

Witnessing and Evangelism

A Perpetual Ministry

Lesson #13 for June 30, 2012

Scriptures: John 4:7-42; Acts 2:42; 11:19-23; 2 Timothy 2:1-7; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

1. This lesson, the final lesson in this series, will focus on how to perpetuate witnessing and evangelism in the local church and/or Sabbath school.
2. There are always special groups that need attention: the youth, the elderly, those who are not attending church on a regular basis any more, and those who do not feel that they are involved in the church program in any way.
3. Is there ever a time when our witnessing ministry is finished? Does God intend for each of us to play an ongoing part as long as we are able to be active church members? Will we be witnessing even after the close of probation? In the new earth? If you have been serving in your church for a long time, do you look forward to taking a break once in a while? Is there an active training program going on so that there are others able to step into your place if you need a break? Many excuses have been given as to why people cannot get involved in a witnessing or evangelism program, and also reasons why they want to pull out.
4. Did Paul ever take a break? Did Jesus? The apostle Paul had a fire burning in his heart and in his bones to witness for Jesus. He could not put it out. How could we get such a fire started in our bones? And how do we start such a fire in the lives of others in the church?
5. In this series of lessons, it has been almost assumed that an active church member is ready to be saved. Is that true? Did the Pharisees think they were active church members? Does salvation automatically come from church membership? Or, do we need to set higher goals? The Christian churches have had at least some active members since the days when Jesus was here on this earth, and He has not been able to come back yet. Seventh-day Adventists have had active church members since our church was first officially founded in 1863. But, Jesus has not come back yet. What needs to happen before the second coming can take place? Is God waiting for a certain number of people to respond? (2 Peter 3:10-12; Revelation 7:1-3; 14:1-5; compare *Evangelism* 695.3,4) Are we waiting for God? Or, is He waiting for us? Do we need to set our goal not only on bringing members into the church but also preparing them to be a part of the 144,000? How can we prepare them to be part of the 144,000? If God has not succeeded in pulling together a group of people fit to be a part of the 144,000, will He succeed in our day?
6. Why did the Jews and Samaritans seem to hate each other so much? Who were the Samaritans? They were named after their capital city, Samaria. When the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 723/722 B.C., they removed many of the people who lived there and scattered them into other areas around the Assyrian Empire. At the same time, they brought people from those different areas and settled them in Palestine where the former Israelites had lived. The few Israelites who were remaining in what became Samaria had little religious background to keep them faithful; and the new people who came in brought their idols and different gods. In those days, it was believed that a certain "god" was assigned to each geographical area in the world. Therefore, the newcomers actually asked the Assyrian leaders to send them a priest to come back to Palestine and teach them about the "god" of that place. Approximately 100 years later when the Jews were coming back from Babylonian captivity, the Samaritans wanted to join them in building the new temple. (Ezra 4) The Jews rejected the Samaritans offer because they recognized that the Samaritans' religion was already corrupted. This led to the Samaritans doing everything they could possibly do to hinder the progress of the Jews rebuilding their homeland. Eventually, the Samaritans set up

a rival center of worship on Mount Gerizim. Around the year 125 B.C., John Hyrcanus, one of the military leaders of the Jewish people, attacked Samaria and destroyed their temple. This led to so much animosity that usually the Jews traveling from Judea to Galilee or vice versa crossed the Jordan and traveled north or south in Perea to avoid the Samaritan territory even though that was a much longer journey. This should help us to understand why the Samaritan woman said what she did to Jesus.

7. Jesus was always the consummate Evangelist. He knew how to present the good news in a way that seemed incredibly attractive and appealing to those with whom He was speaking. Read John 4:7-42. Notice that Jesus went through five steps in approaching this Samaritan woman: 1) He got her attention by asking for a drink. 2) He got her interested so that she asked Him a question: "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (v. 9, NKJV) 3) He created desire, "Sir, give me this water." (v. 15, NKJV) 4) He brought a conviction to her heart: "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet." (v. 19, NKJV) And 5) The woman acted on her conviction saying to others, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (v. 29, NKJV) (See *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sunday, June 24)
8. Would this pattern of Jesus' interaction with the woman be a good example for us today? While Jesus was able to bring this sequence together in one conversation, it does not necessarily have to happen that way. We can work on people over a period of time. But, the steps probably need to be the same. Jesus began by talking about physical needs—the need for water. But, He soon drew her attention to the fact that she had spiritual needs—the greatest need of all—the need for Jesus.
9. Under normal circumstances trying to get a drink of water would be considered a very casual, brief incident. In our country it is essentially a matter of a few seconds. But, Jesus turned it into a life-giving experience. How many casual acquaintances and contacts do we have on a regular basis to whom we might be able to witness? Do the people with whom we come in contact on a regular basis know what we believe and what we stand for? Do they have any idea that Jesus could return in our generation? In our day, people generally do not want to talk about religion, but many of them are willing to talk about God!
10. Even if we get people's attention and attract them and convict them and draw them, that only gets them to the church. What happens when they first attend?
11. A recent report has come out suggesting that Seventh-day Adventists are again the fastest-growing Christian church in North America. That growth is almost entirely among African-American and ethnic/immigrant groups. Why is the growth so much less in Caucasians? Try inviting a contact to join a Bible-study class, going through the Bible book-by-book.
12. When a new member does come to church, how do we establish him/her as a regular attendee and then nurture him/her into a true Christian life? Establishing him/her means that we get him/her to attend on a regular basis. Nurturing means that we care for him/her, we foster his/her Christianity, we train him/her, we educate him/her, and we get him/her involved in church programs. In other words, fellowship is key to all of this. S/he needs to feel like s/he is a part of the program.
13. Read 1 John 1:7; Acts 2:42; and Acts 11:19-23. For 3½ years after the crucifixion, Christians were focused on carrying the message only to Jews. When Stephen was stoned (Acts 7) and the Christian church suffered terrible persecution, Christians scattered. But, they were still trying to reach out to Jews only. (Acts 11:19-23) Fortunately, some members in the church at Antioch began to spread the gospel to anyone who would listen.
14. What is it that leads a person to become an active member of the group and to stay active? A recent study has found that there are three key variables, two of which must be present in

each person's life if s/he is going to be perpetually involved. 1) That person needs to believe in the church's teachings and doctrines. 2) S/he needs to make friends in the church and feel close to them, and 3) S/he needs to become involved in the church's programs. Any two of these three usually cements a person's place in the church.

