

# **One Minute Witness**

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## Introduction

Witnessing is no longer something we do on Sabbath afternoon two-by-two, going door to door. There are still a few neighborhoods where that might be appropriate, but in most American communities today, unless you have phoned ahead and made an appointment, it is considered bad manners to show up at anyone's front door.

Witnessing is now something that happens primarily where you work or go to school. It is not a program. It is something that happens unexpectedly, informally—"when you least expect it," to quote Jesus—in the context of everyday life. It also happens while you are shopping, getting a haircut or jogging. And at family gatherings, class reunions and retirement parties.

In fact witnessing is something that you have no choice about. You cannot not do it! If you hide out from your work associates, the people you know in the community and other acquaintances, they will eventually find out that you are a Christian and then you will have witnessed to them simply by the fact that they will wonder why you never shared that about yourself. Politeness means they will never tell you that they've found you out or wondered about your silence, but the indelible witness will still be a part of their mind.

Adventists have always focused on "witnessing" instead of witness. We need to change that now. It is not about organized programs and approved methods any more. It is about the kind of impression we leave with those we touch; it is about witness—the evidence about faith we leave with those who sit at the next desk and live next door.

What does a casual, off-hand, accidental, unprogrammed, non-manipulative, in-the-flow-of-everyday-life witness look like? What does it sound like? What does it feel like? What does it smell like? Everything you know about witnessing as it has been taught over the years and seeped down in the Adventist culture does nothing to prepare you for this kind of witness. We have to start all over again with a blank page and a prayer.

A friend recently sent me an Email suggesting the need for a little book entitled something like "The One Minute Witness." (She got the idea for the title from a popular book entitled, "The One Minute Manager.") It weighed on my mind and after some meditation and prayer, I've decided to devote the next several columns to a quick treatment of this theme.

Please tell me what you think. Is it worth publishing? What suggestions do you have? Can you share stories with me that would make good illustrations? You can reach me at [msahlin@compuserve.com](mailto:msahlin@compuserve.com) or (800) 438-9600 or the address on page 2 of this magazine.

## Perceptions

How are you perceived by the people where you work? By acquaintances in the community? How are you known in the secular world, outside “the bubble” of Adventist culture?

Witness always begins with the perceptions that people have before you ever open your mouth or extend your hand. We live in the information age, therefore “the medium is the message.”

Perceptions about who you are—your character—frame anything you do or say. What others hear when you speak is modulated by ideas they already have about who you are.

If I were to interview several people from “outside the bubble” who know you, what would they say? Do they think of you as a religious person? A kind person? A fair person? A supportive, encouraging person who seems to genuinely care about them and others?

The majority of Americans are “unchurched.” By that we mean they do not participate in any religious group. Most have had a little contact with religion, perhaps as a child. They see religion as something of a hobby which a small number of “fans” enjoy. Most of them also have a “religious preference.” That is, if the services of some religion were to become necessary—for a wedding or funeral—then, there is a particular faith that, because of family history or personal taste, they would prefer. Some of them are, in fact, still “on the books” of a congregation somewhere, although they have quit attending.

Most people are not negative about religion, they just don’t know much about it. They see it as a “private” part of life, which it is impolite to bring up. Talking about religion is rather like asking someone, “How much money do you make?” Consequently, a person who is too religious may have already closed the door to witness.

Ellen White describes the example that Jesus set for us. He “mingled with men as one who desired their good.” (*The Ministry of Healing*, page 143.) He did not come across as withdrawn or set apart, but as one who “mingled.” He did not allow Himself to be positioned as critical, judgmental or condescending. He was not seen as “a religious know-it-all.” In fact, the pious of the time accused him of “eating and drinking” with sinners. (Luke 5:30)

The platform for witness is the perception that you are approachable, authentic, a kind and caring person, a fair and honest person, a peacemaker. “If we would ... be kind and courteous and tenderhearted, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.” (*Testimonies for the Church*, Volume 9, page 189.)

