

Witnessing and Evangelism
Defining Witnessing and Evangelism

Lesson #1 for April 7, 2012

Scriptures: Acts 4:33; 13:48; 1 John 1:3; Acts 13:1-49; 22:2-21; 1 Peter 3:15.

1. The purpose of this lesson will be to set out some of the challenges, questions, and goals of this quarter's lessons. What do you think of when someone mentions *witnessing*? Have you ever actively witnessed? Why isn't the church more successful at witnessing? Are there advantages of personal witnessing? If so, what are those advantages? Should the church do more public evangelism? Is the work of witnessing and evangelism primarily the responsibility of the pastoral staff? Or, are individual church members also responsible? Why are we losing so many of our young people out the back door? Why do so many of the people who come into the church through evangelism leave again soon thereafter? These are questions which challenge not only the church leadership at all levels but also individual church members.
2. Read Matthew 28:19,20. Do you believe that you have been given the job of witnessing? Do these verses apply to you? Let us begin with some definitions. What is evangelism? *Evangelism* comes from the Greek word *euaggelion* which means *good news*. If what we are telling people is not good news, it is not evangelism! The good news is about God!
3. Perhaps the greatest examples of evangelism that we could cite are the disciples after the death and resurrection of Jesus. What were they talking about? What was their goal as they were speaking to others? Read Acts 4:33; 5:42; 2:36-39; 7:56; 13:48. Read the story of Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. (Luke 24:13-35) It seems like the disciples had not yet understood the connection between the Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillments in the life and death of Jesus. What did Jesus say to them? What did they say to the other disciples when they got back to the upper room? Now read Luke 24:36-49. What are the implications of verses 45-49? Even though neither Jesus' teachings on the road to Emmaus nor in the upper room is recorded for us, is it possible that in those exchanges taking place on resurrection Sunday that Jesus gave the disciples a pattern for all subsequent messages they gave about the gospel?
4. In general, their evangelistic sermons seemed to take one of two possible approaches—depending on the audience. To Jewish audiences, they would often start with prophecies from the Old Testament. That would be followed by evidence that those prophecies were fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Then came a personal testimony about the effects of those truths on the life of the individual speaking. Finally, he made a call to the audience to respond.
5. In the case of non-Jewish audiences, the approach was somewhat different. The speaker first talked about his life before he knew about the gospel. Then, he would focus on the message of the gospel, particularly speaking about the life and teachings of Jesus. Then, he noted the differences that those teachings had made in his individual life. Finally, he made a call to the audience to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior and see what difference it would make in their lives.
6. The good news about God should become such an important factor in our lives that we cannot keep quiet about it. Evangelism or personal witnessing should be an ongoing effort in the life of every Christian. Paul called himself a slave to the gospel. (Romans 1:1)
7. Read Acts 2:42. This first implies that everyone who became a Christian was "loved into the church" and became involved with other members until they themselves were disciples and winning other members. How good are we at integrating new members so that they become

permanent members and, in turn, are inviting others? New members should join a class that takes them through the Bible book-by-book and teaches them the truth about God.

8. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that our final message to the world is contained in Revelation 14:6-12, the three angels' messages. Sometimes, we even say that when one becomes an Adventist, s/he has accepted the third angel's message. We have also focused on three verses in the book of Revelation which identify us as God's special end-time people—Revelation 14:12; 12:17; and 19:10. What do these verses tell us? God's end-time people will be a commandment-keeping people who also bear the testimony of Jesus. This testimony of Jesus is most clearly spelled out in what we call the spirit of prophecy. We believe that the writings of Ellen White represent this prophetic mark for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But, what was the testimony of Jesus?

9. Read John 16:25-27. Ellen White wrote:

Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, "I have manifested thy name." "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men. *The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890, par. 6,9 (2ST 351:2:0-3:1); compare *ST* December 4, 1893; *Manuscript Releases*, vol 18, 359; *RH* August 14, 1900; *YI* November 21, 1883

10. Jesus came to correctly represent the Father—to tell us the truth about God, to demonstrate that God is the One who has told us the truth. How is that related to dying for our sins?
11. But, that is not the only message that we are to bear. God asks us to give our own personal testimony. Read Mark 5:1-19. That formerly demon-possessed man—there were actually two of them according to Matthew—was healed of his demon possession and spent only a few hours with Jesus and the disciples. But, when Jesus was asked to leave that area and get in the boat and go back to Galilee, Jesus told that man to go home and tell what Jesus had done for him. Thus, he became the first Gentile missionary or disciple.
12. How much did he know about the gospel and about all the details of Christianity? All he really knew was what Jesus had done for him. But, as a result of this man's testimony, 4000 men—not counting women and children—came out and spent three days listening to Jesus when Jesus returned to the area of Decapolis sometime later. (Mark 8:1-10) Likely, the people gave the leftover food to their friends and told the story. So, the testimony of this one man resulted in thousands hearing the gospel. Clearly, witnessing to our own personal experience is a potent evangelistic tool. (Mark 5:18-20; Acts 22:15-16; 1 John 1:1-3)
13. How do we find opportunities to witness either through our personal testimony or through telling the gospel story? 1 Peter 3:15 reminds us that we should be ready at all times to give our testimony.
14. Read Acts 13:1-49. It is clear from this passage that churches like the church at Antioch in Syria had developed the right formula for spreading the gospel. People from many different areas came there and added to the work being done. Then, God called Barnabas and Saul and asked the local church to ordain them to go out and spread the gospel into new Gentile areas.

