

Developing a Winning Attitude



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 4:27–30, 39–42; Matt. 15:21–28; 2 Thess. 1:1–4; Rom. 15:7; Eph. 4:32; 1 Pet. 3:15.*

Memory Text: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15, *NKJV*).

The more we study Jesus' life, the more we marvel at His ability to accept and affirm people. Although He issued scathing rebukes to the religious leaders of His day, He gladly received those who were struggling with sin, plagued with guilt, and hopelessly condemned. His grace was for them. His mercy extended to even the vilest sinners. The depth of His forgiveness was infinitely deeper than the depths of their sin. His love knew no bounds.

Jesus never exhibited a tinge of pride or superiority. He saw in every human being one created in the image of God, yet fallen by sin, and one whom He came to save. No one was beyond His love. None had fallen so low that His grace could not reach them. He showed respect to all He came in contact with and treated them with the dignity they deserved. He influenced people for the kingdom because He believed in people. Their lives were changed in His presence because He cared for them so deeply. They rose to become what He believed they could be.

In this week's lesson, we will explore more deeply Jesus' attitude toward people and discover how to apply these principles in our own lives.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 29.

Receptivity to the Gospel

Read John 4:27–30, 39–42. How does Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman demonstrate the truth that all sorts of people are open to the gospel, even in unexpected places?

The last place the disciples expected to find hearts receptive to the gospel was in Samaria. The Samaritans were in constant conflict with the Jews over doctrine and worship. This animosity was decades old. The Samaritans had wanted to participate in building the temple in Jerusalem but were refused that opportunity because of their intermarriage with the heathen culture around them and their unorthodox views. As a result, the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim. The disciples would readily skip by Samaria as an unfertile ground for the proclamation of the gospel.

Jesus saw what the disciples did not see: receptive hearts. John's account of the story of the woman at the well begins with these words: "He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria" (*John 4:3, 4, NKJV*). Jesus "needed" to go through Samaria because the Holy Spirit convinced Him that there would be receptive hearts in this unlikely place. When our eyes are divinely anointed by the Holy Spirit, we see possibilities where others see only difficulties. We see a rich harvest of souls for the kingdom of God where others see only barren fields.

Read Acts 8:4, 5, 14. What was the ultimate result of Jesus' ministry in Samaria?

The disciples would have passed by Samaria without ever providing an opportunity for the Samaritans to hear the truth of the Word of God. Jesus saw what they did not see. He recognized that the Holy Spirit had created a receptivity in one woman's heart. Her dramatic conversion impacted scores of people in that city. We will not always see immediate results from our witnessing activities, but as we sow seeds in receptive hearts, they will one day bring a harvest for the glory of God.

We never know for sure the impact of our words and actions on others, either for good or for bad. Hence, why must we always be careful about what we say and do in the presence of others?

An Attitude Adjustment

Our attitudes often determine our ability to influence others. A harsh, critical, and unfriendly attitude is going to drive people away from you. Even if you are able to witness, your words, no matter how truthful, are much less likely to be received.

In contrast, a positive attitude and a belief in others draws them to us. It creates a bond of friendship. Jesus stated this principle beautifully when He said, “ ‘No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things I heard from My Father I have made known to you’ ” (*John 15:15, NKJV*). Friends accept one another in spite of their weaknesses and mistakes and freely share their joys and sorrows.

Read Matthew 15:21–28 and Mark 14:6–9. These texts describe two women of widely differing circumstances. Jesus appears to be harsh with one and gentle with the other. What indications do you have in these passages that Jesus was reaching out with His saving grace to each one and building trust?

The woman in Matthew 15 is a Canaanite. Jesus intentionally refuses her request initially so that, as she persists, her faith will grow. He eventually grants her desire and then makes an amazing statement that no religious leader in Judea at that time would ever make to a poor Canaanite woman. He publicly says, “ ‘O woman, great is your faith!’ ” (*Matt. 15:28, NKJV*). He gives her one of the greatest compliments any religious teacher could ever give. Can you imagine how her heart rejoiced and her life was changed?

The woman who anoints Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume is a Jew—a woman of ill repute, a woman who has failed badly and sinned often—but one who was forgiven, transformed, and made new again. When others criticize her, Jesus compliments her and approves of her actions. He declares, “ ‘Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her’ ” (*Mark 14:9, NKJV*).

