

# MAKING FRIENDS FOR GOD

**Mark Finley**



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# Why Witness?

Deep in God's heart is a desire for all people to be saved in His kingdom. He longs for each of His children to experience the joy of salvation and eternal life. He has unleashed all the powers of heaven to redeem us. Without you, there would be an empty space in heaven, and that is why nothing is more important to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit than your salvation.

The apostle Paul makes this clear when he declares, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3, 4). Do you grasp the significance of this statement? God has an intense longing, a deep desire, an overriding purpose in all He does. He wants you and me to be saved and live in the light of His truth. The apostle Peter states that God is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). The salvation of man is heaven's priority. Jesus Christ, the eternal, coexistent, all-wise, all-powerful Son of God, is our Advocate. At His bidding, angels wing their way from the heavenly courts to beat back the demonic forces that wage battle against us. Daily, the Holy Spirit impresses our minds and guides our lives.

To accomplish our salvation, Jesus came to earth, revealing the Father's measureless love for humanity. He lived the perfect

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life we should have lived, bore the condemnation of our sins, and died the death we should have died. In Christ, we see the character of the Father. Jesus dispels the myth that God is unloving. Long ago, Lucifer, a being of dazzling brightness, misrepresented God's character. His lies distorted the image of God before the entire universe (John 8:44). Jesus came to set the record straight, proving that God is not a vindictive judge or a wrathful tyrant. He is a loving Father who wants to gather all His children home.

### The heart of all witnessing

Telling the story of redemption is the task of witnessing. It begins with a declaration of God's faithfulness and ends with the triumph of His love. Through believers, God reaches His lost children. In our lives and speech, people see His gracious character. Our witness to others becomes life's greatest joy. As we grow to be more like Jesus, service comes naturally, and selfishness is starved to death. The more we share His love, the more our love for Him grows.

But many raise fair questions about witnessing. Isn't God doing everything He can to save people without my witness? Why should I share my faith? Does witnessing make any difference at all in an individual's salvation?

In answer to the first question, it is true that God is not limited to the witness of human beings. He has revealed Himself in a variety of ways. David notes the wonders of creation:

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament shows His handiwork.  
Day unto day utters speech,  
And night unto night reveals knowledge.  
There is no speech or language  
Where their voice is not heard (Psalm 19:1, 2).

The design, order, and symmetry of the universe reveal a designer God of infinite intelligence.

Additionally, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our hearts

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creates a desire to know God. This longing for eternity within is convincing evidence of the existence of God (Ecclesiastes 3:11). And, of course, there are special providences that cause us to reflect on the reality of God's presence. Each time we experience undeserved love or an unexpected kindness, we witness a revelation of God's character. He is persuasive, seeking to draw us to Himself.

If this is true, then why witness? Why not let God do His job and be done with it? The challenge of relying on nature as a witness involves the problem of sin. Marred by evil, nature often delivers mixed messages. Although it reveals God's design, it also reveals destruction and devastation. Hurricanes, floods, forest fires, typhoons, and other natural disasters plague our planet. Thousands die suddenly. What do these tragedies say about God and the great controversy between good and evil? This question undoubtedly complicates nature's witness. Beauty and destruction lie close together. The natural world includes both aspects of our reality, yet it stops short of revealing the reason why good and evil coexist.

Nature and our life experience send mixed messages about the goodness of God. Herein lies the reason for our witness. The story of Jesus, as told in Scripture, reconciles the incongruities of nature and our internal struggles. Though nature and the providences of life render evidence of God's existence, they do not clearly portray His loving character. Their witness is incomplete. God has always understood this void and carefully planned that the clearest revelation of His character would be found in the life of Christ, as revealed in the Bible. When we share the truth about Jesus with others, we offer them the best chance of knowing and understanding God's love for them. In the cosmic conflict between good and evil, Scripture presents the ultimate answers to life's most important questions.

In addition to this fundamental truth about witnessing, we tell the story because we know that witnessing is one of Heaven's means of bringing joy to the heart of God and enabling us to grow spiritually. The more we love Him, the more we will share His love, and the more we share His love, the more we will love

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Him. As we share the Word of God with others, we are drawn closer to Him. The life-changing Word not only changes those with whom we study the Bible but also changes us.