15. Does your church or even your Sabbath school class or smaller group within your church have an intentional program to cement new members in their faith?
16. Often, church programs get started around a single individual. That person may put in a great deal of effort to get things started and to establish the basics of the program. But, sooner or later, that person will need to hand over at least some of the responsibilities to others. We live in a highly mobile society. People move around; they change jobs, requiring a move. But, more than that, if the church is growing, new groups need to be started.
17. Read 2 Timothy 2:1-7. Paul knew that he could die any day. He recognized that Timothy could not do all the work himself; he had to teach others. Paul knew that Timothy needed to choose responsible, reliable people who would in turn teach others themselves. How well does this take place in your Sabbath school and your church? Are new leaders being trained on a regular basis?
18. Unfortunately, the Christian vocabulary includes the word *backslider*. Occasionally, people leave the Adventist Church because they disagree with our teachings. But, far more often it is because there is a personal misunderstanding, disagreement, disenchantment, or discouragement that leads to the person leaving. We need to recognize that just as people are gradually convinced to become church members, in general, they gradually leave. We need to be looking around at others, trying to assist them if they seem to be having trouble with their Christian experience. (Galatians 6:2) If someone does not come to church or Sabbath school for a few weeks, do we call him/her? Do we try to visit him/her? Do we encourage him/her to return?
19. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. There is a considerable variation in how these verses are translated in different versions. Basically, the message is that Paul was asking the Corinthians to become God's friends and then to become God's ambassadors to reach out to create other friends. We are to speak for God. Many translations use the word *reconcile*. *Reconcile* implies that once there was a relationship, but now it is broken or stretched thin, and that relationship needs to be reestablished.
20. Read Matthew 10:5,6. Is it possible that Jesus was suggesting that one of the tasks He was giving His disciples was to win Jews back to the original tasks assigned them by God? God's original plan for the Jews was for them to win the whole world to follow Him! Is there someone that you know personally that you could reach out to and encourage to come back to church or to Sabbath school?
21. You have probably heard someone mention the "back door" of the church. What are we implying when we talk about the back door? Often, it is suggested that people enter through the front door and then, unfortunately, sometimes fairly quickly exit through the back door. Why is that? Some people find that being a Christian causes a bigger change in their lifestyle and thinking than they are prepared to make. Some find one or more reasons why they do not like the pastor or the congregation or even taking the time out of their busy schedule. Some churches are oriented to specific groups of people; and if you are not one of those people, you may not feel welcome.
22. Could we identify the back door to our Sabbath school class or church? Can we find effective ways for closing that door? In Hebrews 10:24,25, we are encouraged to love one another, to share, and to meet together, encouraging one another because the second coming of Jesus Christ is near. Do we really believe that? Do we believe that Jesus could come in our generation?

23. Are we kind and loving and caring especially to those who are finding it hard to maintain their Christianity? Churches cannot reach out and put an arm around an individual; but, individuals can. Caring churches are places that are full of caring people. It is the caring people that make a difference. Are we that kind of Christian?
24. So, how can we make witnessing and evangelism an ongoing major part of our church program? Here are some suggestions: (See *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, June 29)
- 1) Make sure that leadership is shared so that the team does not become a one-person band.
 - 2) Report back to the larger church group what is happening in your team. Let them see that the gospel is winning new members and making progress. This can be done through announcements in the bulletin, newsletters, even posters.
 - 3) Be constantly on the lookout for people who you think could become involved in your team or, perhaps, even start a similar team. Occasionally, people may approach you and ask how they can become a member of your team; but, much more commonly, people need to be invited.
 - 4) When people are ready to join a team, they need to be given clear training and instructions so that they feel comfortable in what they are expected to do.
25. If a person in our group or church seems to be slipping back, do we love and care for him/her? Or, do we read to him/her passages from the Bible or quotations from Ellen White condemning his/her behavior?
26. Do we do everything we can to make the program we are involved in as interesting and attractive as possible? Do we try to nurture people who come in? Do we make them feel like they are part of the group? How can we reach out and put an arm around those who seem to be sliding back? What are some of the best ways to foster friendship among the group and especially to incorporate new believers?
27. When it comes to witnessing or evangelism, the most active and effective people are those who have a vibrant, active, personal relationship with God. How can we help all our church members and Sabbath school class members into that kind of a relationship? What do we do if something happens that is very discouraging?
28. We need to be constantly aware of the fact that we are in an all-out warfare with the Devil. (Ephesians 6:12) We are trying to teach people who are naturally-selfish to instead become naturally-loving. This is an uphill battle.
29. In this series of lessons, we have focused on the fact that in order to be really successful, the Christian church and the Adventist Church must have an external focus. While we want to do everything possible to build up the church itself, we must also be reaching out to try to bring in others from the community.
30. How are we as a Sabbath school class doing in reaching out to others? If we believe that our great controversy orientation is a message that the Adventist Church needs to understand, what are we doing to get that message out to other groups or to invite them to join our group? Would that be a valid form of witnessing or evangelism?

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Last Modified: May 7, 2012

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