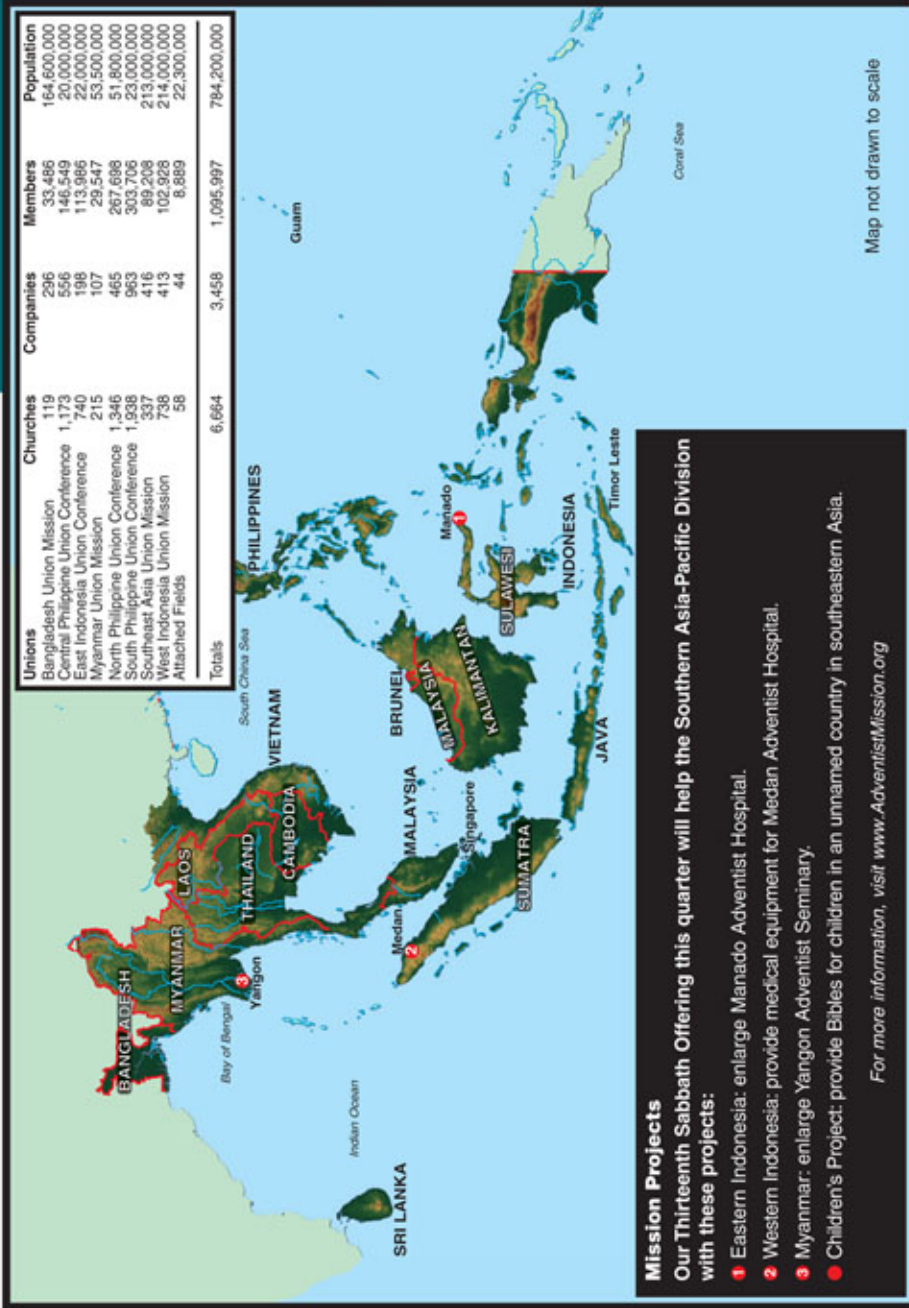


Southern Asia-Pacific DIVISION

ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
April • May • June 2012

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Evangelism and Witnessing



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April • May • June 2012

EVANGELISM AND WITNESSING



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH



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**Sabbath
School
Personal
Ministries**

The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of the Sabbath School Publications Board, a subcommittee of the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM), publisher of the Bible study guides. The published guide reflects the input of worldwide evaluation committees and the approval of the Sabbath School Publications Board and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).



WHY OUR CHURCH?

Although experts disagree on the exact number, one thing is certain: many Protestant denominations exist today. Hundreds, even thousands.

Which leads to such questions as, Why the Seventh-day Adventist Church? What's our purpose? What relevance do we have?

The answer is simple: God raised up this church to proclaim “present truth,” the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12.

Yes, a number of churches exist, and many with aggressive outreach and evangelism programs too. But, at last count, only one church is specifically proclaiming the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14. That church is ours—and that’s why we’re here. Period.

Thus, whatever else our church is doing, first and foremost, we should purposefully attempt to lead as many people as we can into God’s eternal kingdom. Whether we call it “spreading the gospel,” “evangelizing the world,” or preaching “present truth,” our core business is to tell the Jesus story with the intention that people will accept Him as Lord and Savior and become disciples and even disciple makers.

Although most local churches are involved in many activities, and (ideally) all of those activities are good and useful—our challenge must be to make all that we do as a church relate to the core business of reaching the lost with the “everlasting gospel” (*Rev. 14:6*) and all that it entails.

Of course, even with the benefits of modern technology, the task is huge. And when all is said and done, the task falls upon millions of volunteers motivated by a love for God and for lost humanity—a love for those whose sins Jesus bore on the cross just as much as He bore ours.

While evangelism and witnessing are the personal responsibility of each believer, the whole body of Seventh-day Adventist believers (the church) has a corporate responsibility, as well. As each member contributes to the evangelistic goals and strategies of his or her local church, precious people are won to Christ. And here's a point that can't be overemphasized: if it's not done at the local church level, it just won't get done.

In the context of outreach, understanding spiritual gifts also is important. It is vital, however, to not only encourage members to discover how they are spiritually gifted but to also present them with opportunities to exercise those gifts. Fundamental belief number 17 says in part: "God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts, which each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), p. 237. An understanding of the gospel story coupled with a personal connection to Jesus Christ will enable people to work with the right motivation for saving souls. Evangelism and witnessing should be motivated by a love response, not by fear or guilt.

As with any study, this quarter's lessons will help to increase a person's store of biblical knowledge. That's fine, but the goal is not just to gain knowledge, no matter how wonderful the knowledge. The goal is for us to use that knowledge for good, and in this context the greatest good is to give those who face eternal destruction the opportunity for eternal life.

That's the reason that the Seventh-day Adventist Church exists. What better one could there be?

While evangelism and witnessing are the personal responsibility of each believer, the whole body of Seventh-day Adventist believers (the church) has a corporate responsibility, as well.

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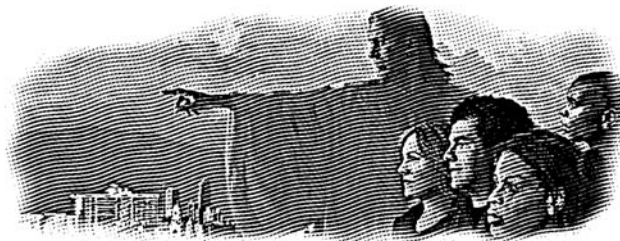
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Thank you for helping tell the world about Jesus through your mission offerings.



Defining Evangelism *and* Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 4:33, 13:48, 1 John 1:3, Acts 13:1–49, 22:2–21, 1 Pet. 3:15.*

Memory Text: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (*Matthew 28:19, 20, NKJV*).

Key Thought: If we are to be involved in fulfilling the great gospel commission, we must understand what we mean by “evangelism” and “witnessing.”

An employee often is given a job description. It's a detailed account of expected duties.

The Bible also speaks about a job description, and in this case it's one for God's people. In 1 Corinthians 15:58 (*NKJV*), the apostle Paul admonishes the Corinthian believers to “always [abound] in the work of the Lord.” While Paul does not specify the work to which he is referring, a similar phrase is used in 1 Corinthians 16:10, with reference to the work of the Lord done by Timothy and Paul in evangelism and witnessing about Jesus Christ and the plan of salvation. Thus, Paul's admonition in chapter 15 certainly included the work of spreading the gospel.

This week we will explore what evangelism and witnessing actually are; in other words, we'll seek to uncover our biblical “job description.”

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 7.*

Evangelism Is . . . ?

We get a clear picture of what evangelism is as we review the activities of the first evangelists. Regardless of the major differences between their world and ours, both worlds were (and are) sinful, fallen, and in disrepair—thus in need of hope and salvation. More than a century ago, German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer somewhat exaggeratedly (he wasn't known as “the philosopher of pessimism” for nothing) expressed the human condition like this: “No one has ever lived who has not more than once wished that he did not have to live through the following day.”—*The World as Will and Idea: Abridged in One Volume* (London: Everyman, Orion Publishing. Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2001), p. 204. Little has changed since the apostle's time, or Schopenhauer's, or during ours. Thus, the main points of the first century evangelistic preaching also should be the main points of ours today.

Read Acts 4:33, 5:42, 2:36–39, 7:56, 13:48. What are some specific themes about which the disciples preached that should be included in today's evangelistic presentations?

To be an evangelist in any sense of the word, one must have personal understanding and experience of “the everlasting gospel.” It is this gospel that ultimately brings belief, confession, conversion, baptism and discipleship, and the promise of eternal life.

The Jewish leaders saw something in the boldness of the apostles that convinced them that the apostles had been with Jesus (*see Acts 4:13*). Most likely the leaders formed this conclusion because they were confronted with a group of men who seemed unable to talk about anything other than Jesus' life and teachings. Evangelism and witnessing surely have to do with speaking about the life and teachings of Jesus, the difference those teachings and beliefs have made in the individual believer's life, and the difference Jesus can make in anyone's life if He is accepted as Lord and Savior.

It is important to view evangelism and witnessing as a continual process rather than as a single program or event. A vital part of the process is establishment and nurture. The word *steadfastly* in Acts 2:42 indicates a strong commitment on the part of the new believers to an ongoing strategy for their spiritual nurture. Clearly, the early church saw evangelism as much more than just the preaching of a message. Their evangelistic process was not complete until people had become disciples and were thoroughly incorporated into the local group of believers.

Of all the gospel promises, which one offers you the most hope? How can you learn to cling to that promise and make it your own, no matter how difficult your circumstances?

Witnessing Is . . . ?

A witness is one who gives a testimony, one who attests to something that he or she knows from personal experience. A Christian's personal testimony regarding the work of God in his or her life can be very powerful. On one occasion Jesus healed a demon-possessed man (see *Mark 5:1–19*). When the healed man wanted to follow Jesus, Jesus told him to “go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you” (*Mark 5:19, NKJV*).

Without question, the short time that Jesus spent with this man was insufficient to tutor him in the art of teaching or preaching. Nevertheless, Jesus told the healed man to witness about what he knew. That is why Jesus said to him, “Go . . . and tell.”

Read *Mark 5:18–20; Acts 22:15, 16; and 1 John 1:3*. What common and important point is being made by all these texts?

God has given us the responsibility of sharing the ways in which He has changed our lives, just as He did to the formerly demon-possessed man at Gadara and to His other followers.

Witnessing, that is, sharing one's personal experience of God—all with the intention of encouraging others to accept Christ—is not necessarily as organized or as intentional as radio, television, or crusade evangelism. Being a witness can be very spontaneous given that the opportunity to share the good news about Jesus can arise anywhere at any time with anyone. We must, therefore, be ever alert for opportunities to share our knowledge and experience.

As to the relationship between witnessing and evangelism, we can say that they are each essentially different strategies for reaching the goal of winning souls for Christ. Witnessing is more spontaneous and short term, while evangelism tends to be more long term and intentional. Sometimes planned evangelism is enhanced by the personal witnessing of those involved, and sometimes spontaneous witnessing leads people into a more planned program. However it happens, both are vital components in the overall process. When we share what Jesus has done for us, those who are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit will want to know more. Also, it's a lot easier for people to argue against your doctrine, your theology, your beliefs. It's not, however, so easy for them to argue against your own personal testimony.

When was the last time you had a chance to witness to someone about what Christ has done for you? What was the reaction? How has Christ changed your life? What is there in your life that would make someone want to learn more about Jesus?

The Biblical Evidence

The early believers, no doubt, had obstacles to overcome as they committed themselves to spreading the good news about Jesus. Not the least of these obstacles would have been that most were untrained in the religious schools of the day, and, therefore, would have had little or no credibility in the eyes of the established church.

Nevertheless, in spite of all obstacles, the apostles and other believers felt strongly called by God to continue in evangelism and witnessing. The blessings of forgiveness and assurance that they had personally experienced compelled them to share. Witnessing was a natural result of conversion.

Read Acts 13:1–49. What work did the Holy Spirit call Barnabas and Saul to do?

The “Word of God” that was preached everywhere most certainly included the messianic passages of the Old Testament. Those Scriptures that foretold the death and resurrection of the Savior, and His consequent forgiveness and justification of sinners, were presented as being fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

The New Testament clearly reveals that the early believers committed themselves to preaching and sharing. Among their regularly emphasized main points were: Jesus as Lord and Christ, salvation through His righteousness, the coming kingdom of God, and the promise of eternal life.

Study Acts 6:1–7. Focus particularly on verses 4 and 7. What enabled the early church to have so much evangelistic success with the professional clergy in Jerusalem?

Many people believed in Jesus and accepted Him as their personal Savior because of the testimonies of believers who had shared their own life-changing experiences and not simply because people had observed miraculous events.

However powerful and compelling the testimonies and witness of these first evangelists, these people were constantly referring to the Scriptures. That is, they were using the Bible to interpret their experiences. How well do you know the Bible, and how can you get grounded in it to such an extent that you can use it in your own witnessing?

Telling Our Stories

As stated earlier, the most powerful witnessing that a believer can do for Jesus is to share his or her personal testimony. That is, the sharing of what *God has done for me and how He has affected my life and experience*. Usually a personal testimony is expressed in three distinct sections. The first part is a short review of the believer's life before accepting Jesus as personal Savior. The second part is an explanation of how the person met the Lord. The third is a declaration of the life experience after getting to know Jesus.

Read through Acts 22:2–21. Paul's defense speech before the Jerusalem council is in the form of a personal testimony. What are some of the points he makes in each section of his testimony?

His life before he knew the Lord Jesus (*vss. 3–5*):

How he met the Lord (*vss. 6–16*):

His life experience after his conversion (*vss. 17–21*):

Even if you were raised in a Christian home and did not experience a dramatic conversion experience, you certainly had a special time when you made your personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Think back on your experience and write out some points that will help to form your own personal testimony.

My life before I knew the Lord Jesus (*or before I made a commitment to Him*):

How I met Jesus (*or what influenced my commitment to Him*):

My life after I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior:

A personal testimony should not be a long and detailed autobiography. We mentioned earlier that witnessing is a more spontaneous way of sharing Jesus than is a planned evangelistic approach. Christians should be able to give their testimony in a short space of time, because we don't know when the opportunity may arise to speak of Jesus. It could be in any number of unplanned situations. It may be on a plane or at a bus stop. It may be during a short telephone call. However the situation arises, we should be ready and willing to speak about what the Lord has done for us, what reasons we have for our faith, and the hope that God offers not just to us but to others.

Consider the eternal difference between the lost and the saved, between eternal death and eternal life. In the long run, what else really matters?

Our Job Description

Read 1 Peter 3:15. What is this text teaching us about witnessing? How does it fit in with that which we have been looking at so far?

By now we have considered evangelism and witnessing sufficiently in order to be able to suggest what we deem as an adequate biblical job description. We don't need to create a definition of evangelism and witnessing that everyone agrees with in every detail, but we must make sure that any definition that we accept includes the essential ingredients of sharing the truth about Jesus and what He offers the world.

Consider the following definition of *evangelism*. Do you consider it an adequate definition? What would you add or take away? **Evangelism is the process of clearly and persuasively proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ so that individuals will accept Him as their personal Savior and follow Him as Lord in order to become disciples and disciple makers.**

While a definition of a task is not necessarily a detailed job description, it does give some overall guidance. Of course, when it comes to witnessing, the individual situation and the believer's own experience with God will determine the approach. However, an understanding of God's desire to reach a lost world through His church will cause us to consider a planned approach to witnessing and evangelism.

The rapid growth of the early church was due in no small part to the conviction and commitment of its members. This in turn was based upon their personal experiences with Jesus and the special empowering outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The teachings of Jesus Christ and the influence of the Holy Spirit remain basic and crucial to all witnessing and evangelism.

"Thousands can be reached in the most simple, humble way. The most intellectual, those who are looked upon as the world's most gifted men and women, are often refreshed by the simple words of one who loves God, and who can speak of that love as naturally as the worldling speaks of the things that interest him most deeply. Often the words well prepared and studied have but little influence. But the true, honest expression of a son or daughter of God, spoken in natural simplicity, has power to open the door to hearts that have long been closed against Christ and His love."—Ellen G. White, *The Colporteur Evangelist*, p. 38.

Further Study: Think about your personal testimony and make sure that you are able to give it when the opportunity arises.

Take some time to sit quietly and consider what areas of church life you enjoy being involved in or the areas that you would consider being involved in if you were asked. Write them down. You may be interested in evangelistic areas in which your church is not currently involved. List these areas too.

Begin to consider the ways in which you can become involved in an evangelistic ministry in your church. If you are already involved in a ministry and desire to stay there, pray that God will continue to bless that ministry. If you are not presently involved, pray that God will reveal to you where He wants you to work for Him.

Discussion Questions:

❶ In the gospel commission of Matthew 28:19, 20, there are four action verbs: *go*, *make disciples*, *baptize*, and *teach*. The commands to go, baptize, and teach are all subordinate to the imperative that says, “make disciples.” Considering this clear emphasis, discuss what it means to be a disciple and how disciples are made.

❷ Consider the following quote and then discuss the question, How do we as individuals and as a church group become a part of God’s channel of communication to a lost world? “As His representatives among men, Christ does not choose angels who have never fallen, but human beings, men of like passions with those they seek to save. Christ took upon Himself humanity, that He might reach humanity. Divinity needed humanity, for it required both the divine and the human to bring salvation to the world. Divinity needed humanity that humanity might afford a channel of communication between God and man.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 296.

❸ Take a look at your own life. What kind of example do you present to the world? In what ways do your words, actions, dress, demeanor, and attitude impact those around you? In short, what kind of witness do you present to the world, even when you are not actively “witnessing”? In which areas can you definitely improve?

Sharing God's Love in China

Deng is a Global Mission pioneer in eastern China. She dreamed of starting a house church in her elderly mother's home in a village with no Seventh-day Adventist church. Deng traveled to the village twice a week to share God's love with her mother's neighbors.

She ministered to the elderly and the sick whom she met during her neighborhood visits, and then she invited them to hear God's message of love. A little group began meeting in Deng's mother's home, and within a year some forty people were attending. They crowded into the small home, filling every available space.

Someone complained to the authorities about the unauthorized meetings being held in the house, and the police shut down the house church. Deng went to the government and explained that she was helping the people. "Some are old, and others were sick; they have no one to care for their needs. Go and ask them who is caring for them," she challenged.

The local people begged the police not to close down the church. "Deng is a good person. She is helping us," they said. The police allowed the house church to continue meeting while Deng sought formal permission to find a church in which to worship.

The church members found a small house to rent and converted it into a church. But soon it, too, was too small, and when Deng asked for land on which to build a church, the local authorities couldn't help her.

The congregation found an old movie theater for sale, and Deng requested permission to buy it. But she learned that a businessman wanted it and could afford to pay far more than Deng's congregation. The believers prayed that God would influence the government to let them buy the building. But the price rose, and the congregation had to release its bid to buy the cinema.

Deng felt impressed to return to the government and ask them to intercede with the businessman, asking him to let the church buy the cinema. The official explained Deng's work in the village to the businessman, and he withdrew his bid to buy the building.

Deng's congregation didn't have the money to buy the building, but the 46 Adventist churches in the region agreed to help buy the cinema. Within two years the little congregation grew to some 150 people.

Global Mission pioneers such as Deng work in many regions of China and throughout the unreached world, sharing God's love and reaching souls who otherwise might never hear the message of salvation. Your mission offerings support the work of Global Mission. To meet more Global Mission pioneers, visit www.Global-Mission.org.

DENG is a Global Mission pioneer working in eastern China.

Every Member Ministry



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Eph. 4:12, 2 Cor. 5:15–20, John 4:35–41, 1 Thess. 1:5–8, Acts 14:27.*

Memory Text: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (*1 Peter 2:9, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Too often evangelism and witnessing are seen as the pastor's job alone; this attitude is wrong.

According to Peter, God's people are chosen, called to be a “royal priesthood.” Because the priests were given a ministry, it follows that if we are called to the “priesthood,” then we have a ministry, as well. We must understand, however, that we are not called merely in order to perform a ministry. First and foremost, God is calling us into a relationship with Himself, and it is out of that relationship that we are compelled to share with others the great things that God has done, and is doing, for us. This is at the heart and soul of personal witness.

Each of us, therefore, has a personal ministry to perform, and it involves proclaiming the praises of Him who has called us “out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

This week we will explore the concept of “every member ministry” and see how each individual experience contributes to the church's corporate ministry. The point is that each of us has a role to play in the work of outreach and evangelism.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 14.*

Every Member Ministry

Too often we hear Christians lament that they are not talented enough to do anything significant for God. While the devil would certainly like us to think this way, the Bible tells us that all Christians have a God-given ministry. We need to know what it is and then determine by God's grace how to use it for His glory.

Examine Ephesians 4:12 and 2 Corinthians 5:15–20. What do these verses say about each believer's ministry?

Paul clearly says that the saints are to be equipped for a ministry. Everyone who has been reconciled to God through the sacrifice of Jesus is given the ministry of reconciliation and is an ambassador for Christ. An ambassador is one who personally represents a sovereign or head of state. This concept emphasizes the personal relationship between Christ and all who have been reconciled as they carry the message of His love and grace into the world.

There is much confusion over the word *ministry*. Today ministry is seen to be something that the pastor does; after all, he or she is “in the ministry.” Although some engaged in pastoral ministry do have certain special areas of work and expertise, Scripture is adamant that part of the work of the pastor is to equip the members for a personal ministry.