## Compassion

How do you begin to witness to people who are not interested in being witnessed to? How do we begin to share Christ with the large number of Americans who believe that religion is personal and it is impolite to bring up the topic?

In fact, what you do is more powerful than what you say. Everyone knows that there is a distance between what people say and what they actually do. We call that distance “hypocrisy.” Not only did Jesus have some hard things to say about hypocrisy (Matthew 6), but today’s research shows that one of the key reasons the average American is turned off by the whole idea of going to church is because he sees hypocrisy among church-goers. “They say it’s all about God’s love and mercy,” one nonbeliever told me, “but when you go to church there are too many rules and people are cold.”

You misunderstand if you think this is a visceral reaction. A woman with whom I have had many professional contacts with over the years told me, “I certainly believe there is a God, but I simply cannot get over the basic hypocrisy of organized religion. How can they spend all that money to worship God one hour a week while around them there are so many suffering people?” Surveys indicate that four of five Americans agree with this woman. They do not take seriously any religion that is not visibly engaged in social work.

Colleagues of mine a couple of years ago produced a video about how to be a caring church. They hired some professional actors from the secular marketplace. At the end of the project, one of the actors said, “I’m not religious, but if there were a church like this, I would join.”

Do you “walk your talk” at the place where you work or in the neighborhood where you live? Do you act out the love of God in meaningful ways that can easily be seen by those who work or live near you?

This is an essential element in witnessing. Ellen White writes that Jesus “showed His sympathy” as an early step in His approach to “reaching people.” (*The Ministry of Healing*, page 143) If you daily demonstrate compassion in practical ways, you are making a statement about the God who loves the lost so much He gave His life for them. This non-verbal witness prepares the listener for what you may later say about faith.

It is not “random” acts of kindness, but consistent caring that demonstrates a truly Christlike approach to life. The hallmark of authenticity is a person who regularly gives time, money and energy to feed the hungry, house the homeless, care for the poor, heal the sick and speak up for the oppressed. (Matthew 25) Does your life demonstrate a genuine humanitarian concern?

## Listening

The most common misconception about witnessing is that it begins with “what to say.” In fact, any truly effective, authentically Christ-like witness begins with listening, not with trying to say something. Until you have won a hearing by demonstrating that you are a caring listener, the other person is unlikely to listen carefully to what you have to say.

Listening achieves several important steps in personal ministry. It is an unselfish act that clearly shows the grace of Christ. It gathers information about the attitudes, history and needs of the person you are ministering to. It helps the other person to think about their own thoughts, feelings and needs. It opens the door to a deeper level of conversation in which a nonbeliever or a nominal believer can seriously consider their spiritual needs and the claims of Christ.

A simple, every-day way to demonstrate compassion is by taking the time to listen attentively to the people around you. It is a surprisingly unselfish way to reach out to people around you. Most people don’t listen well, so it is a rare gift. Do people compliment you as “a good listener”? If so, you have “got to first base” in Friendship Evangelism.

Listening tells you about the needs of the other person. This is crucial knowledge if you are to rightly represent Christ in your witness. Jesus “ministered to their needs.” (Ministry of Healing, page 143) If you wish to really meet the needs of another person in a way that represents Christ, you must have a good knowledge of their needs.

Reflective listening also helps the other person to know more about themselves. The reason why there are so many dialogs in the Bible (Job, for example) is because human beings sort out their feelings and bring their ethics and beliefs into the process through the method of thoughtful conversation in a “safe” context. One reason today’s world is so secular is that the time pressures we all live under leave so little time for this kind of dialog.

Of course, this opens the door to thinking about spiritual things. Every person has a deep, inner need for an intimate relationship with God. In the quiet space created by friendly dialog, “the still, small voice” can be heard.

Christ displayed this reality in His life on earth. He was here for about 33 years, and He spent the first 30 years listening and observing before He began to present a message during the last three years. Perhaps if we followed His example and spent 90% of the time listening and only 10% of the time talking, we would be better examples of His good news!

