

Witnessing and Evangelism

Let the Church Know

Lesson #11 for June 16, 2012

Scriptures: Acts 4:1-31; 21:19-25; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Numbers 13:17-33; Acts 11:1-18.

1. How important is it for you to report your evangelistic activities back to your Sabbath school or church? In this lesson we will explore biblical examples of people who reported back to their groups. As it turns out, some of the reports were not good, and some of the groups were not friendly! We should not always expect everything to be “peaches and cream” when we report back to the church, but it is a necessary exercise in any case.
2. Jesus and His disciples traveled on missionary journeys through Galilee three different times. (Matthew 4:23-25; Mark 1:38,39; Matthew 9:35; Luke 8:1-3; Luke 9:1-6) Later, He sent out an even larger group of 70 or 72 men into the areas of Perea. (Luke 10:1) It seems clear from Mark 6:30 and Luke 9:10 that it was the custom for the disciples to report back to Jesus. What do you think they reported? (Luke 10:17) Why was this important? Did it have something to do with the very rapid growth of the church in those early days?
3. Read Acts 4:1-31. Peter and John healed a man at the Gate Beautiful in the temple. They were arrested and called before the Sanhedrin. The members of the Sanhedrin were not at all happy to hear what they had to say. By contrast, when Peter and John returned to the Christian believers, the believers were very happy to hear what they had to say. As a result, the Holy Spirit descended upon that place, shaking it.
4. What should we learn from the fact that when very strongly warned by the Sanhedrin not to speak in the name of Jesus, Peter and John immediately refused and then returned to the larger Christian group, rejoicing that they could speak out in the name of Jesus? Will there be times when we will have to witness contrary to the rules and regulations of the governing authorities or even act contrary to the rules of the church?
5. There were times in Scripture when the reports were not good. (Numbers 13:17-33) There were times when the groups who heard the reports were not happy or were even angry about the reports. The report of the 10 spies was completely self-contradictory! (Numbers 13:17-14:10; Acts 4:1-31; 11:1-18; 21:19-25) Could a land be rich and fertile and at the same time not support the people who live there? That was a lying report!
6. One important factor to remember about these biblical events is that there was no other media available—no newspapers, no radio, no television, no news reporters. News spread by mouth from one person to another. When it was reported that something very significant was happening, it was the custom for people to flock to that location to see for themselves.
7. Read Acts 21:19-25 and *Acts of the Apostles* p. 405; compare 1 Corinthians 9:20. Paul and his friends had carried a very large offering from Macedonia and Achaia all the way to Jerusalem. As all that money rolled out onto the table in front of the Jewish believers, they were temporarily warmed. But, then they recommended to Paul a very cowardly action. Instead of supporting Paul in his difficult work among unbelieving Gentiles, they asked Paul to do something to try to make their work among the Jews easier. That was a mistake—it was not authorized of God—and as a result Paul was imprisoned. Were they afraid Paul would win too many Gentiles to become Christians?
8. How do we respond to reports of God’s activity in other parts of the world? Do we ignore

them? Do we try to support them with our prayers and our finances? Or, do we secretly wish that more could be done in our area instead of focusing so much on other parts of the world?

9. Why is reporting back to the church body so important? Several answers could be given:
 - 1) Even if we are doing a great work, if we do not report it to others, it will not help to encourage the church to get involved in evangelistic activities.
 - 2) It will encourage church members to feel that something is actually happening and being done.
 - 3) God's Holy Spirit will move among the congregation as we make such reports to encourage others to step out and get involved in one way or another.
10. It seems clear that reporting back to the group leads to other events. 1) The report is evaluated in one way or another, 2) Actions are taken, 3) Decisions are made, and 4) Responses are planned. (See *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, page 126)
11. What was the result of the times when reports were made back to the church group in early church times? (Acts 5:14; 8:4,12; 11:21; 14:21) Many people were encouraged to join the church.
12. Why do you think the disciples seemed to be so successful in those early years to the point that even their enemies said that they had "turned the world upside down"? (Acts 17:6) Was it because of their absolute commitment to the truth? Was it because they knew God so well that they could represent Him correctly? Was it because their message was so startling? What should we be learning from their experiences? Are we saying that because we do not see miracles happening, we cannot expect to be as successful as the disciples were? (What about DA 832.3?) Doesn't our health message heal people today?
13. What motivates us to do something good? Is all the reporting being done in the church fair and honest? Have you ever heard a slanted or slightly dishonest report from a church leader?
14. Read Numbers 13:17-33. How do you suppose it was possible that twelve spies came back from the land of Canaan and ten of them gave such a decidedly different report from that which Caleb and Joshua shared? Why did the children of Israel choose to believe the report of the ten even though it was patently inconsistent with itself?
15. What kind of reporting should we do if an evangelistic process or program turns out not to be very successful? When we report back, are we more worried about what people will think of God? Or, the church? Or, more worried about what they will think of us?
16. When an evangelistic program is successful, we traditionally give God the credit. But, if an evangelistic program seems to be unsuccessful, do we blame God? Who is at fault if there is some kind of failure? Or, should that be an opportunity to learn from our mistakes? How is success measured? The number of attendees? The number of baptisms? Offerings gathered? How should success be measured? Thomas Edison said that if he learned something from a failure, it was not really a failure. (See also *Ev* 696.2)
17. Think of all the ways that are being suggested—new examples are being given almost every day—to evangelize or witness to our neighbors or our local community. It is obvious that we could never try every possible approach. So, how do we choose which programs or approaches we will try to implement?
18. How can we know for sure that God is leading out in whatever program we choose? Do we