15. Acts 13 tells us that they mentioned the Old Testament passages which foretell the death and resurrection of the Messiah. Which passages were those?
16. Read Acts 6:1-7. Here we see that the Devil apparently made an attempt to hinder the work by tying up the apostles in financial matters and distribution matters so they could not focus on their main task of spreading the gospel. What was the result? Seven deacons were chosen to take care of the distribution. And what did they do? We know specifically that Stephen gave one of the best sermons in the entire New Testament, (Acts 7) and Philip also was soon involved in the great evangelistic work in Samaria. But, the choosing of those seven deacons allowed the apostles to focus more specifically on telling the story of Jesus. And the deacons soon were telling the gospel as well.
17. In order to be an effective witness, one must clearly understand what s/he is witnessing about. In the case of Christianity, this means we must clearly understand what we believe and the basis in the Bible for those beliefs. Can we do that? How many of us can give a Bible-based study explaining our most important Adventist beliefs? How can we become better grounded in Scripture?
18. Telling our own personal story is the easiest part. It is also often very effective. This would consist of: First, a brief account of what we were like before we became a Christian; then, a short explanation of how we came to be a Christian; and finally, a few words about what Christianity has meant to us since becoming a Christian.
19. One of the best examples of this technique is Acts 22:2-21 where Paul gave his defense before the church council in Jerusalem. Acts 22:3-5 tells us about his life before he knew Jesus. Acts 22:6-16 tells about his conversion experience. Acts 22:17-21 tells about his experience after conversion.
20. It would be wonderful for each one of us to spend some time thinking about our personal experience and deciding what we would say in the form of a personal testimony of this sort. Perhaps, we have been an Adventist all our lives and have been raised in an Adventist family. But, there still will be specific times in our experience where we were led to make a definite commitment to Christianity. We could end our personal testimony by talking about the hopes that we have as Christians.
21. Why do so few in our world take the future life and heaven seriously? How can we get them to take a serious look at the possibility of salvation and eternal life?
22. Some of us may not feel qualified to give a full Bible study. So, what can we do in preparation for the time when we may be qualified to do that? There are several possibilities: 1) We could hand people a card giving them an Internet website that they could go to or give them a small tract to try to answer some of their questions. 2) We could simply tell them our own experience. 3) With a little more practice, we should be able to give a careful explanation of some specific teaching of the church in answer to their questions. 4) With a little practice and perhaps an outline or even a DVD, we should be able to give a simple Bible study on a subject or question in which they are interested.
23. As we have seen, evangelism and witnessing are two aspects of the ways that we can spread the gospel. Witnessing may require nothing more than telling our own personal story. The word *evangelism* as commonly used is a description of the process of clearly and persuasively telling the good news about Jesus Christ in such a way that the listener is convinced to become a disciple and even a disciple-maker.
24. This raises the question of the relationship between witnessing and evangelism. In a well-organized church, personal witnessing should be the means of convincing people to come to church or perhaps to attend a more organized series of evangelistic meetings. In our age

of sophisticated television programs and sound bites, public evangelism is not as effective a tool as it used to be. It is more difficult to convince people to come out to meetings. So, we as church members need to think of new ways to reach out to our communities.

25. What evangelistic programs are your church currently involved in? Are you a part of those evangelistic outreaches? Can you think of new ways that you could reach out to your community, methods that the church is not currently employing?
26. Read Matthew 28:19,20. There are four commands or action verbs in these verses: *go*, *make disciples*, *baptize*, and *teach*. The commands to go, baptize, and teach are obviously for the purpose of making disciples.
27. Ellen White wrote:

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, *Desire of Ages*, p. 296.
28. So, why does divinity need anything at all from us? Read Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19,20. These verses tell us that it is through the message of the cross that the entire universe learns more about God. And it is through the church—that is, you and me—that God wants to spread the message of the cross.
29. The early disciples dropped everything to follow Jesus. (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11) God may be asking some of us to do that. But, most of us will be expected to continue our daily work and responsibilities. If God called you and you were certain that He was calling you, would you be ready to drop everything and become a full-time disciple? Are we taking the work of spreading the gospel seriously? Or, are we inclined to think that that is someone else's responsibility?
30. At the end of the day at work, ask yourself: "Did anything happen today that gives evidence that God is at work in and around me? Did I have an opportunity to speak to someone about the gospel?"
31. Matthew 24:14 tells us that the gospel must be preached around the world. This will not happen until a majority of church members take this task seriously and begin to do it.
32. After His resurrection, Jesus spent a period of about 40 days during which He met with and talked to His followers on several occasions. What were His instructions to them? Read Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:47-49; John 20:21; and Acts 1:6-8. In these passages, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to help those who were earnestly desiring to spread the gospel. Do we qualify? Have we had an experience with Jesus Christ that is life-changing and worth reporting to others?
33. Is it possible that the reason why we do not do more witnessing is that we are not sure that we have anything to report? God is prepared to send all the resources of heaven to the help of those who are honestly willing to commit themselves to the task of spreading the gospel. Are we ready?

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