The New Testament gives evidence that the early believers understood the concept of every member ministry. Wherever they went and in whatever circumstances they found themselves, they all preached about the Lord Jesus (see *Acts 8:1–4*).

There is another way in which Jesus shows that we all have a special ministry to perform. He clearly stated that He did not come to be served but to serve (see *Matt. 20:28, Luke 22:27*). He also clearly said that His followers are to be servants also (see *Matt. 23:11; 20:26, 27*). If that's not ministry, true ministry, then what is?

Jesus is not simply ordering us to be servants; He is leading us to understand that a servant ministry is a result of our connectedness with Him. These verses describe the life of the person who has fellowship with the Suffering Servant Jesus Christ. They also affirm that to be in Christ is to continue His ministry.

How willing are you to serve others? Is it your natural inclination, or do you tend to try to *get* from others rather than to give? How can you further acquire the attitude of service?

The Need for Laborers

Sometimes we are sent to reap where others have turned the soil, sown the seed, and watered the crop. Although there may be the rare occasion when one person digs, sows, waters, and reaps all in one field, this is certainly not the rule. In our fast-paced modern world, people move into and out of our sphere of influence, and we must be ready to build upon the evangelistic work that others have begun.

Read John 4:35–41. While we often get excited at the reaping stage of a person’s Christian growth, what do these verses tell us about rejoicing with others who have contributed along the way?

Usually when we refer to reaping, we are specifying a certain time of year when the crops are ready to be harvested. For most crops there is a specific reaping season. In the spiritual realm, however, there is no set time for reaping. Jesus makes this point strongly in John 4:35. In agricultural terms, the harvest may well have been four months away, but in regard to those who are ready to accept Jesus, some part of the field is ever ripe for harvest.

At Jacob’s well, Jesus sowed the gospel seed in the heart of the Samaritan woman. She, in turn, sowed the seed among the people of Sychar, and now the Samaritans walk toward Jesus past unripe grain fields. As it was with the disciples, the Lord encourages us to be ready to reap from the continually ripening field of the world.

Consider 2 Peter 3:9. Why is God so keen for laborers to go out into the harvest?

It is because of God’s great love and compassion for humankind that He desires laborers to go into the harvest (*see Matt. 9:36–38*). As we consider the world field today, the harvest still seems great and the laborers few. The disciples were told to pray that reapers would be sent out into the harvest. As we modern-day disciples pray for laborers, the Holy Spirit will open the way for us to do that which He has called us to do.

Think over the past few days. How many chances did you have to witness for your faith, to plant a few seeds that could one day reap a harvest? How many of those times did you do it? How many opportunities did you pass up?

Individuals but Together

The local church is not simply a number of disconnected people who sit in the same building for a couple of hours once a week. According to Scripture, the church is a group of people who are as closely joined as are the parts of a human body. The possibility does exist, however, that people can meet together regularly without being a part of the body in a biblical sense. Although this unfortunate fact can be true in many areas of church life, we are focusing on the need to be united in the areas of evangelism and witnessing.

Consider Ephesians 4:16. **What would happen to the growth and effectiveness of a body if it lost its elbow, wrist, or knee joints? And what does Paul's analogy say about the church as a body of believers that has been given an evangelistic mission?**

The apostle Paul says that a church body grows when all of the members do their share. What does this say about churches that are not growing? Our first reaction might be to blame those whom we consider to not be doing their share. That might be true, but think about this: how often do churches deprive members of an opportunity to contribute to the body? If church leaders don't understand the *ministry of all believers* principle, they will not intentionally work for maximum involvement of the membership in church life and ministries.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5–8. **What did the Thessalonian church do with the gospel that they had received from Paul?**

The church at Thessalonica is an example of a church that received the gospel and passed it on. It is still God's will that His church function in this manner.

The blessings received when each individual member works within a planned church evangelistic strategy are many. We will focus here on the important areas of encouragement and accountability. Working as a team enables us to consider these areas seriously. A lack of team encouragement has been the death of many a worthwhile lay ministry. While individuals may possess special talents and gifts, working toward common goals through corporate strategies is still the ideal. Likewise, the group dynamic encourages accountability, not in the sense of judgment but in the sense of review and evaluation.

In what ways could you work more closely with church members in the effort of reaching out to others? Why is it so easy to get complacent, sleepy, and inward focused?

Working Together, With God

Yesterday we noted the importance of working together evangelistically as a church. We must also understand that we are working together to accomplish a divine objective. Therefore, when a church considers witnessing and evangelistic strategies, members must feel strongly that they are working together with God, who motivates, directs, empowers, and gives the increase.

Read Acts 2:47 and 1 Corinthians 3:5–9. What is the result of God’s influence in the church’s attempts to share the gospel?

Read 2 Peter 3:9 and Titus 2:11. What motivates and empowers believers to work together with God?

The Scriptures abound with evidence of God’s love for the crowning act of His creation: human beings. It is not surprising, therefore, that He has taken the initiative in the salvation of humankind. In truth, the Cross alone provides all the proof we would ever need regarding how much God loves us and how much He wants us to be in His eternal kingdom. The Lord has, indeed, reached out and blessed us through His grace; and this amazing grace, as revealed through the Cross, creates in us a desire to share that which we have freely received (*see Matt. 10:8*).

Although sometimes the disciples tried to work alone (*see Matt. 17:14–21*), for the most part their experience was one in which the divine and human worked together.

Jesus called the first disciples and promised to make them fishers of men. He taught and equipped them, and through their ministry many others became believers. However, there was still another divine aspect that they would need after Jesus had returned to heaven. That was, of course, the Holy Spirit, who would empower the early church in its witnessing and evangelism mission.

Those who become involved in evangelism today are still collaborators with God for the salvation of others. We must pray that the Holy Spirit will teach us how to present God’s love and provision in ways that will reach the hearts of those in need of the Savior. We need to be aware that we cannot do anything apart from the Lord and that only by an attitude of faith, submission, humility, and willingness to die to self and to serve others can we be the most effective witnesses in God’s hands. Self must be put aside in order for the Lord to use us as effectively as possible.

Reporting to the Church

This week we have noted some important aspects of a believer's work for God. We now can touch on the topic of "reporting" (we will look at this in more detail in week 12). Reporting to the church on witnessing and evangelism activities builds a climate of encouragement and blessing. Those reporting can receive the encouragement of the church membership, and those hearing the reports are blessed as they realize what God is accomplishing through His people.

Read Acts 14:27 and 15:4. Why do you think that reports were brought into the church?

A reading of the context of the above verses reveals that reports were brought into the church after some extended period of cross-cultural evangelistic preaching. These reporting sessions show the church's interest in, and support for, spreading the gospel.

The whole book of Acts is a report of the early church's missionary endeavors, and it is filled with lessons for the modern-day church. The importance of reporting is underscored as we imagine what it would do to the book of Acts if all reports of evangelistic activity were removed.

Read Mark 6:30. Why do you think the disciples reported to Jesus what they had done?

While it is true that there is personal witnessing and evangelism that happens spontaneously, it is also true that the church as a whole must have an intentional planned approach. Working with an overall church strategy helps to maintain focus and the logical progression of activities. It also brings regular opportunities to evaluate and report. Reporting is not simply listing the things we have done. Through reporting, the church and those witnessing can again see that they are co-workers with the Lord.

Some people are hesitant to turn in reports because they wonder if it is a form of boasting in human achievement; however, by our faithful reporting, God is glorified, and His church is strengthened in faith. The early Christians glorified God when they heard the missionary reports of the apostle Paul (*see Acts 21:19, 20*).

If you were to report to the church your most recent evangelistic efforts, what would you say? What does your answer say about yourself, and what about it, perhaps, might need some changing?

Further Study: Choosing a Ministry in Which to Become Involved In.

Last week you were encouraged to consider all of the witnessing and evangelistic areas of church life in which you like being involved or in which you would become involved if asked. The challenge this week is for you to decide upon an evangelistic activity and to become involved in it. The following are this week's key areas of focus:

1. Review the list of evangelistic activities in which you could possibly become involved. Shorten your list to two or three evangelistic ministry areas by considering where you feel that your talents lie and to which area of ministry you feel that God is calling you.
2. Further reduce your list by considering the amount of time you will be able to regularly devote to a ministry. Also consider being committed to a ministry that will continue for twelve months so that you will be able to move through the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages.
3. Choose a ministry and inform your pastor and personal ministries leader of your desire to become involved in your preferred area. Request a meeting with them to share your ideas and dreams. Inquire about their plans for the church's evangelism and determine how you can get involved or where your preferred ministry can complement whatever plans (if any) that the church already has in place.
4. Humbly ask your pastor and personal ministries leader to share their thoughts on your suitability for the ministry you have chosen. They will want you to be successful in whatever area of witnessing and evangelism you choose; therefore, their counsel will be invaluable.

Discussion Questions:

1 How does the following quote relate to the biblical truth of the priesthood of all believers? How does it support the need for every member to work together? "The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 352.

2 As a class, discuss what strategies your church could put in place that will help members to understand that they are important to the church's witnessing and evangelism. How best can you work toward maximum participation of members?

Jewels of Truth

Afet knew that she had found great truth at the small group meeting that she and her mother and sister had been attending. Within a year all three were baptized.

Afet's heart burned to share her faith with others, but it wouldn't be easy. Most people in her country consider Christians to be infidels. Afet prayed for wisdom, and God showed her texts in the dominant religion's holy book that could help to lead people to Jesus. Afet printed these texts out and gave them to people.

"Your holy book says that Jesus will come again," she told people as she gave them the cards that she'd made. As people read the verses, God opened their hearts to hear about Jesus. "I tell them that the Bible teaches many of the same things their holy book teaches, sometimes in greater detail," says Afet. "They are surprised. I show them verses from their holy book that say that the Bible is the word of God and it never changes." Using this approach, Afet and her fellow believers have led many to Christ and organized several small groups.

With help from the church headquarters in her country, Afet and her fellow believers bought 10,000 books to sell door-to-door in their city of 800,000 people, where very few people are Christians.

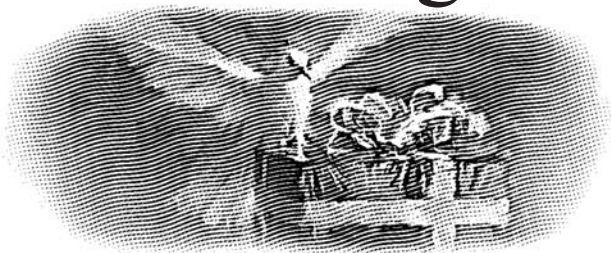
One day an older man answered Afet's knock. He saw that Afet was selling books and sent his son to fetch a young man who sells religious books of his own faith. Afet prayed for wisdom and asked God to guide her words. When the young man arrived, the home owner took a copy of *Steps to God [Steps to Christ]* from Afet and showed it to the young man. "Do you sell this book?" he asked. The young man said that he didn't know the book. The older man bought two copies of *Steps to God* and gave one to the young man to read. He kept the other for himself and thanked Afet for the opportunity to read more about God.

A girl on the second floor had seen Afet going door-to-door. She hurried to catch Afet before she left the building. She asked to see Afet's books and picked up *Steps to God*. "I saw this book in a dream!" she said. "I must have it!"

God is using Adventist books to lead these people to the Bible and to the Savior. Your mission offerings help to support ministries such as this in countries where it's difficult for Adventists to share their faith.

AFET shares her faith as a Global Mission pioneer in a country in central Asia. To protect her identity, her full name hasn't been used.

Spiritual Gifts *for* Evangelism *and* Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Pet. 4:10; John 16:8, 13; 1 Cor. 12:28–31; Acts 2:40–47; 13:4, 5.*

Memory Text: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (*Ephesians 4:11, 12, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Spiritual gifts are special attributes given to each member to be used for God's glory and for the saving of souls.

As a church we have rightly emphasized the spiritual gift of prophecy, but we have not always stressed the importance of other spiritual gifts for ministry. Yet, it's important that we do so. It's a clear biblical doctrine; thus, as a church, we need to take these gifts seriously in order that members can become comfortable with receiving and exercising those gifts.

It is unfortunate that many church members do not take advantage of the gifts they have been given. There are many reasons for this lack. Sometimes the fault lies with the members themselves. Sometimes, perhaps, more could be done to encourage members to discover their gifts and then use these gifts in ministry and outreach under the direction of the Holy Spirit. What a waste to have a gift and never use it for that which it was intended.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 21.*

Gifted Believers

If you asked the members of your church, many of them would have to think long and hard before they could conclude that they had any spiritual gift that the Bible lists, even though many of these people have probably already been exercising a spiritual gift. They have just not consciously recognized it as such. A number of people who have not formally sought to discover their giftedness do expert ministry in areas to which they feel called, and their church affirms them. Very often a spiritual gifts discovery seminar simply confirms the gifts already manifested in a ministry. It is clearly possible, therefore, that people can exercise a spiritual gift under the leadership of the Holy Spirit without formally discovering and naming that gift. At the other end of the spectrum there are those who find it difficult to become involved anywhere in the church because they don't consider themselves gifted in any way. It is important to encourage them to discover their giftedness and intentionally seek to work within it.

Read 1 Peter 4:10. What does this verse say about everyone who is committed to the Lord having some gift?

We have already seen that every believer has a ministry, so it should come as no surprise that God will equip us to perform it. Therefore, everyone who takes the great gospel commission as a personal evangelistic mandate from God will be equipped by the Spirit to become involved. Regarding the church's soul-saving work, God knows what is needed in what place and at what time.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:11. It reveals that the bestowal of spiritual gifts to believers is a part of the Holy Spirit's work of equipping the saints for every good work (*see Eph. 2:10*). Not only does the Holy Spirit distribute spiritual gifts among believers but, also, as Acts 1:8 reveals, He empowers us to use our gifts.

None of the Bible passages that list spiritual gifts are identical. This suggests that the lists of gifts given are not complete; that is, there might be other gifts as well that could be added to the list.

Think about the word *gift* or *gifts*. What does the word imply? What does it tell you about your responsibility to use that which has been freely given you for the work of the Lord (as opposed to only for some other purpose)?

The Spirit and His Gifts

To a certain extent a person's spiritual gifts define his or her place in the local church. In other words, to discover spiritual gifts is to discover where the Lord wants you to function in the body. Have you ever been asked to be involved in an area for which you just had no passion or interest? Do you know people who have accepted church positions only to resign partway through the church year because they feel that they are the wrong person for the job? Most likely in these situations, people have been asked to undertake, and in some instances have tried to become involved in, a church ministry that they are neither called to nor gifted for. Though this does happen, it doesn't have to be the norm.

Read Acts 13:1–3. What happened here, and what does it tell us about the importance of being called to a ministry?

It is significant that the Holy Spirit is the one who calls us to minister for God. Barnabas and Saul were called and equipped by the same Spirit. Verse 2 gives us some important information. It reveals that Barnabas and Saul were already involved in ministering for the Lord before they were called for a specific ministry. We know that it was a specific ministry because Simeon and Manaen were not called at this time.

Just before Jesus left the earth, He promised that the Holy Spirit would come to be our Helper. Part of the Spirit's work is to equip us to spread the gospel. If, therefore, He gives us gifts to accomplish the evangelistic task, then they are surely important, and we need to exercise them.

What do the following texts reveal about the Spirit's interaction with us? *John 16:8, 13; Acts 13:4; Rom. 8:11; Acts 1:8.*

When we understand why the Spirit gives spiritual gifts, we see how vital they are to the salvation of those we are to reach for Christ. Through the Holy Spirit's calling and gifting, each believer is involved to varying degrees, and in diverse ways, in the great work of spreading the gospel.

Although we may designate some gifts as important or special, in reality all gifts are crucial to the life and mission of the church. While we sometimes place a gifted evangelist, preacher, or teacher on a pedestal, those with gifts that nurture and disciple are just as crucial.

Discovering Our Gifts

Discovering our gifts is not difficult. You will be able to recognize quickly the gifted ministry areas of your pastor and other key leaders in your church. All you have to do is observe what they are doing and notice how people respond to their ministry. However, it is another matter when it comes to considering what one's own spiritual gifts might be.

The process of discovering an individual's spiritual gifts has sometimes been presented as rather simplistic: fill out an inventory, apply a formula, and your gift is discovered. Many church members have attempted to discover their spiritual gifts through this avenue but have been disappointed when their local church does not place them in positions where they can exercise their gifts within the body.

An appropriate spiritual gifts seminar is perhaps the easiest way to begin to discover your spiritual gifts. However, it is wise to consider the seminar as only the beginning of the search, as, indeed, most prepared seminars point out.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:28–31. What is Paul telling us in these verses about spiritual gifts?

These verses are not directing us all to desire one or two gifts that are commonly thought to be the best. In this passage Paul shows that spiritual gifts are distributed according to the needs of particular situations facing any church in any place at any time. The best gifts would be those that would empower members of the local church.

When seriously considering your possible gifts, don't underestimate what other church members say. When members sit on the nominating committee to choose the various leaders and support teams for the coming church year, they look for people who have already exhibited an interest and ability in certain ministries. Even though the committee may not understand or intentionally consider spiritual gifts, they are in fact looking for people gifted in specific areas of ministry.

When someone shares his or her belief that you would be really effective in a certain ministry position, it may well be a confirmation of your gifts. It would be wise to listen and pray about it.

The results of a spiritual gifts seminar—coupled with the affirmation of fellow believers and the results of a trial period in a particular ministry field—would be a clear indication of what the Lord has called and gifted you for.

What do you think your own gifts are, and why?

Other Gifts

When we think of spiritual gifts and witnessing and evangelism, we tend mostly to focus on the gifts of evangelism, preaching, and teaching. Though not all gifts are overtly evangelistic, if ministered within the church body they will have varying degrees of impact upon the church's evangelistic mission.

Read Acts 6:1–4 again. People were given similar responsibilities to those we would expect of deacons today. What reasons did the disciples give for not wanting to do this work? How are we to understand the principle that is revealed here?

The newly elected deacons were contributing to the overall evangelistic program of the early church by freeing up the disciples to be engaged full time in evangelism and preaching. So while we may not consider the actions of the deacons as gifts that would equip them for the evangelistic front line, they did have evangelistic impact behind the scenes. Of course, it is quite possible that the deacons' ministry of distributing aid to needy widows rendered people more ready to listen to the gospel when it was preached. God alone knows the good these people did in their roles.

For a church to function, leaders and administrators are necessary in the areas of organization, finances, and so forth. Those who serve their Lord in these varied capacities must understand that they are part of a team and that their contribution is essential to the church's overall evangelistic thrust.

Read Acts 2:40–47. What spiritual gifts were being manifested here, and what was the result, not only in witnessing but in discipleship? What important lessons can we take from this for ourselves?

The word *added* in Acts 2:47 is used in the sense of incorporation into a society. While the new converts were certainly added to the church, they were also brought into fellowship and cared for. Therefore, we can conclude that spiritual gifts in the areas of administration, leadership, hospitality, pastoral ministry, and service would be among those present. This is a good example of the exercising of individual spiritual gifts to benefit the whole church through supporting the evangelistic ministry of others.

Think of your own part, your own role, your own ministry in the church. Where does it fit in with the mission of the church as a whole?

Gifts and Christian Responsibility

Spiritual gifts are not discovered just to satisfy our curiosity but rather to indicate that which the Lord would have us do and to show where we fit into the church body. This, of course, brings great responsibility as we seek to fulfill that for which God has especially equipped us.

Compare Romans 12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:12, and Ephesians 4:16. What do these verses say about spiritual gifts and the body?

It is significant that the three main chapters that list spiritual gifts all do so in the context of the church body. This shows that although an individual may be involved in a witnessing or evangelism event on a personal level, as with Philip and the Ethiopian treasurer (*Acts 8*), we each have the responsibility to exercise our gifts through the church.

As we have seen already, whatever the church does, it must do under the authority and direction of the Holy Spirit. It is our responsibility to seek the will of God and to work in harmony with that which the Spirit reveals. We must not fall into the trap of making plans and then seeking divine approval. Often we ask, “What can our church do for God?” We would do better to discover and get involved with what God is already doing among His people.

What do Matthew 10:19, 20; Acts 13:4, 5; 16:6, 7 tell us about how the disciples were directed by the Holy Spirit?

The disciples allowed the all-knowing Holy Spirit to direct their ministry. Sometimes they tried to enter a field of labor and were prevented by the Holy Spirit. Most probably Paul received a vision in which the Holy Spirit gave him specific instructions as to where the disciples were to work (*see Acts 16:9, 10*).

Spiritual gifts must be used responsibly, and the best way to ensure this is for the receiver of a gift to maintain an open communication channel with the Spirit. We have a responsibility to maintain the unity of the church. If we are Spirit-led, there will be the desired unity. The Spirit directs individuals, and He directs the church. The direction He gives to one member, He gives to the whole church. The Spirit does not lead individuals away from the body.

When we have committed ourselves to the service of Christ, we can expect great things to happen as the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us. The key is for us, as individuals and as a church, to be ready to receive that which the Spirit gives.

Further Study: Discover or Organize Local Training Opportunities.

If you have decided upon an area of witnessing and evangelism and have discussed it with your pastor and evangelism leaders, it is time to consider your readiness for the task. You will want the best possible chance of influencing people for Jesus; thus, training is important. Remember, working as a team rather than individually will ensure encouragement, support, and success. The following are this week's key areas of focus:

1. In consultation with your pastor and evangelism leader, discuss what, if any, training events and processes can be undertaken. All training does not have to be at the local church. Explore the possibility of attending regional training or being sponsored to attend some training seminars, if available.
2. Another training option is to request that your pastor or other trainers provide local witnessing and evangelism training. If costs are prohibitive and there are only a few people wishing to be trained at your church, why not advertise regionally and make it a regional training event based at your place?
3. While you are undergoing training for your chosen area of witnessing and evangelism, consider what resources are available. Becoming familiar with resources, and how to use them, forms an important part of preparation for your ministry.
4. Crucial to your outreach and evangelism ministry is personal spiritual preparation. You will become increasingly aware of your personal spiritual needs as you begin to serve God. As you then request and receive a greater infilling of the Holy Spirit, you will be empowered for greater service. Pray for the Holy Spirit to direct and use you.

Discussion Questions:

1 “God has set in the church different gifts. These are precious in their proper places, and all may act a part in the work of preparing a people for Christ’s soon coming.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 481. Consider to what extent spiritual gifts are emphasized in your local church. What can you do to raise their profiles?