## Friendship

The vast majority of people who join the church tell us that a key reason was a relationship with an acquaintance from work, school or a volunteer program. A friend, relative or neighbor introduced them to Christ and to the church. This is why “friendship evangelism” is strategically important to the mission of Christ.

At the same time this reality is a “two-edged sword.” If a non-believer thinks that the only reason you are friendly with him is to convert him, he will conclude that you are untrustworthy, not a genuine friend and not respond to your witness. That is why so many Christians actually participate in friendship evangelism without knowing it. I have interviewed hundreds of church members who have had a friend join the church, and when I ask them “What did you do?” most say, “Nothing.”

True friendship evangelism happens naturally. A calculating, manipulative witness will not be effective because the non-believer can “smell” that lack of authenticity.

An authentic witness involves being with people because you truly enjoy them, not just as “bait.” Your unchurched acquaintances know when you are relaxing and when you are “fishing.” Jesus “won their confidence.” His method “alone” will result in “true success” in reaching people with His good news. (The Ministry of Healing, page 143)

Are you a trustworthy witness? Are you seen by your non-believing and unchurched acquaintances as a real friend who genuinely enjoys spending time with them? Who really cares about them and has their best interests at heart?

In a very practical sense, you must be willing to give up the goal of winning converts in order to achieve it. Christ states this principle in a slightly different context; “whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.” (Matthew 16:25 NIV)

Authenticity is the most powerful argument for giving one’s life to Christ. The first test of authenticity is the authenticity of your friendship. If you genuinely enjoy being with your non-believing friend and would continue to spend time with him or her even if it were clear that they will never accept Christ, then you pass this test. Then, it becomes possible for them to see your witness and for them to consider the unthinkable—giving their lives to Christ.

The most powerful witness is a Christian who comes into the world of the non-believer and is able to both enjoy being in that world and at the same time be a real Christian. This makes faith tangible and accessible to the unchurched.

## Readiness

How do you know when one of your friends, work associates, neighbors, relatives or other acquaintances is ready to talk about spiritual things? If you bring up religious topics when they are not ready, you will simply turn them off and reduce the possibility of real witnessing in the future. If they are ready, and you don't sense it, they may conclude that you don't want to talk about spiritual things with them.

A Bible principle is especially relevant at this point. "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and even slower to react emotionally." (James 1:19) We often overload those to whom we witness with too much too soon. We give them a lot of truths long before they are ready to receive and understand our statements. Timing is important. "Then"—and not until then—Jesus "bade them, 'Follow Me.'" (*The Ministry of Healing*, page 143)

There are several ways to assure that we carefully pace our witness to their readiness. Number one, listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. God's knows better than we do when a person is ready.

Number two, observe where the other person is at in their life. Unbelievers are more likely to be open to spiritual topics at a time of trauma or transition in their life. Are they going through a divorce or have they experienced the death of a loved one, or serious illness? Are they moving to a new community, taking a new job or becoming unemployed? Are they getting married or expecting a baby? All of these, as well as other major life events are indicators of readiness.

You will know it when you hear it. If you are a good listener and have a reputation as a caring, compassionate person, people will share with you their burdens and concerns. As you listen to their stories, if you are able to identify with themes of pain and loss, your listening skills will lead you to very important times when people share with you their deep, inner sense of lostness. These are moments for ministry, sharing the grace of Christ!

Just to be sure you are not intruding, there is a simple question you can ask right at that moment to test for readiness. Ask, "Do you have any spiritual resources to help you with this?" And, then bight your tongue and listen! The other person will tell you what they want and need.

## Patience

“The most frustrating thing,” a man at a Friendship Evangelism Seminar told me a couple of years ago, “is when I have invested time in making friends with someone at work or in the neighborhood, and I spend time using my listening skills, a window of opportunity opens up in their lives, but they close the door.” He found that in his circle it was rare when someone was ready to talk seriously about spiritual things.

What if your nonbeliever or unchurched friend is not ready to have a conversation about their spiritual needs? You hear an opportunity, you ask the readiness question and he or she changes the subject. What do you do next?

