

Jesus Won Their Confidence



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 15:6, Num. 14:11, 1 Cor. 3:1–9, Dan. 6:1–3, Neh. 2:1–9, Deut. 4:1–9, Acts 2:42–47.*

Memory Text: “But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities” (*Luke 5:15, ESV*).

For several years, a Seventh-day Adventist church has provided breakfast five days a week for a local public elementary school. Though the nation itself was very secular, it just had passed a law providing enough money for each public school to have a chaplain, and the school and community wanted the Seventh-day Adventist church to provide one (it is rare to ask only one church to do that). The chaplain's role is to help look after the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the students and even the wider school community. The opportunities are amazing.

“I enjoy the unique and special relationship we have with your church,” the school principal had said to the church pastor, who was visiting the school, “and just wish other churches could be involved the way you are.” When the pastor was leaving the grounds, the school's community liaison officer thanked him for what the church was doing and asked if she could attend one Sabbath.

This week, we will explore the issue of winning the confidence of people whom we aim to serve and win for Christ.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 3.

Winning Confidence

After desiring their good, showing sympathy, and ministering to their needs, Jesus “won their confidence.” *Confidence* in Latin is composed of the words *con*, meaning “with,” and *fides*, meaning “faith.” Throughout the Bible several words are employed to get across the meaning of the word *faith*.

In Hebrew the main root for “faith” is *amn*, from which we get the word *amen*. The basic idea is that of constancy, continuity, and reliability. It gives the idea of something solid, firm, in which one can trust and believe. It is often translated as “believe” in the context of a saving faith in God, and in another form it means “truth.” In the context of Christ’s example of winning people’s confidence, the implication would be that of evoking the kind of trust that comes from seeing unwavering and solid commitment, which in the case of Jesus came through mingling with, sympathizing with, and serving the people.

Read the following texts, all of which have a word based on the root *amn* (*Gen. 15:6, Num. 14:11, Isa. 7:9, Hab. 2:4*). **How is it used in the text, and how does it convey the idea of confidence and trust?**

In the Greek of the New Testament, the root word used to convey the Hebrew *amn* (faith, belief) is “*pistis*.” This Greek word for faith implies belief, trust, absolute certainty, reliability, and assurance. In the context of Christ’s example of winning people’s confidence, the implication would be that of evoking absolute certainty, assurance, trust, and belief in response to His unselfish commitment to mingling, sympathizing, and serving.

It is important to note that in Scripture, whenever this concept of confidence is attributed to humans—as in self-confidence or confidence in a person—it can often have a negative connotation (*see Mic. 7:5 and Ps. 118:9*). It is positive when this confidence is attributed to God. This calls for a word of caution. As followers of Jesus, we are called to live out His pattern of mingling, sympathizing, and ministering to people’s needs. Yet, when those we serve show confidence in us, we must point them to Jesus and what He has done for them.

If someone were to ask you, “What does true faith in God look like?” how would you answer, and why? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

A Careful Balance

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in an African country is growing rapidly. What is the secret? Church leaders have stated that there is a strong connection between this growth and the unselfish and unconditional service of the church members to people in communities throughout the country. The widespread confidence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church came to the attention of the country's president. He attended a large Adventist Community Services rally and thanked Seventh-day Adventist Church members personally for their service.

At the same time, as representatives of Christ we need to walk a fine line. We need to, as Jesus did, win the trust and the confidence of the people. But their confidence and trust in us needs to be directed toward Jesus. We are mere conduits. They see something of Christ in us—be it selflessness, love, caring, self-denial for the good of others—and they are drawn to us. As always, though, if they look at us too carefully, because we are all sinners, they might not like all that they see. Hence, we must always point them to Jesus, in whom alone they can put their full confidence. The rest of us are, sooner or later, bound to disappoint.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1–9, 5:1. What is Paul dealing with in the church? What kind of witness would result if these people were inviting others to their church and the visitors saw what Paul was talking about?

Of course, we don't have to be perfect or have a perfect church before we can seek to minister to the needs of others. At the same time, we must seek to be the kind of people whom, to some degree, others can learn to count on and trust. And we can do that only to the degree that we faithfully and diligently care for people as Jesus did. Indeed, there's no question that many of the quarrels and struggles within a church would quickly dissipate were the members focused solely on ministering to the needs of the community and revealing to them the love of Christ.

If some visitors started attending your church regularly, what would they see, and what kind of witness would it present to them?

