no one is watching, will soon attract people to you.

STEP 4—Apply

The song, after all, is "Dare to Be a Daniel," not "Dare to be a Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah."

Does that mean that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are unimportant? Hardly! They probably encouraged each during all their trials. That is, they remained companions in faith, no doubt encouraging each other. How important that we do our best, in every way, to encourage one another in faith. How important that we by our lives show that we truly believe what we profess to believe. How important that we never utter a word of doubt to anyone.

We might not be called to such trials as were these four young lads. But sooner or later we all have to stand up for what we believe, even when it could cost us something. We can prepare for that time, day by day by not only talking our faith but by acting on it.

TE-3Q-2008-12-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *Acts 8:6*

The Student Will:

Know: The history and contribution of Philip to the rise and progress of the early church.

Feel: An affinity to Philip and his mission.

Do: Resolve to do ministry as Philip carried out his.

Learning Outline:

I. Philip the Evangelist (*Acts 8:6*)

A. Evangelism is a specific spiritual gift (Eph. 4:11) given by the Holy Spirit.

B. Philip is an outstanding New Testament example of an evangelist.

C. Emphasize to the class, however, that not all Christians are evangelists, but all Christians are witnesses.

II. Call to Discipleship (John 12:26)

A. All Christians are also called to discipleship.

B. Discipleship means a person becomes available, willing, accountable, and responsible in the cause of the Lord.

C. Have your class identify these aspects of discipleship in Paul's calling in Acts 9.

D. How can your class witness in an effective way even though few members may be called as evangelists?

E. Have the class devise a specific outreach plan (if you don't already have one) that they can put into practice as a class unit.

Summary: Philip provides another powerful example of what God can do through somebody who has dedicated his or her life to Him.

TE-3Q-2008-12-Learning Cycle**STEP 1—Motivate**

Ironically, *The Good Shepherd* is the title of a 2006 motion picture about a fictional American who helps start the Central Intelligence Agency, a spy service that may have reached its apex during the Cold War between America and the former Soviet Union. The life portrayed is one of substance and shadow, disguises and deceptions, all packed with drama.

For a life of intrigue, suspense, and thrills, however, you don't have to look much farther than Philip, plucked from the ranks of day-to-day church members in Jerusalem, first to help serve meals, then to break the bread of life to others. His ministry crossed deserts, was carried (by others) into Africa, and even touched the "untouchable" land of Samaria. Philip "got around" and brought hope and help to people in need. His active

partner was God the Holy Spirit, and the results were something to behold.

Philip was a good shepherd of the people he served, but, of course, he wasn't the "Good Shepherd" that Jesus was. However, Philip's readiness to tackle new projects and difficult tasks is one we would do well to emulate. There are people waiting!

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. A Gift With A Purpose

(Review Acts 6:3; 8; Rom. 12:6-8 with your class.)

You've seen this on television, perhaps or heard about it, or possibly have witnessed it in your community: a "preacher" or "healer" comes to town, sets up an elaborate meeting, and proceeds to "cure" those who have serious,

sometimes life-threatening diseases. But after the event is over, those who have been "healed" find that it was a temporary phenomenon at best.

When God truly gives a spiritual gift to someone, He does it for a specific purpose—not for show. Philip received his spiritual gifts to accomplish the work of evangelism; signs and wonders were needed in the early church to confirm the message. Today, God still equips those He calls, but with the gifts suited to the immediate task.

Consider This: Philip also prepared himself, through diligent service and worship, to receive God's call and God's gifts. What can we do to be ready to answer a call, and what preparations can we help others to make?

II. Service Specified

Consider This: Philip was called to service in a new church job—deacon—because of the needs of a growing

congregation. What roles does your church see developing as it grows or changes?

Less than ten years after the birth of the group which was to organize itself as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, our pioneers recognized that young people and others needed training in the ways of God that extended beyond a sermon or lecture.

“In 1853—only a few years after the first group of Sabbathkeeping Adventists was formed in Washington, New Hampshire—James White, one of the founders of the Adventist Church, organized the first regular Sabbath School in Rochester, [New York,]” stated a September 30, 2003, Adventist News Network article entitled “150 Years of Sabbath School Celebrated Where It All Began.”

Consider This: Are there innovations we can consider that will help us to serve others in our church—in the world church as a whole?

III. I Was Led of the Lord

(Review Acts 8:26-39 with your class.)

We read earlier of Philip's preparation for service. It wasn't intentional, he didn't attend the "early church school of theology and ministry," but it was preparation nonetheless. Now we see that he was able to be used of God to reach a key government official, and introduce the Christian faith to an entire nation!

