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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 the ways in which 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.”


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 the Seventh-day Adventist Church exists. What better one could there be?

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
Defining Evangelism and Witnessing

SABBATH AFTERNOON


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 apostles’ time, 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?
We dnesday April 4

(page 10 of Standard Edition)

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 Ministry, p. 39.
**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:**

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Matthew 28:19, 20

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Compare and contrast the job descriptions of evangelism and witnessing for members of Christ’s body.

**Feel:** Sense the compelling urgency of the gospel message and its eternal consequences for every soul.

**Do:** Do his or her part in both the individual and the corporate work of the sharing of the gospel.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Job Descriptions

A. What are the similarities between witnessing and evangelism, and how are they different? Why are both ways of sharing the gospel important?

B. How do the experiences of the early church inform us regarding the importance of both personal witness and corporate evangelism?

II. Feel: The Everlasting Gospel

A. Why is the gospel such an urgent message to share?

B. How does personal testimony make witnessing more compelling?

III. Do: Individual and Corporate Work

A. How can you share your witness of what God has done for you this week? How is your story one that no one else can share? Why is it important that you share your experiences about your relationship with God with your friends, family, and coworkers?

B. What part can you play in the evangelistic work of the church that would give you great joy as you bless others?

**Summary:** Sharing our stories of what Christ has done for us is an important individual witness on a one-to-one basis. Our individual work for God may also be a critical part of the church’s long-term evangelistic work.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Having spent time with Jesus, His original followers shared their experience with others. Witnessing was a natural and life-changing result of the time they had spent with Him. But it was also a specific task that Jesus gave them—and us—to do.

**Just for Teachers:** When we hear about someone being described as a witness, the typical image that comes to mind is that of an individual standing up in a court of law to talk about what he or she has seen. In court there are rules that restrict the witness to talking about his or her own experience; if someone makes comments about things that he or she does not know about directly, little credibility is given to such testimony. So it is with being a witness for Jesus. We are witnesses of what we have experienced. This is what makes witnessing credible. It also makes a difference in how we go about witnessing.

**Opening Activity:** Ask class members to pair up, preferably with someone they do not know very well. Assign each person the task of introducing his or her partner to the rest of the group, sharing the most positive thing that happened to this person during the past week. If the class members already know one another well, perhaps ask each person to find out a new fact about his or her partner. Give the people in each pair a couple of minutes to talk to each other; then, in turn, invite each person to introduce his or her partner to the group. Preface the invitation with a brief discussion of the vital importance of knowing someone well in order to be able to introduce him or her to others.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** This section provides an opportunity for the class to explore key aspects of Jesus’ command to be His witnesses and examines different ways of doing this.

**Bible Commentary**

Have members of the class read aloud the five texts referenced. Then ask them to compare and contrast the different contexts and emphases among these various versions of Jesus’ command to His disciples—from that time forward and in the future—in order to tell His story. In the case of the four Gospel accounts, these commands come as part of the ending of each story: each story climaxes with Jesus’ death and resurrection, followed by the story’s logical conclusion that the people who had seen and experienced what had happened would go and do something about it. These commands have the weight of the gospel stories behind them to give each conclusion its punch. By contrast, the command in Acts is the beginning of a new story, and the rest of the book of Acts—and the bulk of the New Testament—is a record of what happened as those first disciples went forth to do as they had been instructed.

Consider This: What can we learn from the differences between these five passages?

■ What do some or all of these accounts have in common? What is important about these commonalities?

II. Witnesses (Review Mark 5:18–20; Acts 4:8–13; Acts 22:15, 16; and 1 John 1:1–3 with the class.)

The amazing witnessing recorded in Acts was based on personal experiences that the disciples and the other early Christians had had with Jesus (see 1 John 1:1–3). The disciples had experienced Jesus in many ways; they had seen, touched, and associated with Him. Once the disciples had gotten to know Jesus, their lives had changed, and they were able to tell others what they had experienced. So if we think about how we get to know God and learn about Him, we can discover ways in which we can share our experience with others.

Consider This: Why is an experience with Jesus foundational to any kind of witnessing?

■ What are some of the ways in which we can get to know Jesus that also can serve as ways in which we can share our knowledge and experience of Him with others?

III. Evangelists (Review Acts 6:1–7 and Acts 13:1–49 with the class.)

As the group of witnesses and believers grew and new needs arose, people were appointed to minister to these needs. For example, in Acts 6, the first
deacons were appointed following a meeting called by the Twelve to discuss the distribution of food to widows. But the real purpose of this appointment was to free the Twelve to be more focused on evangelism. In a similar way, gifted individuals, such as Paul and Barnabas, were appointed in formal and informal ways to focus on specific tasks of evangelism—becoming full-time “witnesses” to the Person and mission of the early church.

**Consider This:** How would you explain the difference between witnessing and evangelism?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Throughout this quarter there is sure to be quite a bit of discussion about the “how”—the rights and wrongs—of evangelism. These are important discussions, because the call to be evangelists is an invitation to present and represent God to a world of sinners who desperately need Him, even when they may not always know it. This calling requires the best of thinking, learning, praying, sharing, and working, which is what we should ardently strive to do in our study groups during this quarter.

**Application Questions:**

1. Think about how natural it was for Jesus’ first disciples to witness. If it seemed like a natural and easy thing for them to do, despite continual opposition, why is it so often awkward for us, and how can we overcome the obstacles?

2. To what degree should the church in Acts be a model for evangelism today? In what ways are we as a church different from the early church? How is our world different? What principles of outreach used by the church in Acts can we apply in order to meet these differences?

3. When we talk about witnessing, we may feel discouraged that we don’t have a strong enough relationship with God upon which to base our witnessing. How can we be confident enough in our Christianity to be able to share it with others? Conversely, how can witnessing to others actually be a factor in the growing of a stronger relationship with God?

4. At the outset of this quarter’s study, discuss some guidelines for appropriate witnessing. What are some things that we should not do in witnessing? Why?

5. How do we find a balance between not offending, upsetting, or annoying...
people to whom we are trying to witness, and impressing upon them the importance of knowing Jesus?

6. What is the importance of the distinction between witnessing and evangelism?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: These activities are intended (1) to prompt class members to develop a growing awareness of their personal witness and that of their church and (2) to monitor how that awareness will progress during the course of this quarter.

Suggestions for individual activities: Provide paper and pens to class members and ask them to write down the names of three friends for whom they would like to pray during the course of this series of lessons. These three friends should be people whom the class member knows personally and whom he or she would like to see come to know Jesus and/or join the church. Challenge class members to pray every day during this three-month period for their three people and for the opportunity to be witnesses to them. Ask them to retain the piece of paper as bookmarks in their study guides or Bibles and to report back to the class at the conclusion of this quarter about the ways in which they might have seen God answer their prayers.

Suggestions for group or team activities: As a class, conduct an “audit” of your church’s witnessing and evangelism. Make a list of things that your church members participate in that might be considered evangelism, using a broad understanding of what is included in that term. When you have made a list that class members consider to be comprehensive, rank the different activities or projects as to how well they fulfill the gospel commission. (You can either order them in reflection of their importance/effectiveness or score them from 1 to 10, with 10 being excellent.) Allow for class members to express a variety of opinions in relation to these questions. Retain the list so that you may revisit it at the conclusion of this set of lessons. After completing this quarter, consider whether class members changed any of their views as to what constitutes evangelism. Also consider what is most important or effective in this task.
Lesson 2  *April 7–13
(page 14 of Standard Edition)

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 which it 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 church-planned, 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 inwardly 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 coworkers 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

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 down 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?
The Lesson in Brief

►Key Text: 1 Peter 2:9

►The Student Will:

**Know:** Discuss what it takes to have a growing, personal relationship with God, and the ways in which one can share this relationship with others.

**Feel:** Feel the encouragement and rejoicing that rises out of the act of collaborating with the Holy Spirit and the church body in servanthood.

**Do:** Work toward the common goals of the body of Christ as a fellow laborer in the harvest fields.

►Learning Outline:

I. Know: Harvest Workers

A How does a passionate relationship with the Lord of the harvest translate into servant ministry in the harvest?

B What are the common goals that we share with the body of Christ?

C What corporate strategies do the harvest workers use in order to strengthen the work?

II. Feel: Common Joys

A How does the reporting of progress in witnessing and evangelism add to God’s glory and encourage the church?

B Why is it important to collaborate with the Holy Spirit in both individual and corporate labors? How does the Holy Spirit draw workers into unity?

III. Do: Common Goals

A In your opportunities for individual witness, how can you pass along to others that which you have received in your relationship with Christ?

B How can you encourage your fellow laborers for Christ?

►Summary: As members of the body of Christ, each of us has a personal ministry in the sharing of what He has done for us, as well as a responsibility to the whole body to cooperate in the local and worldwide work.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Twice called, each member receives not one but two invitations from God: to be saved and to serve. First and foremost, God calls us into a relationship with Himself, and, as a result of this relationship, He calls us to perform a personal ministry with others in the work of outreach and evangelism.

**Just for Teachers:** How easily we (those of us living, that is, in the individualistic cultures of our world) forget that Christianity is primarily communal. Most of the New Testament is written to “you” in the plural sense, a group of believers who believe together and work together to build God’s kingdom and share their lives. Except when addressing specific individuals by name, Paul refers to God’s people in a singular sense only when he writes to them as part of the larger body of Christ. In other words, we are “single” Christians only when we are working so closely with others that we can be described as part of the one body.

**Opening Activity:** Ask students to think of examples of teamwork that exist in various sectors of life. Examples could include sports teams, business and corporate teams, a group of people working on a theater production, a team of builders on a construction site, the staff of a restaurant kitchen, and so many more. When performing optimally, these groups work together for a common goal or cause. Choose one of these examples (perhaps a sports team might be one of the more familiar ones), and discuss the different roles played within such a team. Obviously, while there are different roles played within the on-field team, there are so many others off the field who also make a contribution, including coaches, managers, medical staff, and even bus drivers, cheerleaders, and water carriers. How infinitely more important is teamwork for each church member when participating in the much more vital mission of sharing with the world God’s love and message of salvation.

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** This section provides an opportunity to consider and discuss Bible texts that describe the individual and team roles in the evangelistic mission that God has given to His people.
Bible Commentary

I. Reconciling People to Him (Review 2 Corinthians 5:15–20 with the class.)

When we begin to appreciate that which God has done for us, we soon realize that what He has done is not just about us. Nor is it for us only. Furthermore, we realize we have something so vital and astounding that it must be shared with other people. That which God has done, thanks to His love for us, motivates us to allow Him to do still more through us. We become agents of hope and ambassadors of reconciliation. It remains God’s work, but we become a means by which that work advances in the world.

Consider This: A lack of appreciation for the acts and love of God may be one reason that many people do not prioritize evangelism. How can this be remedied?

What is the significance of the word reconciliation in these verses? What does this add to our understanding of the gospel and of the sharing of it?

II. Equipping for God’s Work (Review Ephesians 4:11–13 with the class.)

As Paul was traveling around and establishing churches, he demonstrated the importance of a basic church structure, explaining that God had ordained the complementary roles that different individuals might serve within the church community. Clearly, these divisions of roles and labor dictate some kind of organization or structure with the specific purpose of equipping God’s people for mission, for the doing of God’s work, and for the building up of the church.

Consider This: How do we find the balance between specific, professional ministry roles and the idea that we all have ministries and roles to play in evangelism? What are the dangers of focusing too much on specialized ministry or, alternatively, on general ministry?

III. Planting and Harvesting (Review John 4:35–41 with the class.)

When we talk about evangelism, our first thought is often of large-scale public evangelistic programs. This is one form of evangelism, but, in many cases, it is only part of a longer process. Increasingly, such events are being described as “reaping” events. Rather than being considered as complete evangelism, such events work best as part of a larger plan, complementing the efforts
of churches and individual members in a given community, sometimes over a period of years. Perhaps we are coming to understand more of the process that is described by Jesus in these verses.

**Consider This:** How can this model of planting and harvesting encourage us when we sometimes seem to see few results for our evangelistic efforts?

**IV. By the Spirit’s Power to the Whole World** *(Review 1 Thessalonians 1:5–8 and Acts 14:27 with the class.)*

Paul and Barnabas had been sent out across the then-known world to tell the good news about Jesus. On their return to their commissioning church at Antioch, they made sure that they reported back, telling these church members what the Holy Spirit had done in the regions they had visited. These were some of the first “mission stories,” a tradition that continues in the church today. Such reports, when they show successes and God at work, should encourage the church and challenge members to remain faithful to the task still to be completed.