Social Capital

“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold” (*Prov. 22:1, NIV*).

How does the concept expressed here relate to our community witness and outreach?

What is “social capital”? When you make investments in a bank account, its value grows. Social capital consists of positive, productive relationships that are just as valuable as money in the bank. When you nurture rapport with community leaders, asking them what are the community’s needs, seeking their advice on meeting these needs, and then following up with action, you are building relationships with them. This is social capital. Each positive experience with them is like an investment in your relationship. Your social capital continues to grow, and you increase in value in their eyes.

The *Church Manual* reminds us that Seventh-day Adventists “should be recognized as outstanding citizens . . . in working for the common good.” We “should support by our service and our means, as far as possible and consistent with our beliefs, efforts for social order and betterment,” maintaining “an uncompromising stand for justice and right in civic affairs.”—“Standards of Christian Living,” in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2010), pp. 137, 138.

In addition to Jesus’ earthly ministry, Scripture gives other examples of what can happen when God’s people have acquired “social capital.” Read the following passages and describe the positive relationships these Bible characters experienced with “outsiders” and what happened as a result:

Acts 7:9, 10; Gen. 41:38–45 _____

Dan. 2:46–49, 6:1–3 _____

Of course, we might not have the kind of dramatic rescues and stories that are seen here. But that’s not the crucial point. These men displayed strength of character that impressed those around them. Ellen G. White states in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (pp. 217, 218, 221) and in *Prophets and Kings* (p. 628) that the following qualities among these godly men won the confidence and favor of the “heathens” around them: gentleness, fidelity, wisdom, sound judgment, abilities, noble dignity, and unswerving integrity.

The Value of Social Capital

Churches are largely volunteer groups, which operate on limited budgets. Social capital helps improve the chance that your church can reach its significant goals. The old tradition in some countries of farmers helping other farmers bring in their harvest is an example of social capital. That is, though we need to look at each situation on its own, when it is feasible and practical we can cooperate with others in order to reach our goals.

Read Nehemiah 2:1–9. What was the result of the heaven-sent confidence that King Artaxerxes had in Nehemiah?

“The means that he [Nehemiah] lacked he solicited from those who were able to bestow. And the Lord is still willing to move upon the hearts of those in possession of His goods, in behalf of the cause of truth. Those who labor for Him are to avail themselves of the help that He prompts men to give. . . . The donors may have no faith in Christ, no acquaintance with His word; but their gifts are not on this account to be refused.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 634.

How fascinating that, in this case, God moved upon the hearts of pagans to help with the advancement of His own work. This should teach us an important lesson. To whatever degree we can, we should be willing to work with others, even those not of our faith, or even of any faith, if it will advance the cause of Christ. Though, of course, we always have to be careful about any kind of alliance we engage in with others, we can carefully and prayerfully work with others whose input can greatly aid in what we want to do for the good of the community as a whole. Oftentimes governments or even private businesses or individuals, impressed by our humanitarian work, will offer their support. This support shouldn't be automatically accepted or automatically rejected. Instead, it should be prayerfully looked at on a case-by-case basis, with input and counsel, before a decision is made.

What are some ways you can build “social capital” in your community that could later result in positive benefits, *not for yourself* but for others?

Favor With All People

There's no question that we, as a people, have been blessed with much light from the Lord. This light isn't just in theology, such as understanding the Cross, the sanctuary, the state of the dead, the Sabbath, and the great controversy, which are great blessings in and of themselves. When we think about the light given us in regard to health and healing as well, we surely have much to offer those around us.

In fact, the health message can be a powerful point of contact to help us reach out to our communities. After all, even those who might not (at least at first) have any interest in our beliefs care about having good health. What an opportunity for us to share what we have been given. As we have already seen, Jesus said: " 'For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more' " (*Luke 12:48, NKJV*). And there's no question: to us much has been given.

Read Deuteronomy 4:1–9. What is the Lord saying to His people at that time, and in what ways does the principle expressed here apply to us, including the Lord telling them that they must be sure to obey all that He has commanded them?

A few years ago, a Seventh-day Adventist congregation was thinking about this question: Would our community miss us if somehow our congregation disappeared overnight? The answer was simple. No, they wouldn't be missed. Their community had no confidence in them.