There is a powerful passage in *Steps to Christ* that discusses the relationship between witnessing and our personal spiritual growth:

If you will go to work as Christ designs that His disciples shall, and win souls for Him, you will feel the need of a deeper experience and a greater knowledge in divine things, and will hunger and thirst after righteousness. You will plead with God, and your faith will be strengthened, and your soul will drink deeper drafts at the well of salvation. Encountering opposition and trials will drive you to the Bible and prayer. You will grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ, and will develop a rich experience.

The spirit of unselfish labor for others gives depth, stability, and Christlike loveliness to the character, and brings peace and happiness to its possessor. The aspirations are elevated. There is no room for sloth or selfishness. Those who thus exercise the Christian graces will grow and will become strong to work for God. They will have clear spiritual perceptions, a steady, growing faith, and an increased power in prayer. The Spirit of God, moving upon their spirit, calls forth the sacred harmonies of the soul in answer to the divine touch. Those who thus devote themselves to unselfish effort for the good of others are most surely working out their own salvation.

The only way to grow in grace is to be disinterestedly doing the very work which Christ has enjoined upon us—to engage, to the extent of our ability, in helping and blessing those who need the help we can give them. Strength comes by exercise; activity is the very condition of life.<sup>1</sup>

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This insightful passage offers four lessons on soul winning:

1. Soul winning leads us to feel the need for a more profound spiritual experience.
2. Soul winning leads us to plead with God until our faith is strengthened.
3. Soul winning gives us depth, stability, and Christlike loveliness.
4. Soul winning gives us clear spiritual perceptions; a steady, growing faith; and an increased power in prayer.

In addition to drawing us closer to God, the blessing of witnessing is twofold: it provides a way for others to be saved, and it nourishes our languishing souls.

### Witnessing and God's heart

The motivation for witnessing comes from appreciating God's passion for saving the lost. No Bible chapter illustrates this better than Luke 15. Here the Gospel writer sweeps aside the curtain on God's heart and reveals three pictures of His love. He is the tireless shepherd who seeks the lost sheep until He finds it. He is the sorrowful woman who, on her knees, searches for the precious lost coin from her wedding dowry. He is the anxious father, scanning the horizon for the return of his lost son. In each story, when the lost are found, there is tremendous joy. All of heaven rejoices when men and women accept the salvation that Christ purchased at Calvary.

In the first story, the story of the lost sheep, Jesus teaches three significant lessons. First, God's love pursues the lost. Luke 15:4 declares that the shepherd goes after the lost sheep. Our God is a pursuing God. He will not let His children go easily. He seeks them wherever they may wander. With relentless love, He searches for them. Second, we notice that the shepherd goes after the sheep until he finds it. God's love perseveres. He does not give up on us easily. We cannot weary Him. He will never abandon His search. In Christ's time, if a Middle Eastern shepherd lost one of his sheep, it was expected that he would return

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to the flock with the lost sheep or return to the flock with the carcass of the lost sheep. He had to demonstrate that he had done everything possible to find it. Each sheep was valuable to the shepherd. He knew the flock so well that he was immediately aware when a sheep was missing. To Christ, we are not a mass of nameless humanity; we are individuals created in His image and redeemed by His grace.

Finally, when the lost sheep is found, the shepherd celebrates. “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!” (verse 6). The Good Shepherd does not rest until He finds His lost sheep, and when it is found, there is tremendous joy. This joy theme is consistent in all the Luke 15 parables. When the coin is found, the woman exclaims with joy, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!” (verse 9). When the prodigal son returns, his father shouts for joy and throws a party (verses 22–24). Each of these parables dramatically concludes with the joy of finding the lost. Though many things sadden God and bring tears to His eyes, His heart is filled with joy when we participate in soul winning. When we join Him in His single-minded quest to find the lost, His heart is filled with unspeakable joy.

Have you ever spent hours searching for just the right gift? Maybe it’s a birthday, anniversary, or Christmas present you’re seeking. When you finally find the perfect gift, you are thrilled. It matches both the person and the event. You can hardly wait to share it. With great anticipation, the day arrives, the gift is unwrapped, and that special someone is delighted. Unprompted, they throw their arms around you and say, “Thank you so much!”

Who received greater joy from the gift? you, or the one who received it? Of course, both of you were elated, but there is an exceptional satisfaction that comes with giving something of value to someone else. Unselfish gift giving creates a strong and unique bond between people.