Don't show any disappointment! He or she may simply be watching to see how you react. Nonbelievers often say that they feel pressured or even manipulated by believers.

The church has taught many pressure tactics and manipulative approaches to witnessing over the years. Often these have been applied by believers with little finesse and no sensitivity. That can result in a kind of emotional “scar tissue” which builds up and becomes a barrier to talking seriously about spirituality. Your friend may be afraid to go ahead with the conversation.

It is also true that we live in the midst of psychological warfare between God and Satan. There is a subtle pressure from the evil side to encourage the nonbeliever to “leave it alone” when the opportunity for spiritual dialog comes up. This is particularly true if the opportunity surfaces in the presence of a believing friend who has a personal relationship with Christ.

Remember, the Holy Spirit is in charge of timing, not you. God never gives up on anyone. His Spirit patiently, respectfully waits until the last opportunity slips by, if necessary. “Your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these should be lost.” (Matthew 18:14) Although He sorrows lovingly, knowing that some will resist forever.

If your friend or colleague is not ready to talk about spiritual things, don't give up on them. Continue to enjoy their friendship. Keep listening and meeting needs. It is very likely that another window of opportunity will come along. If not, then here is a test of the reality of the unconditional love which God has extended to you and I. Are we able to extend that unconditional love to those who persist in not wanting to talk to us about faith? Do we have the real thing to share or not?

## What to Say

When an appropriate opportunity comes along to share your faith through words, what should you say? The Bible provides no specific formula or guidelines. And, many of the canned speeches that have been taught over the years are no longer understood in many of today's settings.

It is vital that whatever you say is heard by the other person as authentic, respectful, honest and helpful. If it does not meet these standards, it does not rightly represent the character of God.

What you say should focus on the spiritual core of Christian faith, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Topics such as prophecy, the state of the dead, the Sabbath or any other Bible doctrine really do not make any sense until a person is prepared to look at those topics from the perspective of personal faith in Jesus. That is the essence of Christianity.

Whatever you say, remember to say it in terms the other person can understand. We who have grown up in the church or have a lot of experience with conservative, Protestant religion have learned a particular language—a set of words and definitions—that are not widely known outside our circle. Only a small percentage of Americans are familiar with this “inside” language. When you speak of personal faith to non-believing friends, use clear language this is understandable to them, not religious jargon.

Opportunities to share sometimes come in the form of a question. Often it is a casual question, but sometimes it comes from a person who is trying to cope with real concerns in his or her life and is seeking a range of possible ways to deal with those concerns. An opportunity may come because you have asked a question such as the “readiness question” suggested in the previous column.

If you have a clear indication that your friend trusts you enough to want to hear you talk about faith, it is best to use a question to frame your answer, so you don't come across in an authoritarian manner. A good way to begin: “Have you ever thought about ...?”

Immediately follow up that question with a simple, basic statement about how Christian faith is relevant to their situation: “If you were to make a serious commitment to follow Christ, then ...” Insert an immediate benefit that Christian faith would provide for the specific need or situation they have talked about. And, leave it at that! Unless, your friend asks another question or brings up the topic again.

Here's a verbatim example: “Have you ever thought about centering your life on spiritual values? If you were to focus your life on faith in Christ, then He would give you inner peace no matter how much conflict you have to deal with in your family.”

Another verbatim example: “Have you ever thought about finding a personal relationship with God? If you were to establish a spiritual foundation for your life in a relationship with Christ, then that would give you criteria for deciding about the job you are being offered.”

## What Not to Say

When we talk about witnessing, we usually focus entirely on what to say. Equally important is what not to say! In fact, the biggest stumbling block for nonbelievers is the fact that we often say way too much.

The sheer volume of new information is a communication block for many non-believers. If you have been involved in Bible studies, evangelistic meetings, Sabbath School and other church activities for any amount of time, you know thousands more facts and concepts about religion than does the average American. Please don't make your friend try to "drink out of a fire hydrant." Keep it to very small doses. Wait for their questions. Warn them if the answer to their question is complicated and "it takes three steps to answer that."