**Consider This:** Why are “mission stories” important in the life of the church?

- *How do we, in talking about the work of evangelism, find the balance between our work and that of the Holy Spirit’s?*

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** When we talk about every member as a minister, we could be tempted to think of working in isolation rather than focusing on the fact that each member should play a role in an active and effective community that in itself is a powerful witness. Lesslie Newbigin reminds us that the church community is itself one of our greatest arguments for the gospel: “How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”—*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans® Publishing Co., 1989), p. 227.

**Application Questions:**

1. How does your local church work effectively as a team when reaching out to, meeting the needs of, and sharing the gospel in your community? How could this outreach be improved?
2 Which is more important, and why: for church members to be trained to do evangelism, or for them to see that they have the potential for evangelism?

3 In light of the planting and harvesting model of evangelism described by Jesus in John 4, how might we best define evangelism?

4 What might the risks be to a church that becomes “stuck” in planting mode? What might that stasis mean? What role does the Holy Spirit play in preventing this from happening?

5 How might the church, in upholding the “reapers,” sometimes discount the “planters”? How can we train church members to be better “planters”?

6 If every member is a minister and evangelist, how accountable should members be to the church in this ministry? Or are we accountable only to God? Give reasons for your answer, based on Scripture.

7 Mission stories can sometimes tempt us to triumphalism, self-centeredness, or even the stretching of the truth. What are some principles for the telling of better mission stories?

STEPPING 4—Create

Just for Teachers: This activity is intended to work as an audit of the many activities and programs conducted by the church and its members in light of the planting-and-harvest model as described by Jesus in John 4:35–41. This should prompt class members to think about the different activities that might be considered evangelism and to appreciate the roles that all members can play in the witness of the church.

Suggestion for group or team activity: As a class, spend time considering the outreach and evangelistic activities of the church as being part of the growth process of planting to harvesting. On a sheet of paper or on a blackboard or whiteboard, draw three columns, label them “Planting,” “Watering,” and “Harvesting,” and ask class members to suggest activities, events, or programs conducted by the church or individual members that could fit into these different categories. As the lists grow, look at how items in each column might fit together as an evangelistic plan. Also, consider whether the church, as a whole, has only a few items listed in any one column. If so, what could be done to focus more on this aspect of the growing of people toward God? Close with prayer for these different activities by humbly asking God to use these programs and church members to grow a harvest in your community for His kingdom.
Lesson 3  *April 14–20

(Sabbath Afternoon)

Spiritual Gifts for Evangelism and Witnessing

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?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Ephesians 4:11, 12

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize what spiritual gifts are and the ways in which his or her gifts fit in with the work of the church.
Feel: Be aware of the dependence of the church on his or her individual spiritual gifts, as well as his or her dependence on the Holy Spirit for the expression of these gifts in the work of the church.
Do: Share his or her gifts generously for the building up of Christ’s body.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Identifying Our Gifts

A How do spiritual gift seminars, previous experiences in ministry, and requests for our services from the church help to inform us regarding the nature of our gifts for ministry?
B How do personal, spiritual ministries fit into the corporate work of the church in the saving of souls?

II. Feel: Made to Help

A Why does the Holy Spirit give gifts?
B In what ways is the work of the church dependent on the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to us to use in ministry?

III. Do: Sharing Generously

A How would our ministries change if we were to be more generous with the use of our spiritual gifts?
B What steps do we each need to take in order to identify our gifts and incorporate them into the mission of the church?

Summary: The Holy Spirit has given us spiritual gifts to use in both our individual witnessing and the corporate ministries of the church, and He calls us to be generous in the sharing of these gifts.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Through the Holy Spirit’s giving of spiritual gifts to the church, each believer is equipped to take part with other believers in the great work of spreading the gospel.

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following meditation about gifts to help class members to appreciate the fact that spiritual gifts are a direct endowment from the Holy Spirit to the body of Christ, and are given in order to equip the church in its work of evangelism and witnessing.


For 2,000 years, this story has repeated itself in the life of every believer when he or she is born again by grace through faith into God’s “royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). Summoned from the darkness of unbelief, these royal priest-kings now minister to the High Priest and sovereign God against whom they once rebelled. As in the original story, there are kings who make a journey—kings who bring gifts in honor of a newborn’s life. But this time the gifts are as heavenly and eternal as the Kings who bear them—gifts of mercy, healing, teaching, prophecy, and leadership.

Gold fluctuates in value. Frankincense and myrrh lose potency with time. But the spiritual gifts of the Three Wise and eternal Kings of heaven never lose value. Royal gifts from royal Kings, given to equip the royal priesthood of all believers to save souls.

**Discuss:** What does it mean to belong to a “royal priesthood” of believers? In what way should that influence how we live out our lives? How does it make you feel, knowing that God the Father and the Son, through the Person of the Holy Spirit, come to us at our new birth (just as the wise men of the East came to Jesus at His birth) to bestow the riches of heaven upon us? How should this attitude influence our reverence for God and our appreciation for His spiritual gifts?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** This section provides opportunities to explore examples and instructions from the first Christian believers regarding the ways in which church members can use their spiritual gifts to share the good news about Jesus.
Bible Commentary

I. Allowing God’s Generosity to Flow (Review 1 Peter 4:10, 11 with the class.)

The Bible tells us that we each have been endowed by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts that should be used in the service of God and the gospel, and to minister to the world. First Peter 4:10 urges us to “use them well to serve one another” (NLT). This verse is a call to stewardship of our gifts, abilities, and opportunities. This call asks that we seek to identify our gifts, and develop and use them as they are best suited to God’s work. But we must remember that this work is for the glory of God, for it is God’s work and generosity that flow through us.

Consider This: What does it mean for each of us to “manage” the gifts that God gives us?

How is the concept of stewardship helpful in our understanding of how we use God’s gifts?

II. Sent Out by the Holy Spirit (Review Acts 13:1–5 with the class.)

The story in Acts specifically identifies the role of the Holy Spirit in the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas as some of the first international missionaries. The church leaders were praying and fasting when they heard from the Holy Spirit, and while it was these men who laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas, verse 4 specifically says that they were “sent out by the Holy Spirit” (NKJV). It seems that these leaders were so connected with the Spirit that their actions were said to be those of the Spirit’s.

Consider This: How do we maintain the right balance between human decisions or planning and the Holy Spirit’s leading?

III. A Body of Gifts (Review 1 Corinthians 12:27–31 and Ephesians 4:11, 12 with the class.)

In a number of places in the New Testament the apostles give a list of roles or gifts within the church in order to highlight the variety of these roles. But these listings also portray the unity of purposes amid the diversity of roles. Each member “is a part of it” (1 Cor. 12:27, NLT), and the church functions best when we play these many roles together. We should not expect uniformity in the church—we do not all look, think, or act
alike, nor should we. In fact, we should see the many differences as sources of health and strength within the body.

**Consider This:** How can we learn to better appreciate the differences between the members of the church? How can we recognize these as sources of strength?

- What is the significance of these verses in 1 Corinthians 12 as the lead into the “love chapter”—1 Corinthians 13?

### IV. Worshiping, Working, and Growing Together *(Review Acts 2:40–47, 6:1–7 with the class.)*

The early church described in Acts focused on community and mission. The members shared their lives in practical ways and organized their leadership so that they could focus on their areas of giftedness *(see Acts 6:1–7)*. This structure supported and built up the newly formed group of believers into a new kind of community that served as an example of a new way to live by faith in God. This community also served as a base for the proclamation of the good news about Jesus, as well as a place where new believers could belong. By worshiping, sharing, and working together, these early believers attracted more believers, and God worked through this community to grow it further.

**Consider This:** To what degree do the descriptions of the early church in Acts suggest a pattern for how the church should function today?

#### STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The Bible’s instructions and examples of what it means to be part of a church as a group of believers are focused both on our individual commitments and on the roles we play as part of the larger group. A community is genuinely something greater than the sum of its parts. Together we can make the most advantages of our individual strengths.

**Application Questions:**

1. How important is the variety of spiritual gifts to the life of the church? Why does God not give the same gifts to everyone?
What is the difference between a spiritual gift and a natural ability? Even though they are given to us upon being reborn, why are spiritual gifts something we need to use or work on in order to improve?

Why do gifts sometimes seem to be unequally distributed? Why is it important to be content when we see others who seem to be more gifted than we are?

What are some of the ways in which a local church could better recognize, develop, support, and use the individual gifts of its members?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** These activities are intended to connect the specific spiritual gifts of class members with real ideas and opportunities for evangelism.

**Suggestions for individual activities:** Invite class members to spend time by themselves in order to reflect on things that they know they are good at and enjoy doing, as well as opportunities whereby they might use these gifts to represent God to others with whom they come in contact, especially to the people they committed to pray for (see Lesson 1).

**Suggestions for group or team activities:** Often when we plan an evangelistic program or event, the evangelistic plan comes first, and then we find people to fill the roles that the plan requires. Perhaps we might be better served to consider the gifts that each member has, and then consider the ways in which those gifts could best be used for an evangelistic plan, event, or program. Ask class members to identify the gifts that they recognize in each other. Make a list of these gifts and consider it as a group. What kind of evangelism could best utilize these gifts in the context of reaching out to your community? Begin to plan an event that seems to fit best with the gifts available, and pray together for the Spirit’s leading in the ways in which this might be able to occur.
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?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Acts 9:36

The Student Will:

Know: Describe how lifestyle can demonstrate to friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers the power of God in the transformation of his or her life.
Feel: Long to illustrate the beauty and goodness of God through the way in which he or she lives.
Do: Demonstrate the love and compassion of God for humankind in the ways in which he or she treats others.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Like a Book

A What aspects of everyday life illustrate to friends and neighbors that which God has done in our lives?
B How did Christ identify with those whom He came to serve? How did He demonstrate that He knew their needs and accepted and loved them just as they were?

II. Feel: Heart Service

A What emotions are awakened when we are thoughtfully cared for?
B How can our hospitality draw those we serve to Christ?
C What other aspects of the beauty and goodness of God are revealed in the ways in which we live?

III. Do: Hospitality Evangelism

A How can we identify with the needs of others in our neighborhoods and workplaces?
B What touches our hearts most in ministries of the church, and how can we use this understanding when reaching out to others?
C What can we do for others that may illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts?

Summary: The work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is shared by the ways in which we live in loving and compassionate service for others.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: An effective, witnessing lifestyle flows naturally from a sanctified life.

Just for Teachers: In this very practical lesson we focus on living a true Christian life, where who we are (how we live) takes priority over what we merely profess. Invite students to consider the following proverbs as a way of motivating them to understand how important it is that, as Christians, we must back up our words with loving actions.

“Talk doesn’t cook rice,” states one Chinese proverb. “A promise is a cloud; fulfillment is rain,” according to an Arabian proverb. The Italians wisely observe that “between saying and doing many a pair of shoes is worn out.” “When deeds speak, words are nothing,” says an African proverb. And the wisest man who ever lived asserted, “Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool” (Prov. 19:1, NKJV).

Consider This: Why are actions more credible than words? What happens when the words and actions of a person do not correspond? What do you think is the cause of such a situation? If your witness were to be summed up in a proverb by others, what would that proverb state?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: With your class, carefully examine the biblical passages for each section, looking for the key points.

Bible Commentary

I. An Open Letter—Forgery or Genuine? (Review John 13:35 and 2 Corinthians 3:2, 3 with the class.)

What is the difference between a true and a false follower of Christ? In John 13:35, we are clearly given the sign that identifies genuine followers of Christ: those who demonstrate Christlike love without selfishness or pride. It is a love that acknowledges the dignity of every person through a demonstration of courtesy, tenderness, and benevolence.
The believers in Corinth were an “open letter” for all to read by exhibiting a genuine heart change and allowing the Holy Spirit to write on the “tablets of human hearts,” rather than just external “tablets of stone” (2 Cor. 3:3, NASB; compare Jer. 31:33.)

Consider This: Read the following texts and then answer the questions: Jeremiah 17:1, Exodus 31:18, Ezekiel 36:25–27, Jeremiah 32:38–40.

Note that sin uses an “iron stylus” with a very sharp diamond point to engrave itself on our hearts (Jer. 17:1, NASB). “The names of idols were engraved on the horns of their altars with such a tool. The idea is that Judah’s sin was . . . etched in them as if into stone. How much different to have God’s Word written on the heart ([Jer.] 31:33).”—The MacArthur Study Bible, note on Jeremiah 17:1, pp. 1086, 1087. Notice the type of writing instrument that God uses to write that law (Exod. 31:18). Iron implies that the heart of the sinner is unyielding. In contrast, the finger of God shows God’s desire to replace that hardness with flesh and to write His law there intimately and personally. How is God’s law transferred from the “tablets of stone” (NKJV) to our hearts? What does it mean to have God’s law written on our hearts? (See Ezek. 36:25–27.)

