

# Jesus Commanded Them, “Follow Me”



## SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 3

**READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON:** John 10:1–5, 16; Luke 9:2; Revelation 14:6, 7; Luke 19:1–10; Acts 26:11–27; Revelation 3:20.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “‘But they [the sheep] will never follow a stranger. In fact, they will run away from him. They don’t [do not] recognize a stranger’s voice’ ” (John 10:5, NIV).

**IN A.D. 362** Roman emperor Julian started a campaign (planned action) to bring paganism<sup>1</sup> back to life. Christianity was spreading over the Roman Empire. Julian and the pagan<sup>2</sup> leaders were worried. Julian’s advice to an important pagan priest shows his concern. It gives a hint as to why Christianity was growing so rapidly: “‘I think that the poor are being neglected and forgotten by the [pagan] priests. The impious<sup>3</sup> Galileans [Christians] saw this neglect. They devoted [gave; dedicated] themselves to being kind and generous to the poor. [The Christians] support both their poor and ours too. Everyone can see that our people do not have help from us.’ ”—Adapted from a quote in Rodney Stark, *Cities of God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), page 31.

The Romans had hoped that Christianity would fade away when their leader, Jesus Christ, died. Instead, a great many Roman citizens were following Jesus. How did they explain this “problem”? Jesus’ followers were showing His love by meeting the basic needs of people around them. That is what Jesus did when He was here. And that is what His followers are to do too.

No wonder, then, that when many people had a chance to follow Jesus, they did.

### DEFINITIONS

1. paganism—a religion that has many gods or goddesses, considers the earth holy, and does not have a central authority (leader).
2. pagan—of or relating to the worship of many gods or goddesses or the earth or nature.
3. impious—showing a lack of respect for the pagan religion (a belief in many gods or goddesses or the earth or nature).

**THEY KNOW HIS VOICE (John 10:1–5, 16)**

**Read John 10:1–5, 16. How do these verses explain why it is important that we, as Jesus’ followers, make positive and loving relationships with people in our communities? How can we help them to learn to hear His voice?**

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

It is important that we know Jesus’ voice ourselves before we can help others to know it too. We need God’s wisdom to tell the difference between the cunning (sly) voice of Satan and Jesus’ voice. We must never forget that the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan) is real. We have an enemy who works in secret to keep people from coming to a saving relationship with Jesus.

Even so, we still can help people know the voice of Jesus. He speaks through nature (even after the Fall). He speaks through the influence of the Holy Spirit, godly people, and His Word (the Bible). (Read Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pages 85–91.) As we ourselves come to know and obey that voice, we can be guides to others too. As Jesus once warned, we do not want to be the blind leading the blind (read Matthew 15:14).

Why did Jesus have such power to pull people toward Him? It is because Jesus gave of Himself unselfishly. We, His body, are to set selfishness aside. We are to become servants. Also, we are to let Him live out His life within us. Then others will want to follow the call of Christ living in us.

As the Good Shepherd’s followers, we must show the principles (important rules) of His ministry (work done for God) in our lives when we tell people to follow Him. Being true to the principles that show Jesus’ love opens the ears of those whom we serve. It also breaks down “road blocks” between the community and the church.

**What are useful ways that you can help others to hear the voice of the Shepherd?**



**Jesus, the Good Shepherd, can work through us to help others hear, know, and follow His voice.**

## WE ARE TO SEEK (LOOK FOR; SEARCH) (Luke 19:10)

Read Luke 19:10; Mark 1:17; Luke 9:2; and Revelation 14:6, 7. What is one important point that all these verses share? What are they telling us to do?



What are we doing to reach the “hard-to-reach fruit”?

## DEFINITIONS

4. atheists—persons who believe there is no God.

For years a Seventh-day Adventist congregation prayed, “Lord, please lead the people in our community to our church and to You.” They imagined the church as being a giant magnet that would magically pull people in. Yes, sometimes people do walk into our churches, searching for God without our having done anything to pull them in.

But what is your church to do when years go by and no one from the community walks through your doors? If you just pray for people to come, you are not following Jesus’ method for winning souls. He mixed with, socialized with, and searched for people to save. “We are not to wait for souls to come to us. We must find them where they are. . . . There are crowds of people who will never be reached by the gospel if we do not carry it to them.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 229.