2 “All men do not receive the same gifts, but to every servant of the Master some gift of the Spirit is promised.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 327. How can we encourage all church members to discover, develop, and use their spiritual gifts? Why is it important that we do so?

A Home of Hope

Eddah watched the activity in the Masai camp nervously. It seemed that the whole clan had come to help her mother prepare for her wedding feast. But Eddah didn't want to marry; she wanted to continue her studies. She is a bright girl and had completed several years of primary school several miles from her home. Then one day she was attacked and raped on her way to school. Even after Eddah realized that she was pregnant, she continued her studies, stopping only to have her baby.

Eddah wanted to return to school, but her father found a man who would marry her and take her baby. He already had several wives. The wedding would take place the next day; Eddah's only hope was to run away to a school she'd heard about, Kajiado Adventist Education and Rehabilitation Center near Nairobi, Kenya, a self-supporting school operated by Seventh-day Adventist lay men and women.

When the women went to buy supplies for the wedding, Eddah wrapped her 4-month-old son in a blanket and set off to find the school. She walked more than 25 miles through bush country to the school.

Eddah and her baby arrived sunburned and dehydrated after their long walk. The matron fed them and listened as Eddah told her story. The matron agreed to take Eddah, but they had no facilities for her infant son. However, there was an orphanage not far away.

Eddah's family learned where she had gone. Her father was angry that she had run away, but he is proud that she is at the top of her class. Eddah will soon graduate from high school. "I want to study law," Eddah says. "I want to fight for the rights of other girls to study and have a brighter future."

Eddah's family, like many Masai families, is learning that education is a better investment for their daughters than an early marriage.

Kajiado Adventist Education and Rehabilitation Center must find sponsors for more than 100 Masai girls whose families cannot or will not pay their tuition. The girls learn responsibility by sharing chores and caring for their personal needs. And while they study they learn to love and obey Jesus.

The work at Kajiado has changed the lives of dozens of Masai boys and girls over the past several years. Global Mission pioneers are being sent into the area to reach the Masai with God's message of love. Your mission offerings help support this work in the farthest corners of the world.

Kajiado Adventist Education and Rehabilitation Center near Nairobi, Kenya, is a self-supporting school operated by Adventist lay members.

Evangelism *and* Witnessing *as a Lifestyle*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Cor. 3:2, 3; Matt. 9:36–38;
1 Cor. 9:20–22; Mark 5:1–19; John 17:11–19.

Memory Text: “At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did” (*Acts 9:36, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Whether we acknowledge it or not, all believers preach a message by the example of their lives.

It has often been said that Christianity is not just an adherence to a set of beliefs; it is also a way of life, a lifestyle. After all, what we believe will, ultimately, impact the choices we make and the kind of lives we live.

It is also true that those who claim to be Christians are keenly observed by others who are looking to see whether their lives match their professed beliefs. Even if we don't intend it, those who watch us do learn from us. So, the important question is not, “Are we influencing other people and passing things on to them?” but rather, “*How* are we influencing other people, and what are we passing on to them?”

While we should always remember the importance of our unintentional influence on those around us, we must also intentionally plan to help people to make a connection between faith and lifestyle. This week we will study how the Christian's lifestyle can demonstrate the relevance of faith in everyday existence.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 28.*

Silent Sermons

How would you have recognized the followers of Jesus back in the first century? You could recognize the priests and the Pharisees by the way they dressed. Likewise, you would recognize a fisherman, a peasant, or a Roman soldier by their clothes. But, again, how would you recognize a Christian?

Read John 13:35. According to Jesus, what is one special way His followers are identified? What does that mean in practical terms?

Jesus said that if we love one another, others will know that we are His disciples. How will they know? Because love in action will convince them. The love we have for Jesus and for fellow believers will determine how we respond to God's will and, in turn, how we treat one another. Furthermore, the love and concern that we have for those outside of God's fold will determine how we treat them too. This is the sermon that they will see and observe, and it speaks louder than anything you could ever say. Many parents have noticed that very early in life their children develop an internal "hypocrisy detector" that becomes enhanced and fine-tuned as they grow older. We must be aware, therefore, that many of the people we associate with, and witness to, also have a highly developed ability to recognize the difference between a genuine spiritual experience and a mere profession of spirituality.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:2, 3. What is Paul saying about the way in which God wants to use His people to influence the lives of others?

We must not underestimate both our intentional and unintentional influences on those around us. The Christian's life is to be like a letter sent from Jesus Christ to the world. From a heart that is renewed by divine grace, this letter will demonstrate the power of the gospel to transform lives and thereby will witness for the Lord.

How have you been affected by those whose actions matched their profession? How have you been affected by those whose actions *didn't* match their profession? What will help you to always remember that your actions will influence others, one way or another?

Having Compassion for People

Each day we all fleetingly brush past people we don't know. We pass them on the street, sit near them in cafés, and wait with them in lines. Sometimes we even acknowledge their presence with a nod or a smile as we move past them. Although we could never personally contact each person we see each day, God's desire is for all these people to accept Him into their lives. For someone, somewhere, we can be a part of God's plan to save him or her.

Read Matthew 9:36–38. **Though spoken in a specific and unique context, the sentiments Jesus expressed are not limited to just that context. What was Jesus saying, and how do those words apply to the field in your immediate area?**

The multitude that Jesus saw on this occasion was troubled and distressed. The people were so downcast that they had all but given up on any remnants of a religious experience they had left. Those whom God had placed in charge of the spiritual welfare of His people had neglected their duty. Consequently the people were scattered and disheartened. Jesus had compassion for them because He knew that they needed a spiritual shepherd.

Among the masses of people with whom we mingle, many are committed to Jesus Christ. But many more also desperately need the Good Shepherd. Somehow they must be reached for Christ.

Jesus, the disciples, and a few other followers had been engaged in the gospel harvest, but as the harvest grew, so did the need for more laborers. Although Jesus' invitation to pray for more reapers was probably also calculated to get some followers to consider their own call to the harvest field, it also promises that God understands the need for more workers and will supply them.

Most churches are surrounded by such a large harvest field that it is not practical to leave the reaping up to a few members. When we have compassion for the people who live around our churches and our homes, in some cases numbered in the thousands, we again will sense the need to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers, and perhaps, in turn, we will realize our potential as laborers for the Lord.

As we focus on outreach and evangelism, it is important that we continually review our potential local harvests. These local people, many of whom are already seeking God, will be impacted for good by the compassion we show them.

Discuss what the word *compassion* means. How can you learn from your own suffering and your own need for compassion? How can you be more compassionate to those around you?

Walking in Their Shoes

Here's an important point: rather than providing what we think people need, we must learn to recognize what *they see* as important priorities. What are they concerned about? What are their problems? What do they feel that they need?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:20–22. What do these verses tell us about Paul's approach to different peoples and his desire to identify with their needs and concerns? What can we take from this for ourselves in our attempts to reach out to those around us? *See also Heb. 4:15.*

Without compromising on matters of principle, the apostle Paul was willing to go anywhere and do anything he could to be in a better position to convince people of the truth of the gospel. In other words, he was willing to walk in their shoes in an attempt to understand them and to determine the best way to reach them for Jesus Christ.

The point is that often we try to provide what we think people need. Yet, we should seek first to understand what they see as their needs. To walk in the shoes of another means that we attempt to understand life and all its intricacies and issues from their perspective; it is to try to understand their hurts and joys. In other words, to meet them where they are.

Of course, this is what Jesus did. His earthly life was one of identifying with those He came to save. He can understand our struggles and pain because He experienced the same. He had great disappointments, endured false accusations, rejection, and unfair punishment. He was "God with us" in the fullest sense of entering into our lives.

Furthermore, because He entered into our experiences, He can meet people where they are. As we read through the Gospels we discover that Jesus did not have just one method of evangelism and witnessing. He reached out to people in their own life context. When He met the woman at Jacob's well, He spoke about living water. To farmers, He told stories about sowing seeds, harvest time, and the weather. To fishermen, He spoke about fish, nets, and storms. Jesus had a wonderful way of presenting great spiritual truths as He identified with the normal issues of daily life, and those who listened learned about the water of life and the need to sow the gospel seed. Many of them even became fishers of men.

A Hospitable Lifestyle

There is a saying that is often voiced when we speak of reaching people for Christ. “People don’t care how much we know until they know how much we care.” The point is that we can teach and preach all we want, but if people feel misunderstood, unloved, and unaccepted, then our witness will be severely hampered, no matter how eloquent our preaching or how reasonable and true our teachings.

This leads to the simple idea of hospitality. Hospitality includes the areas of acceptance, welcoming, openness, caring, generosity, kindness, and friendship. These qualities all have to do with the way that God would have Christians relate both to one another and to those whom they seek to reach for the Lord.

Read the story of the demon-possessed man in Mark 5:1–19. What did Jesus tell this man that illustrates the principle that friends are more receptive to our sharing the gospel? How can we learn to apply this principle in our own work of personal witness and ministry?

Jesus could have directed this man to go back to his town and tell everyone about his healing experience. The fact that the Lord specifically directed him to seek out his friends underscores the truth that those with whom we already have relationships are the most receptive to the good news that we want to share about His love, grace, and deliverance. Those friends would then share the exciting news with their other friends, and so the gospel message goes forward.

Important to this whole process is that we have friendships outside of our circle of believers. Because many work out in the world, they will naturally have many acquaintances, but acquaintances are not close friends. However, acquaintances can become friends through what has been called hospitality evangelism, and hospitality evangelism flows out of a hospitable lifestyle. In other words, hospitality evangelism is not something that is turned off on occasion; rather, it is the way we live. *See also Luke 14:12–14.*

In what ways could you be more hospitable to those around you? How can you learn to be more willing to give of yourself in order to meet the needs of those whom you are seeking to reach?

Widening Your Friendship Circle

While a searching soul occasionally may approach a Christian and ask, “What must I do to be saved?” for the most part believers must go out in search of the lost sheep. Some suggest that the church acts too much like a fortress from which a few people go out on a campaign or mission in order to collect some converts who are then admonished not to get too close to the world from which they have been saved. Whether this is true or just a perception is not the point. The point is that many Seventh-day Adventists have few, or no, meaningful relationships outside of the fellowship. Though it is important for us to avoid unholy influences, there is a degree to which such isolation detracts from our ability to reach people with the gospel message.

Examine closely John 17:11–19. What do these verses reveal about the Christian’s place in the world? See also Col. 4:2–6.

From these verses we can extract the following truths about Jesus’ disciples and the world:

They are in the world (*vs. 11*).

They are not of the world (*vss. 14, 16*).

They are not yet to be taken out of the world (*vs. 15*).

Jesus sent them into the world (*vs. 18*).

We are all born into this world. While we are here, God also has a work for us to do in it. Just as with His first disciples, Jesus has sent us into the world to introduce whomever we can to Him and the promise of salvation that He offers all humanity.

The challenge for each one of us is to intentionally expand our personal mission field. This may mean adjusting our lifestyle in order to rub shoulders with more unchurched people. This is not to say that we compromise principles, convictions, and values, but, rather, that we look for opportunities where we can, in clear conscience, interact with others in a way that will allow us to become both friends and, as a result, channels of God’s truth.

Often we excel in sending out invitations for the people to come to us. Yet, Jesus actually told us to go to them. Thus, we need to ask ourselves if we have withdrawn too much from the world and therefore have lost some of our evangelistic effectiveness.

Look at yourself: do you tend to be too insular, too remote from the world? Or, perhaps, are you too cozy with the world? How can you better learn to be in the world (and thus witness to others) and yet not be “of it”?

Further Study: Discover Where Your Ministry Fits Into Your Church's Overall Plans.

While most local church departments may have a well-organized program and be quite busy, the chances are that those involved in each department may not know much about what is happening in other areas of church life. Furthermore, there may not be an overall church evangelistic plan of which each department group is aware and, therefore, can contribute toward. For the purposes of encouragement, support, and effective evaluation, it is best that your evangelism and witnessing ministry be a part of an overall church strategy. To achieve this, the following suggestions are important:

1. Meet with your pastor, elders, or evangelism leaders to understand what, if any, evangelism and witnessing goals are in place and what strategies are being followed to reach these goals. Remember, you are trying to discover where your chosen evangelism and witnessing activities will fit with the church's plans and help to reach their goals.
2. You may discover that although there is much evangelistic activity in your church, there are no documented goals or strategies. If this is the case, then request a meeting with the pastor, elders, or evangelism leaders, and ask them what their personal goals for evangelism are. Take some notes during your discussions. You are building up a picture of your leadership's evangelistic vision that will help to suggest goals and ways of reaching others.
3. At this stage you may decide to join with an already established evangelistic ministry. If, however, your chosen ministry is in a new area of evangelism or witnessing, you will need to gather a small group of people who share your vision. Document your goals and the strategies you will employ to reach those goals.

Discussion Questions:

- ① "Too often the influence of the sermon preached from the pulpit is counteracted by the sermon preached in the lives of those who claim to be advocates of truth."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 21. What kind of witness does your life, as opposed to your words or profession, reveal?
- ② Think about your church as a whole. How integrated into the community is it? If your church vanished tomorrow, how much difference to the community would that make? Would it make any difference at all?

Stubborn Atheist

I was an absolute atheist, a teacher of physics and astronomy on a mission to convince my students in Bulgaria that God doesn't exist.

Then my brother became a Christian—a Seventh-day Adventist Christian! I wasn't sure what he believed, but I was sure it meant trouble. My brother tried to convince me to study the Bible and give Christianity a chance, but I refused to listen. In fact, I refused to allow him to say one word about it in my presence.

He sent me Bible studies and literature, but I refused to open the envelopes. I reminded my brother that Karl Marx had said that religion is the opiate of the people, and I refused to be tainted by such superstition.

But my brother kept sending the literature. Finally, I decided to read what he sent, only so I could show him the errors of his new beliefs. I opened the first envelope, and read through the lesson. Then I read another and another. The sixth lesson talked about Jesus' second coming. Something about this lesson touched my heart. My interest was aroused. I went back and reread each lesson and filled in the study sheet. I found myself looking forward impatiently for each lesson to arrive.

I found the tiny Seventh-day Adventist church in my city and began to visit it. I began reading the Bible, too. When I finally told my brother that I was studying the Bible, we shared precious moments of discovery together. For the first time in my life I experienced the presence of God in my life as we prayed together.

At first I thought that only absolute vegetarians who wore ultra-conservative clothes were God's true children. But over time God revealed that His children don't focus on outward appearances and actions, but on being heart-right with God. As I realized this, I felt a wonderful freedom and joy. I learned to love the believers who didn't eat like me or look like me. I learned to love others because Jesus loves them, and He relies on us to be His light in this dark world.

Four years after my baptism God surprised me again. I had wanted to teach a few old women in a village how to serve God, but the conference invited me to become the women's ministries director! Imagine, me, the stubborn atheist, teaching other women to love God! He never ceases to amaze me.

God reached me through a praying brother and literature provided by the mission offerings of faithful people around the world. Imagine what He can do with your mission gifts.

TATIANA MODREVA *shares her faith in western Bulgaria.*

Sequential Evangelism *and* Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 25:35–40, 1 Cor. 3:1–3, 1 Pet. 2:2, John 6:54–66, Luke 8:4–15.*

Memory Text: “I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it” (*1 Corinthians 3:2, NKJV*).

Key Thought: In all evangelism and witnessing, it is important that we first present the simple truth of the gospel.

Sequential evangelism is a strategy based on the understanding that people will move from one church program to another when the programs are arranged in the right sequence. This, however, has to be done correctly or else it can do more harm than good.

Our key text shows how Paul understood the fact that we can undo by overdoing. We can deliver so much complex material, and in the wrong order, that the receiver either chokes on the volume, fails to grasp the depth of meaning, or is reluctant to apply personally what is learned. Just as a baby's diet begins with milk and gradually comes to include solid food, babes in Christ must receive spiritual food so that their developing spiritual understanding can assimilate.

This week we will explore how evangelism and witnessing strategies and programs blend and how they build on, and support, each other throughout the church's sequential evangelistic year.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 5.*

Sequential Evangelism and Felt Needs

As we have already noted in earlier weeks, the discovery of individual or community felt needs will influence how we approach people and the programs and services that we make available to them. As we understand felt needs, we are better able to plan a sequence of programs that meets those basic needs, whether for an individual or a community.

Read Luke 9:11. What does this verse indicate regarding Jesus' desire to heal both physically and spiritually? In our spheres, how can we seek to do the same thing for those whom we are trying to reach?

No doubt many who came to Jesus were primarily focused on His ability to relieve physical suffering. Jesus would help them physically, of course, but He would also address a need that perhaps was not keenly felt by each person—the need for spiritual healing.

While God's people today are active in meeting people's personal or community needs, they must follow Jesus' example and somehow help to turn minds to eternal issues.

Examine Matthew 25:35–40. What is the message here? How seriously do we really take those words, or do we just see them as a metaphor? That is, if we really believed them, how differently would we act?

Ministering in any way to those whom Jesus loves and for whom He gave His life is ministering to Jesus Himself. This demonstrates just how closely related Jesus is with His creation. When any are hurting, He is concerned for them and sympathizes with them; we must do the same. Matthew 25:35–40 indicates that meeting felt needs does not always have to be a part of a fixed church strategy. When needs are discovered, they must be met, no matter where a church is in its sequential strategy. While many people will move along from program to program as their spiritual interests develop, others will need spiritual nourishment right away. A church need not abandon its planned sequence of programs and events, but it must be able to respond to any eventuality by having trained personnel and adequate resources available at all times.

Milk and Solid Food

Compare 1 Corinthians 3:1–3 and 1 Peter 2:2. What do you think Paul and Peter were specifically referring to when they spoke of milk and solid food and the need to grow? In your mind, what is theological milk as opposed to solid food?

Evidently the members of the church at Corinth had not progressed very far in their spiritual development after Paul had established the group. Consequently, when he preached to them, his message was an appeal for them to surrender themselves to God and grow in spirituality to the extent that they could grasp the deep truths of the gospel. His preaching at this time would have been evangelistic rather than edifying. Paul would not preach on the deeper themes while the people were not spiritually mature enough to understand and respond to them.

As we reach out to people today, we must be ever mindful of Paul's strategy. We must lead people to surrender to Christ before we expect them to accept the deep, life-changing truths of His Written Word.

When we speak of an evangelistic sequence, it can refer to a long strategy or a short process. When people have progressed through a sequence of programs to the place where they are open to God's call, they can be led through a full evangelistic series or begin a personal Bible study series. Whatever the program the principle is still the same: first the milk (simple gospel themes to begin a relationship) and then the solid food (deeper and more testing truths leading to firm commitment).

Read John 16:12. What important point do we find here? How can we learn to apply this principle in the ways in which we deal with others?

A new Seventh-day Adventist was so excited about the truth he had learned that he wanted to tell everyone. Often, the first thing he wanted to share with others was all about "the mark of the beast." However well-meaning, he was a prime example of how truth needs to be presented in a sequential manner.

Think about some Bible truth that you struggled with at first that you found hard to accept. Over time, how did you eventually settle into that truth? What did you learn from this experience that could help you to be more sensitive in your outreach to others?

Testing Truths

A testing truth is a biblical teaching that, once understood, challenges the individual to make significant changes in his or her personal beliefs or lifestyle. Some testing truths, such as seventh-day Sabbath observance and the avoidance of unclean foods, impact both belief and lifestyle. This underscores once again the necessity of leading people to accept Christ before urging them to do things for Him.

John 6:54–66 shows that some people turned away from Jesus when they faced a testing truth. Why did some who had followed Jesus eventually turn away? What lesson is here for us personally? What “testing truths” still, perhaps, challenge your commitment to Jesus?

Many who had witnessed, and benefited from, the feast on the mountainside the previous day followed Jesus in order to be fed again. As Jesus attempted to turn their minds to spiritual things by using the illustration of His body and blood, many turned away. It wasn’t that they could not grasp the truth of salvation through Christ alone; it was that they refused to accept it. It was a testing time, and when their personal wants were not met, they chose to walk away.

Read John 14:15. In what ways do these words present a “testing truth”?

Here is a challenge for those who claim to love Jesus to consider seriously their commitment to Him. Sooner or later the time will come when a professed belief will be tested by the call to action. The reality is that sometimes, at any stage in the evangelism process, people turn aside when faced with testing truths. Experience has shown, however, that people respond more easily and positively to a testing truth when a love relationship with the Savior has been cultivated. In other words, it is still true that the right sequence brings the best results.

Jesus had many things that He wanted to tell the disciples, but He knew that they would not understand them yet (*see John 16:12*). His promise that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth (*John 16:13*) is a promise that extends to our time, to us, and to those we seek to lead to Christ.

However free the gift of grace is, the *commitment* that results from accepting that gift can, at times, be very costly. How can you help someone struggling with this cost, whatever the specifics? What have you learned about the cost of commitment that you could share with someone who is facing the same challenge?

Measuring Spiritual Growth

Just because we deliver biblical information through a public lecture, seminar, or Bible study, there is no guarantee that we have influenced those present in a spiritual way. Many people have attended an evangelistic series, a Revelation seminar, a Bible study, or maybe all of the above. Though they might have gained an intellectual understanding of Bible truth, this doesn't mean that they have integrated these truths into their lives.

How, then, can we better determine that people who hear what we have to say are being impacted by truth in a life-changing way?

One important way in which we can measure people's spiritual growth is by asking questions. Asking questions is a good way to gauge a person's spiritual understanding and growth. It is best to ask open-ended questions. These are questions that encourage an informative answer and that cannot be answered simply by yes or no.

Some typical questions might be, What do you think these verses are saying to us today? How would you share this Bible truth with a friend? How do you feel about God's promise to you? What changes do you think you need to make in your life, in your attitude toward others, and in how you live in general, because of what you have been studying? How do these truths help you to love Jesus more? Of all the things you have been learning, what impresses you the most? What gives you the most hope? The most fear?

Bible studies, as well as other evangelistic presentations, should be arranged in a logical and orderly sequence. That is, the more simple and easy-to-understand studies are presented first, while more complex studies are presented later in the series when the Bible student's understanding has grown. It is important that searching questions be asked throughout each study to gauge spiritual understanding and growth.

Look up the following verses and consider why a God who knows everything would ask such questions: *Gen. 3:9, 13; Matt. 16:13–15; 22:41–46; Mark 9:33; Luke 2:46.* What does this tell us about how questions can be a powerful tool for helping people grow in God's grace?

