

Jesus Bade Them, “Follow Me”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *John 10:1–5, 16; Luke 9:2; Rev. 14:6, 7; Luke 19:1–10; Acts 26:11–27; Rev. 3:20.*

Memory Text: “‘But they [the sheep] will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice’” (*John 10:5, NIV*).

In A.D. 362, Roman emperor Julian launched a campaign to revive paganism. Christianity was taking over the Roman Empire, and he and the pagan leaders were worried. Julian’s advice to a prominent pagan priest expresses his concern and gives a clue as to why Christianity was growing so rapidly: “‘I think that when the poor happened to be neglected and overlooked by the [pagan] priests, the impious Galileans [Christians] observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence. . . . [They] support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us.’”—Quoted in Rodney Stark, *Cities of God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), p. 31.

The Romans had counted on Christianity’s fading away when their leader, Jesus Christ, died. Instead, record numbers of Roman citizens were following Jesus. How did *they* explain this “problem”? Jesus’ followers were demonstrating His love through meeting the basic needs of those around them. That’s what Jesus did when He was here, and that’s what His followers are to do as well.

No wonder, then, that when given the offer to follow Jesus, so many did.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 10.

They Know His Voice

Read John 10:1–5, 16. How do these texts illustrate the importance of why we, as Jesus’ representatives, must form positive and loving relationships with people in our communities as we seek to lead them to Jesus? How can we help them learn to hear His voice?

The whisper of a friend is more powerful in drawing people to Jesus than is the shout of a stranger. When we make friends who learn to trust us, the Good Shepherd (*John 10:11, 14*) can work through us to help these people hear, know, and follow His voice.

It is, of course, important that we know Jesus’ voice ourselves before we can help others know it as well. We need divinely given discernment to distinguish between the cunning voice of Satan and Jesus’ voice. Indeed, we must never forget the reality of the great controversy and that we have an enemy who works with great stealth to keep people from coming to a saving relationship with Jesus.

Nevertheless, we can be powerful conduits who help people know the voice of Jesus. He speaks through nature (even despite the ravages of the Fall), providential circumstantial workings, the influence of the Holy Spirit, godly people, and His Word. (See Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 85–91.) As we ourselves come to know and obey that voice, we can be guides to others, as well. The last thing we want to be is, as Jesus once warned, the blind leading the blind (*see Matt. 15:14*).

Why did Jesus have such compelling power to draw people to Him? It is because His example of unselfish giving of Himself is hard to resist. When we, His body, set selfishness aside and take on the nature of a servant, letting Him live out His life within us, others will be drawn to the call of the Christ in us.

As the Good Shepherd’s representatives, we must reflect the characteristics of His ministry when we bid people to follow Him. Authenticity in word as well as genuine service that reflects Jesus’ sacrificial love opens the ears of those whom we serve and breaks down barriers between the community and the church.

What are concrete ways that you can help others hear the voice of the Shepherd?

We Are to Seek

Read Luke 19:10; Mark 1:17; Luke 9:2; and Revelation 14:6, 7. What is one key point that all these texts have in common? That is, what are they telling us to do?

For years a Seventh-day Adventist congregation prayed, “Lord, please draw the people in our community to our church and to You”—as if our church is a giant magnet that will magically draw people in. Yes, sometimes people do walk into our churches, searching for God, all with no apparent effort on our part.

But what is your church to do when years go by and no one from the community walks through your doors? If you merely focus on praying for people to come, you are not following Jesus’ method for winning souls. He mingled, socialized, and sought out people to save. “We are not to wait for souls to come to us; we must seek them out where they are. . . . There are multitudes who will never be reached by the gospel unless it is carried to them.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 229.

Various metaphors illustrate this idea of seeking:

1. The shepherd leaves the 99 sheep that are in the fold to seek for the one who has wandered away (see *Matt. 18:10–14*). Jesus is telling this story in the context of His admonition to nurture and protect “little ones” from sinning. The “little ones” could be literal children or immature Christians. If they wander back into the world, we, like Jesus, are to seek for them and lovingly bring them back to Him.

The point here, as in the texts above, is similar: we are to be proactive in seeking the lost. We need to make an effort to reach out to them. Though, on occasion, it happens that someone walks in off the street and says, “Teach me about God, about salvation, about truth,” that’s generally not the norm, is it?

