

Jesus Won Their Confidence



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 15:6, Num. 14:11, 1 Cor. 3:1–9, Dan. 6:1–3, Neh. 2:1–9, Deut. 4:1–9, Acts 2:42–47.*

Memory Text: “But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities” (*Luke 5:15, ESV*).

For several years, a Seventh-day Adventist church has provided breakfast five days a week for a local public elementary school. Though the nation itself was very secular, it just had passed a law providing enough money for each public school to have a chaplain, and the school and community wanted the Seventh-day Adventist church to provide one (it is rare to ask only one church to do that). The chaplain's role is to help look after the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the students and even the wider school community. The opportunities are amazing.

“I enjoy the unique and special relationship we have with your church,” the school principal had said to the church pastor, who was visiting the school, “and just wish other churches could be involved the way you are.” When the pastor was leaving the grounds, the school's community liaison officer thanked him for what the church was doing and asked if she could attend one Sabbath.

This week, we will explore the issue of winning the confidence of people whom we aim to serve and win for Christ.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 3.

Winning Confidence

After desiring their good, showing sympathy, and ministering to their needs, Jesus “won their confidence.” *Confidence* in Latin is composed of the words *con*, meaning “with,” and *fides*, meaning “faith.” Throughout the Bible several words are employed to get across the meaning of the word *faith*.

In Hebrew the main root for “faith” is *amn*, from which we get the word *amen*. The basic idea is that of constancy, continuity, and reliability. It gives the idea of something solid, firm, in which one can trust and believe. It is often translated as “believe” in the context of a saving faith in God, and in another form it means “truth.” In the context of Christ’s example of winning people’s confidence, the implication would be that of evoking the kind of trust that comes from seeing unwavering and solid commitment, which in the case of Jesus came through mingling with, sympathizing with, and serving the people.

Read the following texts, all of which have a word based on the root *amn* (*Gen. 15:6, Num. 14:11, Isa. 7:9, Hab. 2:4*). **How is it used in the text, and how does it convey the idea of confidence and trust?**

In the Greek of the New Testament, the root word used to convey the Hebrew *amn* (faith, belief) is “*pistis*.” This Greek word for faith implies belief, trust, absolute certainty, reliability, and assurance. In the context of Christ’s example of winning people’s confidence, the implication would be that of evoking absolute certainty, assurance, trust, and belief in response to His unselfish commitment to mingling, sympathizing, and serving.

It is important to note that in Scripture, whenever this concept of confidence is attributed to humans—as in self-confidence or confidence in a person—it can often have a negative connotation (see *Mic. 7:5 and Ps. 118:9*). It is positive when this confidence is attributed to God. This calls for a word of caution. As followers of Jesus, we are called to live out His pattern of mingling, sympathizing, and ministering to people’s needs. Yet, when those we serve show confidence in us, we must point them to Jesus and what He has done for them.

If someone were to ask you, “What does true faith in God look like?” how would you answer, and why? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

A Careful Balance

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in an African country is growing rapidly. What is the secret? Church leaders have stated that there is a strong connection between this growth and the unselfish and unconditional service of the church members to people in communities throughout the country. The widespread confidence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church came to the attention of the country's president. He attended a large Adventist Community Services rally and thanked Seventh-day Adventist Church members personally for their service.

At the same time, as representatives of Christ we need to walk a fine line. We need to, as Jesus did, win the trust and the confidence of the people. But their confidence and trust in us needs to be directed toward Jesus. We are mere conduits. They see something of Christ in us—be it selflessness, love, caring, self-denial for the good of others—and they are drawn to us. As always, though, if they look at us too carefully, because we are all sinners, they might not like all that they see. Hence, we must always point them to Jesus, in whom they alone can put their full confidence. The rest of us are, sooner or later, bound to disappoint.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1–9, 5:1. What is Paul dealing with in the church? What kind of witness would result if these people were inviting others to their church and the visitors saw what Paul was talking about?

Of course, we don't have to be perfect or have a perfect church before we can seek to minister to the needs of others. At the same time, we must seek to be the kind of people whom, to some degree, others can learn to count on and trust. And we can do that only to the degree that we faithfully and diligently care for people as Jesus did. Indeed, there's no question that many of the quarrels and struggles within a church would quickly dissipate were the members focused solely on ministering to the needs of the community and revealing to them the love of Christ.

If some visitors started attending your church regularly, what would they see, and what kind of witness would it present to them?

Social Capital

“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold” (*Prov. 22:1, NIV*).

How does the concept expressed here relate to our community witness and outreach?

What is “social capital”? When you make investments in a bank account, its value grows. Social capital consists of positive, productive relationships that are just as valuable as money in the bank. When you nurture rapport with community leaders, asking them what are the community’s needs, seeking their advice on meeting these needs, and then following up with action, you are building relationships with them. This is social capital. Each positive experience with them is like an investment in your relationship. Your social capital continues to grow, and you increase in value in their eyes.

The *Church Manual* reminds us that Seventh-day Adventists “should be recognized as outstanding citizens . . . in working for the common good.” We “should support by our service and our means, as far as possible and consistent with our beliefs, efforts for social order and betterment,” maintaining “an uncompromising stand for justice and right in civic affairs.”—“Standards of Christian Living,” in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2010) pp. 137, 138.