Preparing a Harvest

Leading a person along in his or her spiritual journey is like preparing for a harvest. Anyone who has worked a vegetable garden knows that there is a definite time frame and sequence of steps to follow if the desired harvest is to be realized. We must dig in the soil, remove the weeds, plant the seeds, and water the garden. It is also necessary to create the right environment for the plants; some may require full sunlight, while others may need some shade. Furthermore, it is necessary to protect the plants from birds and other garden pests. In other words, plants in a garden must be nurtured from seeds to fruitful and mature plants. For people on the spiritual journey, a similar process begins before they are baptized, and it must continue afterward, as well. Ideally a person is nurtured along until he or she is able to start nurturing others. This truth again underscores the vital nature of a planned sequence that provides the right time frames, takes the right steps, and creates the best nurturing and protective environment.

Read the parable of the sower and Jesus' explanation in Luke 8:4–15. What challenges does this parable bring to us in regard to nurturing to maturity the seed that falls on good ground? See also John 16:7, 8, 13.

Jesus' explanation of the parable reveals some interesting facts. Verse 12 suggests that some people began to believe but were sidetracked by the devil before their belief was firmly established. Verse 13 describes some who received the word with joy. They believed for a while, but, when tempted, they chose another direction. Verse 14 mentions another group who heard but did not go on to Christian maturity. Most of the people started on the journey toward Christ and His kingdom, but things happened at various stages along the way that prevented their growth progress.

Simply sowing the seed is rarely enough to bring about a good harvest. Our challenge as a church, and as individuals, is to sow the gospel seed and then sequentially nurture to maturity all those who begin the journey.

What part of the parable best describes your own spiritual experience? What choices can you make that can improve your situation?

Further Study: Finding a Target Audience

By now you will have discovered that the evangelism strategy we are following week to week will take longer than one quarter to achieve. For instance, we would not expect that the local evangelistic training opportunities mentioned in Lesson 3 will be discovered, planned, and attended in just one week. However, while you are considering training and where your ministry will fit into your church's overall plans, it is important that you consider your target audience.

The following points are worth considering:

1. In consultation with your pastor, elders, and evangelism leaders, decide upon your witnessing and evangelism programs and target audiences. Considering your target audience will help you to focus on all aspects of the process. For instance, with a children's program, it will be better to advertise in schools and in neighborhoods that contain young families. Other target audiences may be the retired, the unemployed, students, and so on.
2. Focusing on a target audience will help you to choose the best personnel, location, time, and follow-up strategies. It will also help in effective evaluation at the conclusion of your program, as well as providing you with a specific prayer focus.
3. You may not have to look further than your church to select a target group. Consider people who attend church but are not baptized, or the church's unbaptized young people, or people who regularly attend special church or church-school programs.

Discussion Questions:

❶ “One truth received into the heart will make room for still another truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 449. In what sequence should the truths we hold be presented in order to increase the effectiveness in our outreach? Why should Christ's substitutionary death always be at the forefront of all that we teach?

❷ “Christ drew the hearts of His hearers to Him by the manifestation of His love, and then, little by little, as they were able to bear it, He unfolded to them the great truths of the kingdom. We also must learn to adapt our labors to the condition of the people—to meet men where they are.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 57. How should love for those to whom we are speaking to about God's Word temper the way we present Bible truth, especially points of doctrine that might challenge a person's existing beliefs, or do we need to?

No Longer Alone

“Sometimes, I wonder if my mother has seen me but didn’t recognize me,” 16-year-old Ginny said.

Born in the Haitian countryside, Ginny was given up at birth. She lived in several different homes and even lived on the streets. When Ginny was 4, a woman took her home to live with her. “I got to go to school!” Ginny said. “But when Ginny was 10, the woman invited a man to live in the house. He beat Ginny and tried to rape her. “I screamed, but no one came to help me,” she said stoically. “I was so scared; I couldn’t sleep.”

Ginny left the woman’s home and lived with a neighbor, where she cleaned house in exchange for food. Ginny was mistreated in this home, too.

“I’ve suffered a lot,” Ginny said. “I just wanted to have a home and a mother.”

One day someone told Ginny that her mother was in Port-au-Prince. They gave her a telephone number. Ginny called the number and heard her mother’s voice. She learned that she had five sisters. When Ginny asked if she could visit, her mother agreed.

Excited that at last she’d have a home and a family, Ginny made plans to visit her mother.

But the January 12 earthquake shattered Ginny’s plans. Ginny survived the earthquake, but she lost everything else. She searched for her mother’s home to find it was now only a pile of rubble. “Day and night, I wonder if my mother and sisters are still alive somewhere,” she said. “I came so close to meeting her, and then the earthquake took everything away.”

Ginny made her way to a displaced-persons camp, where ADRA provides shelter, food, and understanding adults who can help her to deal with the traumas she’s experienced. ADRA is working with other agencies to keep these children safe and unite them with their families. They have given Ginny hope.

Ginny met another girl who also was separated from her family. “We look out for each other,” she said. “For the first time in my life, I have a sister. We are no longer alone.”

Our church has more than 330,000 members in Haiti. ADRA has been working to help the Haitian people for some thirty years. Your mission offerings and a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping to rebuild the work in Haiti so that more people can experience God’s love.

MICHELLE L. OETMAN is communication and media coordinator for Adventist Development & Relief Agency (ADRA) in Haiti.

Personal Evangelism *and* Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 4:13, 14; John 1:37–50; Psalm 139; 1 Pet. 3:1–15; John 4:37, 38.*

Memory Text: “ ‘You are My witnesses,’ says the LORD, ‘and My servant whom I have chosen’ ” (*Isaiah 43:10, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Those who have the joy of assurance of salvation will want to lead others to experience the same.

Although many people will hear the good news about Jesus through a church's witnessing and evangelism endeavors, there is a special sense in which the individual's influence contributes significantly to the success of the corporate church program. Over the last few decades, surveys have shown that friends, relatives, neighbors, or acquaintances (all under the power of the Holy Spirit) were the most influential factors in leading people to give their hearts to Christ. Research has shown that up to 83 percent of new members surveyed stated the influence of their church-member friends, relatives, and acquaintances as being significant. Of those who attended some form of public evangelistic meetings before joining the church, 64 percent attended at the invitation of someone in their close-people network.

This week we will review some biblical examples of networking and consider our connectedness to Jesus and our personal influence on those close to us.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 12.*

My God and Me

Our personal relationship with Jesus will have a direct bearing upon our success in witnessing for Him. It is so easy to learn some witnessing and evangelism formulas and then rally forth in our own assumed wisdom and strength. While God can still bless our efforts, we must ever remind ourselves that it is His work, and we accomplish it through His power. Do we want to merely impart knowledge (albeit important knowledge), or do we want to encourage a vital spiritual relationship? And how can we pass on to others what we don't have in and of ourselves?

Of course, there are always examples of people—however weak in faith themselves, however close to tottering on the edge of apostasy and backsliding—who nevertheless are used by God to lead others to Jesus. In a large city a number of years ago, a young woman, having joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church, worked tirelessly to reach her brother. After years, the brother was baptized. One month later, the sister left the faith and, as of now, still renounces it. Although cases like this happen, the fact is that the stronger our own connection with Jesus, the more powerful a witness we will be.

Read Acts 4:13, 14. **What do these verses reveal about the relationship that Peter and John had with Jesus and what this connection enabled them to accomplish? Think through what was meant when it says that “they realized that they had been with Jesus.” What does that mean? What should a person who has just “been with Jesus” be like?**

The lesson in God's Word is pretty clear. As we think about our personal mission fields, as we assess the ripeness of the grain and the urgent need of laborers, we need to allow the Lord to draw us into a close and powerful relationship with Him; a relationship that will give us power that, otherwise, we wouldn't have.

How is your own personal relationship with the Lord? How does your mere presence, the way you talk, act, and treat people, reveal your relationship with God? Be as painfully honest with yourself as you possibly can.

My Personal Mission Field

When Jesus looked at the crowds of people, He was filled with compassion (*see Matt. 9:36*). Sometimes we may think that Jesus simply saw the crowd, but, in reality, He saw each *individual* that made up the crowd. In the same way, we should be aware of the individuals in the crowds through which we walk and those in which we live. Our church can be aware of individuals in the crowd only if church members interact on an individual basis with those who are in their sphere of influence.

Those with whom we personally interact on various levels of intimacy are, in reality, our personal mission field. From our closest family relationships we can move outward to other relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Occasionally others may fleetingly move in and out of our sphere of influence and, for a brief time, become a part of our personal mission field.

Read John 1:37–42. Why do you think Andrew told his brother about finding the Messiah before he told anyone else?

Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist, and as John’s ministry was to prepare the way for Jesus, it is understandable that some disciples made the transition to following Jesus. Andrew’s conversation with Jesus excited him so much that he immediately went looking for the person closest to him, the brother with whom he had spent many long nights fishing on the Sea of Galilee.

Read John 1:43–50. Look at what is going on here. What interpersonal relations are revealed? In what way does Philip respond to Nathanael’s skepticism? What lessons can we take from this story that can help us to understand how personal witnessing works?

The early movement to follow Jesus seems to have gained momentum through social networking in the Capernaum and Bethsaida areas. Notice that Philip does not argue when Nathanael has doubts that the Messiah would come from a small, insignificant, rural village. He just issues a simple invitation, “Come and see.”

How much self-sacrifice will it take on your part for you to be a better witness to those in your vicinity?

My Personal Potential

When our personal ministries leaders call for volunteers to be involved in witnessing and evangelism, we often think that many people are more qualified and gifted than we ourselves are. Others seem more confident and capable. However, the Bible reveals to us that God is not necessarily looking for those who are the most qualified as much as those who are willing to be used, whatever their gifts and talents.

A good example of this is God's calling Moses to deliver His people from Egyptian slavery. Moses could see many reasons why someone else would be more qualified to do what God proposed (*see Exod. 3:11, 4:10*). In Moses' mind, he had what he thought were good reasons not to do what the Lord asked of Him.

In response to a call to evangelistic action, many modern-day believers echo some of Moses' concerns—"Who am I to be considered for such a task?" "What if they ask me some hard questions?" "I am not a good enough speaker." We can smile at Moses for thinking that God needed to reconsider His personnel-recruitment strategy, but God knew Moses' potential, and despite his personal fears and concerns, he was the right person for this special task.

The calling of Moses to lead God's people is one that convinces us that God knows us infinitely better than we know ourselves. God does not focus upon past performance but upon personal potential. Each believer has tremendous potential to contribute to the Lord's work.

On the other hand, we must guard against overconfidently running before the Lord. While it is true that we should often search our own hearts in order to evaluate where we are spiritually, we need also to understand that the human heart can be less than objective with self-evaluation. Therefore it is also good to ask God to examine us and show us our true condition, because our condition affects our potential.

Read Psalm 139. Why did David ask God to search His heart? What lessons are here for us, not just in terms of witnessing but regarding our walk with the Lord, in general? What can we take away from this psalm for ourselves right now? What comfort, hope, and encouragement is there for you? At the same time, what does it say to you about the changes that you need to make in the way you live?

The Witness of a Righteous Life

Do actions really speak louder than words? Yes, immensely so. It is true, therefore, that while a message can be given through actions without words, an equally strong message can be given through words without actions. There is something very powerful about a message that incorporates both actions and words that are in agreement. To profess to love God and then act as if you don't is hypocrisy, and the worst witness that can be given is profession and action that are not in harmony.

Consistency speaks loudly. While your family and friends may not seem to be listening to what you say, they are watching to see if it is in harmony with what you do and how you live.

Read 1 Peter 3:1–15. What do these verses tell us about the power of a Christian life and its potential to win unbelievers to Christ? Imagine the power that would attend our witness were we to live as we are told to in this passage. What message especially does verse 15 give in the whole context of our personal witness? *See also Matt. 5:16.*

We can imagine the strife that could have arisen when a pagan woman accepted Jesus as her Savior while her husband remained in paganism. Her burden for his salvation could lead her to exhibit an argumentative and nagging spirit as she considered him to be part of her personal mission field. On the other hand, as Peter suggests, she could be faithful to her God and hope and pray that her godly life would win her unbelieving husband to the Master. In other words, she could let the actions of her daily life be a constant and powerful witness.

Letting our light shine incorporates all the possibilities of influencing lost men and women for the kingdom. Those around us must not only hear our good words, they must also see our good works, for in so doing they will see the power of God working through us, and the Spirit will challenge them to recognize the possibility and blessing of God's presence in human lives. People must be convinced that Christianity is not only a title that we claim but also an empowering relationship that we enjoy. Using examples is an important method of teaching, and Christians are examples, whether intentionally or unintentionally. We witness by what we do and who we are even more than by what we say or profess to believe. If that's a scary thought, it ought to be.

My Contribution to the Whole

This week we have been considering our personal mission field and our witnessing and evangelism potential. It is also important to grasp the truth that, because the church consists of all the members, each one's individual effort contributes to the church's overall corporate evangelism. Are you aware of what strategies your church has in place in its work to lead people to Jesus? You may be able to invite people from your personal mission field to attend church functions and programs. On the other hand, are your church's evangelism leaders aware of what you are doing in your personal mission field? They may be able to support you through prayer and with specific resources.

Read John 4:37, 38. What encouragement can we get from Jesus' words, " ' 'One sows and another reaps' ' ' "? What is He saying here, and how have you seen that truth realized in your own experience?

It is very probable that on this occasion Jesus was making reference to the gospel seed sown by Himself, John the Baptist, and the Samaritan woman. The disciples were reaping where others had sown, and the time had indeed arrived when sowers and reapers were rejoicing together.

When Jesus said " ' 'One sows and another reaps,' ' ' " He was not saying that, as individuals, we are either sowers or reapers. Although our churches have probably put more emphasis upon the reapers, it is true that, were there no sowers, the reapers would wait in vain for a harvest. We are all called to sow and to reap, and in any local church scene there are many combinations of sowing and reaping activities. It may be that your sowing in your personal mission field will be reaped at a corporate church reaping process. It may also be that the seeds that others have sown will be reaped as people come into your personal mission field.

As we consider the ways in which each individual contributes to the whole (*see 1 Cor. 12:12–27*), the farming process reminds us that even before the seed is sown, someone else has cleared the ground and ploughed the soil.

Clearly the sowing and reaping are parts of a process that continues after a person has joined the body. The harvest must not be left in the fields but gathered into the barn.

How can you be more involved in the sowing and reaping process in your church? In what ways have you discovered that by working for the salvation of others, your own faith is strengthened? Why do you think that is so?

Further Study: Spiritual Preparation for a Personal Ministry

While we would not deny the importance of Bible knowledge and the proven procedures of witnessing and evangelism, we must be careful not to neglect an emphasis on personal spiritual preparation. The essential ingredient in personal spiritual growth is, of course, the Holy Spirit, and to experience the Holy Spirit's power for evangelism we must give Him access to our lives.

As Christians begin to serve their God, they become more aware of personal spiritual needs. As they then request, and receive, a greater indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they are empowered for a continuing ministry.

The key is a daily surrendering of our will to God, a daily willingness to die to self, a daily keeping of the grace of Christ before us, a daily remembrance of what we have been given in Christ and what He asks of us in response to that gift.

Discussion Questions:

1 In regard to winning souls, Ellen G. White wrote this challenging statement: "Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 193. What important point is she making here? After all, how often do we see people turn away from the powerful and convincing evidence for our message? So often doctrine itself—no matter how biblical, logical, uplifting, and sensible—will not impact a person with a closed heart. How, then, do we reach the heart? In this context, how much more important is it to live out what we profess rather than just profess it?

2 Ponder the following statement as you consider the ways in which you can share your personal experience with others: "The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416. The question is, How do we in a daily and practical way "manifest His glory"? How often in the past 24 hours have you manifested God's glory in your life? What kind of witness for your faith does your lifestyle reveal? How can your local church as a whole "manifest His glory"?

Fwachi's Faith

"I hear you're attending the Adventist church," Fwachi's mother greeted her. "I hope you haven't been baptized!"

Fwachi stood silent, unsure of what to say. She had come home from Zambia Adventist University planning to tell her mother that she had been baptized. Now what should she say?

Fwachi had grown up in a Christian home. Her sister invited her to visit the Seventh-day Adventist church, but Mother refused to let her go. However, when Fwachi finished high school, she wanted to study at Zambia Adventist University. Her sister agreed to pay her school fees, so her mother allowed her to go. "Just don't join the church," Mother warned.

At school Fwachi enjoyed her Bible classes and was drawn closer to Christ. During the Week of Prayer, Fwachi rededicated her life to Christ, but for months she resisted the invitation to be baptized.

The next year during the Week of Prayer, Fwachi decided to follow Christ, even if it angered her mother. She waited to tell her mother until her school break. Then her mother greeted her by saying, "I hear you're attending the Adventist church; I hope you haven't been baptized!"

"I do enjoy going to the Adventist church," Fwachi stammered, lost for words. *Maybe it's best to wait to tell Mother of my decision*, she thought. As Sabbath drew near, Fwachi made an excuse to visit her cousin in town, where she could attend church. Her vacation ended, and Fwachi hadn't told her mother that she was an Adventist.

Then Fwachi's sister died. Fwachi was devastated; her faith was shaken. *So many people were praying for her*, she thought. *How could God let my sister die?* She found comfort in the songs of faith that her sister often sang. As she sang the precious songs, she no longer felt forsaken. Still, she faced the question of who would pay her school fees.

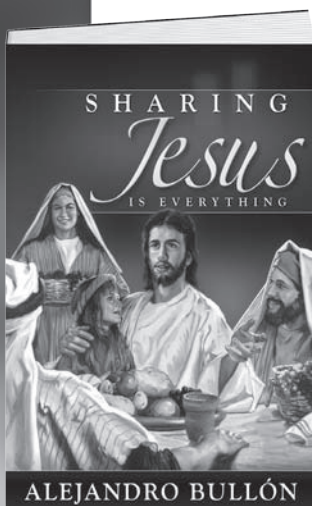
She told her mother of her baptism, expecting her mother to be angry. Instead her mother nodded. She even agreed to help pay Fwachi's tuition. Although Fwachi works at school, it still isn't enough to pay her fees. She trusts God will provide the rest.

One day Mother called Fwachi to tell her she'd visited the church. She hasn't attended again, but Fwachi feels this was one small step of faith. "There will be other steps," Fwachi says. "I pray that God will use me to draw my mother to Him again."

Zambia Adventist University is one of hundreds of Adventist schools around the world that receive help from the mission offerings. These schools make a difference in the lives of their students and the communities they serve. Thank you for giving to mission so that others can meet the Savior who loves them.

FWACHI MTONGA lives in Zambia, Africa.

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Corporate Evangelism *and* Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Eccles. 4:9–12; Psalm 37; Phil. 1:5–18; Eph. 4:15, 16; Col. 1:28, 29.*

Memory Text: “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2, NKJV).

Key Thought: The dissemination of the truth of God is not confined to ministers. The truth is to be scattered by all who claim to be disciples of Christ.

As we have seen, it is important that all believers recognize their God-given potential. Scripture gives many examples where believers used their gifts while working with appointed leaders in an evangelistic team ministry.

In Acts 13:13, Luke's reference to “Paul and his party” suggests that the apostle Paul was the recognized leader of a missionary group that included Barnabas (*vs. 1*). Luke tells us that sometimes the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas showed that they worked together (*Acts 13:50, 14:1*).

Sometimes it is difficult for someone to become involved in local church witnessing and evangelism because leaders are not constantly looking for gifted people to incorporate into that work.

Last week we looked at the contributions of individual members in relation to the church's witnessing and evangelism. This week we will look at some aspects of the church's corporate strategies and the way in which individuals can become involved.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 19.*

Letting the Left and Right Hand Know

Most people in the church are busy; others, for various reasons, do comparatively little. Either way, people often are not aware of what their church as a whole is planning or working toward; consequently, they don't see how the activities in which they may be involved are contributing to the church's overall goals.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9–12. What do Solomon's words tell us about working together? How might these words be helpful to you in other settings?

These verses describe the benefits of mutual help, support, and care, whatever the situation. What is true for two or three people is also true for the local church. For the blessings described in Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 to be realized, each person must be aware of the activities of the others. If one person is not aware of what the others are doing or planning, how can they know what support is needed, and when? If we consider these points with our local church's witnessing and evangelism in mind, we see again that if most members are unaware of what their church is involved in, they are not able to give support and assistance when needed. Sadly, because of a lack of support, those who are on the front line of witnessing and evangelism sometimes feel that no one cares about this vital ministry when it simply may be the case that others just don't know what is going on.

The following verses record people performing special support tasks. Write down how you think these activities contributed to the overall mission of spreading the gospel. *Acts 16:14, 15, 33, 34.*

What may at first seem to have nothing to do with the church's witnessing and evangelism strategies will, upon further consideration, be revealed as being vital to the whole process. Those who provide food and lodging for the visiting evangelist play as vital a part as those who welcome the public to the program. Many church members will volunteer to support when they are aware of the program and what is needed and when they are assured that their contribution is an integral part of the whole church program. In this context, it is important to let the right hand know what the left hand is doing.

Take a few moments to reflect upon your church's evangelism and witnessing activities. Are you aware of the corporate church goals and strategies? Do you know at what stage the church is in this year's program? How could you become more involved in your church's attempts to fulfill the gospel commission?

Planning Together

Often, when it comes to the planning of witnessing and evangelism goals and strategies, only a very few people are involved. Then when plans have been decided, those few people set about the task of trying to get others involved in the implementation stages. It is much better to get a larger group involved right from the start. This is why the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* states that a chief concern of the church board is the work of planning and fostering evangelism in all of its phases.

What do Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:40 tell us about the need to plan? What does this verse suggest may be the results of a lack of, or inadequate, planning?

There are a number of mistakes that churches can make when considering their involvement in witnessing and evangelism. They can set goals but then neglect to introduce strategies necessary to reaching them; they can try to work on some strategies without setting any firm goals; or they can attempt either of the above without considering a process of evaluation. Goals and plans go hand in hand, but goals always come first so that plans that enable the goals to be reached can be laid. Furthermore, it is the process of evaluation that helps to keep the church on track and measures progress toward its goals.

Every church should be aware of the concept of goal ownership. Those who set goals and are involved in strategic planning are typically the ones who buy into the whole direction and process. It is important, therefore, that as many people as possible have some input into all phases of the planning so that they, too, have a sense of ownership. If this does not happen, then, most likely, the long-term plans will become the property of a select few who will struggle to fulfill those plans. In this case, success is unlikely.