2. “Christ’s method” of reaching the lost “will not, cannot, be without fruit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 144. Are we, however, focusing only on the “low-hanging fruit”—people who already share our Christian worldview, such as Christians of other denominations? What are we doing about reaching the “hard-to-reach fruit”—secular people, atheists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, et cetera? Historically, people with Christian worldviews find Adventism relevant, but we must do a much better job of sharing Jesus with faith groups that have other worldviews.

The Bridge

Sometimes a church will have community service outreach programs in areas of health, family, personal finance, conflict management, et cetera, and might ask: What is the bridge to bring them to the “Follow Me” stage? We rather should ask, *Who* is the bridge? Answer: You are! “The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470. Churches that are successful in keeping inquiring visitors engaged from event to event and program to program are blessed with members who genuinely love God and are eager to nurture lasting friendships.

On the flip side, church members who are careless in their approach to visitors, or even lethargic toward them, can have a very negative impact on your church’s outreach. “The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 371.

Read Luke 19:1–10. Why did Zacchaeus find it necessary to climb a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus? What spiritual lessons should we take from this story?

Imagine what might have happened if those who were blocking access to Jesus there in Jericho had paid attention to Zacchaeus’s keen interest in coming close to Jesus and had lovingly invited this “sinner” to the feet of the Savior.

Those of us who are part of the “crowd” around Jesus must be so “infected” with His love for struggling, sinful humanity that we become “contagious” Christians. If we are deeply aware of God’s love and grace for sinners like us, we will passionately seek those outside of the crowd who are short in spiritual stature and caringly usher them to Christ.

How do you act toward new faces in your church? Do you make an intentional effort to talk to them? Or do you ignore these people, thinking that someone else can minister to them? What does your answer say about yourself and what might need to be changed?

The Bidding

Jesus and His disciples healed people *and then* turned their minds to eternal issues. (See Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 20.) Evangelist Mark Finley reminds us that not to introduce God to people is spiritual malpractice. Jesus' method of evangelism was to touch people at their points of greatest need. This is medical missionary work. Christ was not content only to heal them physically and do nothing else. The goal is eternal life in Jesus. Medical missionary work may not start with bidding those whom we know to follow Jesus, but it should get there eventually. Out of our love for people, we will long to offer them *everything* that Jesus offers.

But you may say, "I will take care of the first part of Jesus' method, but I don't do the bidding 'follow Me' part. That's not my gift." If you do the first part, you may surprise yourself by automatically sharing Jesus—and it will be so natural, so much easier, because you did the "groundwork" in the soil of their hearts.

As you become better acquainted with the people you serve, be alert for opportunities to talk about faith and about what the Lord means to you. Seek for opportunities to bring up spiritual topics. Ask your new friends about their family, their occupation, and their religion, which opens the way to share your personal testimony.

In fact, personal testimonies can be the most powerful way to witness, because they also can be the least threatening. You aren't overtly preaching; you simply are telling a story, and we all should have our own personal story about what Jesus has done in our lives.

Read Acts 26:11–27, the apostle Paul's telling of his personal testimony to King Agrippa. What can we learn from this for ourselves in seeking to witness to others about Jesus?

Notice the various stages. Paul told about what he was like before he knew the Lord. He then told about his actual conversion experience. And Paul then told about what God had done in his life since then. Then he made an appeal.

Though our stories might not be as dramatic as Paul's, what is your own story with Jesus, and how can you learn to share it with others when the time is right?

Seek and You Shall Find

Read Revelation 3:20; Matthew 7:7, 8; and John 1:12. In what ways are these three passages related, and what are they saying to us about what it means to seek and to find the Lord?

These texts together show that people must ask and seek and be open to receive Jesus. At the same time, Revelation 3:20 depicts Jesus as standing at the door and knocking so that a person will open the door and let Him in.

These ideas are not contradictory. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord is working on the hearts of people, drawing them to Him, even if people aren't necessarily aware that this is what is happening. They are often seeking for something that life itself doesn't offer them. What a privilege to be there to point them in the right direction and to help them better understand just what it is that they are looking for.