In view of the two stories we have read above, what are the essentials of a positive winning attitude? What kind of attitude adjustments do you need, not just for witnessing but for life in general?

Presenting the Truth in Love

Friendship alone does not win people to Christ. We might have many friends, people we enjoy being with and who enjoy being with us, but if we never tell them what Jesus means to us and how He changed our lives, our friendship may make little eternal difference. Sure, we might be fun to be around, but God calls us to be more than just fun to be around. Friendship alone will not bring people to Christ, but unfriendly attitudes may drive people from Christ.

The apostle Paul reminds us to speak “the truth in love” (*Eph. 4:15*). The bonds of friendship are built when we agree with people as much as possible, demonstrate acceptance, and compliment them where it is appropriate. How important that we make a habit of looking for the good in people as opposed to the bad.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1–4. List some of the specific things for which Paul compliments the Thessalonians.

There are those who seem to delight in looking for things that are wrong with others if for no other reason than that it makes them feel better about themselves.

The apostle Paul was the opposite. He looked for the positive in the churches he ministered to. Certainly, he reproved error and did not condone sin, but his focus was to build up the churches that he established. One way he did this was by highlighting what they did right.

Ellen G. White’s statement on the importance of positive relationships is remarkable. “If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful [full of pity], there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 189.

Reflect on the statement above for a moment. What would it mean for your church if kindness, courtesy, tenderheartedness, and pity (mercy) overflowed from each member’s heart? What would a church like this look like? Look into your own heart and ask yourself about a way in which you could improve in this area.

The Foundation of Acceptance

Read Romans 15:7 and Ephesians 4:32. How would you describe the foundation of all acceptance? What is the essence of an accepting attitude?

In these two passages, the apostle Paul presents the principles underlying our acceptance of one another. Because Christ has forgiven and accepted each one of us, how can we possibly refuse to forgive and accept one another? In fact, it is precisely because Jesus has received us that we can receive one another, even despite the other's flaws.

Think hard about what this means. Think about yourself and about some of the things you have done and might still be struggling with—things that, perhaps, you alone know about, things that you'd be terrified if others knew about too.

And yet, what? By faith, you are accepted in Christ, who knows all about the things that others might not know anything about. Yes, He knows all of that, and, yet, He accepts you anyway, not because of your own goodness but because of His.

What, then, should be your attitude toward others?

Here is a difficult concept for some to understand. Genuine acceptance means that we accept people as they are, with all their sinful habits, because they are human beings created in the image of God. Because Christ died for us “while we were yet sinners” and “reconciled [us] to God” when we were His enemies, we can forgive and accept others. His love toward us becomes the very foundation of our acceptance and forgiveness toward others (*Rom. 5:6–10*).

But once an accepting, caring relationship has been established, it is often necessary to confront another individual lovingly with the truths of Scripture. To fail to do this is to neglect to love. We must care enough to share life-changing, eternal truths with our friends.

Jesus' attitude was not, “Do whatever you please. It's all right. I still accept you.” His attitude was, rather, “No matter what you have done, I am willing to forgive you and provide you with power to change.” Biblical truth presented humbly in Christ's Spirit with a loving attitude wins hearts and changes lives.

How is it possible to accept an individual without accepting that person's sinful behavior? How can we be accepting while at the same time not condoning or tolerating sin?

Truth Lovingly Presented

Jesus did not neglect presenting truth for “love’s sake,” because that would not have been love. Love always seeks the best for another. There is no conflict between love and truth. Truth presented humbly and kindly is a statement of love. Jesus said, “ ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’ ” (*John 14:6*). Jesus is the only way of salvation (*Acts 4:12*). His grace saves us so that we can know His truth and live His life. Truth without love leads to stifling legalism, which strangles spiritual life. So-called love without truth leads to tolerant sentimentalism with no substance, leaving an individual adrift on a sea of uncertainty. Truth presented in love leads to an authentic Christian experience that provides clear direction, purpose, and certainty.

Read 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Timothy 4:2; and Titus 3:4, 5. What expressions in these verses present the balance between presenting Bible truth and having a humble, accepting spirit?

The New Testament writers never emphasize love over truth. They beautifully blend love and truth, grace and law, compassion and honesty. Peter admonishes fellow believers to “give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (*1 Pet. 3:15, NKJV*). In other words, you need to know what you believe, why you believe it, and be able to explain what you believe and why. This doesn’t mean you must have all the answers or be able to convince others of your beliefs. It means only that with “meekness and fear”—that is, with humility and a sense of the greatness of the issues at stake—you can explain and defend your faith.

