

## Reaching Forward - #5 Anticipating Spiritual Growth in Others

[Slide 1] Dscplshp NSD #5 Anticipating spiritual growth in others by being in genuine relationships

[Slide 2] Discipleship is a partnership in ministry with Jesus. We follow His leading.

[Slide 3] As a part of the Seventh-day Adventist movement, and recognizing our prophetic role in history, a disciple of Jesus Christ is one who is growing in an authentic relationship with God and others. I will commit to: REACHING FORWARD

[Slide 4] Following God through daily spiritual practices

[Slide 5] Opening myself to God by participating in regular corporate worship

[Slide 6] Returning time, talents, and resources to God

[Slide 7] Willingly serve my local church and community in the context of my spiritual gifts

[Slide 8] Anticipating spiritual growth in others by being in genuine relationships

[Slide 9] Part of our identity as Seventh-day Adventists is our call to invite others to meet Jesus. Reading from our fundamental belief titled The Remnant and Its Mission.

“The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and [Slide 10] heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness.”

[Slide 11] In Romans 5:1-2, Paul tells the results of Jesus’ work in his life.

*1 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”*

[Slide 12] I am going to share the most important concept from our presentation today. It is entirely possible - indeed, essential - for a Christian today to be a personal witness of the resurrection power of Jesus. Yet far too many of us are hearsay witnesses.

Our friend shared that God is good. Our mother and father told us about Him and took us to Sabbath School. Our pastors preach about Him. We trust all these people; they are faithful witnesses. Surely they speak the truth. And so we go and tell others what we believe to be true, and are discouraged by the results.

We’ve missed a step, perhaps two. Have you truly taken a good look at your life, repented, and become personally acquainted with God’s unlimited forgiveness? If so, you/we most assuredly **have something to share**, something that tends to overflow out of our hearts and voices to others; our family, friends, neighbors, and work associates.

When we travel, whether it is to another state, or country, we like to tour and take pictures of historical places. They have been built to draw attention. There is something more important that we can do with our lives than build buildings.

[Slide 13] It is said that this inscription was found in the Washington monument when it was renovated. “Whoever is the human instrument under God in the conversion of one soul, erects a monument to his/her own memory more lofty and enduring than this.” The most significant thing that we can do is invite others to follow Jesus; to be His friend and His disciple.

The book of Acts contains passages of Paul being told by Jesus, “*You are My witness.*”

[Slide 14] Acts 22:4-16, Paul is telling the story of Ananias coming to him and reporting that God has chosen Paul to be His witness. “*4 I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. 6 "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' 8 "'Who are you, Lord?' I asked. "'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' He replied. 9 My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of Him who was speaking to me. 10 "'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. "'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' 11 My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. 12 "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. 13 He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. 14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from His mouth. 15 You will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.'”*

Paul can’t tell stories about walking with Jesus day by day and seeing Him feed thousands, or calm the storm, or heal a blind man. But Paul has personally seen Jesus change thousands. He has experienced the hand of the risen Lord changing his life and directing it a completely new way. He has been blind to the goodness of Jesus, but now he sees!

[Slide 15] Saul had to meet Jesus for **himself**. When he did, he had a choice how to respond. He started praying. And his heart was softened. Then it was safe for God to call some of His disciples to talk to Saul. Ananias touched him and brought God’s comfort, healing, and commission to him. The group kept him with them, no doubt told him their stories, and were the first to hear his.

Now that Saul (now Paul) knew about repentance by personal experience, now that he understood a changed life, now that he was forgiven now that he turned around (the literal translation of “repented”), he began spreading the news he’d learned. What is the goal of a faithful disciple? By definition, a witness simply tells the truth. (It isn’t the witness’s business to convince or convict. This is Holy Spirit’s job.)

[Slide 16] The main task of witnesses is to tell stories. Not hearsay stories, but ones the witness has seen with his or her own eyes. The early Christians told the story of Jesus, especially the last week of His life. They might say sadly, “I was one of the ones shouting at Him, cursing Him.” Then, through their tears, they could glow with the joy of being able to say, “He forgave me! He loves me! It’s unbelievable!”

Paul could and did say, “I am the chief of sinners. I used to kill people for believing in Jesus! But thanks be to God, Jesus delivered me from this body of death!”

Witnesses also answered questions about Jesus. His closest friends could say, “Yes, He really did say He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We didn’t understand it completely but my life is different.”