The fact is that, through you, Jesus can knock at the "door" of the lives of the people in your community, and anyone who willingly "opens the door" and receives Him will receive the blessings that come with Him (*Rev. 3:20, John 1:12*). Also, He invites His followers to ask, seek, and knock at *His* door and receive the "good gifts" of His kingdom (*Matt. 7:7, 8, 11*).

When the Holy Spirit impresses you that someone is ready to "open the door" to Christ, ask, "Would you like to pray with me to receive Jesus Christ and become a member of His family?" The following is a sample prayer that he or she can pray:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name, amen."

We need spiritual discernment to know when it is the right time to make an appeal. While there's always the danger of being too aggressive, there's always the danger, perhaps worse, of not being aggressive enough. Sometimes people need a firm and loving push to make a choice for the Lord. Who knows who might be teetering on the edge between two choices: eternal life in Christ or eternal loss?

We do, for sure, have a sacred responsibility.

Further Thought: Read Psalm 77:20, Hosea 11:4, 2 Corinthians 5:11–21. Read Ellen G. White, “Teaching and Healing,” pp. 139–146, and “Help in Daily Living,” pp. 469, 470, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “ ‘This Man Receiveth Sinners,’ ” pp. 185–197, and “ ‘Go Into the Highways and Hedges,’ ” pp. 228–237, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

There was a young man who loved the Lord and who wanted to tell others about Jesus. Articulate, charismatic, he was a powerful witness. People loved to hear him speak. Yet, there was a constant problem: he was always afraid to ask people to make a commitment to Jesus. This surprised other church members, because in every other way he seemed so bold for the Lord, so willing to speak openly about his faith. Eventually, when asked about it, he gave the argument that we saw in Wednesday’s study that this was not his gift. He liked to sow seeds; he would leave it to others to reap the harvest. After a while, though, he confessed that, more than anything else, he was afraid of being rejected. He always felt a bit inadequate as a witness for the Lord (which is a good thing), and thus he was afraid that people would not make commitments to Jesus after he had asked them to do so. Others in the church explained to him that witnessing isn’t about us but about Jesus. We are always going to be imperfect witnesses. Though we can prayerfully and lovingly point them to Jesus, we cannot play the role of the Holy Spirit, who alone can bring conviction and conversion. We, though, are to be the human conduits of the love of Christ to others.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What would you say to someone who said that he or she was afraid to ask others to make a commitment to Jesus?
- 2 John 1:9 reads: “That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (NKJV). How does this verse help us to understand that the Lord is seeking to reach every person with salvation?
- 3 How friendly is your church to visitors? What could you do better in regard to how you deal with strangers who walk in the door?
- 4 When was the last time someone off the street simply walked into your church? How did the church respond?
- 5 In class, talk about your own conversion stories. How have you used them, or how could you use them to be a witness to others?

A Changed Heart: Part 1

by AGNES MUKARWEGO and ALITA BYRD, Rwanda

“Why are you all dressed up?” the fish seller in the marketplace asked me.

I looked at my good clothes—not what one normally wore to the market—and wondered what to tell this man, who was a friend of my husband. If my husband knew that I had gone to church, he would be angry. But I could not lie. Finally I told the man, “I came from church to buy my husband’s favorite fish for dinner.”

My home was not a happy one. My husband drank heavily and paid little attention to the children or me. We were poor because he did not work regularly. These problems left me discouraged and searching for anything that would bring me hope. So when I met my neighbor and her friends on the road one day and they began to tell me that God is the answer to all my problems, big and small, I was eager to hear more. But when they invited me to their church on Saturday, I told them I could not go. Saturday was market day, the busiest day of the week.

Before my neighbor and her friends parted, they gave me a Bible. I opened it and began reading as I walked home. I continued reading the Bible at home, and soon I found some precious verses that seemed to speak just to me. I read them again and again.

“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (*Matt. 6:25–27, NIV*).

God knows about my worries! I thought. *If God cares that much about me, He can certainly help me with my problems.*

I decided that I would make time to go to the Seventh-day Adventist church the next Saturday to learn more about the God who did not want me to worry about anything. I got up and dressed before my husband awoke and slipped out of the house.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Revelation 3:20*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Appreciate the crucial importance of the final step in Christ’s method of ministry.

Feel: Be assured that although he or she must play a part in “inviting,” conversion is 100 percent the role of the Holy Spirit.