Be honest; don't promise too much. In their eagerness to be helpful and demonstrate how welcoming Christ into their lives can make a difference, I have overheard believers say that things like, "If you become a Christian, He will find you a job." Or, "... He will heal your baby."

God does not work miracles on demand. It is not our place to promise miracles, especially in an implied exchange for conversion. There are large numbers of sincere Christians around the world who are unemployed and poor. There are dedicated, life-long vegetarians, teetotaling Adventists dying of cancer. There are faithful believers who have lost a child to illness or accident.

Don't get me wrong. I am not denying the miracle-working power of our Lord. But, the reason we call them "miracles" is because they happen much less often than we would like, and we really do not understand why they happen when they do. Or, more precisely, why they don't happen when they do not.

If the witness you share sounds too good to be true, you may be promising that which God has not promised to deliver. You can promise His encouragement, support and comfort no matter what your friend is facing. You can promise His unconditional love. You can promise the sense of direction and purpose that He offers; the clarity about right and wrong. You can promise the "new heavens and a new earth ... where there will be no more suffering, disease or death" that Christ has promised in Revelation 21. You can share His promise to come back "and take you to live with me where I live," because He said, "if it were not true, I would tell you." (John 14:1-3)

## Questions

Don't be put off by the objections and "hard" questions that nonbelievers and non-practicing Christians share with you. This is important dialog. This is the real work of personal ministry. It is very important to listen carefully to these questions and answer them with respect. The fact that a person wants to enter into dialog with you and share their real concerns is a sign of trust and openness. His or her curiosity about spiritual things is something to be cherished.

The kinds of questions about religion and spirituality that are on the minds of most people may surprise you. These are definitely not the classic questions that so many Christian books focus on. Times have changed!

"Why would I be interested in religion? Its boring, untrue and irrelevant!" ... "Why are there so many hypocrites among church people?" ... "Does prayer do any good? How should I pray?" ... "Why does the church always asked for money?" ... "Why does God allow suffering?" ... "Why are there so many religions?" ... "Why is religion against sex?" ... "Spirituality is a good thing, but is organized religion really necessary?" ... "Why does religion operate like a big business?" ... "What does religion have to do with real life?" All of these are frequently asked questions by today's adults who are not actively involved in religion in a recent study.\*

Don't ever use put-downs. Take your friend's objections seriously, try to understand where he or she is coming from. Treat the questions and the person asking the questions with respect. The most powerful statement you can make for the character of God is in how you handle the questions, not the specific answers that you give.

Give them honest answers. Never be afraid to say, "I don't know. But I will find some more information for you." Don't waste their time or change the subject.

Let your friend lead in the dialog. Go with his or her questions and do not bring in other topics. If the answer to a question is complex, first say something like, "Well, to answer that will take a couple of minutes." Or, "That answer will take several steps."

Don't argue, unless you have a history with your friend in which both of you really enjoy debating with each other. And even then, be very careful. Arguing about sports or politics or something technical is different from the highly personal area of spiritual topics.

Questions—especially challenging questions—are a good thing! It is a sign that your friend is taking seriously what you have shared with them.

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\*Questions of Life by Nicky Gumbel (1996, Cook Communications, Colorado Springs CO).

# Story

A good way to answer any question about faith is by telling a story. Narrative is much more personal than statements of hard facts. Story-telling reaches out to a wide range of people and more easily filters through the differences in background and world view. Making statements of truth can be heard as arrogant and therefore immediately resisted, while sharing a story is most often heard as open and vulnerable.

A long-used method is to use items in the news as opportunities to comment on the signs of the times. Unfortunately, critiques of current events can be heard by friends and professional associates as simply opinionated. On the other hand if we appropriately share stories about ourselves -- stories which reveal our personal and spiritual needs, stories which give hints about our spiritual journey -- that is heard as genuine and even empathetic.

Stories about other people can also be helpful if shared in a straight-forward manner with little if any moralizing. In fact the best way to give the moral of the story may be to share; "That story makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_." Or, "That story makes me ask, ...". Remember, more than one sentence is usually too much.