II. High Unemployment (Review Matthew 9:36–38 with the class.)

Jesus sees plenty of work to do for His kingdom and yet so few workers. Rather than urging His small group of disciples to work faster or longer hours, Christ urges them to “beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers” (Matt. 9:38, NASB). Notice in this phrase who is in charge of the harvest.

Discuss: Why does Jesus urge His disciples to pray for more workers rather than to work harder? How much time do we spend praying versus doing? Which act is easier, and why—to pray or to work? What is the relationship between prayer and work? How does too little prayer affect our work? How does too little work affect our prayer life?

Consider This: “As activity increases . . . there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith. Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to make a savior of our activity. We need to look constantly to Jesus, realizing that it is His power which does the work. While we are to labor earnestly for the salvation of the lost, we must also take time for meditation, for prayer, and for the study of the word of God. Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and sanctified by the
merit of Christ, will in the end prove to have been efficient for good.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 362.

III. Being Culturally Relevant * (Review 1 Corinthians 9:20–22 and Hebrews 4:15, 16 with the class.)

Paul was sensitive to the needs, values, and circumstances of his various audiences. He did not needlessly offend or overwhelm them with his knowledge and experience. He learned of their interests and met them where they were, speaking in ways that they would be able to relate to, while never compromising his principles. Paul adapted his methods in order to win people to Christ. He was more concerned about the effectiveness of his proclamation than he was of his own rights and knowledge.

Jesus Himself used this method. *(See John 1:14; Heb. 4:15, 16.)* Setting aside His own rights and power, Jesus became one of us, experiencing the suffering of life as we know it. As one who can “sympathize with our weaknesses” and “who has been tempted in all things” *(Heb. 4:15, NASB)*, He now serves as our heavenly High Priest.

**Consider This:** Read aloud 1 Corinthians 9:22, 23. Why did Paul use this method when reaching others? How effective was Paul’s method? How do we know? In what ways does the example of Jesus rebuke our pride and, at times, aloofness from unbelievers? How can we incorporate the methods of Jesus and Paul into our lives?

►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The point of this activity is to help the class see the ways in which Jesus related to a wide variety of individuals. Although Jesus had many positive results, there were also those individuals who refused His witness. This should be of encouragement to the students as they relate to others.

**Activity:** Using a whiteboard or large sheet of paper, create a chart similar to the one on page 52 and guide the class members as they fill it out.

►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Have writing materials available so that your class can copy the following chart to use individually in this final activity. *(To save time, prepare copies beforehand for distribution.)* The category “What I Can Do for Them” is intended to bring intentionality to those relationships and is not
just meant to be a to-do list. Activities can be “pray for their upcoming test,” “show them support by inviting them for a meal,” and so on.

**Activity:** Looking at the chart “Considering the Context,” what can we learn from Jesus’ method of interacting with a wide range of people? Think of people you know and make a similar chart. For the category “What Jesus Did for Him/Her,” write in “What I Can Do for Them.” Pray for an opportunity to minister to each person and record the results in the final column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What We Know About Him/Her</th>
<th>Expressed Need/Desire</th>
<th>Unexpressed/Unrecognized Need</th>
<th>What Jesus Did for Him/Her</th>
<th>The Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John the Baptist (Luke 7:18–23)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Woman at the well (John 4:1–30)</td>
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Lesson 5 *April 28–May 4

Sequential Evangelism and Witnessing

SABBATH AFTERNOON


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:

1. “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?

2. “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?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 2 Corinthians 3:2

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Explain why it is important to sequence the presentation of the gospel, starting with simple, relationship-oriented truths, and proceeding to the more testing truths that lead to commitment.

**Feel:** Empathize with both the physical needs of the people and their spiritual needs.

**Do:** Provide a nurturing, protective environment for the growing of the gospel seed in those to whom he or she ministers.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: From Relationship to Commitment

- **A** How did Christ consider the developing needs of the seeds of the gospel that were planted in His disciples and other listeners?
- **B** Why should truths that build a relationship with God be presented before testing truths that call for commitment and change?
- **C** How can open-ended questions help us to understand the degree of spiritual growth in those with whom we are working?

II. Feel: Caring Shepherd

- **A** Why is it important to provide for both spiritual and physical needs in ministry? How did Jesus model this approach?
- **B** What examples exist from Christ’s ministry that show people who partook of Christ’s care for their physical needs but rejected His spiritual truths?

III. Do: Protecting Tender Growth

- **A** What are the various challenges that face young growing Christians in their families and communities?
- **B** How can we nurture and protect these young Christians as they develop stability in the faith?

**Summary:** We should present gospel truths that first lead souls to a loving and saving relationship with Christ and then challenge young believers to commitment and obedience.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Ministering to people and guiding them on a closer walk with Jesus requires patience and planning.

Just for Teachers: It is helpful when establishing good witnessing and Bible teaching practices to look at the ways in which Jesus, Paul, and Peter led people to God in a needs-sensitive, logical sequence.

Opening Story: Imagine that it is your first day of school ever. You are excited, yet nervous about your upcoming experience. Walking into the classroom, you are greeted warmly by the teacher, who invites you to sit at a desk loaded with books. After a loud bell rings, the teacher tells you to open your physics book to the chapter titled “Quantum Mechanics and Path Integrals.” Because you haven’t yet learned to read, it’s a little hard to find the right page. You begin to wonder if maybe you’re not smart enough to be in school.

Consider This: While we would never expect a first-grader to do college-level work, how often do we, in our well-intentioned eagerness in witnessing, try to get to the “meat” of the Bible with someone before first establishing a personal relationship and an understanding of basic Bible teachings?

STEP 2—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. Christian Ministry (Review Matthew 25:35–40 with the class, along with Deuteronomy 15:7–11, Job 29:12–16, and Isaiah 58:7.)

The acts listed here are simple: feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty something to drink, being hospitable to strangers, giving clothing to those in need, and visiting those who are sick or in prison. These acts of love require no special training or skill, just a heart full of love for those in need. Furthermore, Jesus assures us that when we do these things for someone, it is the same as if we were ministering directly to Him.

Caring for the poor and needy has long been a hallmark of those who love
God. As early as Moses’ time, the Israelites were told not to “‘harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother’” (Deut. 15:7, NASB). In looking over his life, Job remembers helping the poor, the orphans, the widows, and being “‘a father to the needy’” (Job 29:16, NASB).

Consider This: In Isaiah 58:6, the “fast” that God chooses is remarkably similar to the list found in Matthew 25:35–40. Have the class read and compare these two texts, recording the similarities. Why are these acts of charity so important to God? Why are we also ministering to Jesus when we relieve the suffering of those in need? What precedence does the Bible give for relieving the physical needs of people before addressing their spiritual needs?

II. Milk, Then Solids (Review 1 Peter 2:1, 2 and 1 Corinthians 3:1–3 with the class.)

Both passages refer to milk as food for those who are young in the faith. In 1 Peter 2:2, we notice that the young in faith are encouraged to “long for the pure milk of the word” (NASB) to grow stronger in their faith. In order to experience this growth, the previous verse points out the need to put aside all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander.

Unfortunately, it seems that the believers in Corinth were still struggling with those issues (see 1 Cor. 3:3). As a result, their Christian growth was stunted, and they were not yet ready to learn the deeper spiritual truths that Paul longed to share.

In spiritual nourishment, as in physical, the dietary progression goes from basic milk to the more substantial “solid food”—the kind that can be more readily digested once the new believer’s understanding has grown.

Discuss: Why are newborns given milk rather than solid food for nourishment and growth? Why did Peter urge the new believers to put aside the negative attributes listed in 1 Peter 2:1 before drinking “the pure milk of the word” (NASB)? What are some of the easier biblical teachings that make up the “milk,” and what are some of the deeper ones that go beyond it?

Consider This: Regarding the believers in Corinth, we are told that “those addressed in these words had not been feeding on Christ, and therefore they were not advanced in spiritual knowledge. Paul said, ‘I have fed you with milk’—the plainest, most simple truths, suitable for converts young in the faith; ‘not with meat’—the solid, nourishing, spiritual food suited to those who have made progress in a knowledge of divine things. They were living on a low level, dwelling on the surface truths which call
for no thought, no deep research.”—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 70, 1901.

III. Hard Sayings (*Review John 6:54–66 with the class.*)

In reading this “hard saying” (*NKJV*), it is important to back up and read more of Jesus’ teaching, beginning with verse 41. Here we see several basic points raised by Jesus that help to prepare us for the challenging passage, beginning in verse 54. The points include (1) accepting Jesus as God’s Son, sent from the Father; (2) understanding that it is God who draws us to Himself; (3) not only hearing but learning; (4) accepting Jesus as our Savior in order to have eternal life. Following these basic points (the “milk”), Jesus presents more solid food in the offering of Himself as the Bread of Life. More than just the daily manna that fed the Israelites in the wilderness, Jesus invites us to partake of Him in order to be eternally satisfied.

**Discuss:** Why did Jesus use such a graphic metaphor in John 6:54–66? Did the hearers really think that Jesus was encouraging cannibalism, or were they using this hard saying as an excuse to walk away when Jesus did not meet their expectations? Give reasons for your answers. How are we, when confronted with a difficult teaching, tempted to do the same?

**Consider This:** “Christ used the figure of eating and drinking to represent that nearness to Him which all must have who are at last partakers with Him in His glory. The temporal food we eat is assimilated, giving strength and solidity to the body. In a similar manner, as we believe and receive the words of the Lord Jesus, they become a part of our spiritual life, bringing light and peace, hope and joy, and strengthening the soul as physical food strengthens the body.”—Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 105.

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Activity:** Choose two willing volunteers to read the skit below. After the skit, invite the class to come up with a dialogue that better illustrates a “milk-to-solid food” sequencing.

**NEW BIBLE STUDENT:** I’m happy that you’ve come to study the Bible with me. I’ve been wanting to understand it better.

**BIBLE TEACHER:** I’m glad to be here, and I thought that because you were raised a Roman Catholic, you might be interested in studying about the mark of the beast for our first lesson.
NEW BIBLE STUDENT: Mark of the beast? . . . Sounds kind of strange. Could we start with something else? I’m sad because my grandmother just died. But even though I know she’s in heaven now, I can’t help feeling so sad.

BIBLE TEACHER: Oh, no! Your grandmother isn’t in heaven. She’s—

NEW BIBLE STUDENT: What? Do you think she’s in hell? You just don’t know what a saint she was! (Student reaches for a pack of cigarettes.)

BIBLE TEACHER: Please don’t smoke! It makes me feel sick. Besides, don’t you know that your body is the temple of God and that you should be taking better care of that temple?

NEW BIBLE STUDENT: Well, uh . . . I don’t know exactly what you mean. But, uh, anyway, why don’t you try one of these ham sandwiches? Hopefully, it will help your stomach feel better.

BIBLE TEACHER: Uh . . . sorry. I think I need to be going now. Perhaps we could reschedule our Bible lessons for another time?

NEW BIBLE STUDENT: I don’t know. I’m not sure I’m so interested in Bible study after all.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The point of this activity is to help class members to build confidence in the effective sequencing of Bible study so that the needs of various Bible students are met.

Activity: On a sheet of paper, make a list of the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church but leave the beliefs unnumbered and mix up the order. Duplicate the paper so that everyone in the class has a copy. Invite your students to look down the list and put a star beside the top five basic (or “milk”) beliefs and a check mark by the top five advanced (or “meat”) beliefs. Then put the class into pairs or small groups (depending on the class size) and instruct them to number the beliefs in an order that would make a good Bible study sequence for someone who wants to understand Bible teachings.

Encourage your class members to start small-group, Bible studies in their homes, places of work (many employers allow for such activity during the day, such as on lunch breaks), or other welcoming venues. Remind them to arrange the Bible study topic sequence appropriately for their particular study group.
Lesson 6  *May 5–11  

(page 46 of Standard Edition)  

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”?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Isaiah 43:10

Student Will:

Know: Outline the reasons that personal witness is so effective in the saving of souls.

Feel: Emulate the attitudes and dispositions that Christ used to attract others to Himself.

Do: Live a life, through God’s grace, that can win others to Christ.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Power of Being Personal

A Why are spouses, friends, and neighbors in positions to witness powerful demonstrations of what it means for Christ to live out His life in us?

B What kinds of people has God used in the past to speak for Him? What gave them the credentials to speak for God?

C What simple phrase did the woman at the well and the disciples use in order to share that which they had found in Christ?

II. Feel: Loving and Lovable

A What attitudes did Christ have that drew seekers of the truth?