Do: Look for and find opportunities to help people move from the other four steps of Christ’s ministry to the crucial decision to follow Him as their Savior.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Knocking on the Door

A The book of Revelation pictures Jesus as knocking at the door (*Rev. 3:20*). What else does it suggest Jesus does while He is standing at the door? What ways can we knock on the door of people’s hearts?

B What does Paul suggest should be the key motivation for us, Christ’s followers, to become His “ambassadors” of salvation (*2 Cor. 5:20*)?

II. Feel: Experiencing Salvation

A What emotions do you think Zacchaeus experienced (*Luke 19:1–10*): When he climbed the tree? When Jesus called him? When Jesus forgave him?

B It doesn’t matter if we are sitting in a tree, by a roadside begging, or in a pew just playing church—Jesus will reach out to us if we reach out to Him. How does it feel when you know you’re in the place God wants you to be, doing what He’s asked you to do? How does it feel to be in the wrong place?

III. Do: Sharing Salvation

A What are specific steps we can take to share the good news with neighbors and friends with whom we have built friendships and confidence? What are the potential pitfalls?

B How can we experience a sense of willingness to move outside of our “comfort zone” for the sake of the gospel?

► **Summary:** The final essential stage in Jesus’ method of ministry flows naturally from the other four steps. However, we can’t just take this stage for granted, expecting it to happen by itself. We need to prayerfully ask God to provide openings for us to bid people to follow Him.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Revelation 3:20*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The final step of Christ’s method, bidding people to follow Him, is a crucial step that must be approached with love and care. In some ways this step flows naturally from the other four steps—mingling, showing sympathy, ministering to needs, and winning confidence. But it needs careful prayer and planning.

Just for Teachers: In your class this week, discuss how this final stage in Christ’s method of ministry is not about the right technique or formula. It needs to be planned and prayed about, but bidding people to follow Jesus should flow naturally from faithfully following His other steps of ministry. It is never something that can be forced.

Opening Discussion: The apostle John pictures Jesus knocking at a door, saying, “ ‘Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me’ ” (*Rev. 3:20, NIV*).

In the chapel of Keble College, Oxford, hangs a famous painting by British painter Holman Hunt that illustrates this verse. Jesus is depicted knocking on a door with one hand, holding a lantern in the other. Significantly, there is no handle on the door—the only way it can be opened is if the person inside chooses to do so.

When bidding people to follow Him, Jesus doesn’t force entry. He knocks, issues an invitation, and leaves the choice to each individual.

God invites us to salvation. He doesn’t try to trick, cajole, bribe, or force. The finale of the book of Revelation beautifully describes a God who invites: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (*Rev. 22:17*).

The water of life is free to “whosoever will.” Too often we get the idea that it’s our task to “convert” people, rather than leaving it to the Holy Spirit. And so we try different methods to open the doors of people’s hearts. We talk about “entering wedges,” a wonderful metaphor if we’re talking about attractive ways to open the way for people to accept Jesus. But it’s not so appealing if we mean slipping these wedges between the door and the doorframe, grabbing a hammer, and forcing open the door.

Our calling is to join Jesus in knocking on doors, inviting people to open their lives to Him. Our calling is to pray that the Holy Spirit will

touch the emotions and intellects of people to open up to His love. Jesus Himself was so interested in opening doors to people that He even says, “‘I am the door’ ” (*John 10:7*).

Consider This: If conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, then what role do we have in bidding people to follow Jesus? What can we do to help encourage people to respond to Jesus’ knocking?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: *Jesus spent much of His time caring for people’s physical needs, but His ultimate purpose was to lead people to accept Him as Lord and Savior. Explore with your class how we can follow His example and find the proper balance in our mission today.*

Bible Commentary

I. Tax Collectors and Sinners (*Review with your class Luke 19:1–10.*)

The story of Zacchaeus happens as Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem is drawing to a close. It starts with a scene that is almost comic—a proud, noble, rich man doing a very undignified thing. The little man runs down the road ahead of the crowd to see Jesus. No doubt people only had ever seen him striding proudly with his head held high. The Zacchaeuses of Bible times don’t run. There are some things below their dignity. But there he is, running for his life, with no doubt the town children pointing and laughing at him.