James or John could answer the question, “I get so angry! What can I do about my bad temper?” Peter could answer someone who wanted to know, “How can I keep from getting cowardly and running away from trials?” If somebody was curious about how to believe without seeing, he could ask Thomas.

And surely the new converts wondered, “Since He’s gone now, how can I know Him?” Then the Christians could explain about the Holy Spirit. “You can have the Holy Spirit living in you, too! Shall we ask Him?”

[Slide 17] You can live in the attitude and anticipation of witness. One thoughtful definition of witnessing calls it: “offering Christ to those outside our doors.” Jesus died for us, AND our family, friends, neighbors, and work associates. He is willing to use us as His first person, trustworthy witnesses. All He wants is for us to tell our stories.

[Slide 18] We are invited to look every day for God in the faces of others; and to be listening for the Holy Spirit’s guidance and watching for His divine appointments; opportunities to share Jesus’ goodness. Christians are often reminded we are the only Bible some people read, so they should be able to see God in our faces. As we look for where the Holy Spirit is working and let Him guide us, we will find wonderful divine appointments for fruitful sharing.

“What if we recognized, every time we had a chance to share our faith, that we have as much to learn from the other person as she has to learn from us? I believe we would be loving instead of preaching! At first we might not be able to mention God or heaven at all. But if we affirm and encourage every sign of love we see in others, especially when we can honestly be grateful for things they’ve done for us directly, we may find doors opening and the Holy Spirit developing more love in them. And in us!” (Materials from [ifollowdiscipleship.org](http://ifollowdiscipleship.org).)



George Sweeting, in his book *The No-Guilt Guide for Witnessing*, tells of a man by the name of John Currier who in 1949 was found guilty of a crime and sentenced to life in prison. Later he was transferred and paroled to work on a farm. In 1968, Currier's sentence was terminated, and a letter bearing the good news was sent to him. But John never saw the letter, nor was he told anything about it. Life on that farm was hard and without promise for the future. Yet John kept doing what he was told even after the farmer for whom he worked had died. Ten years went by. Then a state parole officer learned about Currier's plight, found him, and told him that his sentence had been terminated. He was a free man.

As you heard this story, did you focus on the 10 years it took to deliver the good news or the thought of what fun it would be to be the bearer of that good news? Both? We are bearer of the best news, eternal good news of Jesus' salvation! Here are so keys principles of sharing our witness with others.

[Slide 19] Living Our Stories in Witness

[Add] 1. Listen! (most important)

[Add] 2. Find common interests

[Add] 3. Watch for the leading of the Spirit

[Add] 4. Maintain a teachable attitude; assume you have as much to learn from others as they have from you.

[Add] 5. If you're in crisis, accept their comfort and help. Let them see both your pain and fear, and your trust that God knows what He is doing. Be sure you make it clear that you do not believe God causes bad to happen. If they are in crisis, be there to offer support and comfort. Listen. Ask what you can do. Offer to pray. You will know by now whether it is appropriate to offer to pray aloud with them. If it isn't, don't push.

[Slide 20] 6. If you have friends who are of radically different belief systems, you are blessed. God is sending you to the front lines.

[Add] 7. Be sure your Christian support system is strong and in place.

[Add] 8. Be humble and pay attention to their questions and admonitions. (Listen!)

[Slide 21] 9. Do not neglect your personal devotional life.

[Add] 10. Don't try to move someone all the way from the left to the right. That's God's job, and will happen in His time.

[Slide 22] There is a song that says, "Jesus is the Answer for the world today." We believe that! Seventh-day Adventism is the Gospel on adrenaline; Jesus is coming soon! Discipleship is a shared journey. Ask God for a person to be in genuine relationship with. Ask Him to make a divine appointment to share His goodness. Watch for that appointment and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the words He wants you to share.

[Slide 23] For our activity, we are going to practice helping someone accept Jesus as a personal Savior and Friend. In pairs, we will role-play leading someone to Jesus using this card. We will spend 20 minutes, 10 minutes for each partner. (Print Card – Invitation to Accept Jesus – print on card stock sized to fit in a Bible.)

[Slide 24-28] You might have chosen a chorus that has become the theme song for your study time during the discipleship series or have been singing #330 "*Take My Life and Let It Be.*" Conclude with a group benediction.