Read Psalm 37. What assurance can we gain from this text in relation to the success of our witnessing and evangelism activities (as well as a host of other things)? What principles and promises can we take from this passage?

Working in Teams

It is logical to think that there were times when each of the disciples would have shared their faith on a one-to-one basis, but for the most part we see them in a shared ministry with fellow disciples and being supported by other believers. There is something special about working on an overall plan and receiving support and encouragement from others on the team.

The Bible provides us with a blueprint for effective witnessing and evangelism, and it should not surprise us that, even today, when God raises up someone for a significant responsibility, He inspires a team to gather around the leader.

Read Matthew 10:2–4, Mark 3:16–19, and Luke 6:12–16. What simple lesson can we learn from these lists?

Without question, the early believers worked together in groups. It makes a lot of sense. Besides each one having specific gifts and talents that others don't, there's also protection in numbers. There's a sense of accountability: others are watching you, others can help guide you, others can help to protect you from wandering into directions that tragically might lead you astray. A solid team of faithful brothers and sisters, each one looking out for the other, yet all with the common goal of soul-winning, presents the ideal way of doing outreach.

Read Philippians 1:5–18. What do we see in Paul's commendations to the believers at Philippi that indicates they were engaged in corporate witnessing and evangelism?

At the beginning of his letter to the Philippians, Paul speaks of their fellowship (*partnership*, *NIV*) in the gospel (*vs.* 5). They had defended and confirmed the gospel (*vs.* 7) and had spoken the word of God without fear (*vs.* 14). He also shares his joy because Christ is continually preached (*vss.* 15–18). Remember, Paul is writing to the church, not to individuals. Of course, it would have been individuals who preached Christ, but the fact that Paul commends the church reveals that this evangelistic preaching was a corporate strategy.

Eager to witness, have you ever found yourself tempted in ways that being in a group could have protected you from? Why is it important to cultivate an attitude of humility and accountability if you are going to work with others in a group?

Every Part Does Its Share

When a unified church is focused upon the evangelistic task at hand, the Lord will bless its combined efforts. A careful study of the Bible will reveal how much of the New Testament was written to show Christians how to live and work together in harmony. “One another” passages are scattered thickly throughout its pages. We are commanded to love one another (*John 15:12*), forgive one another (*Eph. 4:32*), pray for one another (*James 5:16*), to mention just a few. Besides the “one another” passages, many scriptures relate to the corporate church, the work that it does, and the corresponding growth.

Read Ephesians 4:15, 16. How does working together contribute to the growth and edification of the church?

Paul tells us that it is God’s will that we grow into Jesus Christ. This shows that we are all on a spiritual journey, and, to a degree, it is our own spiritual journey. However, the text explains that each individual’s growth will affect the growth of the body both numerically and spiritually.

As believers grow up into Christ, something happens that is wonderful, even supernatural. They are “joined and knit together” through their personal contributions to the church as a whole. Optimum effectiveness of any church is achieved when every part does its share. According to Acts 1:12–14, what did the early believers do while they waited in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit? The answer should tell us a lot about what corporate worship meant. Indeed, it wasn’t until the Holy Spirit had come upon the early believers that they were ready for the task of fulfilling the gospel commission. This group, numbering about a hundred and twenty, were united in prayer and continued in prayer. No doubt it was Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit that united them and constantly brought them together for prayer as they waited for the power that would enable them to do the Lord’s bidding. We, as a church, should be doing the same.

As you think about your local church, ask yourself this question: How much time and effort does your church, as a corporate whole, spend in outreach, witnessing, and evangelism in contrast to the time it spends over internal issues, everything from liturgy, worship format to music, and so on? Discuss the answer on Sabbath.

The Need for Corporate Unity

It has been well said that a Christianity that does not begin with the individual does not begin, but a Christianity that ends with the individual ends. This statement underscores the importance of every new believer being incorporated into the body of believers. As with witnessing and evangelism, it is also true that incorporation cannot be left to certain individuals in the fellowship. Incorporation is the responsibility of the entire church.

Read Colossians 1:28, 29. **What specific goal did Paul place before his new converts?**

The Christian's maturity, growing into the fullness of Christ (*Eph. 3:19*), is the proper goal of the local congregation. Working for the maturity of new converts is just as important as working to get them to accept Christ and to join His church. In fact, the church's work of incorporation will help to ensure that their evangelistic efforts will not become a waste of time. Usually, before any witnessing and evangelism project gets under way, there is a time of preparing the church. This is a time when we focus on transportation, child care, greeters, prayer teams, and visitation teams. The apostle Paul would have us focus on incorporation as another important part of church preparation. Consider the following question:

Which is more important to ask, and why: How can new believers get involved in church life and its programs? How can the church enter the lives of new believers and help them to mature? Are both these concepts related and, if so, how so?

Often we see the work of follow-up and incorporation as the work of the one who has led the person to Jesus Christ. We only have to realize how impossible it would have been for the apostle Paul to nurture all who believed through his ministry in order to see that this is not the biblical way. Follow-up is not just the work of one or two designated leaders, it is the work of the whole church.

Too often we lament the fact that new people come in the front door and leave by the back door soon after. This is a tragedy of eternal consequence.

Think about new members in your local church. How can you—not the pastor or the elder, but you—get involved in helping them to become solidly grounded in the church community and its teachings?

Further Study: Setting Realistic Evangelism Goals

Both as a church and as a smaller ministry team, we must make sure that all witnessing and evangelistic goals are realistic. The following are some key areas to consider.

Affordable. Finances play a big part in many church strategies today. Consider the costs of advertising, transportation, resources, postage, venue hire, refreshments, to mention just a few of the expenses incurred in evangelistic activities.

Achievable. Are the set goals realistically achievable? Do we really have the money, time, support, facilities, and personnel needed to achieve the planned outcomes? It is better to start small and build into a larger project as others join the team and key support is given in other important areas.

Sustainable. If a witnessing and evangelism ministry is successful, it is surely worth repeating. It may also be that your ministry is part of an ongoing strategy, in which case you will need to keep looking ahead in order to organize what is needed to sustain the ministry.

Able to be evaluated. Be sure that you evaluate all aspects of the ministry: personnel, finances, training, results, to name just a few. For ongoing ministries, definite and regular evaluation times must be set and adhered to. Also be sure to examine how this venture contributed toward the church's overall strategic plans for evangelism.

Discussion Questions:

1 Go over your answer to Wednesday's question as a class. Why is it that churches busy fighting internally rarely do outreach? In contrast, how could outreach unify a church that's otherwise preoccupied with internal strife? How can you help your church to move away from preoccupation with itself and get busy with the work of outreach? Why is that so important?

2 As you consider the following quotation, think about your local church. To what extent are the members involved in witnessing and evangelism teams? What part can you play in organizing team-training events? What is your personal attitude toward working in teams? "In laboring where there are already some in the faith, the minister should at first seek not so much to convert unbelievers, as to train the church members for acceptable co-operation."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 196. How many members of your church have even the slightest idea of how to work for the conversion of souls? If not many, how can that situation be changed?

God's Patient Pursuit: Part 1

I grew up in a non-Christian family in India. I attended a Christian boarding school and lived a highly regimented life. So I wasn't ready for the freedom I found when I moved to Australia at age 16 to study.

Many of the young people at school smoked and drank. I wasn't interested in these things and avoided the young people who were involved in these activities. I attended church for my first year in Australia, but then I quit. I told God that I wanted a break from Him, to see what life was like without Him. That was the most miserable year of my life.

I finished high school and started my university studies. One day while studying, I felt a sudden pain in my chest. I thought I was having a heart attack. Then I realized that it wasn't physical pain, but an ache for something. *Could this be God?* I wondered. I hadn't prayed in a year, but that day I prayed. "God, if this is You, please take away this unbearable pain!" The pain went away, and I forgot about it. But when the pain returned, I knew it was God speaking to me. I found a church and attended a few times. But my job in a bar required me to work Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, so I quit attending church.

One evening on the train home from work I met a young man, Daniel, and his friend Keith. Daniel struck up a conversation with me. I asked him why he had chosen to speak to me, and he said God had prompted him. We continued talking, and he invited me to his home for dinner. I gave him my phone number. I got to know Keith, and I sensed that he knew God. The peace I saw in him made me wish for a relationship with Christ. I accepted his invitation to worship with him on Saturday, but the idea of worshipping on Saturday instead of Sunday seemed strange.

I graduated and began searching for a job. I couldn't find one, and I felt frustrated and out of control. I remembered Keith and the peace he exuded. I visited him, and he invited me to a small group meeting.

I went. The group was indeed small, but the members were so genuine, friendly, and loving that I enjoyed attending. As I studied the Bible, I realized that it was the Holy Spirit who had been speaking to me all these years, urging me to let God back into my life. I had come to God broken and hurting, but God put me back together.

I learned that the small group meeting was actually a Global Mission church plant designed to attract young people just like me.

(continued next week)

VIKRAM PANCHAL *shares his faith with young people in Melbourne, Australia.*

Equipping for Evangelism and Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 4:19, 11:1–11, 10:1–14, 1 Pet. 5:8, 2 Pet. 3:9.*

Memory Text: “Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’ ” (*Matthew 4:19, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Whatever the important proper training, we must first be grounded in our relationship with Jesus before we can be “properly equipped” to effectively witness for our faith.

It is highly unlikely that a person who has no personal assurance of salvation will be able to lead another into an intimate saving relationship with Jesus (although it does happen). They might be able to convince others to believe some Bible doctrines and some facts, biblical dates, and charts. Such convictions and beliefs may even cause people to make significant lifestyle changes. However, because good deeds can be performed apart from Jesus Christ, it is imperative that any witnessing and evangelistic training feature both the doctrinal and the spiritual. To be a true evangelist, one must have a firm grasp and experience of “the everlasting gospel.” It is this gospel that ultimately brings belief, confession, conversion, assurance, and discipleship.

This week we will see that spiritually and skillfully equipping people for evangelism and witnessing is indeed a biblical principle and that we need to encourage people to make this a reality in their local church.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 26.*

The Need for Training

In Matthew 9:37 Jesus told the disciples that the harvest was plentiful but the laborers few. Today the harvest is infinitely larger and the laborers are still relatively few. There is a great need to send out harvest workers who are thoroughly trained and equipped. While it ever remains true that the Holy Spirit's influence is the major factor in the success of witnessing and evangelism, it is still important that those whom God calls to service be trained through formal instruction, observation, and participation. According to Ephesians 4:11, 12, there should be a definite endeavour to equip people for the many and varied aspects of ministry and service.

God has promised to bless leaders with certain gifts that will help them to function as leaders and trainers for ministry. We can't stress enough, however, that evangelists, pastors, and teachers are not following scriptural guidelines if they are doing all the work themselves and are not equipping others for service. Everyone who is training for witnessing and evangelism work must be brought to the strong conviction that it is indeed God's will that the world be saved from sin, that the God-given work of the church is to reach out to a lost world, and that it is God's will that His church in the world will grow.

Read Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:17 in the context of Matthew 28:19. **What significance do you see in the fact that the first recorded command of Jesus was “ ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’ ”? What should those words mean to us today as Seventh-day Adventists with our understanding of the three angels' messages? How much “fishing for men” are we really doing as opposed to just “tending to our own boats”?**

It is significant that Jesus did not simply call the disciples to be fishers of men. He did not say “Follow Me, and be fishers of men.” He said, “ ‘Follow Me, and *I will make you* fishers of men’ ” (ital. supplied). Right at the beginning of their formal association with Jesus these men understood that they were embarking upon important training. Jesus called them into a learning environment where they would be trained for the task to which He had called them. The disciples would learn much through watching and doing. Only when they had learned, on the local scene, what to do and how to do it would Jesus issue to them a worldwide commission. Without the appropriate training, instruction, and personal spiritual development of workers, the task of taking the gospel to our neighborhoods would seem impossible.

Learning by Observing

There are two aspects to learning for those who wish to serve the Lord, and one leads to the other. First there is learning to know Jesus; then comes learning how to share Him and what He offers to the whole fallen human race.

Read about the time Jesus fed the 5,000 (*Matt. 14:13–21, Mark 6:30–44, Luke 9:10–17, John 6:1–14*). **List the things that the disciples would have observed that would help to equip them for their future ministry. What things can we safely assume they observed that are not specifically mentioned in the Gospel accounts? Read also what Ellen White adds to this story in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 364–371.**

How exciting not only to listen to the greatest preacher but to observe His presentation as He preached about the kingdom of God (*Luke 9:11*) in a way that would have created a desire for the kingdom in every heart.

The principle of learning through observation is applicable to everyone. Book learning, or listening to instruction, must always be built upon through observation and involvement. Jesus expected the disciples of John the Baptist to learn from what they had observed.

Examine Matthew 11:1–11. **What had the disciples of John the Baptist observed, and what did Jesus expect them to tell John as a result of their observations? What was the lesson that Jesus was teaching to not only John but His own disciples?**

John the Baptist had previously presented Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But then John was imprisoned with no opportunity to preach, and he heard only secondhand reports of Jesus' ministry. It seems that his prison experience caused some doubts to surface in his mind regarding Jesus. When doubts arise we should go to Jesus, and that is exactly what John did. Jesus sent John's disciples back to tell him what they had heard and seen. As their reports encouraged John, we are left to wonder how the things that they had seen impacted their own witnessing and evangelistic ministry.

In most cases we can't do the kind of miracles performed by Jesus. But with a willingness to die to self and live for others, what can we do in our own sphere that reflects the kind of work that Jesus did when here?

Learning by Doing

No matter how many books people read about their favorite sport, and no matter how many games are watched, if they want to be a player they have to put their boots on and get out on the field. We call it hands-on experience, learning by doing, and without it a person is simply not equipped for the task. This universal truth even applies to the Christian's witnessing and evangelism. Sometimes we hear people say that they don't want to get involved because they are not completely ready. They must understand that active participation is a vital part of becoming ready. Starting small, step by step, building up, is the way to go. As the Holy Spirit leads us, our skills, experience, and confidence increases.

Matthew 10:1–14 records Jesus equipping His disciples and then sending them out. However different the situation than that which we face today, what can we learn from Him sending them out that reveals how this was part of their training?

Jesus had taught the disciples “in the classroom,” so to speak. He had also taken them out into the field where they learned by observing what He did. Then after Jesus had equipped them with power to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons (*vs. 8*), He sent them out without Him. But notice the amount of instruction He gave as He sent them out. Jesus instructed them about what to preach, what miracles to perform, what not to take with them, with whom to lodge, and when to leave an unfruitful field of labor. We can safely assume that they received other instructions, as well. Only through this interaction with people would many important lessons be learned. This passage shows on-the-job training at its best. They couldn't minister to those with whom they didn't come into contact; this is a point we must never forget.

Read Luke 10:1–11. What similarities are there between the instructions that Jesus gave to the 12 and to the 70? Again, what principles can we learn for ourselves from His instructions?

Although initially Jesus sent the 70 into places where He intended to shortly go Himself (*vs. 1*), He knew what the disciples and other missionaries would encounter as they attempted to spread the gospel after His ascension when they were on their own. The instructions given to the seventy disciples as they were sent out indicates that Jesus was preparing them for what lay ahead.

How many excuses do you manage to find to not witness for your faith when the opportunity arises? What's your usual one?

Learning Through Failure

Sometimes we may fail to reach all of the goals that have been set for a particular evangelism activity. Does this mean that we have totally failed? Of course not. Regardless of the strategy we employ in our search to win the lost, we will have both successes and failures. We may even set the bar too high. For instance, if we fail to reach set baptismal goals, we may have set unrealistic goals; or this activity may have been more of a seed-sowing venture than a reaping program. In short, however much we might think the harvest is ready for reaping, it might still only be sowing time. We aren't always in a position to know.

Read 1 Peter 5:8. **What other power is dedicated to undermining your attempts to win people to God's kingdom? How can being conscious of this threat help us to better prepare and execute witnessing and evangelism strategies?**

In all of our attempts to win souls, we are up against a supernatural foe that is very active to influence people against the gospel. Sometimes when we let go of the hand of the Lord, the evil one can cause some problems with our efforts to work for God. Our only defense is the complete surrender to Christ every moment of our lives.

As with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, failure may sometimes cause us to play the blame game, one of Satan's most successful tools for bringing disharmony among God's people. Rather than looking for people to blame, we would do better to undertake serious, honest, and intensive evaluation, remembering that even Jesus, the greatest Preacher/Evangelist, did not win everyone to whom He appealed.

Compare Luke 10:17 and Matthew 17:14–20. **What did the disciples do when they encountered failure in their ministry?**

Rather than give in to despair over our perceived failures, we can learn from the disciples again. Even though they had been given the power over evil spirits and had indeed been successful in casting them out, it is evident that sometimes they failed to accomplish that for which Jesus had gifted them. On such occasions they came to Jesus and asked Him to explain what was happening and why (*see Matt. 17:19*). Here is a principle that we would do well to note; an important part of our search for reasons for failure, and how to do better, is to take our witnessing and evangelism situations to the Lord.

What have you learned from your failed attempts at witnessing to others that can help you in future attempts? How often does fear of rejection hold you back?

Learning Through Success

There are two areas in which we can learn through success: the area that can be called practical/procedural and the area that can be called spiritual cooperation. Although it can be rightly argued that there is a spiritual aspect to both areas, we will deal with them separately in order to better highlight what can be learned from success.

The practical/procedural is where we learn from what we actually do. For instance, we learn the most acceptable sequence in which to present Bible studies in our area. We learn which preaching venue is best, which advertising draws the most people, and a host of other practical and procedural choices that best fit our particular location.

Spiritual cooperation is an emphasis upon the fact that God is intimately involved in the believer's witnessing and evangelism. After all, it is God's will that everyone be saved.

Read 2 Peter 3:9. What crucial lesson must we take from this verse that we should always keep in mind and claim in all our witnessing activities? *See also 1 Cor. 3:6.*

It is no use planting if no one is going to water the seeds. Likewise, it is no use watering if you don't put the water where the seeds are planted. And even if the sower and the one who waters get it all right, there is still no increase unless given by God. As we see the blessing of God bringing success to our humble efforts, we learn. We learn the extent to which God is, and wants to be, involved in our endeavors. We learn to trust Him more. We learn the importance of a close spiritual cooperation with God as we strive to reach the souls for whom Christ died because *there isn't a person you witness to for whom Christ has not died and whom He doesn't want to see saved.* How important it is that we never forget this crucial truth.

How do we take the words of Jesus in John 15:5 and make them practical and real in our lives, particularly in our work of witnessing and evangelism? How can we as individuals or as a team ministry truly experience what Christ tells us in this text? What things must we change in order to have that kind of connection with Him?

Further Study: Formulate Evangelistic Strategies.

As your church seeks to do its part in outreach, keep the following points in mind:

- At the very least, involve all of the witnessing or evangelism team in the strategic planning process. Ideally the whole congregation will be involved in the church's setting of goals and direction.
- Initially plan for the next church year. A 12-month strategy is long enough to start with. Later, you can add more plans and strategies that will continue beyond the initial period.
- Give great attention to helping strategic personnel know exactly what is expected of them and at what time. When people are not sure of what to do or when and how to do it, a church's strategic momentum toward its goals may be slowed or halted.

Discussion Questions:

1 “Every church should be a training school for Christian workers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 149. How well does your local church fare in this area? If not very well, what can be done to bring about the needed changes?

2 “Every day Satan has his plans to carry out—certain lines that will hedge up the way of those who are witnesses for Jesus Christ. Now, unless the living, human agents for Jesus are humble, meek, and lowly of heart because they have learned of Jesus, they will just as surely fall under temptation as they live; for Satan is watching and artful and subtle, and the workers, if not prayerful, will be taken unawares. He steals upon them as a thief in the night and makes them captives. Then he works upon the minds of individuals to pervert their individual ideas and frame their plans; and if brethren see danger and speak of it, they feel that a personal injury is done them, that someone is trying to weaken their influence. One draws one way, and another in an opposite direction.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 101. How can we, as we seek to do the work of witnessing, deal with the danger so graphically presented in this passage? What is our only defense?

3 In class, talk about someone or some church evangelistic project that has been successful as a whole. What can you learn from that person or project? How can you adapt what you have learned to the work in your area, realizing that every situation is different and what works in one place might not work in another?

God's Patient Pursuit: Part 2

I found a job and was doing well, but I wasn't satisfied. I sensed that God had something else in mind for me. A friend called and offered me my dream job. It was everything I wanted, and the pay was excellent. I could rise quickly to the top of my field. It seemed perfect! I agreed to interview for the job.

That same week a Seventh-day Adventist evangelist came to hold meetings in our town. His wife would hold training sessions for people interested in becoming Bible workers. I didn't plan to go to the workshop; I didn't even know what it meant to be a Bible worker. But God impressed me to attend.

As the week progressed, war raged within me. I had a chance for a perfect job and great pay, but God seemed to be calling me to work for Him. Should I quit my present job and work for God as a Bible worker? The struggle made me miserable until I surrendered to God. I quit my job and signed up for further training to become a full-time Bible worker.

I returned to India to tell my parents of my decision. I knew that they would be disappointed, and maybe even angry to learn that I was giving up a career to work for God. But the confrontation was far more difficult than I imagined. My father cried and tried to convince me to stay in India and work. Finally my step-mother convinced my father to let me do as I wished with my life.

I took a three-month Bible training course and returned to Australia to begin work as a Bible worker at Gateway, the church plant focusing on university students and young professionals in Melbourne, Australia. We meet with young people on the campus and become friends. Then we invite them to our Bible study and worship group. Most of the young people who come know almost nothing about God. They socialize, eat, study God's Word together, and pray and praise God. In one year about 90 people have come at least once, and 12 to 15 come regularly. A number of these are studying the Bible with us regularly.

Many international students come who have no concept of God. Others have attended church before but have had no personal relationship with Jesus. We tailor our Bible studies to what the students need.

This church plant has received funding from Global Mission, and the mission offerings support the ongoing work. I praise God that He called me to work for Him and that He calls each member of His church to make such ministries possible through their offerings.

To learn about other Global Mission projects that are touching lives for God, visit www.global-mission.org.

VIKRAM PANCHAL shares his faith with young adults in Melbourne, Australia.

Releasing Into Ministry



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 18:13–26; Matt. 7:17, 18; Acts 6:1–8; John 4:36; Acts 15:36–40.*

Memory Text: “And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’ ” (*Romans 10:15, NKJV*).

