

13. A Step in Faith (3Q 2020—Making Friends for God)

Biblical Material: Phil. 2:5–11; Matt. 4:18–20; Acts 9:3–6, 10–20; John 21:15–19; 1 John 3:16–18.

Quotes

- The Spirit goes ahead of us when we witness— preparing the way, giving us the words, and granting us courage. *Billy Graham*
- The mission that Jesus invites us to participate in is primarily a relational one in nature. Our ability to sustain our relationship in a meaningful way will have a direct impact on our missional fruitfulness. *Gary Rohrmayer*
- He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose. *Jim Elliot*
- Live as if Christ died yesterday, rose this morning and is coming back tomorrow. *Martin Luther*
- God desires for you to be involved in drawing people to His Word through a dedicated life to Him and an active witness for Him. *Paul Chappell*
- People pay attention when they see that God actually changes persons and sets them free. When a new Christian stands up and tells how God has revolutionized his or her life, no one dozes off. When someone is healed or released from a life-controlling bondage, everyone takes notice. *Jim Cymbala*

Questions

How do we “step out in faith” in our witnessing? In what ways do we really trust God, especially in what to say and do? How do we move away from imparting propositional truth to promoting a deep relationship with our loving Lord? How can even Bible-reading get in the way of discovering Jesus and relating to him? At the end of these lessons, what have we learned?

Bible summary

We are to have the same attitude as Jesus (Phil. 2:5–11). Matt. 4:18–20 is Jesus’ call to Andrew and Peter, “Follow me!” Acts 9:3–6, 10–20 is Paul’s conversion experience. In John 21:15–19 Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. 1 John 3:16–18 tells us what love is, and that we should not only love in words, but with action and the truth.

Comment

To have a deep, personal and intimate relationship with you is what God is interested in! That way he can heal and save you, and prepare you for his eternal kingdom. He’s certainly not interested in bargaining with people or making some kind of transaction. Nor does he want people to believe their salvation depends on working for credit! Some people seem to think that they can make it to heaven without even *liking* God.

Again and again, when God comes to human beings, he wants a relationship based on love and acceptance. *He doesn’t want fear!* That’s why he says, “Don’t be afraid!”

There is no other meaning to the truth: “God is love” than that God wants a relationship based on loving, accepting trust that works both ways. That was the reason Jesus came: to show, to demonstrate, prove that God truly is love—and he even let us crucify him to answer the charges that he was selfish and unloving.

Jesus told the story of the sower who spread seed as a way of showing how people respond differently to God and his desire for a relationship with him. Some hear and yet don't allow God to change them. They just have no depth, and when the heat comes, they dry up. Others get choked out by the distractions of other relationships, other ways of living. Some don't want any relationship at all, and get eaten up by the birds! A lasting relationship only comes from having deep roots in the soil of God's friendship, growing in him and loving him and his caring commands.

I remember talking with a woman about her experience. She had tried *so hard*. Doing everything her church leaders told her she had to do. Making sure that her behavior was faultless. As if she were trying to impress God, just as we try to impress those around us. The result? It made her life miserable, and she ended up hating God. Sad, tragically sad. Because even in human relationships, the ones that last, the ones that are meaningful, are not based on trying to impress. Only by being who you really are can you hope to have a deep and enduring relationship.

The same with God. He loves us just as we are. Not that he loves all the mess of sin that we have got into, but he still sees what we can be. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). He came here to this earth for that very purpose: to show us what he was really like (John 14:9), and to win us back to love him and to trust him. What God most wants is that love relationship based on mutual trust, and the Cross shows the ultimate trustworthiness of God.

Said Jesus, "If I be lifted up...I will draw *all* to me." (John 12:32). The drawing power of God is his character that wants to love all of his unlovable, rebellious children. He offers friendship, and saving, healing love. Our role? To let others know what Jesus has done for us!

Ellen White comments

In His life Jesus of Nazareth differed from all other men. . . . He is the only true model of goodness and perfection. From the beginning of His ministry men began more clearly to comprehend the character of God. . . . Christ's mission on earth was to reveal to men that God was not a despot, but a heavenly Father, full of love and mercy for His children. He spoke of God by the endearing title of "My Father." . . . {HP 14}

The work of the Good Samaritan represents Christ's mission to the world. Our Saviour came to reveal the character of God, to represent his love for man. He acted just as the Father would have done in all emergencies. {HM, October 1, 1897}

Christ revealed to the world the character of God as full of mercy, compassion and inexpressible love. He came to lift up man. It was provided that whosoever should believe in Christ as his personal Saviour should be saved. In all his works he taught men that it was his mission not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. {ST, July 2, 1896}

These disciples had been for some time associated with Jesus in active labor. John and James, Andrew and Peter, with Philip, Nathanael, and Matthew, had been more closely connected with Him than the others, and had witnessed more of His miracles. Peter, James, and John stood in still nearer relationship to Him. They were almost constantly with Him, witnessing His miracles, and hearing His words. John pressed into still closer intimacy with Jesus, so that he is distinguished as the one whom Jesus loved. The Saviour loved them all, but John's was the most receptive spirit. He was younger than the others, and with more of the child's confiding trust he opened his heart to Jesus. Thus he came more into sympathy with Christ, and through him the Saviour's deepest spiritual teaching was communicated to His people. {DA 292.1}