If a person asks you a challenging question about faith or makes a statement that reveals a lack of faith, resist the urge to respond with a propositional statement. Tell a story. For example: "I met a man about five years ago when I was working at \_\_\_\_\_. He said that .... And he found ...". Give them different viewpoint to ponder; some evidence which supports faith.

Always use "and." Never use "but." The point is to *not* get into an argument, but simply provide some additional evidence alongside what the person already has. People change their minds because they get a larger picture of reality, not because my arguments are better than your arguments or because my pile of evidence is bigger than your pile of evidence.

Of course, if you can share a personal story, that would be even more powerful. "I used to ask that same question. And, I found ...." Of course, you cannot claim what is not yours. Authenticity is more important than a good story. Canned speeches, just like borrowed realities, do not give evidence of authenticity.

So, what if you've been a Christian all your life and you have no conversion story to tell? That's OK! The traditional conversion story does not work very well for lots of people in today's world and you have lots of blessings which you can honestly share. Although, don't underestimate your need to make a serious effort to understand the inner world of your nonbelieving friends.

## Introductions

The foundation for Christian faith is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If you know someone who has opened up to you, indicated a real interest in spirituality, but has not connected with Jesus, then He is depending on you to make the introductions.

Jesus does not force Himself on people. It is rare that He intrudes into someone's life in the dramatic way that He did to Paul on the Damascus road. (Remember, Paul was not one of today's secular unchurched or nominal believers; he was a religious zealot.) Usually, Christ waits patiently until you or I introduce one or our friends to Him. That is only polite, after all!

When you have guests at your home or host a business meeting, you know that there is an appropriate moment to make introductions. If the moment comes, and you don't make the introductions, your friends feel awkward and wonder why you didn't do it. I blew it on one occasion, and later a friend asked me, "Don't you want me to meet him?"

This is true in any relationship, including a relationship with Jesus. If a dialog has opened up between you and a friend about spiritual things and the needs in his or her life, and the appropriate time comes and you don't introduce them to Christ ... How will they feel? How will He feel?

After mingling, showing compassion, meeting needs, and when the other person shows enough trust to reveal their spiritual needs, "then" Jesus gave the invitation, "Follow Me." (*Ministry of Healing*, page 143) That is where the journey of discipleship begins: with a personal introduction to Jesus and a decision to follow Him.

It makes no sense to give a Bible study about any other topic until the person has decided to follow Christ. Here is the most basic Bible study—the 1 in "Christianity 101."

1. The world is full of evil—disaster, despair and death—because of the sin problem, our self-centered, self-destructive instincts. See Romans 3:23, 5:12, 6:23, 7:21-23, 1 John 1:8-10, Isaiah 53:6, 1 Peter 2:24. (*Steps to Christ*, page 18)
2. God has acted to overcome the problem of evil through a free gift of eternal life out of His love. See Ephesians 2:8-9, John 3:16, Titus 3:5, Romans 3:27, 4:4, 9:30-33, Philippians 3:8-9. (*Steps to Christ*, page 61)
3. When we accept this gift, we enter into a saving relationship with Christ. See John 5:24, 1 John 2:3-5, 3:24, Acts 5:31, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 3:20. (*Steps to Christ*, page 51)

After covering these basic points, ask your friend, "Does this make sense to you? What does it mean for you personally? Is there any reason why you cannot make a decision right now to follow Christ?" Listen carefully. Don't push them or manipulate them! If they are ready, lead them in a simple prayer, giving their life to Jesus. And pray for them after they pray.

# Beginnings

When you have the opportunity to introduce a friend to Christ, there are some very important things to do immediately after you both pray. There are basic, beginning steps in following Jesus that are critical to an authentic Christian life. At least four things are essential for you to take a minute to review with the person who has just accepted Christ.

1. Stay in touch. It is meaningless to say, “I accept Christ as the center of my spiritual life,” and then never connect with Him again. It would be like getting married and then never talking to your spouse again after the saying, “I do.”