B What attitudes must we have in order to win over loved ones without preaching or nagging?

III. Do: Actions That Speak

A What do we need to do in order to prepare to give a reason for the hope that lights our way?

B What kinds of conversations that we have with our family, friends, and neighbors can the Holy Spirit use to draw souls to Christ?

C What kinds of actions speak louder than words when reflecting our relationship with God?

Summary: A personal witness is an invitation for others to take a closer look at the difference that God has made in our lives.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Our own day-by-day relationship with Christ is the true basis of all that we have to share with others.

Just for Teachers: Use this opening activity in order to help your students to share their real, everyday experiences with God.

Opening Activity: Ask the following questions:

• What Bible promise have you especially depended on this week?

• In what important way has God helped to change your life?

• What answer to prayer has meant the most to you in the recent past?

• What praise do you have for a special blessing that you have received lately?

• What element has caused a major turning point in your relationship to Jesus?

Invite class members to share a recent meaningful experience with God.

Consider This: Ask your class members about how they felt when hearing from one another. What does this experience illustrate about the simplicity of witnessing? Peter noted, in 1 Peter 3:15, that it is important to be prepared to give the reason for the hope that is in us. How might we practice sharing until the simple act of speaking of our experiences and hope in God becomes second nature?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Use this study in order to help your class to examine how various Bible characters influenced others around them through the sharing of their convictions, their faith, and their hope.
I. Being With Jesus (Review Acts 4:13, 14 with the class.)

Peter and John stand arraigned before the most powerful ecclesiastical body in their nation. The rulers of the Sanhedrin—among whom are the high priest, Annas, Caiaphas, scribes, elders, and members of the high priest’s family—demand to know by whose power these two men preach and heal.

Filled with the Holy Ghost, Peter gives an eloquent defense. In response to the testimony of Peter, the Bible records that the elders do four things. First, they see the boldness of Peter and John. They could not do this if Peter and John had not given them something to witness. The two disciples don’t fail to deliver. Passionately and faithfully devoted to the gospel, they seek to share its liberating message, regardless of the threat to their lives. They had fearlessly preached the resurrection the previous day, and the effect on the people had been so powerful that, notwithstanding the public arrest of Peter and John in the temple precinct, “many of those who heard the word believed” (vs. 4, NKJV). Arresting the two men seemed to be the perfect solution that would quench the interest sparked by the gospel. After all, who would want to join an offshoot movement that promised temporal loss and imprisonment, possibly death? If the Sadducees thought that arresting the disciples would serve as a deterrent to the people, the strategy backfired, for “the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (vs. 4, NKJV).

Second, the rulers perceive that Peter and John had not been educated in the rabbinical schools and had had no formal training in Old Testament theology. Rather, they spoke by the unction of the Holy Spirit (vs. 8), stressing the importance of whom we know over what we know. This is not to suggest that biblical knowledge and appropriate training are not essential—they are. But without the consecrating influence of the Holy Spirit to bless our training and efforts, they are as the apostle Paul says, “nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3).

Third, the rulers marvel. How could these unlearned, untrained men speak with such boldness, such authority, such power, such influence? From where did these qualities come?

The answer, the Bible tells us, is clear and immediate in the rulers’ minds. And that brings us to the fourth point of the rulers’ response. They realize without a doubt that Peter and John have “been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Moses’ face glowed when he carried the law down the mountain, testifying to the fact that he had communed with the Lord. When we spend time with God, God leaves visible tokens of His presence in our lives for others to witness. “And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it” (vs. 14, NKJV). Why did this silence the rulers? There was no way that Peter could have faked this miracle. This man was “lame from his mother’s womb” (Acts 3:2). The boldness with which Peter and John spoke, despite their lack of rabbinical school training, gave clear evidence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. And the miraculous healing
of the lame man all pointed incontrovertibly to the fact that these two men had “been with Jesus.”

Consider This: What does the disciples’ response, and the rulers’ reaction to it, reveal to us about what it means to have “been with Jesus”? Just as Moses’ face glowed after his time with God, and the lame man was healed, what visible tokens of God’s presence exist in our lives that reveal to others that we, too, have “been with Jesus”?

II. “Come and See” (Review John 1:37–39 with the class.)

One of the first things that Jesus’ earliest disciples did, as described in the first chapter of John, was bring others to Christ. And this was a direct result of Jesus’ drawing them to Himself. As the Lord said of Himself to Moses, the “‘one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him’” (Num. 16:5, NKJV).

Notice Jesus’ method of disciple making. His response to Andrew and John’s following Him was to turn and ask them a question: “‘What do you seek?’” (John 1:38, NKJV). From this eloquently simple question we learn the value of avidly seeking to engage the interest of those who are drawn into our sphere of influence. Notice also the nature of the question itself. It is direct without being forceful or overbearing; it is invitational without being coercive. It also implies that Jesus genuinely was interested in hearing their answers and in getting to know them personally.

Next, Jesus invited them personally to witness His life. Once He was assured of their interest, Jesus took advantage of the opportunity, while the flame of their curiosity was stoked, to invite them to come and see where He was staying. This was an invitation to come and witness firsthand for themselves His life of self-denial and sacrifice. Jesus was a gracious Host. He opened His life and His heart to them ungrudgingly, showing us how much value He places on each individual and the importance of the personal touch when reaching another’s life. For the Bible tells us, “They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day” (vs. 39, NKJV). From this personal one-on-one contact, Jesus turned avid curiosity into a genuine, heart desire to join His ministry.

Another valuable lesson is made manifest for us here. Andrew and John turned to Jesus because they were looking for the Lamb of God. This means that they were already seeking but didn’t have the wisdom to discern who Jesus was in the crowd surrounding John the Baptist. When the Baptist pointed out Jesus to them, their curiosity was aroused enough to follow Jesus.

There are many who “follow” us in our daily lives with their eyes and
thoughts, taking note of what we say and do, weighing and judging us. God’s own Spirit may, just as John the Baptist did, impress upon their hearts to “behold the Lamb of God” (vs. 29) in us. They may draw close to us, wanting to know more of who we are without directly asking. Like Jesus, we can ask them a question that implies an interest in their needs. We can offer them our hospitality. Notice, too, that Jesus, the great Miracle Worker and Physician, performed no visible miracle in order to draw Andrew and John to Him. No one was healed from leprosy; no one was raised from the dead. Water wasn’t turned into wine in order to attract their interest. No miracles other than the simple miracles of courtesy, hospitality, and kindness. What hope this should give to those of us who feel that just because we are not great evangelists or preachers no one would bother listening to us. Just a humble invitation was extended, one that we, too, can issue: Come, see for yourself.

Consider This: When each disciple followed the invitation to “come and see” and actually came face-to-face with Jesus, He took up His part in the starting of a relationship with these new acquaintances. What did He do? What challenges did the disciples face as they developed a relationship with Christ? In what ways can Jesus’ method of disciple making transform our own personal, witnessing efforts?

►STEP 3—Apply

Life Witness: How may our lives be transformed if we determine to accept everything that happens to us as permitted by Christ and falling first upon Him? How could this transformation affect all the lives that intermingle with our own?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Suggest the following activities to do during the week.

1. Plan a personal testimony service for a Friday evening, family worship. Ask each family member to tell about the most significant development in his or her relationship with God.

2. Brainstorm several ideas of ways in which you can improve your relationships with your neighbors. Consider sharing food, flowers, garden produce, or a service such as child care or respite care, for an elderly family member.
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?

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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?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** 2 Timothy 2:2

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Explain the benefits that come from cooperating with a team in the sharing of the gospel of Christ.

**Feel:** Sense the power and joy of harmonious labor that knits the body of Christ together in love.

**Do:** Unite with others in prayer and in the power of the Holy Spirit, each doing his or her part as the Spirit leads.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Building Together

A What are the benefits that come from sharing in the work of witnessing and evangelism with the other members of the church?

B What weaknesses that result from working alone can be alleviated in the organized labor of a group?

C How did the experience of the early church demonstrate the power and unity in evangelism that was brought about through prayer and the working of the Holy Spirit?

II. Feel: Harmonious Labor

A How is the body of Christ knit together in love through corporate work?

B How can setting goals, planning, and evaluating work together bring about harmonious working relations?

III. Do: Unity in Love and the Holy Spirit

A How can we experience the unity of the disciples before, during, and after Pentecost?

B What do we need to do in order to love one another better and work more closely together?

**Summary:** Working together under the direction of the Holy Spirit to set goals, plan, and evaluate our witnessing and evangelistic programs can draw us together in prayer and loving support for one another’s efforts.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Working together as part of a team in the sharing of the gospel is the true work of the body of Christ.

**Just for Teachers:** The purpose of the opening activity is to cultivate an appreciation for teamwork and to inspire members that they can be more successful in their witnessing and evangelistic efforts with the help of others.

**Opening Activity:** Ask class members to write their full names on a piece of paper. Then ask them to write their names with their opposite hands. Compare signatures. Which one is clearly the more legible?

Now ask your students to try the same exercise again using the hands that they normally write with, only ask them not to move their wrists or their arms as they write their name. How far do they get across the page?

**For Reflection and Discussion:** It is easy to take for granted or under-appreciate the effort involved in what one part of the body does until you assign that same task to another part. Then it becomes nearly impossible to execute. But even writing with the hand we use every day becomes difficult, if not impossible, when motion is restricted. The hand needs the wrist in order to write and to guide it across the page, as much as it needs the fingers to grip the pen. What does this tell us about how the different parts of the body are necessary in order to function as a team, supplying what is needed to perform a task? What application does this have for the way in which the different parts of the body of Christ function together?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Use this study in order to help your class to examine how teams worked together in the Scriptures.

I. The Body of Christ *(Review Ephesians 4:15, 16 with the class.)*

The Bible clearly states that the body of Christ is knit together “by what every
joint supplies” (vs. 16, NKJV). God designed the different parts of the church so that they may join together to satisfy one another’s needs. The important point is that Christ satisfies their needs only as they come together, and that results in growth.

**Consider This:** How does an understanding of the whole truth prepare members of Christ’s body for work in God’s harvest? In which areas is it critical to pull together? What happens to the work when church members don’t pull together? How does Christ keep us in step with one another?

**II. Witnessing and Evangelism, Part 1: Promises for Success** *(Review Psalm 37 with the class.)*

Psalm 37 is a treasure house of promises. One of the most powerful promises in all of Sacred Writ is found in verses 4, 5: “Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass” (NKJV). This promise offers endless possibilities for witnessing and evangelistic efforts.

Each promise in the Bible is a gift from God. A gift often tells us as much about the giver as it does the recipient. What does this promise tell us about God? It proclaims His staggering power and sheer strength. No human, no matter how rich or powerful, could make such an extravagant promise. Once a drunken king foolishly offered to give of his wealth to a girl who danced for him: “‘Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom’” (Mark 6:23, NKJV). He never dreamed she’d bypass his throne, a crown, and his pleasure ships to ask for the unwashed head of an imprisoned and dissident prophet.

But even that king’s promise of wealth, corrupt as it was, is but a faint shadow of what God offers here. Such a promise from the lips of a mere human is limited to that person’s sphere of influence and is hubristic at best. But God’s power is not constrained by human weakness, and He will hold nothing back from the faithful one who trusts in Him to keep His word, waiting on Him to bring the work to completion. What hope this promise offers to those of us who desire with all our hearts to see someone give his or her life to Jesus.

**Consider This:** What does it mean that God will give us the desires of our hearts? How do we avoid presumption in claiming this promise? How do we understand this promise in the context of witnessing and evangelism? According to Psalm 37, what is the fulfillment of this promise contingent upon?
What are some of the other promises in the psalm that offer assurance in our efforts to lead souls to Christ? What conditions of fulfillment does God place on the promises?

III. Witnessing and Evangelism, Part 2: Principles for Success (Review Psalm 37 with the class.)

The success of any group effort in evangelism and witnessing depends on the quality of the spiritual life of the individuals in the group. A powerful, effective witness begins with a consecrated life. Individuals must be consecrated to, and sanctified by, the truth that they teach, ever bearing in mind that truth is a Person, and that Person is Jesus Christ.

Psalm 37 is not only a storehouse of promises; it is a blueprint for entire consecration. Filled with principles for living a sanctified life, this blueprint, if followed, will empower and energize the group and its efforts to bring people to Jesus. These principles, lived out, enable us to realize the fullness and the riches of the promises contained in the psalm.

What are these principles? David begins with the injunction not to fret. To fret means “to worry, get anxious, be nervous, fear.” So essential is this injunction in his mind that he repeats it eight verses later: “Do not fret—it only causes harm” (NKJV). Why? Because worry is a form of lack of trust in God. It is the spoiled, decaying fruit of faithlessness and gives no nourishment to the spirit. His list of don’ts also includes don’t envy, cease from anger, forsake wrath, and depart from evil.