But Zacchaeus doesn’t care; he’s desperate to see who Jesus is. He’s been worshiping things all his life. He has a big house, a large bank account, a full closet, and an empty life. He needs Jesus. He adds to the indignity of the spectacle by scrambling up a sycamore tree. Below, amid the choking dust and the pressing crowd, Jesus demonstrates that His constant mission is “to seek and to save” the lost (*Luke 19:10*). He walks to the tree that Zacchaeus had just climbed, looks up at him (probably the first time anybody had ever done that, given his stature), and says, “‘I must stay at your house today’ ” (*Luke 19:5, NIV*).

In doing this and in going to the tax collector’s house, Jesus blatantly flaunts Jewish law and makes Himself ritually unclean. But that does not stand in the way of His mission.

Consider This: What barriers might there be that we let get in the way of bidding people to follow Jesus? What can we do to get rid of them?

II. Seeking and Saving (*Review with your class Luke 19:10.*)

In the story of Zacchaeus, Jesus is portrayed as the One who searches for the lost. This is a theme throughout the Gospels, but in this story and the ones leading up to it, Luke gives it a special emphasis—Jesus seeks out the marginalized, the outcasts.

In His final words to Zacchaeus, Jesus announces again the purpose of His ministry on earth: “ ‘For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost’ ” (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*). In Luke 15 we see Jesus pictured as a Shepherd who leaves His 99 sheep to seek and save the one lost sheep (*Luke 15:3–7*). And throughout Scripture, the role of shepherd is often used to describe the mission of reaching out to the lost, and caring for and nurturing “the flock.”

In Ezekiel, God rebukes the “shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves!” He asks, “Should not shepherds take care of the flock?” (*Ezek. 34:2, NIV*). He adds, “You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally” (*Ezek. 34:4, NIV*).

John Milton, author of *Paradise Lost*, builds on this imagery in his poem “Lycidas,” where he lambasts spiritual shepherds who don’t do their job: “The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.”

In contrast, God says, “ ‘I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. . . . I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick’ ” (*Ezek. 34: 11, 16, NKJV*).

Jesus also tells the story of the sheep and the sheepfold, where thieves come to steal and kill sheep. In contrast, He says, “ ‘I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ ” (*John 10:10*).

Consider This: In what ways are we acting like shepherds when we bid people to follow Jesus? What lessons about how to do this can we learn from the example of the Good Shepherd?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The link in Christ’s method between winning confidence and bidding people to follow Him is a natural one, but it doesn’t happen by accident. Discuss with class members ways to bridge between these two steps. Also emphasize that our love and care for people should never be conditional on their accepting Jesus or becoming church members.

Activity: As Seventh-day Adventists familiar with the great-controversy theme, we know that people have free choice and can reject the invitation of Jesus. More than 100 years ago, Dr. David Paulson, founder of the Hinsdale Hospital and Sanitarium near Chicago, wrote, “The man who is interested in only those who he thinks can become church members as a result of his ministrations will find fewer and fewer openings for missionary work; for he gradually develops in others a spirit of distrust and suspicion, which closes more

and more doors against him; while, on the other hand, the worker who has allowed the needs of humanity to touch his heart will try to benefit the ‘nine lepers’ even if he knows perfectly well that they will never join his church.”

Thought Questions:

- ❶ Some might argue that if people aren’t responding to our invitation to follow Jesus, we should leave them and move on to more fruitful fields. How would you respond to this?
- ❷ Once we have won people’s confidence, what are some practical ways we can help bid them to follow Jesus?
- ❸ What are the dangers of preaching to people before we have mingled with them, shown sympathy, ministered to their needs, and won confidence?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: In this activity, encourage class members to consider the final step in Christ’s method of ministry and the most effective ways of putting it into practice. It’s easy enough to talk about it, but how exactly should we go about bidding people to follow?

Activity: Bring to class photos of these items. (Where you can, bring the actual item. Where you can’t bring the items or pictures, just bring a list. Feel free to add to this list, as well.)

1. A fishing rod (or line)
2. A magnet
3. A net
4. A hook
5. A megaphone
6. A lasso rope
7. A welcome mat
8. A hammer

Discuss each item as a symbol of a method of bidding people to follow Jesus. What does each symbol suggest? What are the strengths of each method symbolized? What are the weaknesses?

Encourage class members to suggest other symbols of how we can best bid people to follow Jesus.