No one knows the destinations, or destinies, God has in store for us in this life. However, with planning and an open heart, we can be led to places we never thought we'd go and to people who need Him!

STEP 3—Practice**Thought Questions:**

- ❶ What was the "seed" that blossomed into a new role within the church—and a new leader for the nascent

movement? How does this translate to our day—are there needs we can help fill creatively?

② We read of miraculous occurrences in the life of Philip. But miracles are happening today all over the world as God's good news is shared by Adventist Christians every day. What are some of today's miracles that you've seen or heard about?

Application Questions:

① Does service belong only to the pastor? The head elder? A select group of people? Or does service, and witnessing, belong to every member of the church? How can you better serve the brethren and your community?

② Philip prepared himself by serving. When the opportunity arose, God the Holy Spirit selected and equipped him. How can we model Philip's quality of service and where can we best serve others?

Witnessing

It's wonderful to have ambitions and desire to improve your situation in life. That's what education and hard work can help anyone accomplish. But along the way, don't forget to help others, both by instruction and by service. As is often said, "People won't care about how much you know, until they know how much you care!"

STEP 4—Apply

Philip's story is fascinating, exciting, and, as we've said, miraculous. But it's not one we often go to when considering the great heroes of the Bible. Philip isn't of royal heritage, he never bested a giant, and there's no book of the New Testament that bears his name.

Yet, even the "everyday" people, such as Philip, can be mightily used of God. It wasn't Peter or James or Paul who was sent to a top national leader from Ethiopia, it was the "deacon," or "servant" named Philip!

Consider This: “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong” 1 Cor. 1:26, 27, NIV.

The pioneering founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were not listed in any social register of the prominent and powerful. Ellen White was barely out of her teens; her husband, James, an itinerant schoolteacher; and Joseph Bates was a weather-beaten old sea captain. Yet, these people had a passion to know God’s will and to obey His commands. Because they were teachable and submitted to God, the movement they helped found has grown tremendously.

Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a global reach far beyond anything the pioneers saw in their lifetimes. In 2006, some 15 million were baptized members and at least another 10 million worshiped with those members every week. Our global network of schools,

colleges, universities, and hospitals have made the name Adventist recognized for quality work around the globe.

It all started, though, with a band of "ordinary" people who were committed to God's Word. Just think where your commitment can lead!

TE-3Q-2008-13-The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: *Isaiah 6:8*

The Student Will:

Know: The parallels between Isaiah's time and message and our own contemporary message.

Feel: The need to experience the same sense of awe and cleansing as did Isaiah. (see *Lev. 16:30*).

Do: Resolve to seek this cleansing and response of God's call to you and the class members.

Learning Outline:

I. Seeing God (*Isa. 6:1-10*)

A. We have studied about how various biblical people were "called." Is there anything unique about Isaiah's call?

B. Monday's lesson says that this experience affected "all of Isaiah's senses." Discuss with the class what that means.

II. Cleansing + Call (*Isa. 6:8*)

A. Tuesday's lesson points out that Isaiah answers the call *before* he got an assignment. Discuss the significance of this with the class. What does it have to do with us?

III. Tough Assignment (*Isa. 6:8*)

A. Why did Isaiah need to go through this experience recounted in Isaiah 6? He was already a priest and religious leader.

B. Ask the class how they feel about God calling a person to such an unpromising situation as Isaiah's.

C. What does the phrase "a light to the Gentiles" (*Isa. 49:6*) have to do with us?

Summary: The Prophet Isaiah accepted a mission from God that was unpopular. And yet, through his ministry, lives were changed and the power of his words is still felt today.

TE-3Q-2008-13-Learning Cycle**STEP 1—Motivate**

Have you ever experienced a dramatic change in perspective? In 1543, astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus published a theory that would transform how humans viewed themselves and their place in the universe. Copernicus used mathematics and astronomical studies to disprove the belief that the earth was the center of the universe, around which all planets and stars orbited. Instead, he argued, the earth is just one of a number of planets that travel around the sun. Today we know that earth is an infinitesimal speck in the vast, unfathomably huge universe. But for the religious and intellectual leaders of the sixteenth century, Copernicus had advanced an unwelcome theory that required a shocking change in perspective. It was not something easy for people to grasp, and it took awhile before his position became accepted. Old and set ideas are not easy for anyone to give up, no matter how wrong they are!

Radical changes in perspective are rarely comfortable. In Isaiah 6 the prophet encounters the unfathomable vastness of God's majesty, and it becomes a defining moment in his life; his perspective of God, himself, and his mission changes in an instant. Have we also had an encounter with God? Take a few moments to consider how our knowledge of God changes our perspective, priorities and understanding of our place in the universe. Think about how our views, as Adventists, radically differ from those who believe that we live in a godless universe and that our existence here is purely by chance!