David admonishes those who wish for God to “bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday” (vs. 6, NKJV) to do a number of things in order to obtain His blessings: (1) trust in Him and (2) do good; (3) “feed on His faithfulness” (vs. 3, NKJV), (4) “rest in the Lord, and” (5) “wait patiently for Him” (vs. 7, NKJV). Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and often, it seems, one of the most unpalatable ones. Few of us like to wait. But the blessing of waiting is that it teaches us to trust in God and to distrust our own efforts. To rest in God is more than simply the act of waiting or being patient. Isaiah says there is no rest for the wicked. Sin robs the soul of rest and peace. To rest in the Lord is to let the soil of the soul lie fallow, to give it a Sabbath from sin, and to “feed on His faithfulness” (vs. 3, NKJV).

The singer of Israel also enjoins those who would seek the promises of God to be content with little. This is of vital importance. We must have an eye singularly set on the glory of God. To grasp after riches and worldly fame, to be ambitious and pursue the things of this world, is to divide the heart in its service to God. God wants all of us or nothing. Anything less than complete consecration to Him is torn allegiance. The highest work of every soul is the attempt to win others to heaven. Anything that diverts us from that goal is an idol. In contrast, the righteous, the psalmist says, show mercy and give (vs. 21).
The righteous person also speaks wisdom and seeks justice (vs. 30). The law of God is in his or her heart (vs. 31). Whoever does these things, the psalmist assures us, shall not slide. What marvelous assurance that God will uphold us during times of discouragement and temptation as we seek to lead the lost back to His fold.

Consider This: If the truth is a Person, as has been stated, what does it mean to have that Truth living inside you? What does it mean to be entirely consecrated to Jesus? What things must we avoid, according to Psalm 37, in order to live those consecrated lives? What are the principles of living consecrated lives? How do these principles help us to be successful in our group efforts of witnessing and evangelism?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Use the following discussion questions to examine practical aspects of teamwork.

Life Application:

When training workhorses to pull together, younger, untrained horses are usually harnessed to older, well-trained animals. As commands are given, the older horse obeys, teaching the younger one how the work is done as he or she responds to the master’s requests. How does this analogy translate in regard to work in the church? In what areas of church work can younger men and women learn to pull together in a harness with older, more experienced workers in the gospel?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Suggest the following ideas to do during the week.

1. Create a list that identifies similar interests and skills in service, hospitality, crafting, music, or other areas in which the members of your class may have interest.

2. Use this survey in order to identify teams that may assist in ongoing church ministries, as well as possible new programs. Recognize that teams may need people who have a balance of skills, not just those who have similar skills and interests.
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). He or she 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 endeavor 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 70 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?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Matthew 4:19

**The Student Will:**

- **Know:** Outline the different methods of training that Christ used when preparing His disciples to preach the gospel.
- **Feel:** Humbly depend on Christ’s direction and correction in all his or her personal witnessing and corporate evangelistic efforts.
- **Do:** Observe and participate in on-the-job training for evangelism and other personal and church ministries.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Under Christ’s Training

- A How did Christ use instruction, observation, participation, and cooperation to teach His disciples skills in ministry?
- B What similar methods are used today in the preparation of laborers for work in the harvest fields of the world?

II. Feel: Follow Me

- A What are our only guarantees of success in the sharing of the gospel of Christ?
- B What can we learn from the disciples’ failed attempts to heal the demoniac boy? To what did Christ attribute their failure?
- C What can cause failure in our work for Christ? How should we respond to failure in such a way that builds up, rather than destroys, the body of Christ?

III. Do: Hands-on Training

- A What are the types of training available to us that we should take advantage of?
- B In what practical procedures may we engage that can provide hands-on, on-the-job training in witnessing and evangelism?

**Summary:** In the same way that the disciples of Christ learned by direct instruction, observation, participation, and cooperation, so we may use similar methods by which to learn how to minister to others for their salvation.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Jesus equips us with the knowledge, skills, and training needed in order to be effective witnesses.

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following activity to help your class to identify the tools necessary for sharing the gospel.

**Opening Activity:** Bring a number of tools to class, such as scissors, hand plane, measuring tape, food mixer, paintbrush, and so on. Discuss how each tool enables a worker to accomplish his or her goal. How difficult would these jobs be if one didn’t have the proper tools? Ask if anyone is willing to share an experience about trying to do a job without the right equipment.

If there are professionals in the class, such as a doctor, nurse, lawyer, social worker, or teacher, ask about the tools that are required in their work. How are these tools different from the physical implements we wield with our hands? (If possible, you might ask a professional to prepare for his or her answer ahead of time in order to get a more thoughtful response.)

**Consider This:** What are the tools needed by those who work to save souls? How do we find these tools and learn how to use them?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Use this study to examine the ways in which we become equipped to do the work of God.

**Bible Commentary**


The feeding of the five thousand furnishes Christ’s disciples with the opportunity to observe, firsthand, many valuable lessons that can help to equip them for their future ministries. However, it is not only the miracle itself but the context in which it occurs that provides important lessons for us, as well as them.

First, the miracle takes place shortly after John the Baptist is beheaded. The Bible records that when Jesus heard this news He withdrew to a deserted
place. Jesus, fully divine and fully human, was feeling the direct effects and ultimate curse of sin—death, a state unnatural to Him. He was light, order, and life. And death was darkness, disorder, and destruction. But He had to experience John’s death as a man, without doing a thing to reverse it. With one word He could have uttered the phrase that would reattach the head of His cousin that had been severed from his body by Herod’s headsman. Instead, Jesus endured the loss in order to experience fully what it means to be deprived of a loved one by the sword of injustice and senseless cruelty so that He might enter fully into the sorrows and grief of all human beings and be equipped to comfort them.

Also, He endured it in order to announce to future generations who joined His cause that some would be called to suffer a martyr’s death, and all who desired to live godly lives would taste persecution. The full lesson for His disciples is that Jesus, the Creator of our emotions, did not deny His own emotions.

But nothing for Jesus was ever as easy as it is for us. Jesus was not even able to grieve like a normal man. Not without interruptions.

First, the Twelve come back from preaching the gospel, brimming with the need to tell Jesus about their experience. He observes that they are exhausted and have not even taken time to eat. He sees to their needs, inviting them to come to a quiet place where they can rest, eat, and talk, away from the noisy crowds. Here is another lesson for His disciples of then and now. He demonstrates the regard and compassion that every leader and shepherd should put forth for the members of his or her team. He sees to their needs first. When they are in danger of overworking, He draws them aside to rest and rejuvenate so that they can gather strength for the next ordeal. He communes with them, listening to their experiences, thus reinforcing His interest in their efforts and instilling a sense of accountability in them for the work done for Him.

Then Jesus is interrupted a second time. This time, as the multitude swarms the refuge, the disciples are there to witness firsthand the way in which Jesus deals with the intrusion. Jesus could have reacted with irritation. Instead, the Bible tells us that He responds with compassion. This love equips Him to ever perceive the true needs of people around Him. The people appear to Him as sheep having no shepherd. And as such, He sees them not as intrusions but as opportunities to impart the bread of life. He withholds nothing from them: He heals their sick and teaches them many things. In doing so, Jesus provides a visible demonstration of dealing graciously and selflessly with those He is seeking to save, even in the most stressful of situations.

Consider This: What does Jesus’ response to John’s death teach us about the way in which He views our emotional needs? What does this say to us about striking the right balance between taking care of our emotional health
and giving all we have to the cause of God? What does Jesus’ response to the two interruptions tell us of how we are to deal with our coworkers and others? What can we learn from Jesus about our handling of stressful situations?

II. “Looking Up to Heaven,” Part 2: Jesus, the Bread of Life

Evening is coming on, and the disciples seek to instruct Jesus that it is time to send the people away. Here’s an important lesson for us: whenever we, the students, seek to instruct Jesus, our Teacher, about what He should do or the way in which He should do it, we have forgotten our place. We are to sit at the feet of Jesus in humble submission, waiting patiently for His instruction. The disciples recognize the crowd’s hunger and exhaustion. Yet, they seem to forget that this was their own state not long ago. Jesus’ tender concern for their own needs should have inspired them with concern for others. Instead, the disciples, in their faulty human wisdom, tell Jesus to dismiss the crowd.

Notice Jesus’ response. He could have severely berated the disciples for their lack of compassion. However, He does not censure their weakness or vent His frustration at their hard-heartedness. Instead, ever the Great Teacher, He seeks to use the moment to instruct them in the selfless caring for others and providing for their needs, just as He sought to provide for His disciples’ needs hours earlier. How gracious that despite His disciples’ weakness, Jesus does not embarrass them in front of the crowd but seeks to use their failures as a tool by which to improve their understanding and rehabilitate them with a powerful lesson in how kindly God provides for all our needs.

Jesus could have turned the rocks at their feet into bread or caused manna to fall from heaven. But had He done so, He would have deprived His disciples of the valuable lesson that showed the importance of joining their efforts to His. The lesson in the five loaves and two fishes is meant to show that in God’s work, all that we bring to Him is never enough to do the work. But when we join our resources, however paltry, to His, He can work miraculously to multiply our talents and gifts in His service.

The disciples were busy looking at the magnitude of the crowd and the paltry-ness of the resources among them. But Jesus, the Bread of Life, was “looking up to heaven” (Matt. 14:19, NKJV). He demonstrated to the disciples the place where their eyes, and ours, should eternally focus. With our eyes fixed toward earth, we cannot see what God will do for us. But with our gaze fixed on heaven, we will not fail to see how God will supply that which we lack in every instance if we only place what we have in His hands.

Consider This: What hopeful assurance does the feeding of the five thousand give us in the work of distributing the bread of life to souls starving for salvation?
**STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: Use the following activity in order to highlight practical skills in which your students can develop expertise and then share with others. You will need two different colored sheets of paper or a chalkboard. Ask your students to ponder the following quote and then complete the exercise below.

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Hand out the two sheets of paper. On one colored sheet, ask your students to write down the things that they can do well when showing sympathy, ministering to needs, and winning the confidence of people. On the other sheet, ask your students to write down the skills that they desire to learn. (Option: You may use a chalkboard to brainstorm these two lists if your class is confident in sharing their strengths and needs aloud.)

Have some of your class members model some of the skills that they have. For example, someone who is good at remembering names may demonstrate how he or she remembers the name of a new acquaintance and then relate how this skill helps people to feel valued.

List the skills that class members would like to develop, and create a plan that will develop training in these areas.

**STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: Suggest the following ideas for activities during the week.

1. Shadow someone who has a skill in witnessing, evangelism, hospitality, or another ministry that you would like to develop. Keep a journal noting the techniques that you observe. Take some time to discuss these techniques with this person and assist him or her in a project in which he or she can oversee your development.

2. Find a mentor who is willing to call or meet you for a short time each week and encourage you in the development of a skill that he or she has that you desire to develop.
**Lesson 9**  
*May 26–June 1*  
( page 72 of Standard Edition)

**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?

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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:

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.
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Romans 10:15

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Describe why and how each church member should be involved in the sharing of the gospel of Christ.

**Feel:** Sense the close bonds of harmony crafted as he or she works together with others to save souls.

**Do:** Answer “Here am I; send me” (Isa. 6:8) to the call of ministry in the home, the community, and perhaps the world field.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Sharing the Load**

   A Why might some professionally trained gospel workers be reluctant to share ministry with relatively untrained laypersons? What can be done to build the leadership’s confidence in the laity’s efforts?

   B What responsibility does leadership carry in the preparation of each church member for ministry, and what role does the Holy Spirit play?

II. **Feel: Crafting Harmony**

   A How does working together to save souls promote harmony and build unity in the church?

   B What attitudes promote the development of close bonds as church members labor together in the cause of Christ?

III. **Do: Here Am I**

   A How shall we respond to a call to ministry from church leadership or the church nominating committee?

   B What field of labor is the most natural fit for your talents, age, and disposition? What field of labor may stretch you out of your comfort zone but still reflect a call to ministry that should be heeded?

**Summary:** All church members have a field of labor in which, with proper training, leadership, and the blessing of the Holy Spirit, they may utilize their spiritual gifts and social relationships in ministry.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** It’s not enough to be an “armchair evangelist.” It’s only through putting theory into practice that we can experience the incredible joy that comes from being an ambassador for Christ.

**Just for Teachers:** There’s often a vast gulf between “knowing” and “doing.” This week, help class members to identify common obstacles to action, and lead them to discover practical ways by which they can translate the theory of witnessing into a personal commitment to take action.