need to pray to Him to help us choose the right program at the beginning? If we get involved in a successful program some distance away from our local church and then come back and report, is that a form of boasting? If our program has not been very successful, do we try to keep quiet about it? What are the criteria for success? New members? More offerings?

19. Read Acts 11:1-18. There are several significant things about this passage that could easily be overlooked. First of all, Peter was staying at the house of a tanner. A tanner had to deal with dead animals all day long. That was completely against strict Jewish custom and would have resulted in the tanner and those in his household continuously being “unclean.” When Peter was called to go to Cornelius’s house, he knew there would be questions back in Jerusalem. So, he took six witnesses with him! (Acts 11:12; compare Acts 10:23,45) It should also be noted that Cornelius had already taken a great interest in the Jewish religion and was considered a “follower of the way.” (Acts 10:22,31)
20. Despite all this, when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, he was severely criticized. With six other witnesses to the fact that the Holy Spirit descended upon the Gentiles, it was pretty hard for even the members of the circumcision party to argue with the results. God had spoken. In light of what happened later in Acts 15 and Acts 21, do you think that the prejudice was gone? How do we go about dealing with prejudice? Can we just ignore it? What about our own prejudice? Does God need to shake us up to get us over our prejudices?
21. Why do you think it was so hard for the Jews—even the Jewish believers—to accept the idea that God wanted the gospel to go to everyone? (Genesis 12:1-3; Hebrews 2:9)
22. When it comes time to report back to the church or even to a Sabbath school class, is it important that we are fair and honest in our reporting? Our reports need to be given in the context of the larger evangelistic thrusts being carried out by the church as a whole.
23. In our day, is it our responsibility as individuals to try to reach across cultural and language barriers to other groups in our efforts to evangelize?
24. One issue that we face which the early disciples did not face was a media-saturated world. Major news gets transmitted around the world almost instantly. People have become accustomed to getting their information in sound bites. In this context how do we get people to take the gospel seriously? How do we get them to recognize that a Book that is thousands of years old is still relevant?
25. In our evangelistic efforts, do we need to compete in style and media with television and radio?
26. The disciples were invigorated by the news they had to carry. How would you convince a friend today that a personal friend of yours had just been raised from the dead? Remember that the Jewish people had been strongly influenced by the priests—who were Sadducees—to believe that a resurrection from the dead was impossible.
27. Ellen White comments:

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. They were to proclaim the gospel of peace

and salvation through repentance and the power of the Saviour.—*The Acts of the Apostles* 27.1.

28. All of us have been called to go out and witness in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:18-19; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23) If we go forth even in our humble, maybe stumbling, efforts to spread the gospel, can we be sure that God will bless us? Could we get excited about spreading the gospel even in our day?
29. Christianity was the first religion to become a worldwide religion. The religions that preceded Christianity were all considered to be local phenomena. Their leaders and members did not feel called to spread their religion to other parts of the world. But, Christians had a message that was for everyone. This was a new and startling fact in their day. Do we need to witness even to other Adventists?
30. The story of Peter with Cornelius was one of the great steps forward in getting the church to gradually accept the idea that the gospel was not just for the Jews. The convincing argument seemed to have been the fact that the Holy Spirit came down upon Cornelius and the members of his household just as it had come down on the disciples at Pentecost. What do you think actually happened there? Are there any kind of special manifestations that we could expect to see in our day to prove that God is working with us?
31. We do not expect people to speak with tongues or exhibit miraculous manifestations of their conversion. So, what should we look for?
32. And what should we do if there are other members in the church who do not approve of some method we are using to evangelize? Even different methods and the use of different media can raise questions and conflicts among members.
33. Consider the following attitudes toward the use of media as outlined on page 136 of the *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*:
 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.
34. Those of us who believe in the great-controversy, trust, healing model of the plan of salvation should realize that there is some very important information that needs to be given to many church members as well. How should we go about doing that? Do we need to conduct a revival series? Could we invite people to our homes to take them through the Bible book-by-book? What preparation do we need to become a part of the 144,000?

© 2012, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials, and we might even want to share good ideas with others. So, let us know. Info@theox.org

Last Modified: May 6, 2012

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSTG-Hart\Evangelism\SS-11-Evangelism-2012_06_16-Fin+.wpd