Not liking the answer, they decided to move from building walls to building bridges. Careful not to compromise what they knew to be truth, they worked in partnership with organizations that are already doing the work of God. They became engaged with these organizations on an ongoing basis, not simply doing one-time projects but maintaining an ongoing program that greatly benefited their communities. No question: attitudes toward the church soon changed.

Read Acts 2:42–47. What connection was there in the early church between “enjoying the favor of all the people” (*Acts 2:47, NIV*) and church growth? Compare the values mentioned in this passage with your church's values.

Further Thought: Read Mark 5:18–20; Luke 8:38, 39; Acts 5:12–16. Read Ellen G. White, “Our Example,” pp. 17–28, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Grace of Courtesy,” pp. 236–240, in *Selected Messages*, book 3 (especially pp. 238, 239); “Blessing the Children,” pp. 511–517, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Relieve the Oppressed,” p. 242, in *My Life Today*.

There are, no doubt, numerous ways in which you and your church can cooperate with other churches and organizations for the good of the community. It’s crucial for your local church to know what the community needs are and then, to whatever degree possible, work in harmony with others to meet those needs. What better way to build confidence among the community and even with other churches? When mutual confidence and trust are established between your church and its target community, groundwork is laid for them to move toward following Jesus, for “this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 144. God alone knows how many people have been, or will be, won through the simple act of reaching out and seeking to do good to others who are in need.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do we reconcile this idea of building good ties and getting a good name in the community with Jesus’ warning in Matthew 10:22: “‘And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved’ ” (NKJV)? How do we work through what appears to be a strong contradiction?
- 2 In class, discuss your answer to the question: What does true faith look like? That is, if we truly have a saving faith in Jesus, what will be different about us from those who don’t?
- 3 The question of gifts from others not of our faith is one that we need to think about carefully. As we saw in Wednesday’s study, Ellen G. White talked favorably about receiving gifts from those who weren’t even believers in Jesus. In *The Ministry of Healing* (p. 340), however, she spoke very sharply against churches that took money from those in the liquor business (even its own members “in good and regular standing”). She said that money from these people “is stained with blood. A curse is on it.” How can we know right from wrong in regard to whom we take gifts from or cooperate with in general, even for a good cause?

Meeting People's Needs

Zephyrin, 29, is a Global Mission Pioneer in the hills of northern Rwanda. When he came to this district two years earlier, he found just three Seventh-day Adventists.

Most people worshiped traditional gods.

Zephyrin studied the people's needs, searching for a way to make friends for Jesus. He asked the chief for permission to teach adults to read and write. The chief agreed and gave him three rooms to use.

Zephyrin was surprised when 126 people showed up for class. He had received some training in adult literacy, but he had no books. So armed with only a blackboard and chalk, he began teaching. Eight months later, most could read and write at least a little. He formed new groups to study advanced reading and writing. When these groups graduated, they could read the Bible in their own language.

Zephyrin started and ended class with prayer, and bit by bit he told his students about God and explained Bible truths to them. As interest increased, Zephyrin arranged to hold evangelistic meetings.

About 500 people came to the meetings. Zephyrin taught them for two weeks, and then followed up with visits for a month. He held another two-week series of meetings and a one-month follow-up. He repeated this six times, all the while continuing to teach literacy classes. With each series of meetings, the attendance grew.

Almost 200 were baptized in the first baptism. One man was a fortune-teller who earned a living consulting the traditional gods. Another man was a religious teacher in another church. Most of the members of his former church followed him.

Rosette, the wife of the local school headmaster, was baptized. Zephyrin was concerned that her baptism would make her husband angry. But the headmaster attended the baptism and said, "Who knows? Maybe I'll be baptized too." He was baptized during the next series of meetings and hopes to start a new group of believers near his school.

Zephyrin continued teaching literacy classes, holding evangelistic meetings, visiting families, and conducting early morning worship and Sabbath services. And God continued to bless. Within a year, the number of believers grew from three to 300!

The church's mission office purchased land and provided cement for the foundation and metal sheets for the roof of a church to seat 500. The believers bought bricks to build the walls.

Today the church has more than 400 members plus many children and visitors. Several smaller groups have formed in neighboring locations, resulting in more baptisms. Your regular mission offerings help support Global Mission and other church-planting efforts. Thank you for giving.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Daniel 6:1–3*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: See clearly the importance of winning people’s confidence *before* inviting them to follow Jesus.

Feel: Gain a fresh sense of the joy of service—an attitude that helps earn the confidence of those you serve.