Paul counsels his young protégé Timothy, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (*2 Tim. 4:2, NKJV*). He reminds Titus that it is the kindness and love of God that saved those who have been reborn in Him (*Titus 3:5*).

We, too, are called to present the truth in love with all meekness and humility. Our Lord invites us to join Him in lovingly sharing with accepting attitudes His last-day message for a world dying without Christ.

If someone were to ask you, “Why are you a Christian?” how would you respond, and why?

Further Thought: “In Christ is the tenderness of the shepherd, the affection of the parent, and the matchless grace of the compassionate Saviour. His blessings He presents in the most alluring terms. He is not content merely to announce these blessings; He presents them in the most attractive way, to excite a desire to possess them. So His servants are to present the riches of the glory of the unspeakable Gift. The wonderful love of Christ will melt and subdue hearts, when the mere reiteration of doctrines would accomplish nothing. ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God.’ ‘O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! . . . He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom.’ Isaiah 40:1, 9–11.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 826, 827.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 It’s unfortunate, but some people can make themselves feel better by pointing out the faults of others. How can we be sure that we don’t fall into that same mind frame?
- 2 Consider this scenario: A friend has just returned from a funeral and makes this comment: “I am so glad my aunt is up in heaven looking down at me. It makes me feel so good.” Based on the principles we studied in our lesson this week, how would you respond? That is, however important the state of the dead is, why might this not be the best time to give that person a Bible study on this topic?
- 3 Discuss the following statement in the light of our witness to others: “The very act of looking for evil in others develops evil in those who look. By dwelling upon the faults of others, we are changed into the same image. But by beholding Jesus, talking of His love and perfection of character, we become changed into His image. By contemplating the lofty ideal He has placed before us, we shall be uplifted into a pure and holy atmosphere, even the presence of God. When we abide here, there goes forth from us a light that irradiates all who are connected with us.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 479.

Speaking Boldly in Finland

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Nineteen-year-old Simo Vehkavuori began to rethink his life while visiting a Seventh-day Adventist uncle and aunt in Sweden. The Finnish teen remembered failing to fulfill a promise to follow God at a summer camp three years earlier, and he anxiously wondered, *Have I lost God's grace?*

One night, he went to the back garden and, weeping, knelt by a large lilac bush. "Jesus, if You still accept me, if tonight is the right time to give my heart to You, please show me," he cried. "Perhaps allow a star to fall in the sky?"

As he stood up, an enormous star fell in the night sky.

When Simo returned home to the family dairy farm in Finland, the farming community heard about his decision to follow God. Some people snickered, and Simo wondered whether he should be so open about his faith. One evening, a government inspector showed up for a regular check as Simo milked the cows in his father's brick barn. She had heard about his conversion, and she spoke mockingly. "Listen, a little bird is spreading a rumor," she said as Simo milked a cow by hand. "I hope that you did not become a Christian in Sweden. Wouldn't it be better for you to go to dances and movies with other young people and to squeeze all the joy out of the world that is possible?"

Looking up at the woman, Simo said, "My dear friend, this evening I can tell you that I met Jesus as my personal Savior in Sweden, and I want to follow Him wherever He leads." He had scarcely finished speaking when a loud explosion rocked the barn. The cow that he was milking dropped to the ground dead. The other cows collapsed on their knees. Silence filled the barn for a moment. Then the cows began to moo madly, their mooing sounding like barking dogs.

Ball lightning, the size of a golf ball, had fallen to the ground and exploded between Simo and the cow. Simo's rubber boots protected him from the shock. The inspector stood frozen on the concrete floor. Her face was pale. Her instruments had tumbled into a gutter filled with cow dung. Finally she spoke.

"Simo, can you forgive my careless words?" she said. The mocking tone was gone. "We are like dust when nature manifests its power. Stay on your chosen path." After a pause, she asked, "How can I get on the same path as you?"



Simo resolved at that moment never to be shy about sharing his faith. In his room that night, he prayed, "Take my whole heart and life, and let me follow wherever You lead me."

SIMO VEHKAVUORI, now 84 and retired, served as a pastor and church leader for many years in Finland.