In addition to Jesus’ earthly ministry, Scripture gives other examples of what can happen when God’s people have acquired “social capital.” Read the following passages and describe the positive relationships these Bible characters experienced with “outsiders” and what happened as a result:

Acts 7:9, 10; Gen. 41:38–45 _____

Dan. 2:46–49, 6:1–3 _____

Of course, we might not have the kind of dramatic rescues and stories that are seen here. But that’s not the crucial point. These men displayed strength of character that impressed those around them. Ellen G. White states in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (pp. 217, 218, 221) and in *Prophets and Kings* (p. 628) that the following qualities among these godly men won the confidence and favor of the “heathens” around them: gentleness, fidelity, wisdom, sound judgment, abilities, noble dignity, and unswerving integrity.

The Value of Social Capital

Churches are largely volunteer groups, which operate on limited budgets. Social capital helps improve the chance that your church can reach its significant goals. The old tradition in some countries of farmers helping other farmers bring in their harvest is an example of social capital. That is, though we need to look at each situation on its own, when it is feasible and practical we can cooperate with others in order to reach our goals.

Read Nehemiah 2:1–9. What was the result of the heaven-sent confidence that King Artaxerxes had in Nehemiah?

“The means that he [Nehemiah] lacked he solicited from those who were able to bestow. And the Lord is still willing to move upon the hearts of those in possession of His goods, in behalf of the cause of truth. Those who labor for Him are to avail themselves of the help that He prompts men to give. . . . The donors may have no faith in Christ, no acquaintance with His word; but their gifts are not on this account to be refused.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 634.

How fascinating that, in this case, God moved upon the hearts of pagans to help with the advancement of His own work. This should teach us an important lesson. To whatever degree we can, we should be willing to work with others, even those not of our faith, or even of any faith, if it will advance the cause of Christ. Though, of course, we always have to be careful about any kind of alliance we engage in with others, we can carefully and prayerfully work with others whose input can greatly aid in what we want to do for the good of the community as a whole. Oftentimes governments or even private businesses or individuals, impressed by our humanitarian work, will offer their support. This support shouldn't be automatically accepted or automatically rejected. Instead, it should be prayerfully looked at on a case-by-case basis, with input and counsel, before a decision is made.

What are some ways you can build some “social capital” in your community that could later result in positive benefits, *not for yourself* but for others?

Favor With All People

There's no question that we, as a people, have been blessed with much light from the Lord. This light isn't just in theology, such as understanding the Cross, the sanctuary, the state of the dead, the Sabbath, and the great controversy, which are great blessings in and of themselves. When we think about the light given us in regard to health and healing as well, we surely have much to offer those around us.

In fact, the health message can be a powerful point of contact to help us reach out to our communities. After all, even those who might not (at least at first) have any interest in our beliefs care about having good health. What an opportunity for us to share what we have been given. As we have already seen, Jesus said: " 'For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more' " (*Luke 12:48, NKJV*). And there's no question: to us much has been given.

Read Deuteronomy 4:1–9. What is the Lord saying to His people at that time, and in what ways does the principle expressed here apply to us, including the Lord telling them that they must be sure to obey all that He has commanded them?

A few years ago, a Seventh-day Adventist congregation was thinking about this question: Would our community miss us if somehow our congregation disappeared overnight? The answer was simple. No, they wouldn't be missed. Their community had no confidence in them.

Not liking the answer, they decided to move from building walls to building bridges. Careful not to compromise what they knew to be truth, they worked in partnership with organizations that are already doing the work of God. They became engaged with these organizations on an ongoing basis, not simply doing one-time projects but maintaining an ongoing program that greatly benefited their communities. No question: attitudes toward the church soon changed.

Read Acts 2:42–47. What connection was there in the early church between “enjoying the favor of all the people” (*Acts 2:47, NIV*) and church growth? Compare the values mentioned in this passage with your church's values.

Further Thought: Read Mark 5:18–20; Luke 8:38, 39; Acts 5:12–16. Read Ellen G. White, “Our Example,” pp. 17–28, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Grace of Courtesy,” pp. 236–240, in *Selected Messages*, book 3 (especially pp. 238, 239); “Blessing the Children,” pp. 511–517, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Relieve the Oppressed,” p. 242, in *My Life Today*.

There are, no doubt, numerous ways in which you and your church can cooperate with other churches and organizations for the good of the community. It’s crucial for your local church to know what the community needs are and then, to whatever degree possible, work in harmony with others to meet those needs. What better way to build confidence among the community and even with other churches? When mutual confidence and trust are established between your church and its target community, groundwork is laid for them to move toward following Jesus, for “this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 144. God alone knows how many people have been, or will be, won through the simple act of reaching out and seeking to do good to others who are in need.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do we reconcile this idea of building good ties and getting a good name in the community with Jesus’ warning in Matthew 10:22: “‘And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved’ ” (NKJV)? How do we work through what appears to be a strong contradiction?
- 2 In class, discuss your answer to the question: What does true faith look like? That is, if we truly have a saving faith in Jesus, what will be different about us from those who don’t?
- 3 The question of gifts from others not of our faith is one that we need to think about carefully. As we saw in Wednesday’s study, Ellen G. White talked favorably about receiving gifts from those who weren’t even believers in Jesus. In *The Ministry of Healing* (p. 340), however, she spoke very sharply against churches that took money from those in the liquor business (even its own members “in good and regular standing”). She said that money from these people “is stained with blood. A curse is on it.” How can we know right from wrong in regard to whom we take gifts from or cooperate with in general, even for a good cause?