When we share the most precious gift of all, Jesus Christ, pure joy fills our hearts. There is deep satisfaction in knowing we have made an eternal difference in someone’s life. Ellen

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White describes the experience in *Steps to Christ*:

The humblest and poorest of the disciples of Jesus can be a blessing to others. They may not realize that they are doing any special good, but by their unconscious influence they may start waves of blessing that will widen and deepen, and the blessed results they may never know until the day of final reward. They do not feel or know that they are doing anything great. They are not required to weary themselves with anxiety about success. They have only to go forward quietly, doing faithfully the work that God's providence assigns, and their life will not be in vain. Their own souls will be growing more and more into the likeness of Christ; they are workers together with God in this life and are thus fitting for the higher work and the unshadowed joy of the life to come.<sup>2</sup>

It is still an eternal truth that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

### Your circle of influence

Think of someone in your sphere of influence who might be receptive to knowing more about Jesus. A son or a daughter, maybe a husband or a wife, a work colleague, neighbor, or friend. Picture the person's face and ask God to create an opportunity for you to guide the conversation in a spiritual direction. Do not feel you have to create an opportunity that does not present itself. The mission is God's. We do not create opportunities; He does. Our role is to be sensitive to the opportunities and cooperate with Him by walking through the doors He opens.

A story I heard recently illustrates the value of taking a particular interest in someone. Dr. Marilyn Hellenberg taught English at Kearney State College. One semester, she had a student named Kwan. On the opening day of class, she asked the students to write a simple statement about themselves. Kwan

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wrote: “I think English is a real bore. My main hobby is harassing stupid teachers, and English teachers are the stupidest of all.”

Kwan was disruptive throughout the entire class period. He had a callous disregard for the feelings of other students. As Dr. Hellenberg prayed that night, she was deeply impressed to see Kwan through God’s eyes. He was created by God, valued by God, and loved by God. She prayed that she would be able to see Kwan as Christ saw him.

As the semester progressed, Dr. Hellenberg tried every way possible to make Kwan feel accepted in class. But her efforts were to no avail. He continued his belligerent, disruptive ways.

One day, before reading a poem, she announced to the class, “Kwan, this poem is dedicated to you.” The poem was “Outwitted,” written by Edwin Markham.

He drew a circle and shut me out—  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But Love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle that took him in!

After class one day, Kwan lingered to ask a question: “Why don’t you just give up on me?” Before Dr. Hellenberg could reply, he went on to confide, “You can’t let people get too close to you. I play a game in which I try to hurt them before they hurt me. I have been rejected so many times; I cannot take it any longer.”

In his final essay, Kwan wrote, “There are three kinds of teachers. Those who are interesting but stupid, those who are intelligent but boring, and those who are both boring and stupid like my English teacher.”

When Dr. Hellenberg read his final paper in the quietness of her office, she burst into tears. “Lord, I have tried to reach this boy, and I cannot take it any longer. My efforts have been in vain. I have invested so much emotional energy in him; I am drained.”

After returning his final essay to him, she added one final thought, “Kwan, I can’t play mind games with you. I care for

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you because God created you. You are His child.” Without further elaboration, she turned, walked back to her office, placed her head in her hands, and began weeping. A few moments later, there was a knock at the door. It was Kwan, and he had been moved by her kind heart. He said, “No one has ever cared for me before; if this has something to do with your Christ, I want to know about Him.”

What made the difference? Dr. Marilyn Hellenberg profoundly believed that every one of her students was created in the image of God and that they had unlimited potential in His sight. She believed in Kwan’s potential, saw him through Christ’s eyes, and prayed for him.

People in crisis or transition are often open to spiritual realities. Maybe they have been diagnosed with a serious illness or experienced a broken relationship or of the loss of a job. These crossroads present an opportunity to give a personal testimony about God’s faithfulness, share a promise from His Word, or offer a short prayer. These sincere gestures build friendships, and as has always been the case, we win our friends to Christ, not our enemies. First comes friendship, then Christian friendship, and eventually, a Seventh-day Adventist Christian friend is made. When this is your life’s goal, God will lead you on an exciting journey of discovering the lost and leading them to a saving relationship with Him.

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1. Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 1999), 80.
  2. White, *Steps to Christ*, 83.