Different word-pictures show this idea of searching for people:

1. The shepherd leaves the 99 sheep that are in the fold to search for the one that has wandered away (read Matthew 18:10–14). If believers wander back into the world, we, like Jesus, are to go searching for them. We are to lovingly bring them back to Him.

The verses above show that we are to be very active in searching for the lost. We need to work hard to reach out to them. Sometimes it may happen that someone walks in off the street and says, “Teach me about God, about salvation, about truth.” But that is usually not how things happen.

2. “Christ’s method” of reaching the lost “will not, cannot, be without fruit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 144. Are we focusing only on the “low-hanging fruit”? By low-hanging fruit we mean the people who already have some Christian beliefs but belong to other Christian churches. But what are we doing to reach the “hard-to-reach fruit”? They are worldly people, atheists,<sup>4</sup> Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists. Historically, people with other Christian beliefs have found common ground (some agreement) with Adventists. But we must do a much better job of sharing Jesus with faith groups that have very different beliefs from ours.

## THE BRIDGE (Luke 19:1–10)

Sometimes a church will have community service outreach programs in areas of health, family, budget planning, grief and anger management, and so on. The church might ask: What is the bridge that will bring others to follow Jesus? Rather, we 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*, page 470. Churches that are successful in keeping visitors involved in church life from event to event and program to program are blessed with members who truly love God. They are eager to encourage lasting friendships.

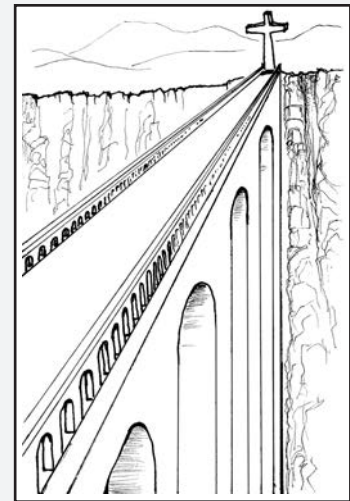
But there are church members who are careless or lazy in the way they reach out to visitors. This carelessness can have a very negative influence on your church’s outreach. “The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of some of the church members. These members have never been truly converted [changed for the better]. And there are others who were once converted but who have backslidden [fallen away from God]. What influence would these unconsecrated [not dedicated to God] members have on new believers? Would they not weaken the power of the God-given message which His people are to bear?”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*<sup>5</sup> for the Church, volume 6, page 371.

**Read Luke 19:1–10. Why did Zacchaeus find it necessary to climb a tree to be able to see Jesus? What spiritual lessons should we learn from this story?**

Imagine what might have happened if those who were busy blocking people from coming to Jesus there in Jericho had noticed Zacchaeus’s desire to come close to Jesus.

Those of us who are part of the “crowd” around Jesus must be so filled with His love for struggling sinners that we want to “infect” them with that love! We must become deeply aware of God’s love and grace<sup>6</sup> for sinners like us. Then we will work hard to find those outside of the crowd who, like Zacchaeus, need our help to see Jesus.

**How do you act toward new faces in your church? Do you make a serious effort to talk with them? Or do you ignore these people, thinking that someone else can minister to (serve) them? What does your answer say about you and what you might need to change?**



**We are the bridge that will bring others to follow Jesus.**

## DEFINITIONS

5. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

6. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

THE APPEAL<sup>7</sup> (COMMAND) (Acts 26:11–27)

Jesus and His disciples healed people and then turned their minds to the treasures of heaven. (Read Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 20.) Evangelist<sup>8</sup> Mark Finley reminds us that it is bad spiritual practice not to introduce God to people. Jesus' method of evangelism<sup>9</sup> was to touch people at their points of greatest need. This is medical missionary work. Christ was not satisfied just to heal them physically and do nothing else. The goal is eternal life in Jesus. Medical missionary work may not start with encouraging or appealing to (asking) those whom we know to follow Jesus. But it should get there sooner or later. Out of our love for people, we will want to offer them *everything* that Jesus offers.

But you may say, "I will take care of the first part of Jesus' method. But I am not good at encouraging people to do the 'follow Me' part. That is 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.

