

Witnessing and Evangelism

Sequential Evangelism and Witnessing

Lesson #5 for May 5, 2012

Scriptures: Matthew 25:35-41; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3; 1 Peter 2:2; John 6:54-66; Luke 8:4-15.

1. What are the steps that we should ask people to go through to become grounded in the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? What should be the first step? Do we need to convince people that God exists? Do we need to convince people that they need God? Do we need to convince them that God loves them? Should we start by offering them heaven and eternal life? How should we start with people who are completely unchurched and unaware of religious issues or the Bible? How do we convince them that they are in need of something that we can offer them?
2. Both Peter and Paul recognized that new beginners need to be given simple, easy-to-understand truths from the gospel. We are asking them to change their whole way of thinking. That is not easy. We must not overwhelm them with too many facts or ideas that are strange to them. As Peter and Paul suggested, we must feed them on the milk of the spiritual Word. What is that? (1 Peter 2:2)
3. The best way to reach people is to discover what their “felt needs” are. In some cases those needs may be physical. Some people are sick. Some people are hungry. Some people are homeless or need clothing. Others are simply depressed or anxious. If we can help those people in the areas of their felt needs, we have an open door to minister to them regarding their spiritual needs.
4. How do we discover felt needs? Can we reach them where they are? When we reach out to people in our world who are in need, do we really recognize that we are ministering to Jesus Himself? Is our health ministry one of the doors that opens people’s hearts? What about our educational system? Are we making optimal use of those opportunities for reaching out to the communities around us? What purpose did Jesus have in doing so much healing?

During His ministry, Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching.—*The Ministry of Healing* 19.4; compare *Counsels on Health* 503.3

5. Why would God through Ellen White make such statements? What church programs might build on these ideas? Once Jesus had met peoples’ physical needs, how did He transition to talking about their spiritual needs? Was there a simple, standard pattern? Or, did He adapt His teachings to each person’s needs? After healing people, Jesus always pointed them to God. (See John 6)
6. Read Matthew 25:35-40. What was Jesus trying to tell us through this parable? Are these words to be taken literally? How do we balance the need to support ourselves and our families with this challenge to reach out to others in need?
7. How did religion get such a bad name? In Martin Luther’s day, the church was so dominant in society and the church leaders spoke so consistently of the idea that one had to get his/her sins forgiven if one wanted to avoid hell that people felt compelled to do what the church told them to do. By contrast, in our day, people are doing everything possible to promote the idea that the church and God are optional. They believe that civil society can set up its own standards without considering biblical standards at all. Things like abortion and same-sex marriage are promoted as choices that we can make on our own without any consideration of what God or the Bible say.
8. In this context, how do we convince people that the church, the Bible, and especially religion as now practiced are relevant? Do we demonstrate that Christianity affects every aspect of our lives?
9. What should be our initial appeal to those around us? Should we focus only on those who are already “churched”? Or, can we appeal to those who have no church background? Does this help us to understand why health is important in our outreach as a church?
10. Today, the special challenge for us is that many people do not perceive that they are experiencing any major problem—there is no felt need. Is there a way to reach out to people who do not immediately recognize any need—people who believe that they are doing “Just fine, thank you”?