**Opening Activity:** On September 20, 2004, a 25-year-old woman, unconscious and bleeding profusely, lay with her head in the gutter on a busy street in south London. Surveillance cameras at the scene captured images of no fewer than 12 vehicles slowing down, swerving around the woman, and continuing on.

In New York, on April 18, 2010, a 32-year-old man was stabbed after he came to the aid of a woman who was being attacked by a knife-wielding assailant. Again, surveillance cameras recorded the scene as at least 25 people walked by—one stopping to snap a picture on his cell phone—while the wounded man bled to death on the sidewalk.—A. G. Sulzberger and Mick Meenan, “Questions Surround a Delay in Help for a Dying Man,” *New York Times*, April 25, 2010.

The reluctance to offer help to a stranger is what psychologists have called the “bystander effect.” In a renowned 1973 experiment, Princeton University psychologists John Darley and Daniel Batson explored the phenomenon within a religious context. They asked a group of seminarians from Princeton Theological Seminary to prepare a sermon and then walk to the building next door to present it. Some students were told to preach on the parable of the good Samaritan. As the students left the building, one by one, to deliver their sermons, they encountered a man “slumped in an alley, head down, eyes closed, coughing and groaning.”

Which students were more likely to stop to offer help? The most significant factor was not whether or not the students had prepared a sermon on the good Samaritan. Rather, it was whether the seminarian had been told he was running late or not. Of those told they had some time to spare, 63 percent stopped to help the man. Of those told they were late, only 10 percent stopped to help.

**Consider This:** According to the 2002 Adventist World Survey, less than 40 percent of Adventist Church members are engaged in sharing their
faith in their communities. How are we guilty of succumbing to the “bystander effect” when it comes to translating our knowledge and beliefs into action?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Throughout Scripture, God calls His people to action. Help your class to understand that this call to witness is not an “optional extra” for followers of Christ—it’s a personal mandate.

**Bible Commentary**

**I. Whose Responsibility, Anyway?** *(Review Exodus 18:13–26 and Acts 6:1–8 with the class.)*

These two biblical narratives—of Moses and the early Christian church—are separated by a vast gulf of time and circumstances. However, as you read the two stories, look for parallels between the situations that they describe. Then take it a step further: how many of the same challenges can you see reflected in your own twenty-first-century church family?

**Consider This:** Why is the delegation of responsibility sometimes so difficult for us to do? (Lack of trust? Reluctance to let go of personal control? Trouble believing others can do the job as well as we can? Unwillingness to burden others?) What are some of the possible outcomes if outreach leaders fail to share responsibilities?

- In the Exodus story, note the advice of Moses’ father-in-law (vss. 19–23). In what ways does this counsel (vs. 20, train/teach; vs. 21, match tasks to skills; vs. 22, mentor) describe an effective process for the delegation of responsibility within a spiritual community?

In spite of the often rigid social structures of the first-century Roman Empire, the early Christian church tried to reflect Christ’s ideal of a “family” of believers, united in faith and mission *(Gal. 3:8)*. Christianity offered women both respect and substantial participation in the life of the church *(Rom. 16:1, 2; Phil. 4:2, 3)*, which was available neither within pagan culture nor under Jewish law.

**Consider This:** Are there groups in your congregation that are consistently overlooked when it comes to planning and implementing mission activities? For instance, are young people, women, and ethnic or cultural
minorities well represented? If not, why not? How can diversity bring strength to a church’s outreach program?

**II. Beyond “Comfort-Zone Christianity”** *(Review John 4:36, Matthew 7:17, and Luke 6:43–45 with the class.)*

When our faith no longer bears “fruit” in our everyday relationships and activities, we’ve strayed into the dangerous realm of “comfort-zone Christianity.” Read Christ’s words in Matthew 5:13, and then read 2 Peter 1:5–9, noting particularly verse 8. What are the spiritual symptoms of someone who has lost his or her “saltiness” or who has become ineffective and unproductive in his or her faith?

**Activity:** Ask your class as a group to compile a list of characters from Scripture whose lives were transformed when they chose to become active participants in God’s mission. (As a starting point, it may be helpful to review Hebrews 11, the apostle Paul’s “roll call” of great men and women of faith.)

1. What happens, spiritually, to individuals who refuse to be mere bystanders in God’s grand plan?
2. How do the lives of these men and women illustrate that faith is not an abstract spiritual concept that is best practiced in isolation? Conversely, how do their lives show that faith will tend to thrust us into the messy reality of life?
3. How does the evidence suggest that faith and faith-motivated action cannot ever be effectively separated?

►**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Help your class to use the biblical principles that they’ve explored above in order to critique their own faith community. How can Seventh-day Adventists be more intentional when nurturing and preparing every believer for witness?

**Consider This:** Seventh-day Adventist historian George Knight preached a sermon at the 2000 General Conference Session in Toronto, Canada, in which he imagined different strategies used by the devil in his attempts to derail the mission of the church. He said, “If I were the devil, I would make pastors and administrators the center of the church’s work. It must have been the devil who gave us the idea that the pastor should do all the preaching, give all the Bible studies, be the church’s primary soul winner, and make and carry out business decisions for the church.”—“If I Were the Devil,” *Adventist Review*, January 4, 2001, pp. 8–15.
Thought Questions:

1. In what way does this description of the pastor’s role reflect the reality of your congregation?

2. List some practical steps that a congregation could take in order to combat the myth of “professional soul winning”—that is, the idea that souls cannot be won to Christ by anyone other than the pastor or evangelist.

3. If you were the devil, what other strategies would you use in order to keep church members sitting on the church pews as spectators, rather than as participants in soul winning?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: No matter how much we know about witnessing, we’ll unleash its power in our lives and our communities only if we actually do it. Help your class to take the first step toward translating theory into practice.

Activity: Consider these two quotes:

“Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven’s chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. . . . But that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 347.

“In the postmodern world, we need to tell our own personal stories: unsanitized, rough and lumpy, not squeezed into a formula. We need to relate the stories of our experiences so that postmoderns can understand the meaning behind the stories—our faith.”—Ed Hindson and Ergun Caner, eds., The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishing,® 2008), p. 400.

Ask your class to divide into pairs. Invite each pair to discuss whom they’d like to share their personal salvation story with during the coming week. Suggest that they take turns role-playing, each sharing his or her own testimony of God’s faithfulness and presence. Come together again as a class and discuss: What felt good about sharing the ways in which God has led in your life? What was difficult? What could make the experience easier?

Reflection: Read Ephesians 6:19, 20, and then reread the list of obstacles to witnessing that the class created in Step 1. Invite as many class members who wish to do so to pray about specific challenges on the list, asking God for the courage to “speak boldly” for Him, no matter what the circumstance.
Lesson 10
*June 2–8
(page 80 of Standard Edition)

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 in which 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.


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, and 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). 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 literally 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.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: John 14:15

The Student Will:

Know: Describe what kind of personal experience is necessary in order to share a compelling witness of God’s love.

Feel: Open his or her heart to the love of God—a love that awakens, softens, and sweetens his or her love for others, leading to a sharing of experiences of God with them.

Do: Serve Christ in loving obedience, as Christ offered up His life for him or her in loving service.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Compelling Love

A Why are guilt and duty not good motivators for witness?

B How do the experiences of being delivered from guilt and slavery to sin and becoming truly happy and secure children of God overflow into a heartfelt witness of God’s goodness?

II. Feel: Awakening Love

A Why is it important to dwell on Christ’s sacrifice for us, believe that He loves us, accept His love, and give our hearts to Him?

B How does His love for us awaken our love for Him?

C Why is love a critical prerequisite for true witness?

III. Do: Obedient Love

A When we love and are loved, how do our relationships to others change?

B Why does true love result in obedience, and how does our loving obedience demonstrate a loving relationship to God?

Summary: Christ’s loving service to us awakens a loving relationship to God and is the basis of our true witness of God’s love for us, as reflected in our loving ministry to others.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The unconditional, all encompassing love of God for His created beings is the touchstone of our faith and witness. To reflect, even dimly, this divine love is the essence of what it means for us to be Christ’s ambassadors.

**Just for Teachers:** The complex, often hidden, realm of human motivation impacts every aspect of our lives—both physically and spiritually. This week, help your class to discover practical ways to untangle the threads of healthy and unhealthy motives for witnessing.

**Opening Activity:** It’s been called one of the most barbaric, “scientific” experiments ever conducted. In the thirteenth century, Frederick II, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, attempted to discover what language God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He theorized that if newborn babies were isolated from all spoken language, they would grow up to speak the “natural language” of humankind. And so the emperor prepared his experiment. He took a number of newborns from their parents and gave them to caregivers who were forbidden to speak to, cuddle, or play with the infants. The babies were even handled with special instruments to ensure they never experienced human touch.

But Frederick didn’t get a chance either to prove or to disprove his theory about “natural language.” Despite being regularly fed, bathed, and clothed, each one of the babies died before reaching the age of speech. Why? Modern scholars have attributed the babies’ failure to thrive primarily to the absence of love, as expressed through human touch and voice.—Daniel G. Amen, *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life* (New York: Three Rivers Press®, 1998), p. 73.

**Consider This:** Why do you think that one of the most fundamental human needs is to both give and receive love? Could it have something to do with the character of the One who created us? Read Zephaniah 3:17, Luke 13:34, and Revelation 3:20, noting especially the imagery. What are we to make of a Being of unfathomable power who longs to sing over us, to gather us up like a mother hen gathers her chicks, who stands at the door of our hearts and knocks? Take a few moments to consider the extraordinary nature of this divine love, which we’ve been called to share with the world.

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Lead your class on an exploration of key biblical
passages that reveal how deeply our Lord wants love to define our response to Him.

Bible Commentary

I. A “Love Revolution” (Review Romans 5:6–8 and 1 John 4:7–21 with the class.)

Agape is the Greek word used repeatedly by New Testament writers to describe the transcendent, self-sacrificing love that God displays for humanity. But this was an alien concept within the pagan world that surrounded the early Christian church. In pagan philosophy, mercy and pity were considered “defects of character”; it was a widely accepted practice to “discard” infant girls at birth; and pagan deities, it was believed, were as likely to torment humans as to assist them.

Within this context, the Christian concept of agape love was nothing less than a cultural bombshell. In place of the self-interested, capricious pagan gods, Christianity assumed that there was a Divine Being who actively sought a love relationship with humanity. And even more radical was the idea that this God expected humans to treat each other with the same kind of love!


Activity: Ask the class members to imagine, as you reread 1 John 4:7–11, that they’re hearing these words through the ears of someone steeped in the cultural and religious norms of paganism. What may have been their reactions, and why?

Consider This: How does knowing more of this cultural context deepen your understanding of the reasons why early Christians emphasized agape love as central to their identity and witness?

II. “More Than a Feeling” (Review 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 with the class.)

Love can mean different things within different contexts. So, what is the nature of the love that fuels Christian witness? Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–21 and note the various facets of Christian love.
A. It’s irresistible (“For Christ’s love compels us” [vs. 14, NIV]). The word compel is closely related to coerce, force, or require. It implies that our choice is somehow limited. Do you think that Paul is suggesting that Christ’s love coerces us in some way? If not, why do you think that Paul uses this particular word to describe the impact of Christ’s love on our lives?

B. It transforms (“The old has gone, the new is here!” [vss. 16, 17, NIV]).

C. It doesn’t come alone; it’s packaged with a specific mission (“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors” [vs. 20, NIV]).

Consider the words of Ellen G. White: “Love can no more exist without revealing itself in outward acts than fire can be kept alive without fuel.” —Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 695.

III. “Spoilers” (Review Romans 3:19–20 and 1 John 4:18 with the class.)

Do motives really matter? Many influential thinkers throughout history—from Niccolò Machiavelli to John Stuart Mill—have said no. They’ve taken a “utilitarian” stance, arguing that it’s the outcome of actions that are important, not the motivation nor the morality of the actions themselves. What do you think?

Read Christ’s pointed words about hypocrisy in Matthew 23:25–27. Here Christ explicitly rejects the idea that if we do the right things, our motives are irrelevant. He calls us to integrated living, in which there’s no disconnect between our actions and our convictions. Why do you think this is so important to Him?

Consider This: Read Philippians 1:15–18. Why do you think that Paul says he still rejoices, even though the motivation is wrong? Is he saying that motivation really doesn’t matter? Why, or why not? How can Paul’s words be reconciled with those of Christ in Matthew 23?