Key Thought: It is not enough that people be trained for evangelism and witnessing work; they must actively work for souls.

Many church members lament the fact that although they are prepared to attend witnessing and evangelism training seminars, they are not encouraged to become involved when they return to their home church. Consequently, many churches that are not very active in witnessing and evangelistic activities are unaware of the well-trained people in their midst. Occasionally some people will voluntarily offer their services, but many others conclude that they are either not needed or not wanted. The most successful way to stifle member involvement in any church activity is to deny them involvement in areas in which they are equipped to function. It is the responsibility of every local church to discover where, and how, each member can contribute to the witnessing and evangelism strategies of the church. All who are willing do have a place. The key is to find that place.

This week we will explore the concept of intentionally sending out gospel workers and the ways in which maximum member involvement contributes to overall church harmony and spiritual and numerical growth.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 2.*

Shared Responsibility

Many a dedicated church leader has cut short, or at best diminished, his or her effectiveness by unwillingness to share the ministry load with others. This is not a new problem generated by our fast-paced modern world. Even the great Old Testament leader Moses needed some help in order to see the big picture of shared leadership. We can learn much from his experience and the good advice received from his father-in-law, Jethro.

Carefully read Exodus 18:13–26. What significance do you see in the words “let them” in verse 22?

We can only guess at how long Moses would have been able to keep up his unrealistic work schedule. Likewise, we can only surmise as to what extent Moses was aware of the availability of capable helpers. What the story does reveal, however, is that there were many who were able and willing to help. Moses would need to let them become involved, delegating certain duties of leadership to them.

The ministry that church leaders must willingly share includes witnessing and evangelism. The principles of properly organized and shared responsibility that we glean from Moses’ experience are invaluable to our efforts to win souls for the kingdom.

What significance do you see in the way that Moses chose men with specific characteristics (*vs. 21*) and gave them varied degrees of responsibility (*vs. 25*)? How would these principles apply to the evangelistic strategies of today’s churches?

It was probably the intense spiritual nature of the task of speaking for God that made Moses reticent to share his responsibilities. We, too, sense the awesome responsibility of talking to people about God and speaking for God. Our witnessing and evangelism is serious business. We are mindful that eternal lives are at stake. And while this would, and should, cause us to be careful as to how we proceed, we must be ever willing to involve everyone in outreach and evangelism.

Read again Exodus 18:21, 22. Notice that the newly appointed leadership made their ministry of the leaders available at all times. Thus, we should always be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us.

Risking for Success

Members of Seventh-day Adventist churches have tremendous ministry potential. Many are enthusiastic about involvement in their church's evangelism strategies; however, those in leadership are sometimes reticent to let them get involved. Behind this "only professionals can do it" mind-set is the fear that church members may do or say something wrong, causing people to turn away from Christ and His church. Sadly, this resistance to member involvement is so ingrained that it prevails even when people have been adequately trained for a ministry. The Holy Spirit and the promises He brings aren't just for the leaders; they are for all who are willing to surrender in faith and submission to the Lord, for all who are willing to deny self and work for the salvation of others.

What principle taught by Jesus in Matthew 7:17, 18 should allay the fears of concerned leaders? How do we distinguish between good and bad fruit, and how should the church leadership as a whole be involved in this process? Also, how do we do this without judging others?

If every sound tree bears good fruit, church leaders should focus on growing sound trees. As with everything that has to do with our response to the gospel call, we must first be someone for Jesus before we can successfully do things for Him. If we give adequate attention to the leading of people into a meaningful and deepening relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit will ensure that they bear the right fruit. Our part is to lead, teach, and train. God's part is to bless their ministry. We need to trust them and God. If we give adequate attention to spiritual growth and practical skills, we can trust people to produce the right fruit of evangelistic success. Certainly, there may be an element of risk depending on the ministry undertaken and the level of training, but we must remember that even the disciples, who had the greatest Teacher ever, never won every soul to whom they appealed.

Have you ever felt that your gifts and talents were not appreciated? What might be the cause? Look inside yourself and see if, perhaps, the fault might lie there with you and some of your own attitudes (pride, and so on) instead of somewhere else?

Matching the Laborers With the Harvest

When people show an interest in learning more about God and His church, we must choose carefully the ones who will be given the task of witnessing to them. In a multicultural society, we would do well to assign someone of the same nationality and language as the inquirer and possibly someone of a similar age group. Furthermore, we would consider the spiritual maturity, biblical knowledge, communication skills, and salvation experience of the worker. In other words, we should take seriously the matching of the laborer to those with whom he or she will be working.

When it comes to witnessing and evangelism, there is no such thing as one size fits all. There is uniqueness to everyone's life journey and uniqueness to each one's spiritual journey. However, while this uniqueness exists, there are also similarities in people's experiences, and it makes good sense to match as well as possible the experiences of the believer and the seeker.

Read Acts 6:1–8. What tasks are listed here? What were the results when specific ministries and abilities were matched?

Notice the progression of these events: the disciples were made aware of a pressing problem. The disciples asked the believers to find seven men to address the problem. The believers brought their selection to the disciples. The disciples appointed them with the laying on of hands, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly.

Although Stephen and the other six appointees were to “serve tables,” the qualification for this task did not seem to be that they had the ability to organize and distribute food. The believers still looked for spirit-filled men because their ministry to the Greek-speaking Jewish widows would also be a witnessing and evangelism work. Thus, we see that the newly appointed men were crucial to the evangelism of the early church in that they freed up the frontline evangelists and also actively supported their work (*see vs. 8*). Again we can affirm that any ministry that church members get involved in will directly or indirectly contribute to, and support, witnessing and evangelism endeavors of a church.

Although natural talents, spiritual gifts, and specific training are important to a successful church ministry, personal attitudes are, perhaps, even more important. Notice that in Acts 16:1–5 and Acts 4:36, 37, both Timothy and Barnabas had the attitude of doing whatever it took to support this gospel ministry. Barnabas would give of his personal means, and Timothy would submit to circumcision so as not to offend some Jews. The lessons for us are, indeed, obvious.

Spiritual Growth Through Ministry Involvement

Spiritual growth comes only as we connect with Jesus. It cannot be produced by human beings simply performing specific tasks, even witnessing and evangelism tasks. A church cannot “program” spirituality into its members. However, it is a great truth that as believers respond to God’s call to be disciples, their personal walk with the Lord deepens and strengthens. Although we should not engage in witnessing and evangelism solely in an attempt to grow spiritually, when undertaken with a genuine love for God and for the lost, these activities bring numerous spiritual blessings to all involved.

Read John 7:17. What does this verse tell us about the doing of God’s will and increased spiritual growth?

A valid question is, “How can a person seeking truth be sure when the genuine has been found?” In verse 17 Jesus presents a truth that will help all who want to follow Him. Those who are willing to do God’s will can know if a doctrine is, or is not, of God. How can this be? Clearly there is spiritual growth through connectedness. Jesus is saying that those who are living up to received Bible truth will receive greater light.

There is a strong connection between hearing and doing (*see Rev. 1:3*). Those who do God’s will, however little of His will they know, will be blessed with a deepening Christian relationship which, coupled with prayerful Bible study, will lead to greater revelations of truth and exciting spiritual growth.

Read John 4:36. What are the spiritual wages received as a result of being involved in the harvest of souls? What spiritual fellowship is suggested by the sower and reaper rejoicing together?

Many commentators suggest that the disciples were reaping where John the Baptist and Jesus had sown. The Samaritan woman herself had clearly planted some gospel seed among the people of her town. How they must have rejoiced together as the ripened spiritual harvest was gathered into the kingdom. Success through working together in witnessing and evangelism creates a bond between God and us and between us as fellow believers. As we respond to God’s call to be involved in soul winning, this bond, this spiritual closeness and growth, blossoms as a natural result of being on God’s team.

How has your own faith been strengthened through your own personal witness, both from success and failures? How does witnessing impact your relationship with the Lord?

Bringing Harmony Through Involvement

There is a phenomenon that is sometimes difficult to explain but can best be described as “circular influence.” Concerning harmony and involvement, circular influence goes like this: by getting people involved you promote harmony, which in turn encourages people to become involved, which in turn promotes harmony. You can see the circular-influence principle at work. It is clearly demonstrated in the old saying that those who are pulling on the oars don’t have time to rock the boat.

There were some key decisions made in the development of the early church’s organization that could have caused major conflict, but the personal preferences of the believers were submitted to what was best for the task that their Lord had given them.

Consider the appointment process recorded in Acts 1:15–26. Although we don’t cast lots today, what key points were they looking for here, and what principles can we take from this example for the work of ministry today?

Of course, whenever human beings are working together, there is the potential for conflict. We would be right in assuming that the evil one is working to undermine the effectiveness of believers. It is only fair, then, that we briefly review an incident in the evangelistic ministry of the early church where the conflict was real.

Examine Acts 15:36–40. What caused the difference of opinion between Paul and Barnabas? What was the result of their disagreement, and what can we learn from it?

On a previous missionary trip, John Mark had left Paul and his other companions and returned to Jerusalem. It seems that this incident (*see Acts 13:13*) made Paul reluctant to take John Mark along on this current trip. But Barnabas saw it would benefit both John Mark and the venture to take John Mark along. Consequently, while Paul chose Silas to accompany him, Barnabas traveled with John Mark.

There was no argument regarding what missionary work should be done, and rather than let personal differences overshadow the evangelistic task, they sent out two witnessing groups. Although Paul and John did work profitably together again (*see 2 Tim. 4:11*), their differences at this time were not allowed to interfere with their mission.

Think of someone with whom you might be struggling now in church. How much humility, death to self, and willingness to forgive and to turn the other cheek will you need in order to bring reconciliation?

Further Study: Setting Realistic Ministry Time Frames

As mentioned in last Friday's Further Study section, 12 months is a good length of time to plan ahead. Depending on what witnessing and evangelism program you are planning, specific time frames will vary with different goal strategies and priorities. However, there are some general points to consider.

1. Document what you aim to achieve throughout these next 12 months. Specify desires in terms of people and discipleship, not just the completion of programs.

2. Write out a procedural time line. This can be as detailed as you like, but make sure that it is not too brief. It should include major training times, program start and finish dates, and set evaluation times.

3. As you document major stages of the program, make sure that you also specify which individuals or teams are responsible at those times.

4. Document how your program strategies integrate with the overall witnessing and evangelism program of the church. Specify where and how other church strategies will support yours and where yours will strengthen those of the church. This will help you to remember that you are a part of a larger team and of the need to work together.

5. Seriously consider whether your program will be ongoing or whether it will be repeated the next church year. This will help you determine what ongoing recruitment training will need to be undertaken. If your program is a developing ministry, each evaluation session will also need to have a forward-looking time.

Discussion Questions:

1 The following statements reveal that God has expectations of every believer and that He has appointed a work for each one. What do you think God expects of His church regarding the equipment of and the organization of their involvement in witnessing and soul winning? What can a church do to help members to understand the expectations of God? As you dwell on the quotes below, ask yourself how they apply to you personally.

“God expects personal service from everyone to whom He has entrusted a knowledge of the truth for this time. Not all can go as missionaries to foreign lands, but all can be home missionaries in their families and neighborhoods.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 30.

“To everyone who becomes a partaker of His grace, the Lord appoints a work for others. Individually we are to stand in our lot, saying, ‘Here am I; send me.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 222.

Our Great Healer

Three-year-old Jenny never missed the morning and evening worships in our village. So when she didn't attend one morning, I missed her. "Where is Jenny?" I asked.

"She's sick, teacher!" one boy answered.

After worship I went to check on Jenny and found her lying in her family's one-room house, writhing with pain. I prayed for her and mixed some simple herbal medicine for her. Soon Jenny fell asleep.

When I returned later to check on Jenny, I found several traditional healers in the family's home. They were performing sacrifices and rituals to heal Jenny. I knew that if I tried to stop these false healers I could be killed. I found Jenny's mother sitting outside and told her, "We must pray to God in heaven to heal Jenny. He is the true Healer, the greatest healer of all." She stared at me as if to say, *You are new here. You don't know that we do these rituals every time someone is sick in the village.*

We prayed for Jenny at school that day. But after school, Jenny's brother told me, "My father said you must not come to our house today because you will disturb the healers." My heart sank. I wanted to help, but I couldn't. *Lord, I prayed, please help Jenny. If it is Your will, heal her. Help her parents know that You are the true God.*

But Jenny's condition worsened, and the family took her to the forest to be closer to the spirits they worship. The healers continued their sacrifices, and we continued praying for Jenny.

Two days later as we prepared to welcome the Sabbath, Jenny and her mother appeared at our door smiling broadly. "We did everything our rituals decreed, but Jenny didn't get better," she said. "Finally we prayed to your God. We promised Him that if He would heal Jenny, we would give our lives to Him. As soon as we prayed, Jenny's pain left. The next morning we awoke to hear Jenny singing the songs that you taught her. I heard her thanking God for healing her. Then she came to me and asked, 'Mama, can we go home now? I want to attend worship.'"

Today Jenny's entire family attends worship in the village church. They plan to be baptized as soon as possible.

Your mission offerings help to support Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities around the world, including Mountain View College in southern Philippines, which sponsors dozens of student missionaries every year. Your mission offerings help to change lives forever.

ELSA MALIG-ON was a SULADS, a student missionary teacher from Mountain View College in southern Philippines, when she wrote this story.

A Love Response



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 John 4:18, 19; Rom. 3:19, 20; John 15:13; Rom. 5:6-8; John 6:28, 29.*

Memory Text: “‘If you love Me, keep My commandments’” (*John 14:15*).

Key Thought: We should work to win souls to Christ; the question we need to ask ourselves is, What motivates us to do just that?

Although our memory text is most often considered to refer to the Ten Commandments, there are other commandments, as well, not the least being “‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’” (*Matt. 28:19, 20, NKJV*).

Our motivation for witnessing and evangelism should be primarily God's grace to us and not a sense of guilt, mere obligation, or debt. One doesn't need to be a behavioral psychologist to know that pretty much everything we do as humans is in response to something. This is true also of our involvement in witnessing and evangelism. We can discover our motivation simply by asking why we do what we do. Why do we become involved in the church's witnessing and evangelistic strategies? Or indeed, why *don't* we?

This week we will explore the right motivation for getting involved in the Lord's work and also expose the dangers of working with the wrong motivations, such as obligation, guilt, or shame. We will explore why evangelism and witnessing should be our love response to God's gift of salvation to us.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 9.*

Motivated by Love

Have you ever wondered why often it seems difficult to motivate people to make long-term commitments in church projects? Perhaps the answer can be found as we think of some other situations where a very high degree of motivation and commitment are evident. What is it that motivates a parent to donate a kidney to save the life of his or her child? Why do moms and dads spend a small fortune to provide the best possible education for their children? Are these things done because the parents would feel guilty if they didn't? Do they think that they owe their children these things? Of course not.

While parents do have a sense of responsibility for the welfare of their children, love is surely the major motivating force. They do what they do because they love. We cannot spell this out enough times: *we do things for God because we love Him and because we know He loves us.*

Read 1 John 4:18, 19. What do these verses mean? Write out their meaning in your own words.

Our love for God must be rooted in His love for us. God existed before we did, and He has loved us supremely from the creation of humankind. Love can come only as a result of, and in response to, love. Obedience to the great gospel commission for any other reason than the fact that we love is all but fruitless. This is why spiritual preparation is vital as we seek to become involved in witnessing and evangelism.

Our love for God and our willingness to work with Him in the saving of souls is dependent upon our knowing Him. It is not usual that we love people whom we don't know. Therefore, it is vital that to obey God out of love, we must know Him personally.

What do the following texts reveal about love for God and the motivation to obey Him and work for Him? Josh. 22:5, Luke 7:41–43, John 14:23, 2 Cor. 5:12–18.

Love and obedience are inseparable as long as they occur in that order. True love for God will always result in obedience to His revealed will, but obedience will not necessarily lead to love (although it can). If we want people to work for Jesus, we must help them to create a loving connection with Him.

How much does your love for God motivate what you do? Does it motivate you at all? What does your answer say about your relationship with Him and what needs to change?

Not by Guilt

Over the centuries guilt has been used to motivate people to action. Evangelism leaders have often reminded us that God has given us responsibility and that we must use our God-given talents and gifts. We are told that God or the church is depending on us. If God has done so much to save us, how can we remain evangelistically inactive? All these attempts to call us to action, delivered, no doubt, with the best intentions, subtly appeal to our sense of guilt and indebtedness to God. Motivation always seems to become counterproductive when we remove the emphasis from what God has done and place it onto what we must do.

Read Romans 3:19, 20. What did the apostle Paul mean when he said the whole world is guilty before God? What’s his point?

The way that Paul uses the word *guilty* in this passage communicates the sense of accountability. He has already stated in Romans 3:10 that “‘there is none righteous, no, not one’ ” (*NKJV*), and in verse 19 he confirms that the law makes “all the world” guilty before God.

The law’s function has often been likened to a mirror that reveals our sinful condition but which cannot provide the cleansing soap and water. Looking into God’s law, we become aware of our sinfulness and are driven to the Savior to receive His free pardon and cleansing.

After we come to Christ, we are no longer motivated by guilt, because the guilt has been washed away, covered by the righteousness of Jesus. We stand in Him, perfect and guiltless and forgiven. Yes, we are sinners, but we have been forgiven, our guilt has been atoned for; now—based on the salvation that is ours through Christ—we are motivated to witness to others about that which Christ has done for us.

Read James 2:10. What is the main point that James is trying to make? How would you explain this verse to a new believer?

The fact that an offense on one point makes one guilty of defying the God who commanded the whole law underscores the futility of the attempt to gain favor in God’s sight through law keeping. Law breaking, even to a small degree, reveals an underlying desire to do our own will rather than God’s.

While acknowledging your wrongs you have to surrender them to Jesus, claiming His righteousness, His forgiveness, His grace, regardless of how unworthy you are. And lest you be mistaken, you are *unworthy*, more than you could imagine. If not, the salvation offered to you wouldn’t be from grace but from a debt God owes you (see Rom. 4:1–4), and do you really think that God owes you anything?

Motivated to Serve

What would you think of someone who constantly and loudly declared that he or she was motivated and yet attempted nothing? What about someone who claimed to be dedicated yet never revealed to what, or to whom, he or she was dedicated? As we have seen, love is a most powerful motivator; but to only declare our love, even our love for God, means nothing unless we act on that love. In other words, we expect love to be revealed through actions. In this sense love is an active word as it reveals itself through loving actions.

Read John 15:13 and Romans 5:6–8. What do these verses reveal to us about Jesus' love as manifested in His actions? How are we to take the principles revealed here and manifest them in our own lives?

What a wonderful Savior is He who deliberately and willingly gave His life because of His great love for us. Here is the ultimate example of where the one who loves is compelled to act for those who are loved. What if Jesus had pledged His love for us and remained in heaven? What if He had declared His love but made no promises to us or provisions for us?

Read John 14:21. What does this verse tell us about love in action, on the part of both Jesus and us?

We are not just talking about love here; we are talking about a loving relationship. In any loving relationship our motivation is to please the one who is the object of our love. Jesus' decisive saving act on our behalf was motivated only by His love for a race that had broken its connectedness to God. Anything that we do for God that does not come from a similar motive suggests that we do not really understand what it is to have a love relationship with God. God doesn't want us to be involved in witnessing and evangelism because we think we owe Him. Rather, He desires our connectedness to Him be such that it compels us to do the things that please Him and to be in tune with things that matter to Him. God wants us to love Him so much that we will reach out to the people whom He loves.

How can we be sure that we do things for God with the right motivation? Can we be a blessing to others even if we are wrongly motivated in our action? If so, in what way? Are right actions for the wrong reason good actions anyway? Whatever your answer, bring it to class on Sabbath and discuss.

The Legalism Trap

There's an English expression that says, "There is no such thing as a free lunch"—the idea that if you receive something free, it really isn't free because somewhere, somehow, sometime, you will have to pay or repay. The theory that nothing is ever really free has subtly infiltrated Christian thinking to the extent that many try to be deserving of God's salvation through obedience to His will.

Legalism in the Christian vocabulary describes the attitude of those who believe that their obedience to God will somehow cause Him to justify them in His sight. Of course, although God's grace does not negate His expectation of obedience, salvation is based solely on this grace and nothing else, certainly nothing else that we could do.

What do the following texts reveal about the misunderstanding of salvation so prevalent in the minds of many? In what ways can we, ourselves, get caught up in that same kind of thinking? Why is it so easy, in fact, to do so?

Rom. 10:1–4 _____

Rom. 11:5, 6 _____

Gal. 2:16 _____

A legalistic religion causes the individual to focus upon personal performance (and often on the performance of others) rather than on the gospel commission. Legalistic attitudes can lead to pride and arrogance on the part of those who are so blind that they actually deem themselves holy enough to be saved. Or, just as bad, legalistic attitudes can lead to discouragement and despair for those who realize just how far they are from the divine standard. Either way, it's a trap that needs to be avoided, especially by a church such as ours where obedience to law is so central to our understanding of what the gospel is all about.

Read John 6:28, 29. How does Jesus reveal the truth of salvation by faith in these verses? What, though, does it mean to believe in "him whom he hath sent"? How should that belief be manifested in our lives? How well do you manifest that belief, especially when no one is looking?

Free to Be a Slave

The Bible makes it clear that we were once slaves to sin, but through Christ we have been released (*Rom. 6:6*), set free (*Gal. 5:1*), delivered (*1 Thess. 1:10*), adopted (*Rom. 8:15*), and born again (*1 Pet. 1:23*).

The effective worker for God is the one who has given the past to Him and has accepted His power to work in the present and the future. In other words, those who have been delivered by Christ are able to be His slaves. If we don't understand this truth, it may seem strange that deliverance leads to slavery, but it is as true as the sayings, "To be spiritually filled we must continually empty ourselves" and "The way to victory is constant surrender."

Read **Philippians 1:1, James 1:1, and 2 Peter 1:1. What did Paul, Timothy, James, and Simon Peter mean when they announced themselves the bondservants of God and Jesus Christ? How are we to understand these ideas for ourselves?**

Usually bondservants, or slaves, would be owned by and compelled to work under a master. To work for the Master in the Christian sense is a totally voluntary choice. God loves us too much to force our will. When Timothy, James, and Simon Peter used these words, they were indicating their entire identification with Christ and His cause. They were declaring their unreserved service to Him as their Lord. They were renouncing their self-importance so that others would focus only upon Jesus. In this picture of slavery we see dedicated followers pledging their loyalty and devotion through selfless service.