Do: Be challenged to find new ways to mingle, show sympathy, minister to needs, and win confidence.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Building Confidence

A Confidence can be built for good or for evil. What examples can you give of biblical characters who won the confidence of people in a good way? In a bad way?

B Is it possible to win people’s confidence through our actions alone? What about through words alone? Give reasons for your answers.

II. Feel: Confidence Through Love

A What role does showing sympathy to people play in building confidence?

B If people feel we are helping them out of a sense of obligation, then we will never win their confidence. What reason does Matthew give for why Jesus had compassion for the crowds (*Matt. 9:36*)? Why should we have compassion today?

III. Do: Winning Actions

A What characteristics must we consistently show in our workplace, neighborhood, or school to earn people’s confidence? What actions or attitudes will destroy confidence?

B What can you do this week to “dare to be a Daniel” and follow his example of winning confidence through faithfulness and honesty?

► **Summary:** Although we can never win confidence through our own efforts alone, we must play our part by mingling, showing sympathy, and ministering to needs—and doing these things out of an attitude of love and compassion, not obligation.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Daniel 6:1–3*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: When we follow Christ’s method of ministry—mingling as one who desires people’s good, showing sympathy, and ministering to needs—we will, as a natural result, win people’s confidence. This method is an essential step in wholistic ministry that lays the foundation for effectively leading people to Jesus.

Just for Teachers: Take the opportunity to review with your class the steps in Christ’s method of ministry and how each step leads toward winning people’s confidence. Discuss why winning confidence is crucial if we are to witness effectively.

Opening Discussion: In August 1980, nine-week-old baby Azaria Chamberlain disappeared from the family tent at a campground near Uluru (also known as Ayers Rock), in Australia’s Northern Territory. The parents, Pastor Michael Chamberlain and his wife, Lindy, maintained that a dingo, an Australian native dog, had taken her. However, public opinion turned against the family, and eventually Lindy Chamberlain was tried and convicted of murder.

At the time, lawyer and author John Bryson couldn’t believe what he was seeing. As a boy, Bryson was friendly with a well-known Seventh-day Adventist family in Melbourne who took him on skiing trips. When rumors about the Chamberlains and the Adventist Church were circulating, he knew it didn’t fit with what he knew of Adventists. This led him to research and write a book called *Evil Angels*, a powerful account of the Chamberlain case that proved influential in changing public opinion and bringing about a retrial—which proved Lindy Chamberlain innocent.

Although Bryson was not a Seventh-day Adventist, nor even a Christian, the childhood influence and example of that well-known Adventist family won his confidence and positively shaped his convictions about Adventists, which in turn spurred him to intercede on behalf of an Adventist woman wrongly convicted. What a testament to the power of influence and the importance of living out our faith.

Consider This: Invite the class to share examples of how they, or other Adventists they know, have won the confidence of nonbelievers. What steps can class members take this week to build confidence among neighbors and colleagues in the workplace or friends at school?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: This week, use the examples of the four Jewish exiles in Babylon—Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—as springboards to discuss the theme of the lesson. Although they predated Jesus’ time on earth by a number of centuries, the lives of these young men reveal key elements of Jesus’ ministry. Consider with your class the ways that we today can help to build confidence among people in our community.

Bible Commentary

I. Winning Confidence in Babylon *(Review Daniel 6:1–3, 2:1, 47–49 with your class.)*

One of the amazing subplots of the book of Daniel is how Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—probably teenagers—won the confidence of the powerful king of Babylon. Within the space of a few years, they won positions of prominence in government and the respect and patronage of the king. How did it happen?

Daniel 2 sheds light on the answer to this question. Here we see Daniel showing sympathy and ministering to the king’s needs. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of Daniel 2 had deeply disturbed him (*Dan. 2:1*). When Daniel interpreted the dream, the king was greatly relieved. In response, he “fell prostrate” before Daniel, and declared, “Surely, your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings” (*Dan. 2:46, 47, NIV*). He then “placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men” (*Dan. 2:48, NIV*).

What an amazing situation. Here we see four foreigners taking a leading role in the king’s court and in Babylonian administration. In just a few years these four men, speaking the local language with Hebrew accents, had won the confidence of the king. And they had done it without, at any stage, compromising their integrity. Right from the beginning, when they refused to eat the king’s rich food, they had stayed true to their faith. And it was that integrity that proved the foundation for the confidence they earned.