First, get to know better the people whom you serve. Then be alert for opportunities to talk about faith and about what the Lord means to you. Watch for opportunities to bring up spiritual topics. Ask your new friends about their families, their daily work, and their religions, which opens the way to share your personal testimony.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, personal testimonies can be the most powerful way to witness. This is because they can also be the least threatening. You are not preaching. You are just 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 (preacher and teacher) Paul's telling of his personal testimony to King Agrippa. What can we learn from this testimony about witnessing to others about Jesus?**

Notice the different stages. Paul told about what he was like before he knew the Lord. He then told about his true experience of being converted. And Paul then told about what God had done in his life since that time. Then he made an appeal.

**Our stories might not be as powerful as Paul's. But what is your own story with Jesus? And how can you learn to share it with others when the time is right?**

## DEFINITIONS

7. appeal—the act of asking or calling on others to give their lives to Christ.

8. evangelist—a person who goes from place to place to preach the good news of Jesus.

9. evangelism—going from place to place to preach the good news of Jesus.

10. testimony—your personal story or witness about the good things God has done for you.

**KEEP SEARCHING AND YOU SHALL FIND**  
(Revelation 3:20)

**Read Revelation 3:20; Matthew 7:7, 8; and John 1:12. How are these three sets of verses related? And what are they saying to us about what it means to look for and to find the Lord?**

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

These ideas do not oppose one another. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord is working on the hearts of people. He is leading them to Him, even if people do not realize that this is happening. They often are searching for something that life itself does not offer them. What an honor to be there to point them in the right direction and to help them to understand better that Jesus is what they are searching for.

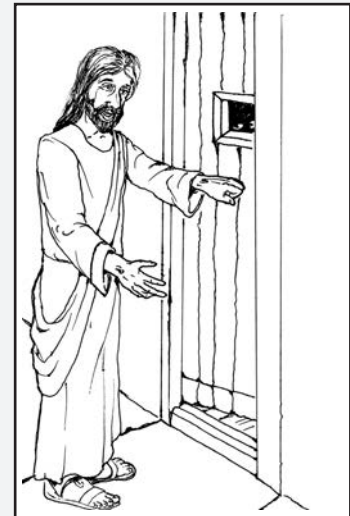
The fact is that, through you, Jesus can knock at the “door” of the lives of the people in your community. And anyone who willingly “opens the door” and receives Him will receive the blessings that come with Him (Revelation 3:20; John 1:12). Also, He invites His followers to ask, search for, and knock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

Suppose that the Holy Spirit tells you that someone is ready to “open the door” to Christ. Then ask that person, “Would you like to pray with me to receive Jesus Christ and become a member of His family?” The following is an example of a 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 away 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 wisdom to know when it is the right time to make an appeal. There may be the danger of coming across too strong. But there is always the danger of not being strong enough. Sometimes people need a firm and loving push to make a choice for the Lord. Who knows who might be “on the fence” between two choices: eternal life in Christ or eternal loss?

For sure, we have a very important and holy responsibility.



**Jesus stands at the door and knocks so that a person will open the door and let Him in.**

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

There was a young man who loved the Lord and wanted to tell others about Jesus. A good speaker and popular, he was a powerful witness. People loved to hear him speak. But there was a serious problem: he was always afraid to ask people to make a strong decision for Jesus. This surprised other church members. In every other way he seemed so bold for the Lord and so willing to speak openly about his faith. But when asked about his fear, he gave the argument that we saw in Wednesday’s study. He claimed that making appeals was not his gift. He liked to sow seeds, but he would leave it to others to reap the harvest. After a while he confessed that he was afraid that people would refuse to accept his call or appeal. He always felt that he was not a good witness for the Lord. And so he was afraid that people would not want to make decisions for Jesus after he had asked them to do so. Others in the church explained to him that witnessing is not about us but about Jesus. We are always going to be imperfect witnesses. We prayerfully and lovingly can point them to Jesus. But we cannot do the work of the Holy Spirit, who alone can bring people to make decisions for Jesus. Instead, we are to be the human “jars,” out of which Christ pours His love 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 decision for Jesus?
- ② John 1:9 reads: “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (NIRV). How does this verse help us to understand that God wants to save every person?
- ③ When was the last time someone off the street just walked into your church? How did the church act toward the person?
- ④ In class, share stories about how you were converted. How have you used your stories? Or how could you use them to be a witness to others?