What “spoilers” does Scripture identify that can taint our motives and subvert our love responses to God? For example, fear that we’ll never “measure up” (Rom. 3:19, 20); an acute awareness of our guilt before God (read the “laundry list” of indictments against human nature contained in Romans 3:10–19); and pride and all its variants, including envy, vanity, and ambition (Phil. 1:15–17, John 12:43).

▶STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: How can we guard our own motives when it comes to the sharing of our faith? Lead your class in a discussion of the practical ways to integrate the biblical principles we’ve discussed into our everyday thought processes.
Thought Questions:

Rather than being motivated by our love for God, in what ways do we sometimes approach witnessing with a distinctly “Protestant work ethic”? How do we show by our actions that we believe that working hard enough and long enough can “get the job done”? What are some of the dangers of a works-focused approach to witnessing and evangelism? In what ways might we become preoccupied with “winning souls” rather than developing disciples? What are the dangers of elevating our importance and denigrating the role of the Holy Spirit? How could this lead to discouragement, especially if we don’t meet our goals?

Ellen G. White writes, “God might have committed the message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. . . . But in His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself.” —Steps to Christ, p. 79.

How do you respond to this assertion? For those caught up in a works-orientated approach to witnessing, how could this revelation operate like a metaphorical bucket of cold water over their heads?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Use the final few moments of the lesson study to guide your class back to the Person of Christ, the anchor of our faith and witness.

In an ideal world, our commitment to witnessing would flow purely from our response to Christ’s sacrifice and love for us. Yet, in the words of Scripture, and in our own experience, we see that there are other powerful forces at work—forces that can subvert our good intentions. Can we ever unravel the hopelessly complicated knot of our motives and desires—both conscious and unconscious? Do we need to? Or is it sufficient simply to acknowledge our inability and submit the whole tangled mess into the loving hands of our Creator?

Activity: Close the class by reading Psalm 51:1–13, which David wrote after repenting of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. David frankly acknowledges that God knows him through and through—the good, the bad, and the ugly. And then David surrenders himself humbly, yet confidently, to God’s mercy. Read the psalm meditatively, as a prayer. Focus especially on verses 10–13. In what ways do these few words encapsulate the main themes of our lesson today?
SABBATH AFTERNOON


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 it 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?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Mark 6:30

The Student Will:

Know: Outline the benefits that result from reporting the results of witnessing and evangelism to the rest of the church body.

Feel: Share the enthusiasm and encouragement that joy in God’s work awakens in his or her heart.

Do: Report honestly on the fruits of his or her labors in order to inform the church and aid it in the evaluating and planning for future work in the harvest field.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Reporting the Results

A How does the reporting of results of witnessing and evangelistic efforts help the church to glorify God?

B Why is the act of reporting important for future efforts in the harvest fields?

C How does the act of reporting help to draw the church together in prayer and praise?

II. Feel: Sharing the Joy

A What were the communal responses to the reports that the apostles gave to the early church?

B Why is it important to share the joy of the harvest with the church body?

III. Do: Talking the Walk

A How do we benefit by not only “walking the talk” but also “talking the walk” with others in our church family?

B What have you learned recently in your work for God that you can share with your fellow servants?

Summary: As we seek to do God’s will in the harvest fields, reporting on our work helps to encourage others to get involved, plan for the future, and glorify that which God has done as we have labored with Him.
Learning Cycle

★STEP 1—Motivate★

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** While the act of reporting on our witnessing and evangelistic endeavors is not as important as the news of the gospel itself, it does represent a key link in the chain of God’s plan to save lost humanity. Communicating God’s activity throughout the church is essential.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s lesson examines the communication mechanisms of the early church, placing special emphasis on the effect that communication has on both leaders and laity. As you prepare the class for study, begin with a brief discussion of today’s media-dense environment.

We live in a media-saturated world. There are profound benefits to living at a time when news travels at the speed of light. When a massive earthquake devastated Haiti in 2010, news of the destruction galvanized worldwide support for the victims. The relief effort even pioneered a new form of giving: donation by text message.

But what technology gave, it also took away. Once the news media “changed the channel” on Haiti, the world quickly followed suit. Today there is scarcely a mention of the Haitian crisis in the news. What do we learn from this? A crisis sells, but only for a time.

**Consider This:** Ask your students to share how they tend to react to news of the crises occurring throughout the world. If shocking world events cannot hold people’s attention for a sustained amount of time, what chance does the news of salvation have in doing so? Discuss.

★STEP 2—Explore★

**Just for Teachers:** This section will consider that which motivated early evangelists to report gospel results to the growing family of faith. The disciples were energized by Jesus’ resurrection, challenged by the Great Commission, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

**Bible Commentary**

Wednesday’s study considers some of the reasons that we believe or do certain things. It bears remembering that the initial telling of the news of salvation was fueled by a supernormal event. At the end of his book, Luke describes a stunned group of disciples struggling desperately to come to terms with the reappearance of their recently crucified Savior.

Luke comments, “He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45, NKJV)—scriptures that related to His coming, death, resurrection, and ascension. The post-Resurrection moments that the disciples shared with Jesus left an indelible mark on their consciousness. How could they possibly go about their daily lives and not tell the wondrous news of their Savior who had conquered death?

Ellen White writes that as the resurrected Savior explained the prophecies regarding His life’s work to the disciples, “they began to realize the nature and extent of their work, to see that they were to proclaim to the world the truths entrusted to them. The events of Christ’s life, His death and resurrection, the prophecies pointing to these events, the mysteries of the plan of salvation, the power of Jesus for the remission of sins—to all these things they had been witnesses, and they were to make them known to the world.”—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 27.

Consider This: The disciples were motivated to share the news of salvation when they understood Christ’s work and ministry. What does this tell us about the importance of knowing and understanding who Jesus is and what He came to accomplish?

II. A Great Commission (Review Matthew 28:18–20 and 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 with the class.)

Countless volumes have been written on the gospel commission, Jesus’ call to lead men, women, boys, and girls to a saving knowledge of Him. All of Christ’s disciples are called to this work. When the commission is lived and practiced, people will take notice. There will be a “buzz.”

Gospel reporting, then, is no exercise in narcissism. In fact, as Thursday’s study makes clear, when the works of God are reported, there is little to do but give Him glory and praise.

Why is that the case? Perhaps it has something to do with the nature and scope of the gospel commission. “Christianity was the first religion to assume a truly international character. Pagan religions were largely devoid of missionary zeal and activity. They were primarily national in character and did not set out to make converts of other national groups. The gospel commission effectively eliminates boundaries, and men of all nations find themselves members of one great brotherhood.”—The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 557.
This boundary-breaking faith was a marvel to the world in which the apostles ministered, and it remains a wonder today.

Consider This: The gospel commission, when practiced in its fullness, demonstrates the power of unity and love in a fractured world. How does the substance of our faith impact the news reports that people carry to others about that faith? What are people saying about Christianity, based on our practice of it?

III. The Work of the Spirit (Review Acts 1:8 and 11:15 with the class.)

The Holy Spirit was indispensable to the work of the early disciples. It was the outpouring of the Spirit that made them vessels in God’s hand used by Him in His work of saving fallen human beings.

Peter testified to the Spirit’s movements in Acts 11:1–18. One gets the sense here that Peter is not so much arguing a case for the inclusion of Gentile believers in the family of faith but simply recounting the activity of God. God had given the Gentile believers the gift, and Peter could do nothing to change God’s plan (vs. 17).

In Acts, the Spirit is seen filling believers (Acts 2:4), falling on those who repent and are baptized (Acts 15:8), and leading and guiding leaders in the church (vs. 28). These are but a few of the Spirit’s exploits in the book of Acts.

The beautiful reports of the early believers testified to something new, powerful, and dynamic at work in their lives and the lives of those whom they sought to reach. God was at work in them and through them.

Consider This: In what ways do we see similar evidence of God’s work in the world today? How can we ensure that there is substance to the reports that we carry? What is the danger of relaying puffed-up reports that make us feel good about our meager efforts for God?

STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

1. If Jesus thought it important enough to unfold the prophecies regarding His life and work to His disciples (Luke 24:45), why do some today discount the study of biblical prophecy? How does this reluctance affect the spread of the gospel?
If God is not at work in our lives, how will we recognize His moving in the world? The early evangelists often gave personal testimonies of God’s leading and work in their lives and the lives of others. Which is more important, and why: the report of what God is doing in your life or the report of what He is doing in the life of the church?

Questions for Witnessing:

1. How can a shy, introverted person share the gospel message? List three options that he or she might explore in order to help fulfill God’s commission.

2. This week’s lesson noted that not everyone was pleased with God’s exploits, as reported by the early evangelists. What should the church do when some members disagree with what others see as the moving of God? How do we handle substantive ministry conflicts? How do these conflicts affect new believers?

STEP 4—Create

Activity: It is difficult to exaggerate the effect that “megachurch culture” is having on today’s concept of Christianity. Fledgling congregations question whether they are indeed doing the will of God because they lack the sheer numbers of larger churches.

There is much talk of houses, cars, clothing, and influence—blessings that should attend all who claim the name of Christ, some say. Many ministries have developed slick media campaigns to better “market” the gospel in an effort to “compete” for souls. In some cases, entertainment culture has crept into church.

Look at the following statements and discuss whether or not you agree with what is being said. Give your reasons.

1. The church should avoid all forms of media, focusing instead on door-to-door, face-to-face ministry.
2. The church should use all forms of technology in order to share its message with the membership and the world.
3. The church should avoid glitzy advertising campaigns. The gospel doesn’t need to be dressed up.
4. Through the careful use of media, the church should manage its image. In doing so, members will take pride in their church, and new believers will come to admire the church’s work and practice.
Lesson 12  
*June 16–22  
(page 96 of Standard Edition) 

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 an 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.
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Proverbs 25:12

The Student Will:

Know: Explain the need to evaluate his or her evangelistic results while keeping in mind the requirements that God has given for growth.
Feel: Sense the solemnity of the times in the context of the church’s call to proclaim the three angels’ messages.
Do: Evaluate his or her soul-winning efforts in the light of God’s requirements and the coming judgment.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Why Evaluate?

   A What has God asked His people to do for Him in light of the coming judgment?
   B Why is it important for the church to evaluate the growth of its membership and ministry programs?
   C Why does development of spiritual disciplines in our personal practices require evaluation, as well as numbers and other indicators of church growth?

II. Feel: Solemn Times

   A How do the three angels’ messages lend impetus to the church’s need to monitor spiritual discipline and church growth?
   B What role do encouraging comments and positive affirmations play in the evaluations of church members who work in evangelism and other areas of ministry?

III. Do: Spurring One Another On

   A What are we doing to proclaim the three angels’ messages, and how can we know that our work is successful?
   B How can we build up one another in the spiritual disciplines that are required to share the gospel?

Summary: Our work in God’s cause needs to be evaluated in the light of God’s requirements, as echoed in the three angels’ messages for these last days of earth’s history.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Evaluating our witnessing and evangelistic efforts is a method of keeping true to the task in the most effective way possible.

Just for Teachers: Share the following story in your own words. The objective of the story is to get the class thinking about the necessity of evaluating our work in soul winning.

There is a story told of an African village where Christianity had taken root. Members of the community had given their lives to Christ and set about learning the spiritual disciplines that make for a strong, vibrant walk with God. Prayer was one of the disciplines that the early believers began to practice. The high grass surrounding each home revealed those who were faithful in prayer and those who were not.

One day a tribesman in the village began to get concerned after he noticed that a fellow villager’s prayer spot had become overgrown. He approached his friend and said, “Brother, is everything OK?”

“Why do you ask?” came the reply from the startled tribesman.

“Well, brother, the grass is growing on your path.”

Consider This: In today’s politically correct world, few people would have the gumption to approach a friend about his or her prayer life. Yet, as we have been studying this week, God asks us to subject our ministry to a process of evaluation. Why do most people dread being assessed?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The apostle Paul and the leaders of the early church went to great lengths to build into their rapidly growing faith a means of measuring its effectiveness. They did not shy away from personally evaluating those who served in ministry. This section examines Paul’s evaluation guidelines and some of those that were used and taught by Christ.

Bible Commentary

I. A Few Good Leaders (Review 1 Timothy 3:1–13 with the class.)
New Testament Christianity is marked by an inclusiveness that runs against the current of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, ministry is seen as belonging to anyone who claims faith in Jesus Christ. In Matthew 11:25–30, Jesus encouraged burdened men and women to come and rest in Him. Those who followed Him were prepared for ministry. This same spirit is seen in the work of the apostles. They welcomed all to fellowship and ministry, but leadership required more than a cursory welcome.