It is essential that the new believer immediately begin a daily habit of communication with Christ. This means both talking to Him and listening to Him. Daily prayer involves talking to Christ, sharing my life and feelings and needs and thanks. Daily Bible study involves listening to Christ by reading His Word and meditating on what it means for my life.

2. Meet the family. Jesus said, “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.” (Luke 8:21, NIV) To accept Christ is to “marry into” a “family”—the other believers around the world are your brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is essential that the new believer immediately begin to meet weekly with a fellowship of believers. This must be a small group where the new believer is comfortable enough to ask any question, be open about the struggles in his or her life, share their feelings, etc. Otherwise, the new believer will never grow in Christ!

Is there a small group or Pastors Bible Class or mid-week meeting in your congregation that is culturally appropriate, fits the learning style of your friend and designed to help new believers learn the Bible and grow in Christ? If not, do you know of such a group somewhere else?

3. Get involved in Christ’s mission. God is working in the world today and the call to “Follow Jesus” is essentially a call to be part of His work. “Therefore, I urge you,” Paul writes in Romans 12, “in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ... We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.” And, each believer is to use his or her gifts in service to Christ.

4. Re-center your life around Christ’s values. Learn from Him. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2, NIV)

This proves to be a difficult journey for every believer, even those born into the church. We have great capacity for self-deception, and often find it difficult to discern the values of Christ. Legalists over-simplify and reduce Christ’s values to a short or long list of rules. Liberals focus on principles so abstract that they rarely cut into the real world.

Remember, this is a journey. Don’t unload too much at this point. Babies don’t starting walking overnight. Discouragement may set in right away and you will need to often re-state the benefits that following Christ can have for the particular needs your friend is facing. The journey will require your daily prayers.

# Disciple

“Disciple” means a follower; not just a fan or supporter, but a student, an apprentice. Jesus has more disciples than “the twelve.” Everyone who believes in Christ—every man or woman who has a significant, authentic spiritual relationship with God through Christ—is either a disciple who is learning from Christ, or a dropout who has quit learning from Christ.

“Discipleship” is the process of learning from Christ, the process of Christian apprenticeship or mentoring in faith. As your friend grows in Christ it is essential that he or she have a specific spiritual mentor and a support group.

Repeated research has shown that if a new believer does not make at least six personal friends in the church during the first year, they will very likely drop out. “Personal friend” in this research is defined as individuals who the new believer spends informal time with outside of church meetings or groups, and individuals who discuss personal and spiritual topics with the new believer.

Belonging comes before believing. It is never too soon to begin to weave a new person into the fabric of fellowship. Introduce them to individuals that you think will be compatible in terms of interests, education, cultural background, social standing, and personality, as well as capable of helping them grow in Christ.

What about Bible doctrines? Over the last 500 years, Christians have more and more defined discipleship in terms of knowing truths—abstract propositions. Adventists have come to suffer from the same unbalanced focus despite a fundamental commitment to a wholistic approach. Bible doctrines need to be learned in the context of learning to follow Jesus in the full dimensions of life—relationships, family, vocation, expressive arts, health, money, citizenship, service.

Ellen White wrote of this imbalance more than 100 years ago. “Ministers frequently neglect these important branches of the work—health reform, spiritual gifts, systematic benevolence, and the great branches of the missionary work. Under their labors large numbers may embrace the theory of the truth, but in time it is found that there are many who will not bear the proving of God.” (*Review & Herald*, Dec. 12, 1878)

This is not to suggest that the task of learning Bible doctrines is to be ignored. Small group ministry is crucial because it is only in the small group that the learning of Bible truths can be mixed naturally with learning the practices of Christian living. A “school of Christian living” is an essential experience if your friend is to grow to spiritual maturity in Christ.

There are five basic things the new believer needs to learn: (1) God loves you and has a plan for your life. (2) Christ is the decisive figure in God’s plan. (3) God is concerned about the quality of life. (4) God wants to spend time with you. (5) Christ has promised to return to Earth and establish a new world built around His values. All 27 of the fundamental Bible doctrines can be connected around these “five fingers.”