Read **John 8:34–36. What do these verses tell us about slavery to sin and the way to freedom?**

Jesus' hearers knew full well that slaves had no security. They could be sold at the whim of the master, while the son of the master was always secure in the household. Here Jesus uses the contemporary slave situation to impart a vital spiritual truth. If the Son of God makes you spiritually free from slavery to sin, you will be free indeed. It would be unusual for literal freed slaves to voluntarily place themselves back in bondage, but, spiritually, this is what happens when we are freed from the slavery to sin and become slaves of Christ (*Rom. 6:17, 18*). If we are free from the things that make us focus upon ourselves, we are free to consider others and what we have that can benefit them. Herein lies the key to a life of service.

Further Study: Keeping on Track.

Just as any good motor vehicle will ultimately break down as a result of a lack of regular maintenance, so many good and worthwhile church ministries have fallen by the wayside because of a lack of regular intentional maintenance.

To keep your ministry healthy and on track, consider the following maintenance checklist:

1. Maintain your personal connection. Remind yourself often that you are in a partnership ministry with the Lord.

2. Maintain your personal vision. Do you still sense the importance of your ministry? Are your goals as clear and as strong as they were when you became involved in this ministry?

3. Maintain your communication. Regular reporting is important to continued support. People are busy, and they need to be reminded of how this ministry is going and also of how they can become involved.

4. Maintain your enthusiasm. It is a true saying that “Nothing breeds enthusiasm like enthusiasm.” Show your continued excitement about your ministry, and others will become excited too.

5. Maintain your focus. Don’t get sidetracked with other duties or programs that will prevent you from spending the time and energy that your current ministry needs to survive and grow.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, go over your answer to Tuesday’s final question.
- 2** What insights does the following quotation give into the relationship between love for God and service for Him? “The watchful Christian is a working Christian, seeking zealously to do all in his power for the advancement of the gospel. As love for his Redeemer increases, so also does love for his fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 261.
- 3** “Those who have never experienced the tender, winning love of Christ cannot lead others to the fountain of life. His love in the heart is a constraining power, which leads men to reveal Him in the conversation, in the tender, pitiful spirit, in the uplifting of the lives of those with whom they associate. Christian workers who succeed in their efforts must know Christ; and in order to know Him, they must know His love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 550, 551. In class, share your own personal experiences of God’s love and how you have come to know it for yourself.

But Now I See

Dilip Tapu had lost his sight, and his future looked grim. His parents had taken him to many doctors in northeastern India, but no one could help him to regain his sight. His parents found a special school for the blind where Dilip could learn Braille. But soon after he enrolled, the school closed, crushing the family's hope of an education for their son.

With nothing else to do, Dilip hung around with the street children and soon became addicted to chewing tobacco. Often he stole his mother's rice and sold it to buy tobacco. He discovered he could earn a few rupees by singing popular songs in the streets and on the trains, but when his money was stolen one day, he returned home defeated. He was 10 years old.

A man offered to help the boy but only took him home and forced him to work for a little food. Dilip escaped and returned home. His mother told him that she had found a school where he could study. "Your life will be better," she assured him. Dilip didn't want to leave home again, but he obeyed.

He arrived at his new school and heard children singing. He didn't recognize the songs they sang, but he liked the music. However, Dilip soon realized that his new school was operated by Christians, and he was prejudiced against Christians. He resisted his teachers' attempts to introduce him to the Savior and even tried to be expelled from the school by writing something bad about a teacher. But instead of becoming angry, the teacher forgave him and spoke kindly to him.

Slowly Dilip realized that these Christians were different from others he had known. He apologized to the teacher he had wronged, and she in turn led him to accept Jesus into his heart. But when Dilip's friends and family learned that he had become a Christian, they scolded and mocked him. In spite of his new faith, Dilip struggled with cravings for tobacco. He prayed fervently for deliverance, but it took many months before the craving for tobacco left him.

When he completed high school, Dilip wanted to continue his studies. His parents had no money, so he worked as a literature evangelist for three years to save enough to start college. Dilip continues his studies at Spicer Memorial College, where he is preparing to become a pastor.

"I thank God for the Adventist school where I met my Savior," he said. "Through this school my life was changed. Now I want to share God's love with others."

Seventh-day Adventist schools throughout India and around the world are making a world of difference to young people. Thank you for supporting Christian education through your mission offerings.

DILIP TAPU *continues his studies at Spicer Memorial College in India.*

Let *the* Church Know



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 4:1–31, 21:19–25, 1 Cor. 9:19–23, Num. 13:17–33, Acts 11:1–18.*

Memory Text: “Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught” (*Mark 6:30, NKJV*).

Key Thought: As a report of the early church's missionary endeavors, the book of Acts is filled with lessons for us today.

The incredible growth of the early church has caused many to study the book of Acts. Consequently, many areas of church life have been examined in the light of the book—areas such as church growth, foreign missions, church administration, and evangelism. Though much has been gleaned from Acts on these topics, there are other areas, such as reporting, that have not received the attention they deserve.

Reporting in the book of Acts builds upon the reporting in the Gospels and shows that this important activity of church life has a significant impact upon the success of witnessing and evangelism. Quite simply, we need to know what is going on, what works, and what doesn't.

This week we will examine how the early evangelists reported to their leaders and to the church as a whole. The aim is to understand the importance of reporting and to see where it can positively enhance the witnessing and evangelism strategies of a local church.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 16.*

A Biblical Principle

As soon as someone mentions reports, you may imagine reams of paper filled with facts and statistics that will probably do little more than gather dust. However, reporting is not a modern invention designed to frustrate those involved in witnessing and evangelism. It is a biblical principle. As our memory text for this week reveals, when the disciples returned from a missionary tour, they reported to Jesus all that they had done and taught. This seems to be a central part of the work of the gospel.

While we cannot point to one specific Bible text that says, “You must report because,” there is ample evidence that reporting was important in both the Old and New Testaments. Reporting is an activity in a chain of events. That is, someone prepares a report, someone receives the report, the report is evaluated, and then decisions are made and actions are planned in response to what was reported.

Examine Acts 4:1–31. What did Peter and John report back to their companions, and what did this report prompt the church to do? What lessons are there for us today?

Consider that without newspapers, radios, or satellite television, word of mouth was the primary way of spreading the good news about Jesus. If these early believers had given in to the threats made against them, their influence for God would have been severely curtailed. So, they gathered together, listened to the reports, and then decided upon a strategy that would enable them to be true to their evangelistic calling.

Central to it all, of course, was their praying and their reading of Scripture. If we take nothing else from this story, we can see how important prayer and reliance on the Word of God was to them. It shouldn't be any different for us today.

Although we don't have details of what they might have planned, verse 29 shows that in spite of the threats made against them, they were going to continue to speak about Jesus.

John and Peter quoted Scripture before both the leaders in Israel and the other Jewish believers, showing how crucial it was to their faith and their witness. How central and crucial is Scripture in your own life? (Hint: you can discover the answer by asking yourself how much time you spend with it.)

“What God Had Done”

We are continually reminded that in most areas of life, effective communication is the key to understanding and harmony. As we consider the church family we see that the reporting of activities and their results is a vital part of internal communication. In many churches there is much activity, but only those involved in each ministry know what is happening there. Because of this, there is a corresponding feeling among those who lead ministries that there is not much interest in what they are doing. These feelings are not surprising if leaders never share their goals and strategies with the church and never report their activities and results.

Read Acts 21:19–25. How was the church affected when they heard the missionary reports of the apostle Paul? At the same time, even amid the good reports, there were indications of division among the believers. What were those problems, how did Paul respond, and what lessons are there for us today? See also 1 Cor. 9:19–23.

Returning to Jerusalem from a missionary journey, Paul reported to James and all the elders of how God had blessed his ministry among the Gentiles. As Paul related one by one the many gospel advances, the church leaders responded with spontaneous and genuine praise to God.

At the same time, however, evidence of division and confusion existed, even amid the good news of Paul’s witnessing.

“Many of the Jews who had accepted the gospel still cherished a regard for the ceremonial law and were only too willing to make unwise concessions, hoping thus to gain the confidence of their countrymen, to remove their prejudice, and to win them to faith in Christ as the world’s Redeemer. Paul realized that so long as many of the leading members of the church at Jerusalem should continue to cherish prejudice against him, they would work constantly to counteract his influence. He felt that if by any reasonable concession he could win them to the truth he would remove a great obstacle to the success of the gospel in other places. But he was not authorized of God to concede as much as they asked.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 405.

Today we also struggle with division among us as to how to best reach souls. What are some of the struggles particular to the church in your part of the world, and how can you help to bring about resolution?

The Importance of Reporting

The importance of reporting evangelism and witnessing activities and their results has not always been seen and consequently not always undertaken. In all areas of our modern busy lives, importance is placed upon things in proportion to their perceived value. Things that are seen as a waste of time and effort generally don't receive a lot of our time and attention. Therefore, the importance of reporting needs to be demonstrated. That is, the church members need to see what any evaluation of reports is achieving.

A difference exists between the simple reporting of cold hard facts and the sharing of how the activities that these facts represent are a successful part of the church's endeavors to reach people for Christ. It is the responsibility of those reporting to make sure that they convey the excitement and joy of success that come from being involved in the reported ministry.

If we removed all reports of evangelistic activity from the book of Acts, what exciting and encouraging information would we miss that is provided in the following verses? Acts 5:14; 8:4, 12; 11:21; 14:21.

The amazing church growth that is reported in the book of Acts did not simply happen. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, and remembering Jesus' promise of success, the believers engaged in activities that brought about these results. They were focused on what they wanted to achieve and on how best to achieve it. It is reported that through the preaching of the gospel, multitudes of men and women turned to the Lord and were baptized as part of their discipleship process. This again underscores the importance of reporting the results and the activities in as much detail as possible. In fact, the Bible records the results of the witnessing and evangelism activities more than the details of the activities themselves.

Those very early missionaries went everywhere they possibly could, preaching about Jesus and His kingdom. Because of the reported and recorded results, we can assume that they also issued powerful invitations to their hearers. This continual preaching and appealing caused the dramatic results in church growth recorded in the book of Acts.

It is, of course, encouraging when we hear stories of successful evangelistic efforts. How do we respond, however, when things don't go so well, when our plans seem to fail, when our efforts appear to do no good at all? What should our response be? Discuss your answer in class on Sabbath.

Reporting and Motivation

When we speak of motivation, we are referring to the deep-seated reasons for why we believe or do things. This is also true of reporting. When we report, we do so for a reason or for reasons. Our reasons could simply be an attempt to convince a committee to continue funding. Or we could report in a way that will convince people to discontinue a program or change leadership personnel. If selected information is reported or emphasized, then perhaps decisions made on the evaluation of such reporting may not be the best. Hence, our reporting needs to be honest and fair.

Read Numbers 13:17–33. All twelve spies saw the same things; what caused only two of the twelve to respond as they did? What lesson should we take from this incident for ourselves, today?

God had promised that the children of Israel could certainly take the land. Joshua and Caleb gave a good report of the land and suggested that they go at once to possess it (*vs. 30*). Others who were with them when they spied out the land gave a bad report, emphasizing the obstacles to possessing it and suggesting that they return to Egypt.

As we formulate reports, we must do so with thought to the revealed will of God and in the light of His blessings. We will not just report on how well we are doing but how well we are doing the will of God (*see Matt. 7:21*). There is always the potential to get caught up in the latest models of evangelistic ministry and measure our successes by how well we are implementing the principles in comparison with other churches. As we report on our apparent successes, we may be more interested in appearing successful than in seeking God's will for our church and pursuing that by His grace.

This is a challenge to our churches today as we seem to be bombarded by never-ending “better” ways of outreach. In the report of the spies, Joshua and Caleb surely also saw the obstacles to taking the land, but they also knew God's will. Therefore, an important part of their report assured the people that possessing the land was surely possible. On the other hand, those spies whose thinking did not include reflections on God's will brought back a completely negative report calculated to convince the people that returning to Egypt was a better option.

How do we strike a harmony between living by faith, claiming God's promises, and acting on them—as opposed to living by presumption and doing things that might not be the wisest but utilizing dubious claims of God's “leading” in order to justify them? How can we do the first and avoid the latter?

Giving Him the Glory

Some people are hesitant to turn in successful reports because they wonder if it is a form of boasting in human achievement. In reality, however, God is glorified by faithful reporting, and His church is strengthened in the faith and resolve to continue working for Him. While it is true that occasionally someone may report with less than honorable motivation, this should not stop humble believers from sharing the mighty things that God has wrought through them as He has empowered them to be witnesses and evangelists for Him. If done with humility, enthusiasm, and a love for souls, reporting can greatly encourage other church members also to get involved in the work of evangelism and soul-winning.

Read Acts 11:1–18. How did the leaders and members of the Jerusalem church respond to Peter’s report of the work among the Gentiles? How could the principles revealed there prove important for us today?

There had been criticism of Peter and the others who had ventured to witness and evangelize outside of Jewish circles; then, however, as a result of Peter’s report to the Jerusalem church, the criticism ceased and the other Jewish believers glorified God.

From our perspective today, it’s not easy to understand the issues at stake then. Of course, the gospel is to go to everyone, Jew and Gentile—even if to “the Jew first” (*Rom. 1:16*). Everyone knows that. Yet, in the context of the book of Acts, the idea of the covenant promises extending to the Gentiles would have required a major shift in Jewish thinking. However, because of the reports of God’s activity and blessing, the church members gained a new understanding of God’s desire to save all people everywhere, even though it had always been God’s plan from the start to save everyone who would be saved (*Eph. 1:1–4, Isa. 53:6, Heb. 2:9*).

For the average reader, it will probably take less than two minutes to read Peter’s report in Acts 11:1–18. We can safely assume that his report, and the ensuing questions and further report responses, would have taken considerably longer. Furthermore, although Peter refers to himself throughout the report, and although some members would surely have said, “Well done, Peter,” all the glory was given to God, and the church leaders were encouraged as they understood better that the gospel commission to the entire world could become a reality.

Further Study: Reporting Your Ministry

As we have seen this week, others need to know what you are doing. Specific reports such as attendance figures and financial statements are certainly necessary. It is also important that you present reports at church evangelism councils and church boards. While a verbal report may touch briefly on the main points, you should hand in a written report that contains as much detail as possible.

Not only will this information keep people interested in your ministry and make it easier to encourage involvement, it will directly enhance evaluation and future planning and direction.

Make sure that your reports are given with reference to the overall evangelism plans of the church. Explain how your ministry is part of a strategy that is contributing to the achievement of church goals.

Challenge yourself regarding your motivation for reporting. To what extent are you focused on both the will of God for your church and the saving of souls?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Go back to the last question on Tuesday. How do we report “bad news”? It’s only natural that we talk about the successes we experience. People do that even in the mundane things of life. But what about in the work of evangelism? What do we do if a church program isn’t working? How should it be discussed and reviewed in ways that will bring about needed changes? Also, discuss this question: If we attribute success in evangelism to the Lord, whom do we blame if things aren’t going so well?
- 2 Think about the change in attitude that the Jewish believers needed in regard to the work among the Gentiles. Look around at your own church, culture, and society. However much we might dogmatically assert our belief that the gospel is for all the world, in what ways might our own cultural and social prejudices need the same kind of shift as the one experienced by these early Jewish believers?
- 3 Although this week’s context was about reporting evangelistic activities, think about the whole concept of giving any kind of report in any kind of situation. How can we make sure that we are always honest and truthful and not dishonestly slanting information in ways that will give us what we want, regardless of how skewed our words are? Why is that so easy to do, and why is it so easy to fool ourselves as we do it?

Loved Into the Church

Stephanie lives in Denmark, a largely secular country. When Stephanie experienced bullying in her middle school, she transferred to a Seventh-day Adventist school. Although at first she thought it was strange to have so many religion classes in school, Stephanie appreciated the accepting attitude of the teachers and students. She quickly made friends in the school, and several of them invited her to attend church. “I was curious about what Adventists believe,” Stephanie said, “so I went.” She noticed that her friends’ families seemed happy. Her own family wasn’t. “I decided the reason for their happy families must be the church, so I gave it a chance and went.” Before long Stephanie gave her life to Christ.

“At first my parents didn’t mind that I went to church,” she said. “My dad would even take me. But when I asked to be baptized, my parents weren’t happy at all. But I was determined.”

She completed middle school and enrolled in the Seventh-day Adventist boarding academy so she could stay with her friends. Stephanie found the stability she needed in a family of teachers and students who really cared for one another.

“I continued asking my mother to let me be baptized,” Stephanie said. “But Mom resisted. Finally she let me become an Adventist when I was 17. It’s the best decision I’ve made.”

Stephanie graduated from the Seventh-day Adventist academy and now shares her faith through a café church in a city near the university where she studies.

“The café church attracts about 30 young people every Sabbath afternoon,” Stephanie said. “We have midweek prayer services, small group meetings to study the Bible and share what’s important to us.

“In Denmark most churches struggle to maintain a small membership, but we’re growing, and our growth is among young people! We have a semi-secular social time when we invite anyone in the community who wishes to come.”

Stephanie leads the music team for several of the services and is a member of the outreach team that seeks to raise awareness of Seventh-day Adventists in this town through fun and attractive methods. “During festivals we make waffles and have a bouncing castle,” she said.

Denmark is a difficult place to attract people to church. Stephanie is a product of Seventh-day Adventist education, and she and her friends are now bringing Christ into the lives of people who didn’t know they needed Him. Your mission offerings help to fund experimental worship services designed to draw in those who are seeking to fill the spiritual hole in their hearts. Thank you for supporting such work with your mission offerings.

STEPHANIE BEHRENDT, 20, lives in Jutland, Denmark.

Evaluating Witnessing *and* Evangelism



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Cor. 13:5, 6; Heb. 10:24, 25; Deut. 10:12, 13; Matt. 23:15; Rev. 14:6, 7.

Memory Text: “To one who listens, valid criticism is like a gold earring or other gold jewelry” (*Proverbs 25:12, NLT*).

Key Thought: It is a mistake to become involved in God's great task of evangelism without effective evaluation.

Too often we are satisfied with minimal results through evangelism when we could have had greater impact and significantly better success if we had evaluated previous witnessing and evangelistic endeavors and allowed our findings to influence future direction and strategy.

Sometimes large sums of money are spent on witnessing and evangelism ministries that give minimal results. This has led to suggested changes in budget allocations and/or procedures. If done with a non-critical spirit, these questions can be a part of valid evaluation. We must quickly add, however, that we really don't know the full results of any specific program because we can focus only upon the tangible results (such as the number of people being baptized) and are unaware as to what extent gospel seeds have been sown. Nevertheless, there is still the need to evaluate in a way that involves making judgments but abstains from being judgmental.

This week we will consider evaluation as a biblical principle and explore its value as an ongoing procedure in local church life today.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 23.*

Why Evaluate?

Evaluation will take place whether we realize it or not. Evaluation is being undertaken every Sabbath and at every public meeting. People evaluate the content, clarity, and even the length of the sermon, and those who attend public meetings expect a high level of professionalism. Wherever and whenever people have expectations there will be evaluation. Although we cannot point to a text where formal evaluation was carried out, it is evident that evaluation was a serious part of early church life.

What do the following texts tell us about the importance of evaluation? And what kind of evaluation do the following verses suggest? *1 Tim. 3:1–13; 1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5, 6.*

When God’s Word sets a standard, expects or prescribes specific actions, or issues a command, our responses are open to evaluation. Evaluation asks very important questions: “How are we doing in this particular ministry?” “How can we be more effective?”

The fact that Paul gave certain qualifications for deacons and elders shows that some kind of evaluation was to take place. This would be evaluation of fitness for the position and also an evaluation of effectiveness in that ministry.

Read through the gospel commission of Matthew 28:19, 20. What evaluative questions would you ask when considering your church’s response to this command?

As God’s servants we are entrusted with the immeasurably valuable gospel truth. Considering that this gospel message is to go to all the world, it should not surprise us that God also has an evaluative process. God is interested in the progress of the work that is entrusted to those who have responded to His call to be co-laborers for souls.

Read again 2 Corinthians 13:5. What does the text say to you personally? How can you apply it to yourself? What evidence do you have that “Jesus Christ is in you”?

Evaluate Kindly

While there are many benefits to evaluation, there are some pitfalls that we must be aware of and avoid. If we are overly active in evaluation and focus mostly on the negatives, there is the potential to create a critical environment that will discourage and decrease your pool of volunteers. To avoid evaluation being perceived as criticism, it must be accompanied by genuine affirmation. Indeed, most often we forget to affirm our workers, particularly those who have served in their chosen ministry for a considerable time. They are always there and always do the job, and we come to expect that they always will be there to do the job. Evaluation will give you the opportunity to affirm them.

What affirmation do you see in the following verses? In what ways could such affirmation be given today to individual workers or teams? *Acts 16:1, 2; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 11:2; Phil. 4:14.*

On many occasions the apostle Paul had to set the church or individuals straight in matters of attitude, behavior, or doctrine. This shows that some evaluation had taken place. Whenever he could, Paul also affirmed people for their support of Him personally or for their faithfulness to God or for the faithful performance of a specific ministry.

To be fair in evaluation, we must evaluate not only the outcomes but also the processes. Outcome evaluation asks whether a program achieved its planned results. Process evaluation reviews internal project management.

Carefully read Hebrews 10:24, 25. What does “consider one another” mean here? What evaluative principles are suggested?

These verses are more than a suggestion. They strongly admonish us to take the spiritual growth and development of one another seriously. If we are to consider what God requires in our Christian lives and also fulfill a need to consider the point at which each of us is at in our experience, then it also follows that appropriate evaluation will be undertaken as we “consider one another.”

Think about how encouraging it is when someone affirms you for either simply who you are as a person and/or your ministry. It’s amazing how just a few simple words can do so much! What’s your general attitude toward others? Do you tend toward criticism or toward affirmation? If the former, how can you change this destructive character trait?

What the Lord Asks

Read the following verses and then, keeping in mind the context of this week (the whole quarter, actually), answer the questions that follow: “ ‘And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?’ ” (*Deut. 10:12, 13, NKJV*).

How would you summarize the essential meaning of these two verses?