In 1 Timothy 3:1–13, we notice that the leaders had to be individuals of proven maturity and sterling character. After all, they were being called upon to lead the church in worship, outreach, service, and the fulfillment of individual spiritual gifts. The qualification guidelines for leadership that were handed down by Paul do not emphasize family lines as Old Testament guidelines did. Paul’s focus was the long-term demonstration of ethical character and moral rectitude. Any man who lived such a life could be considered for leadership.

Paul may have also had another reason in mind for instituting such stringent standards for the evaluation of bishops. The SDA Bible Commentary notes, “Christianity would have little appeal if its leaders were as lacking in integrity as men outside the church too often are.”—Volume 7, p. 299.

Consider This: Paul’s evaluation procedure was designed to ensure that the gospel ministry given to Timothy be built on a strong foundation. What happens to a church when its leaders are unethical or immoral?

II. What Jesus Did (Review Hebrews 10:24, 25 and John 8:1–11 with the class.)

Monday’s study encourages us to evaluate carefully, always with an eye to the affirmation of one another in Christ. The apostle Paul would often go out of his way to affirm individuals and groups when he saw something in them that was worthy of praise. To the believers in Ephesus he wrote, “Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:15, 16, NKJV). Paul encouraged the saints whenever possible. He was always on the lookout for good spiritual fruit, always checking to see the ways in which he might encourage the saints toward good works.

No doubt Paul learned the ethics of nurture from the life of Jesus. Christ seemed to reserve special care for people who had been evaluated and written off by the religious leaders of the day. Of the woman caught in adultery, Ellen White writes, “Jesus looked for a moment upon the scene—the trembling victim in her shame, the hard-faced dignitaries, devoid of even human pity. His spirit of stainless purity shrank from the spectacle. Well He knew for what purpose this case had been brought to Him. He read the heart, and knew the character and life history of every-
one in His presence. These would-be guardians of justice had themselves led their victim into sin, that they might lay a snare for Jesus. Giving no sign that He had heard their question, He stooped, and fixing His eyes upon the ground, began to write in the dust.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 461.

Jesus had “weighed” the woman’s accusers at a level deeper than any human could. He read their hearts and wrote the evaluation of their contents in the dust for all to see.

Consider This: The Pharisees of Jesus’ day brought the woman to Jesus in an effort to trap Him. They cared nothing about her and even had led her into sin. In other words, they attempted to use her failing to achieve their ends. How can we be certain when we evaluate people—or ministries, for that matter—that we are judging without being judgmental?

III. Check the Fruit (Review 1 Samuel 16:7 and Matthew 7:15–19 with the class.)

Wednesday’s portion of the study guide took on the thorny issue of the ways in which we can evaluate personal spiritual growth. We are fallen, fallible human beings from a race marred by 6,000 years of sin. Apart from God, our judgment is faulty and imperfect and hardly qualified to “evaluate something as ‘intangible’ as spirituality in others”; yet, we are called to do just that at times. For instance, in Matthew 7:15, Jesus gives us guidelines for the evaluation of false prophets who “come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” He seems to complicate the matter further by opening this final stanza of the Sermon on the Mount with an oration armed against the judging of one another. Is it possible to ascertain a person’s fruit and not judge him or her? How are we to tell a true prophet from a false one? We are to watch the fruit growing on the tree of his or her life.

How is the watching of fruit different from judging? The SDA Bible Commentary notes that when Jesus cautioned His listeners not to judge that they be not judged, He was referring “particularly to judging another’s motives, not to judging the right or wrong of his acts. God alone is competent to judge men’s motives, because of the fact that He alone is able to read men’s innermost thoughts.”—Volume 5, pp. 354, 355.

Jesus told His audience that they would know (the Greek word for know used in Matthew 7:16 means “to know fully”) those who were false by the words that they spoke, the acts that they committed, the way that they lived. However, He never asked His audience to judge the motivation of their hearts.

Consider This: When did Jesus openly rebuke the sin of others during the course of His ministry? Under what circumstances is it appropriate to bring to light the rotten fruit in someone’s life? How is this to be carried out? What answers does Jesus’ example give us?
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: How do we apply evaluative processes to our personal lives? As class members respond to the questions below, encourage them to pull their answers from the reservoirs of their personal experiences with God.

Thought Questions:

1. In what ways does God evaluate us? What tools does He use to measure our fitness for the work of ministry?

2. Read Matthew 7:21–23. What separates those whom Jesus knows from those He does not? How does the context of Matthew 7 contribute to a deeper understanding of these verses?

Application Questions:

1. If you were called upon to devise a plan that would help members of your local church to grow in their spiritual walk with God, where would you begin? How would you evaluate the present condition of the church?

2. What role does the Holy Spirit play in the guiding of the evangelistic efforts of God’s remnant church? What role does the Spirit play in the assessment of ministry goals and objectives?

Questions for Witnessing:

1. Why might some believers place much importance on the number of people baptized in a year while others do not? How do we tend to look upon churches or groups whose growth appears to be stagnant? What conclusions do we sometimes draw about their commitment to the gospel commission?

2. What are your personal goals for sharing the gospel? Why is it essential to set such goals and assess them periodically? How can we do this without becoming legalistic?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Ask the class to discuss the following question: while we need to be careful when judging others, what about when judging ourselves?
Lesson 13

*June 23–29

A Perpetual Ministry

Sabbath Afternoon


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?’” (vss. 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 new members 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 slid 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, this is 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. The church has 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 humbleing 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?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Luke 13:18, 19

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Describe why ministry is something that he or she passes on to others through mentorship and discipleship, but never retires from.

**Feel:** Nurture the settling into fellowship and service that ensures the ongoing growth and development of new believers and will reach out in reconciliation to those who have slid out of fellowship.

**Do:** Mentor and disciple others in the ministries in which he or she is skilled.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Eternal Ministry

A. Why must we consider that our work toward the sharing of the gospel and the growing of the church is never done?

B. How do we disciple others as Christ taught us to do? How do we intentionally mentor others to take up the ministries about which we are passionate?

II. Feel: Nurturing and Reconciling

A. What attitudes are important when nurturing fellowship and a sense of belonging in new believers?

B. What attitudes are important as we seek to reconcile those who have become disillusioned and lost their sense of fellowship in Christ’s body?

III. Do: Discipling

A. How do we help new believers to forge new bonds of friendship and settle into fellowship?

B. What can we do to mentor new believers in service? How can we help them to find their own niches as workers in the kingdom of God?

**Summary:** As long as we are children of God, we will ever seek to promote His kingdom, minister to His children, and share all that we know of His goodness.
Learning Cycle

STEPP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The heartbeat of the Christian life is a deep, personal love relationship with God. A healthy, vibrant walk with God finds expression in a lifelong desire to see the lost saved.

Just for Teachers: Share the following story in your own words. The most important point that it makes is that evangelism can, at times, be difficult, but we must continue on in God’s strength.

One Sabbath afternoon a church gathered its youth and prepared to go into their local community to witness for Christ. The church had purchased a series of sharing tracts. After a few brief safety guidelines, the youth and their leaders piled into cars and drove out to sow seeds for the kingdom of God.

Stationed on several corners around the city, they began to hand out the tracts to people who passed by. Many of the youth were apprehensive at first, but with each tract delivered they grew bolder, even entering into long conversations with total strangers. That’s when “it” happened.

One of the teenagers handed a tract to a man in a car stopped at a nearby intersection. The man took the tract with a smile. He then pulled out a cigarette lighter and lit the tract on fire before dropping it on the road and speeding off with a laugh.

Consider This: How do you think the tract burner’s act of disdain impacted the teen who gave him the tract? What does this episode tell us about the world in which we are called to minister? What would you, as a leader, say to someone—young or old—who may have experienced a similar insult?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Jesus’ life was one of perpetual ministry. This is the example He left with us. He never compartmentalized His life. He lived “one” life, one that enabled Him to minister so effectively to others.
Bible Commentary

I. A New Paradigm *(Review John 4:7–30 and Matthew 28:18–20 with the class.)*

Sunday’s focus on the steps of evangelism is instructive. There is a process by which people are led from a life of sin to a life of surrender to God. This kingdom work is the great calling of the Christian’s life (*Matt. 28:18–20*). As such, it requires much of those who sign on to it.

As Jesus spied an opportunity to give “living water” to the Samaritan woman, He was conscious of all the taboos He would break by speaking to her, one of which was based in the racial hatred that existed between Jews and Samaritans *(see 2 Kings 17:23–29 and Ezra 4 for some of this history).* *The SDA Bible Commentary* states, “Racial hatred kept Jew and Samaritan so far apart that both avoided social contact, if at all possible.”—Volume 5, p. 938.

**Consider This:** What do Jesus’ actions tell us about the importance of sharing the message of salvation at all costs? What other cultural taboos did Jesus break in reaching out to the Samaritan woman? What lessons are there for us in Jesus’ ministering to this woman, despite her bad reputation?

II. Deep Fellowship *(Review Acts 2:42 with the class.)*

The new believers referred to in Acts gave themselves wholeheartedly to God and to the service of one another. Most important, they ate together. Is there more intimate fellowship between friends than the sharing of a meal? But Jesus was chastised for eating with sinners *(Luke 15:2)*. We must notice here that the believers do not relegate their communication and sharing to a certain day of the week or to a certain form of ministry focus. They don’t just come together because the church is going out to do ministry somewhere. Theirs is a spiritual culture of concern and sharing.

**Consider This:** Sabbath School is one of the essential ministries of the local church. How can it be a place where people experience care and nurture? Aside from providing an opportunity to study truth, for what other purpose does Sabbath School exist? How do we, after being buffeted all week by the devil, nurture those who come to Sabbath School?

III. The Goal in Sight *(Review Matthew 28:18–20 with the class.)*

This week’s study closes with a dual focus on the reclaiming of lost members and the keeping of all members so that none leave the fellowship.
As new members join the church, there is a palpable sense of excitement. Established members often view this as proof that God is blessing the church and that the church is actively engaged in the ministry to which it has been called. New members are ushered into active ministry and prepared for service. Because of all this, growing churches have an aura about them. Might this lead to a sort of complacency about ministry to the wider community? Could such a church become internally focused while professing to fulfill the gospel commission?

In their challenging book *The Externally Focused Church*, authors Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson write, “Internally focused churches concentrate on getting people into the church and generating activity there. . . . These are good churches filled with good people. And what they do is vital but not sufficient for a healthy church. Worship, teaching, and personal devotions are absolutely necessary for building the internal capacity necessary to sustain an external focus, but if all the human and financial resources are expended inside the four walls of the church, then no matter how ‘spiritual’ things may appear to be, something is missing.”—*The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland, Colo.: Group Publishing, 2004), p. 16.

**Consider This:** How can you help your local church to fulfill the gospel commission found in Matthew 28:18–20 and avoid becoming obsessed with what happens within its four walls?

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Thought Questions:**

1. Some churches establish a clear process for the incorporation of new believers into the fellowship and work of the church. What things should be included in such a process? What things should not?

2. Read Galatians 6:2. What are members of the body of Christ supposed to do for other members? Why? In what specific ways does this ethic of caring strengthen the work of the church?

**Application Questions:**

1. Read Hebrews 10:25. Part of this verse conveys a sense of urgency about meeting together as a family of believers. Some members believe that they can focus better on God by worshiping online instead of at their local church. What would you say to convince them to begin attending church?
Some churches have a culture of fellowship that is so strong that “outsiders” can scarcely penetrate it. What can members do in order to break up a cliquish culture in the local church?

How can your Sabbath School class help to reclaim lost church members? What role does prayer play in the reclamation process?

Questions for Witnessing:

1. Witnessing can be a “dirty” process. As we engage in it, our lives often get entangled with people who may have significant problems. How do we continue to minister to those who are hurting when their hurts begin to complicate our lives?

2. What contribution—besides money—can seniors make to the evangelistic efforts of the church? How might a local congregation make them an integral part of its inreach and outreach efforts?

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Ask a member of the class to read Hebrews 11:21. The objective of this closing exercise is to embrace the call to minister throughout one’s lifetime. For example, Jacob was a deeply flawed individual. He made many mistakes in his life; yet, God forgave him, blessed him, and empowered him to bless others. Make the point that in the event that we die before the coming of Jesus, we should be totally spent, having given God all!

The incident referred to in Hebrews 11:21 occurred in Genesis 48. Jacob was an old man then, blind and feeble. He had endured much and learned hard lessons at the hand of God. As he prepared for death, he continued his ministry, chiefly to his family. He blessed Joseph’s sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and worshiped God to the very end of his life.

1. What kind of life did Jacob live? What does his lack of faithfulness to God, at times, tell us about God’s mercy in His dealings with us?

2. How did Jacob’s family suffer as a result of his sins and failings as a parent?

3. What moment changed his life forever? What did God do for him (Gen. 32:26–28)?