“The hand” represents the reality of every-day life and the fabric of relationships. It is essential for the “fingers” to work with the “hand” in order for anything meaningful to be accomplished in discipleship.

## **Appendix: Basic Bible Studies**

These six basic Bible studies cover the entire teachings of the Church. Here they are boiled down to the most important and fundamental things to understand. They are put into simple, everyday language that most people can easily understand, even if they have no background in religion.

These six Bible studies do not have any logical order. They are “multi-entry” in design. You can start with any topic that is of particular interest or relevance and then move to the other topics based on the questions and needs of the persons involved.

### **God**

Key Idea—God’s greatest desire is for me to see a clear picture of His character. When I see Him clearly, I will find His love irresistible.

1. Who is God? - 1 John 4:16
2. What is God all about? - John 6:40
3. What is God doing for you? - Colossians 1:13-14

### **The Bible**

Key Idea—The Bible is God’s voice speaking His love personally to me today. It is not a rule book, but a road map.

1. What is the purpose of the Bible? - 2 Timothy 3:16
2. Where did the Bible come from? - 2 Peter 1:21

Related doctrines from the 27 Fundamental Teachings document: The Holy Scriptures, The Law of God, The Gift of Prophecy

### **Jesus the Messiah**

Key Idea—Jesus is the one who never changes in a universe that always does. Jesus is the “Messiah”—creator, sustainer, savior, friend and God Himself.

1. Who is Jesus Christ? - Colossians 12:15-17
2. What is Christ’s purpose? - John 3:16
3. How do we know that Jesus is divine? - John 14:9

Notes—(1) “Messiah” is based on a Hebrew word and “Christ” is based on a Greek word, both of which mean the same thing: One sent by God. (3) Christ’s very clear and simple claim to be divine leaves you with only three logical possibilities; A. He is a liar and, therefore, cannot be recognized as “a good man,” as do all historians and great thinkers. B. He is deceived and, therefore, cannot be a sane or reliable source of spiritual wisdom. C. He is who he claims to be.

Related doctrines from the 27 Fundamental Teachings document: The Trinity; The Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ; Christ’s Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary.

### **Personal Spirituality**

Key Idea—God loves me and has a plan for my life.

1. How is your life centered? - Zephaniah 3:17
2. Where is your life going? - Jeremiah 29:11

Related doctrines from the 27 Fundamental Teachings document: The Nature of Humanity, Creation, The Experience of Salvation, Baptism, The Lord's Supper, The Second Coming

### **Quality of Life**

Key Idea—God wants to give me the highest quality of life imaginable.

1. What is God's vision for your life? - John 10:10
2. How do I find a good life? - Proverbs 4:18

Related doctrines from the 27 Fundamental Teachings document: Healthful Living, Death and Resurrection, Marriage and Family, Christian Behavior, Stewardship, The Church, Spiritual Gifts

### **Sabbath**

Key Idea—God wants to spend time with me personally.

1. What does God promise? - Deuteronomy 31:6, Joshua 1:9
2. How do God's promises relate to the stress in your life? - Matthew 11:28
3. How do you find that rest? - Hebrews 4:9-10
4. What was the habit pattern of Jesus? - Luke 4:16

Supplement: How do we know that Saturday is the real Sabbath? (Luke 23:44-24:11, particularly 23:54-24:2) How do we know that the Sabbath has not been changed in the Christian era? (Acts 15:1-21, particularly verse 21)

Note—The historical and archaeological record is that traditional Christianity has had great difficulty coming to terms with its Jewish roots. Many writers have brought up this issue recently. This is the main reason that the concept of the Sabbath as a 24-hour spiritual retreat from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday each week is still preserved by Judaism, but largely lost among Christians. If you dig back into the details of early history, you will find that the conventional ideas about Christian worship on Sunday are contaminated by anti-Semitism, although almost none of today's Christians are aware of this.