Of which New Testament text does this remind you, and why does this show us the great importance of the admonition of these verses in Deuteronomy?

The texts say that God “requires” (or “asks”) these things of us. How are we to understand the meaning of this in the context of salvation by faith alone?

The texts themselves deal greatly with our heart, our soul, with love and with fear—things that are often hard to judge from outward appearances. What outward manifestations of these inward things do the verses talk about? How does the link here between the inward and outward fit in with our understanding of Revelation 14:6–12?

In Matthew 23:15, Jesus gave the scribes and the Pharisees a stern evaluation of their “witnessing” and “evangelism” outreach toward the Gentiles. Thus, in a well-meaning quest to fulfill the gospel commission, we must always keep the deep truths expressed in Deuteronomy 10:12 and 13 before us. After all, with all our outreach efforts, the last thing we want to do is create more “son[s] of hell.”

Evaluating for Spiritual Growth

“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’ ” (*1 Sam. 16:7, NKJV*).

Previously in this study guide we have noted that any goals set by individuals or churches must be able to be evaluated. While it is relatively easy to monitor and evaluate numerical growth, it is true that there is more to church than numbers.

It’s obvious (or should be, anyway) that we don’t simply want to fill the church with people. We want to fill it with people who are growing in their relationship with Jesus, who love the Lord, and who express that love in obedience to His commandments. The last thing we want to do is what Jesus said the scribes and Pharisees did: to “‘travel land and sea’ ” (that is, engage in missionary efforts) to make a new convert and make him “ ‘twice as much a son of hell as yourselves’ ” (*Matt. 23:15, NKJV*). That strong rebuke of their “outreach efforts” shows us how important it is that we give attention to the evaluation of spiritual growth, not only of those whom we bring into the church but, even more so, of ourselves.

Read Matthew 26:41; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Romans 8:6; Ephesians 6:17, 18; 2 Timothy 2:15, 16; and Psalm 1:2. **What spiritual disciplines do these verses suggest are important? In what ways are all of these things crucial to our spiritual growth?**

How do we, as sinners in need of divine grace ourselves, evaluate something as “intangible” as the spirituality of others? The fact is that there is no documented spirituality scale against which we can evaluate personal spirituality. It is therefore more appropriate and profitable to consider whether each believer is on a spiritual journey, rather than to determine at what point he or she is on that journey. Indications of a spiritual journey are the spiritual disciplines in which we become involved. The things listed in the verses above certainly are indicators; yet, we always need to be careful regarding how we judge the experience of others. At the same time, especially if we are dealing with new members, we should—in a kind and loving way—help them to understand how important things such as prayer, Bible study, and obedience are to their spiritual growth.

Evaluating for Church Growth

The very reason why our church exists is the reason why we evaluate. We believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been raised up at this particular time in earth's history as part of God's plan to take the gospel to the world. In other words, we exist to win souls for the kingdom.

Read Revelation 14:6, 7. **How do we understand these verses in relationship to our identity as Seventh-day Adventists?**

Evaluating how we are doing is a method of keeping true to the task in the most effective way possible. Any evaluation of what the church does should be an assessment of how the evangelism and witnessing strategies are affecting church growth. How is that in which we are involved helping us to reach the goal?

Read Matthew 6:33, 10:7, 24:14, and Luke 4:43. **What are these texts talking about? How should their meaning impact both us as a church and our work of witnessing and evangelism?**

The record of Jesus' ministry on earth contains numerous references to preaching as a way of winning souls to the kingdom of God. Jesus preached that the kingdom of God was at hand. He chastised the religious leaders for shutting up the kingdom of God and making it difficult for people to enter. He sent His disciples out to preach the kingdom of God. Clearly, the overriding goal of Jesus, the apostles, and the church was the winning of people for the kingdom.

The reports of the numbers of people who were added to the church at various times, and the reports of churches being established among the Gentiles, are evidence that evaluation was being carried out in regard to how the church was reaching the goal of kingdom growth.

Jesus made a very powerful and blunt statement that if you are not with Him, you are *against* Him (Matt. 12:30), that if you are not gathering with Him, you are scattering. Put aside your profession of faith or your name on a church book. Are you gathering or scattering? How do you justify your answer?

Further Study: Inviting Others to Join Your Ministry

Have you ever heard of a one-man band? This is a band in which one person plays all the instruments. The drum is strapped to his back and operated by a foot pedal; cymbals are strapped between the knees and so on. In the metaphorical sense, a one-person band is one in which one individual plays all parts.

One-person bands have the potential to burn out because they have no physical or emotional team support. One-person bands sometimes complain about the lack of church support, but the congregation has probably not been asked to be involved in any way other than financially.

Whether you are just beginning a ministry or evaluating an existing one, the following are some suggestions regarding ways in which to multiply your ministry by getting others involved:

1. Review what is involved in every aspect of the ministry you are undertaking and see how many people could take part.
2. Decide on the areas where significant help is needed and look for key people to fill these major roles. Think about some team leaders.
3. Prepare a fairly detailed written outline of all aspects of the ministry. This will be useful when talking to prospective team members. They will be able to understand exactly what is required of them.
4. Report regularly to the whole church. This will let everyone see that your ministry is a part of the local church's overall witnessing and evangelism strategy, and they will be more likely to get involved.
5. Have regular team meetings. Affirm team members and review progress. Ask the questions, "How have we done?" "How are we doing?" and, "Where do we go from here?"

Discussion Questions:

- 1** When and how do you cross the line between evaluation and the kind of judgment that we are warned against in Scripture?
- 2** Dwell more on the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:15. How can we, as a church, prevent this from happening, especially when new converts are so often full of zeal? How can we make sure that zeal is focused in the right direction so that we don't create more "son[s] of hell" in our midst?
- 3** Consider a current ministry in your church and suggest a good evaluation process of the program, the process, and the personnel.

Learning Lessons of Love

I had been assigned to a congregation in Cameroon that was facing a huge crisis.

A man had given to the church land on which the congregation built a simple church. But the land transfer had not been completed when the man died, and his widow wanted the land back. She took the church to court, and the judge ruled that the church must buy the land for a huge sum of money or vacate the land within two weeks.

I called the members together to pray. But some were angry, and others felt the situation was hopeless. Those who were willing prayed day and night that God would intervene.

On the Sabbath before we had to vacate the property, I preached on Joshua and his “impossible” situation at Jericho. I challenged the members to believe that God would deliver us just as He had delivered the children of Israel at Jericho.

After the service I invited those who were willing to go with me to visit the woman, who was not a Seventh-day Adventist. Several members refused, saying it would do no good. I sensed that it was these members’ lack of love that had driven this woman to take back the church land.

Those who remained prayed with me that God would cleanse our hearts from animosity and prepare the way. Then we walked to the woman’s home. We arrived at her home singing, and the woman sat listening quietly. I told her that we had come to apologize to her and to ask her forgiveness for treating her unkindly. I recounted her husband’s reason for giving the land to the church, and then I prayed that God would bless her.

Silence fell on the group. Then the woman said, “Last week I dreamed that you would come today. Now go; you’ll hear from me later.” The church members greeted her warmly before we left.

The next day I was called to visit the woman’s home. “I have decided to give the church half the land my husband originally gave you,” she said. “But you must build the school you have planned on the land I am giving you.”

That afternoon we had a prayer and praise meeting in the church. Many confessed their unbelief and the unkindness they had felt toward the woman, and everyone praised God for saving the church. The members’ attitudes have changed, and they often visit this woman and invite her family to the church.

Today an Adventist school serves the community, and the members have learned critical lessons in love, forgiveness, and faith.

YVES MBENDE is chaplain of Adventist University of Cosendai in Cameroon, West Africa.

A Perpetual Ministry



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 4:7–30, Acts 2:42, 11:19–23, 2 Tim. 2:1–7, 2 Cor. 5:18–20.*

Memory Text: “‘What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches’ ” (*Luke 13:18, 19, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Evangelism and witnessing are the means by which the mustard seed (the church of God) becomes a huge tree that fills the whole world.

You may have heard it said—you may even have said it yourself—“I have done my bit; I will now leave it to the younger people.” Or, “I have been evangelism leader for years, let some of the new people take over now.”

In one sense these kinds of statements are understandable. People get older, sometimes their health fails, or other life circumstances prevent them from maintaining their leadership in church ministries. Sometimes people just burn themselves out and need a break. Some may believe the Lord requires them to fulfill His will in other areas of church work.

There is, however, a great difference between changing ministry emphasis and ceasing to minister; as long as we have breath we should, in one capacity or another, continue to minister.

This week we will focus on our need to stay involved in witnessing and evangelism ministries. No matter what our role is in the church, there are always going to be opportunities for us to minister.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 30.*

Never-ending Witnessing and Evangelism

It must be emphasized again that witnessing and evangelism must continue as long as there are people who need salvation. It is God's plan to save as many people as possible. Meanwhile, those who have accepted Jesus as their personal Savior are called upon to work with God in this soul-saving work. No matter who we are, where we are, and in what situations we find ourselves, if our hearts are tuned to Christ, if we have a deep-seated appreciation for what He has done for us and for what He asks us to do in response, we will always have opportunity for witness and ministry.

Review Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4:7–30. What was it about Jesus and what He said that she was excited to share with her townspeople? What principles of witnessing can we take from this account that can help us as we seek to reach others?

It seems that Jesus followed a simple “formula” when He spoke to the woman of Samaria. (1) He arrested her attention: “ ‘Give Me a drink’ ” (vs. 7, *NKJV*); (2) He secured her interest: “ ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ ” (vs. 9, 10, *NKJV*); (3) He created a desire: “ ‘Sir, give me this water’ ” (vs. 15, *NKJV*); (4) He brought a conviction: “ ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a Prophet’ ” (vs. 19, *NKJV*); and (5) actions followed: “ ‘Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’ ” (vs. 29, *NKJV*).

These five stages of evangelism do not necessarily need to take place all in one meeting as they did with Jesus and the woman at Jacob's well. They may happen over a period of time as you continue to witness to someone. The situations will vary greatly, but the principles seen in this passage can be broadly applied to our attempts to reach souls.

In addition, although the initial conversation is concerned with literal water, Jesus' goal is to create in the Samaritan woman a desire to drink the Water of Life. In the end, although we are called to help people in whatever situation we find them, and to minister to their needs however we can, we must never forget that their greatest need is salvation in Jesus.

How often do you take advantage of opportunities to witness or to minister? Isn't it true that so often we go about our lives, meeting people who—despite their interaction with us—have no idea of what we believe, what we stand for, or the hope that we have? How can we change so that we can be better witnesses?

A Nurturing Environment

A vital part of evangelism takes place in church every week. This aspect of evangelism is called “nurture” and “incorporation.” We have been very good at inviting people to our churches, but we have not always done so well in the creation of an environment that will encourage them to return and settle into the fellowship. If we are to make disciples, we must give attention to the establishment and nurture of every new Christian.

What does this mean? “Establishment” gives the idea of setting something up on a firm and permanent basis. It is to help provide them with a foundation of faith and fellowship. To “nurture” is usually explained by concepts such as “to rear,” “to bring up,” “to care for,” “to foster,” “to train,” and “to educate.” When someone accepts the Lord Jesus as his or her personal Savior, all of these areas of establishment and nurture must be applied spiritually and socially within the Christian fellowship. In other words, a new Christian needs to be brought up, cared for, fostered, trained, and educated in the ways of the Lord.

Fellowship is key. This is how lives touch and affect one another. People who join a church must be cared for through spiritual fellowship.

What do the following texts tell us about the importance of spiritual fellowship among believers? Why are these things especially important in the case of new believers, those who have come into the church through our evangelism and outreach? *1 John 1:7; Acts 2:42; 11:19–23; 20:35; and Rom. 1:11, 12.*

The word *we* in 1 John 1:7 impresses upon us that, although we are to walk in the light as individuals, we are to walk in the light together. If believers walk in the light, there will be fellowship and unity. Consequently, there will be a nurturing environment where people are focused both upon God’s will for their lives and the encouragement of one another along the Christian path. While it is important to help new members be happy and contented in church, it is also important to lead them to become disciples in the fullest sense of the word, which includes developing the ability to lead others into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Does your church have an intentional focus on establishing new members in their faith? How can you become better involved in helping to nurture new members (or even “old” ones, for that matter)?

Training Trainers

We live in a world where people are highly mobile. Local churches seem to regularly process transfers out and transfers in and often lament the loss of capable members who have been involved in significant ministries. Because of this potential transfer of skills, and because the local church's evangelism and witnessing ministry should continue expanding, there is a great need to multiply these ministries.

What principles concerning the training of trainers can we glean from Paul's instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1–7? How should all these words apply to us today in our work for the Lord, in whatever capacity we find ourselves?

Paul communicates to Timothy the importance of seeing the big picture of the church's work, both regarding extent and duration. The pastoral and teaching ministries are not to be centered in just one man. They are to be the work of a multiplied number of witnesses and evangelists in the church. Primarily, Paul is telling Timothy to train up others for leadership in the church because, eventually, the older generation of leaders will have passed on. Implicit in this instruction to Timothy is that those he instructs will also, in turn, teach others, thereby ensuring that the church's mission in the world will be continuous and expansive. This process is in harmony with Jesus' call for more laborers for the harvest.

It has been said, "Give a man a fish, and you will feed him for a day; teach him how to fish, and you will feed him and his family for as long as he lives." The problem is that if the man does not pass his fishing skill on to his children, the next generation will go hungry. Perhaps the saying should be modified to say, "Give a man a fish, and you will feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and to pass on his knowledge and techniques, and untold numbers of people will continue to be fed." This is the difference between training someone and training them to be trainers.

Think through your experience in our church. Has anyone ever taught you how to witness to others? Have you ever asked to be trained to witness to others? Discuss your answer in class on Sabbath.

Reclaiming Former Members

Backslider is a word we wish did not exist in the Christian vocabulary. It is a fact, however, that many people slide away from church and from a saving relationship with the Lord. Although people do, at times, leave us over doctrine, most of the time they leave over other things, usually personal disputes and so forth. Whatever the reasons, we need to do all that we can to create a loving and nurturing environment that will help those who join us want to stay among us, despite whatever personal issues inevitably arise.

At the same time, we should have a ministry to former and non-attending members as an intentional part of our witnessing and evangelism program. A quick look at the various churches' lists of members will likely reveal that there are many more names listed there than those who attend worship each Sabbath. These names could form the beginnings of a special ministry to people whom God has never ceased to love supremely.

Thoughtfully consider 2 Corinthians 5:18–20. Although the context is somewhat different from ours, the principle is important. In what ways is a “ministry of reconciliation” special to those who once followed God but have slidden away?

Reclaiming former members is a special ministry. Furthermore, this ministry is as evangelistic as when we reach out to people who have never accepted Christ before. The very word *reconciliation* implies that there was a former unity and fellowship between humankind and God that has now been restored through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we are now given a ministry of reconciliation that includes reaching out to those who once worshiped with us.

In fact, one could argue that in Matthew 10:5, 6, Jesus sent His disciples to win back members of the Jewish nation who had fallen away from a saving relationship with their Lord. Thus, it is entirely appropriate that we today also enter into a work for those people who have a special history with God and His church.

Think about those who have left the church and the reason why they did. Is there any one person with whom you could re-establish contact and resume friendship—ministering to them and seeking to reconnect them with the church? Pray about how you could go about doing this.

The Back Door

Have you ever noticed that people often lament the fact that members slip out “the back door”? They even state firmly that the church’s back door needs to be closed but fail to tell us how to close the door or even the location of the door. Some growing churches may think that their back door is closed, but in reality it may be simply that more people are coming in the front door than are going out the back. And while that is better than more going out the back than coming in the front (which is true in some places), we still want to do what we can to retain our members.

Discovering the back door and attempting to close it will take strategies that are indeed evangelistic given that our mandate is not simply to win people for God but to hold them.

Read Hebrews 10:25. Why is it important that Christians meet together regularly? When in fellowship together, how much “encouraging” do we give one another? How can we do even more than we are now?

The decision to leave the fellowship is usually not a sudden one. Rather, most people go through a process of quietly leaving. Just as coming to Christ and His church was a journey, the process of leaving is a journey. Most often for those who leave, this is not a consciously planned strategy. They just start to slowly get disconnected, disenchanted, and dissatisfied with things in the church. Maybe, even in some cases, justifiably so. We should, therefore, seek to be aware of the journey of those around us at church.

Read Romans 14:13, Galatians 5:13, and Ephesians 4:32. How would living in harmony with these admonitions help to keep the back door closed? What can you and your church do to live out these important truths?

A caring church, one that continues to care, is a place where each individual is focused upon his or her personal relationship with Jesus. They have a clear concept of the value that Jesus places upon each individual. Closing the back door involves getting close to people, discovering their needs as they are willing to share, and meeting those needs when appropriate. This is something no church program can provide. Only loving, caring individuals can.

Further Study: Planning to Continue and Grow Your Ministry

Everyone involved in a witnessing and evangelism ministry should give attention to how he or she can ensure that it will continue rather than be a one-time event. There are many things we can do to ensure this. We will review a few of the vital ones.

1. Be comfortable with sharing leadership rather than being a one-person band. Maintain a team approach where both the work and the affirmation are shared.

2. Do whatever you can to keep the importance of your team's ministry before the church. This will include regular reports to major evangelism committees, bulletin inserts, newsletters, notice board posters, and requests for budgets.

3. Be on the constant lookout for people you can invite to join your team or to form another team. If someone volunteers to join your team as a result of your activities and reports, that is fine; however, it will be better to personally invite people instead of sending out a general invitation for volunteers.

4. Regular training events are a must, especially concerning witnessing and evangelism activities.

Discussion Questions:

1 In class, go over your answers to Tuesday's final question.

2 "We are to be channels through which the Lord can send light and grace to the world. Backsliders are to be reclaimed. We are to put away our sins, by confession and repentance humbling our proud hearts before God. Floods of spiritual power are to be poured forth upon those prepared to receive it."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 46. What is needed, and why, to help bring people back into this church and the wonderful "present truth" message that, in fact, no one else is preaching to the world?

3 When people leave, let's love them, let's keep in touch, let's not judge and call them "apostates," or, even worse, let's not hurl at them Ellen White quotes about people falling away. Instead, let's use these sad experiences, as Paul said, to "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5) and ask what we might've done differently, if anything, that could have helped to keep these souls among us. Most important, let's not do anything that would make it harder for them to come back should they change their minds. How can we as a church apply these principles toward those who, for whatever reason, have left us?

My Sister's Faith

My family is Buddhist, the traditional religion of Mongolia. I often visited the Buddhist temple to pray and even learned to chant some Buddhist prayers. I planned to become a Buddhist nun when I finished college.

Then my younger sister, Mungu, began attending the Seventh-day Adventist church. I told Mungu that her religion was foolish, but she continued attending church and even invited me to go. I began noticing that Mungu no longer stayed out until late at night, and refused to argue over petty issues when I tried to pick a fight. The changes in her life were remarkable.

Mungu often brought books home from church and left them for me to read. I read the books and became curious about what her church teaches. So the next time Mungu invited me to church, I went.

The people were friendly, and even the church leaders stopped and talked to us. I decided to return to the church. I learned about heaven and hell, Jesus' second coming, and faith in God. I believed what they were saying. I kept coming. My ideas of what Buddhists believe were vague, but these Christians were very clear about what they believe.

Little by little I gave up my desire to become a Buddhist nun and embraced God's love and claim on my life. My sister and I were baptized together. Our parents tried to talk us out of joining a Christian church. But as they saw the changes in our lives that Jesus made, they let us attend.

Mungu and I share our faith with our parents and elder sister. Our sister believes in God and knows that He has answered her prayers in the past. But according to Buddhist traditions, the eldest child must remain a Buddhist so that when our parents die there will be someone to open the door to the next life. Mungu and I pray that our parents will give their lives to God and give up their beliefs in reincarnation. Then my elder sister will be released from her obligations and can follow God.

The church in Mongolia is still young and small. Most members are under 30 years old, and many are still in school. Your mission offerings help support the growing and maturing church in Mongolia. And recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings have helped to build or buy church buildings, establish a dormitory for Seventh-day Adventist students in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, and helped to buy a youth training center where we can learn to become the leaders of the church in Mongolia for many years to come. Thank you!

ERDENECHIMEG and MUNGU SUKHAATAR are working in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia.

The Thessalonians faced stress, strains, struggles, even outright persecution. In other words, life for them, as for all of us, had its hard moments. Despite these moments, the Thessalonians had a sure hope, a hope based on what Christ had done for them, a hope that pointed to the greatest promise of all—the Second Coming. Though Paul had chided the Thessalonians, they had issues in the church—behavioral as well as theological (sound familiar?)—it was to them, and us, that Paul wrote some of the most incredible, uplifting, and hopeful words in all inspiration.

In this quarter's Bible study guide on 1 and 2 Thessalonians by Jon Paulien, we will get a glimpse into the life of an early Christian church. We will see some of the struggles and challenges that it faced, including the difficulties that arose from the fact that Christ had not yet returned. Fascinating, too, is that however different their circumstances, so often the principles reflected in Paul's words to them deal with the issues and challenges that we, too, confront as we await the return of our Lord Jesus, whose death on the cross at the first coming guarantees His return in glory at the Second.

Lesson 1—The Gospel Comes to Thessalonica

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Preachers Pay a Price** (*Acts 16:9–40*)

MONDAY: **Paul's Preaching Strategy** (*Luke 24:25–27, 44–46*)

TUESDAY: **Two Views of the Messiah** (*Isa. 9:1–7, Isa. 53:1–6*)

WEDNESDAY: **Suffering Before Glory** (*Luke 24:26*)

THURSDAY: **A Church Is Born** (*Acts 17:1–4, 12*)

Memory Text—*1 Thessalonians 2:13*

Sabbath Gem: Our assurance of God's promises must be based on our confidence in His Holy Scriptures.

Lesson 2—Preserving Relationships

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Opposition in Thessalonica** (*Acts 17:5–9*)

MONDAY: **The Episode in Berea** (*Acts 17:10–15*)

TUESDAY: **Interlude in Athens** (*Acts 17:16–34*)

WEDNESDAY: **Arrival in Corinth** (*1 Cor. 1:18–2:22*)

THURSDAY: **Paul Reveals His Heart** (*1 Thess. 2:17–3:10*)

Memory Text—*1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20*

Sabbath Gem: True evangelism leads to relationships that can stand the test of time and last for eternity.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.