Consider This: Surveys show that in many countries Adventists are not well known, which makes it difficult for people to have confidence in us. In what ways can we, as Adventists, become more of a public witness and more involved in community affairs?

II. He Won Confidence. *(Review with your class Matthew 9:9–12.)*

In previous lessons, we have seen how, immediately after giving His

Sermon on the Mount, Jesus puts into practice His missionary method through mingling, showing sympathy, and ministering to needs. But Matthew goes further and shows how, in doing this, Jesus wins the people's confidence: He is invited to have a meal with tax collectors and sinners (*Matt. 9:9, 10*).

In the next verse the leaders accuse Jesus of breaking the rules of their religious club by opening the doors to sinners. And they are correct. He mingled with them, showed sympathy to them, ministered to their needs, and, inevitably, won their confidence. So much so that they invited Him to their social gatherings and parties. Here is the awkward fact—the holy Son of God, who knew more than anyone the horrible destructive power of sin, spent much of His time with wrongdoers.

But perhaps even more amazing is that sinners wanted to spend time with Him. They loved to be near Him. By contrast, the religious leaders closed the door to those outside the religious club. As Jesus said, “ ‘They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on people's shoulders’ ” (*Matt. 23:4, NIV*). “ ‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!’ ” cried Jesus. “ ‘You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces’ ” (*Matt. 23:13, NIV*).

Following Christ's method of ministry does the opposite—it wins confidence and opens up the kingdom of heaven to people. Of course, acceptance of people doesn't mean compromise; it doesn't mean going easy on sin. It simply means that we don't throw stones. Even though Jesus intimately knew the power of sin, He was a friend to sinners. He opened doors to them, and they opened doors to Him.

Consider This: Jesus tells us not to parade our good works in front of people for their approval (*Matt. 6:1–4*), but He also says it's foolish to hide our light under a bushel, because when people see good works they can give glory to God (*see Matt. 5:14–16*). How do we find the correct balance?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In some parts of the world, Seventh-day Adventists are well known and respected. In other areas the church is virtually unknown or widely misunderstood. Explore with your class the concept of building confidence. What things do we need to change in order for that to happen?

Activity: An undocumented story describes a Christian missionary to India, E. Stanley Jones, asking Mohandas Gandhi, “ ‘Mr. Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is it that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming His follower?’ ” Gandhi reportedly replied, “ ‘Oh, I don't reject your Christ. I love your Christ. It is just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ’ ” (Mohandas Gandhi's Writings, Philosophy, Audio, video, and Photographs, “Gandhi's Message to Christians,” accessed June 10, 2015, http://www.mkgandhi.org/africanneedsgandhi/gandhi%27s_message_to_christians.htm?).

This impression of Christians is a long way from the report Luke gives of the early church in which believers shared their possessions, fellow-shipped “with glad and sincere hearts,” and enjoyed “the favor of all the people” (*Acts 2:46, 47, NIV*).

Thought Questions:

- ❶ How do we find the balance between speaking the truth clearly and showing the love of Jesus?
- ❷ Why did the early church, in Acts 2, enjoy popularity, while in other cases it was persecuted?
- ❸ What specific things could we do to build people’s confidence?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Use this final activity as a platform to recap the main themes of the lesson. When we follow Christ’s example of love, compassion, and trustworthiness, we will naturally win people’s confidence.

Activity: Bring to class printed photos from the Internet of the following people (where this is not possible, just bring the names). Although these names are well known worldwide, feel free to substitute some names or pictures that may be more relevant to your local context:

1. Joseph Stalin: leader of the Soviet Union
2. Ellen G. White: Seventh-day Adventist prophet
3. Idi Amin: deposed dictator of Uganda
4. Mother Teresa: renowned Albanian who ministered to the poor of Calcutta
5. Richard Nixon: disgraced U.S. president
6. Abraham Lincoln: renowned U.S. president
7. Saddam Hussein: deposed president of Iraq
8. Lance Armstrong: disgraced champion cyclist
9. Nelson Mandela: anti-apartheid leader and South African president
10. Jesus Christ: Savior of the world

In turn, hold up each picture (or name the person in the photo). First ask if anyone recognizes the face. Ask the following questions:

1. To what degree has public perception of this person changed over time?
2. How did each individual win or not win confidence among people? How did he or she keep confidence? If this person lost the confidence of others, how did that happen?
3. What are the key factors that lead you to have confidence in a person?
4. What can you do to establish those confidence-building characteristics in your life?