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Uncertain Times

Under the 52-year reign of King Uzziah, the kingdom of Judah flourished politically and economically. But the later years set the stage for Judah's decline into captivity (*2 Chron.*

26:16). At the time of Isaiah's vision, the kingdom was also becoming increasingly vulnerable to the military aggression of its neighbors.

Consider This: Isaiah's encounter with God comes at a time of personal and national insecurity. Why is uncertainty so often a catalyst for personal re-examination? How does God work through these events to connect with us?

II. A New Perspective: Of God

(Review Isa. 6:1-4 with your class.)

The terrifying grandeur of Isaiah's vision reveals a God with incomparable power and majesty. The imagery emphasizes God's absolute transcendence, His holiness.

Consider This: Why did the angels cry "holy" and not "love" or "salvation"? Could it be that "holiness" defines every other part of God's character: His love is a holy

love; His power is a holy power? How does this influence our understanding of God?

“When perils encompass God’s people. . . . God calls them to look up to Him, seated on His throne and directing in the affairs of heaven and earth, in order that they may take hope and courage.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 128.

III. A New Perspective: Of Self

(Review Isa. 6:5-7 with your class.)

Consider This: Why does the angel touch Isaiah’s mouth to represent his redemption? Why are the lips, tongue, or mouth so often used as symbols in Scripture to indicate the state of the heart (*Prov. 12:13, 14; Matt. 15:8-10; James 3:6*)?

Isaiah's reaction to the holiness of God is an overwhelming sense of his own unworthiness. Review encounters others have had with their Creator (*1 Kings 19:11-13; Dan. 4:28-37; Matt. 28:5-10; Acts 9:3-9*).

Consider This: How do these encounters differ—either in the way God presents Himself or in an individual's reactions? What circumstances do you think contribute to these differences?

IV. A New Perspective: Of Mission

A. Motivation for mission

In Isaiah 6:8, God asks, "Whom shall I send?" Did He really have no one in mind? In asking the question, God provides space for Isaiah to respond with a willing, eager heart.

Consider This: Isaiah volunteers before he even knows his assignment. Why? What sets apart those who undertake God's work willingly from those who are reluctant? (*Psalm 51:12, 13; Mark 5:18-20*)?

"Those who are the partakers of the grace of Christ will be ready to make any sacrifice, that others for whom He died may share the heavenly gift. They will do all they can to make the world better for their stay in it. This spirit is the sure outgrowth of a soul truly converted."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 78.

B. A Pointless Mission?

(Review *Isa. 6:9, 10* with your class.)

God's description of Isaiah's mission sounds like a recipe for frustration—to preach to those who will refuse to understand or accept his message.

Consider This: What is the point of Isaiah's mission if its outcome is already known? How should we define success in mission today? Should it be by the number of baptisms or churches established?

Isaiah was not the only one who preached to those who refused to listen. Ask someone in the class to read John 12:37-41 to see how Isaiah's experience is explicitly echoed in the ministry of Jesus.

STEP 3—Practice

Thought Questions:

❶ Could the stubbornness of Judah (*Isa. 6:9, 10*) have parallels within our own churches? Is there a danger that those who have grown up with the gospel become resistant to its power? What "spiritual symptoms" could indicate calloused hearts and dull ears?

② Read the following two quotes to your class.

“You were born to win, but to be a winner, you must plan to win, prepare to win, and expect to win.”—Motivational speaker, Zig Ziglar, “Developing and Maintaining the Right Attitude,” Dec. 11, 2006.

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all’ ” (*Mark 9:35, NIV*).

Society says that humility is not the path to success. Yet, Isaiah had to see himself as he really was—hopelessly sinful, a failure—before God could use him. Discuss the tension between these different definitions of success. Divide into groups and ask each group to list the attributes of a “successful” follower of Christ. How do these attributes help us in our mission to share Christ with others?

STEP 4—Apply

The basis of mission is a true understanding of God and His grace. It depends on an encounter with God that changes our perceptions and priorities.

Consider This: This week, how can we open ourselves more fully to an experience with God? Offer the following suggestions and ask class members to add their own ideas.

■ *Consider moments when you have strongly sensed God's presence and majesty. Choose a time and place this week to deliberately focus on who God is and what He has done in your life.*

■ *Choose a favorite hymn or psalm that portrays God's majesty and love. Say the words out loud as a prayer and*

ask God for a deeper understanding of His will for your life.

■ *Take time each day to pray "Here am I, send me!" Whether it's speaking a word of encouragement, offering practical help, or talking about your faith, be alert to God's call to mission.*