11. The most effective way to bring people into the church is to befriend them and to invite them to your home, preferably with a small group of other friends, and integrate them into your social group. Then, invite them to join you in Bible study.
12. It should be obvious that this is not a quick fix for the church's evangelism program. This requires effort, time, and careful study, and may require reaching out to a number of different people before we find those who are receptive to the gospel. It is certainly not always easy to teach unpleasant or unwanted truths.
13. Look at the example of Jesus. How is it possible that Jesus, the greatest Teacher who ever lived on this earth, could spend years with His disciples and still not get them to understand even some very basic issues? See Luke 18:31-34; John 16:12. Why couldn't they understand Him?
14. Jesus suggested that the solution to the problem would be sending the Holy Spirit—another Counselor. (John 16:13) Is it clear to you how the Holy Spirit works in this whole process? Does it seem like it is getting easier to win converts? Or, more difficult? How will this whole process be affected by what we call the shaking and the latter rain?
15. In our world when everybody wants to exercise total and complete freedom to do whatever they feel like doing, how do we convince people of such basic truths as the fact that Jesus is coming again soon? How do we convince them that someday soon they will face a judgment day? How many, even of Adventists, understand some of our more complicated doctrines? Do we?
16. In our day, there is so much emphasis on personal choice. No one seems to want to be told that s/he is under someone else's authority. They do not want to be told what they should do. Is this part of Satan's overall plan to convert the world? (Revelation 13) Satan will conduct the most effective "evangelistic" program of all time! Isn't that exactly what Satan tried to do in heaven?
17. Is it clear in your mind which doctrines are milk and which doctrines are solid food? Solid food doctrines are those that not only require acceptance but require serious thinking and in many cases even a change in paradigm and lifestyle. Some examples would be seventh-day Sabbath observance or changing to a healthy diet. What about things like the nature of man? Might that be a testing doctrine for some people?
18. Read John 6:54-66. What was happening there? Clearly, the people of Galilee were excited about the possibility that Jesus would feed them and lead them on to victory over the Romans. Should Jesus have gone further than He did to meet them where they were? What did He mean when He said, "Eat my flesh and drink my blood"? (John 6:54,56 GNB) What was Jesus saying? (See #38)
19. In times past, Christian groups attracted followers by providing basic needs. This seemed to fit with Matthew 25:35-40. But, when testing times came, many of those who seemed to be Christians melted away. This led to the concept of "rice Christians." How do we avoid that problem?
20. How do we convince people that they should "do right because it is right"? (COL 98.0) How important is it for people to feel loved and accepted by us before they are willing to consider changes in their lives? How do we get them to extend that love relationship which they have developed with us to include Jesus and the church?
21. Over the last 30 years, does it seem like the church is moving closer to the world or the world is being won over to the church? Many "standards" that were considered by some to be important 30 years ago have been largely abandoned by the church. Is that a sign of progress because the church is abandoning irrelevant issues and focusing on what is really important? Or, is this really backsliding? Do you see at least a core group in the church emerging to form the 144,000 that will be God's final people? What will those people be like?
22. We believe that the gift of grace is truly free. God's love—although more valuable than anything else in the universe—cannot be bought for any price. At the same time, we recognize that accepting the call to the gospel and accepting the changes in our lives that Jesus advises us to make can be a struggle.

23. What price have we paid for commitment? Has it really cost us anything? What price did Jesus and His disciples and Paul pay for their commitment? They died for their beliefs. How does the Devil respond when he sees one of us really committed? That would really worry him!
24. All of us have attended Bible studies, even evangelistic series, or a Revelation seminar, or some other special form of Bible study or group meeting. How have we been impacted by those occasions? How should we respond to people who do not immediately grasp everything that was discussed and are still wavering at the end of the meetings?
25. One way to get a good feel for peoples' issues is to ask open-ended questions.

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? (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, for Wednesday, May 2)

What about the central question that we should be asking: What have we learned about God?

26. In the past, have we been guilty of trying to give people too much, too fast? As we have already suggested, one of the most powerful appeals for the gospel is to love people, accept them into our homes, and treat them as friends. At the same time, it is a good idea to continually ask fair, but open-ended, questions to determine if there are still doubts or questions in their minds.
27. Think about the process a person goes through in his progress from being a person of the world to becoming a Christian. If we see people taking timid first steps in that direction, how can we best help them to move forward? How can we avoid trying to rush them? Probably the best evidence that a person is getting it is when they start telling others and trying to convince them of the truth.
28. Read Luke 8:4-15. What lessons can we learn from this parable? Clearly, there are people in different categories. Some are ready to accept quickly but will later fade while others will not seem to respond at all. And let us remember that any progress we make towards bringing someone into God's kingdom will be bitterly opposed by the Devil. He will bring in temptations and doubts and discouragements in every way he possibly can. So, simply sowing the seed is rarely enough to bring a good harvest. We must prepare the soil, sow the seed, water, and fertilize to get a good harvest.
29. One further consideration that we need to think about is that different people have abilities to appeal to different groups. Some can work very well with children. Others with relatively uneducated adults. And a few might even be able to attract well-educated, financially-secure adults. There are also special groups such as the retired, the unemployed, even students or prisoners to whom we can reach out. Some of us may even find our best area of working is with a group that is already partially in the church—perhaps those who attend church but are not baptized; or young people within the church who have not yet been baptized or fully understand the church's teachings and/or practices. Others may be regular attendees at a church school or some other special church program.

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.
30. So, are we beginning to understand the challenge of reaching out and bringing others into the fold? Do we know how to provide a nurturing, protective environment to help them? Are we keeping our eyes open for physical, economic, and personal felt needs as opening doors to approaching spiritual needs?

31. We must recognize that even Christ with His consummate skills could not win everyone. (John 6; consider also the case of Judas.)
32. Let us never make the mistake of trying to choke down too much doctrine too quickly!
33. Some of us may try to avoid all responsibility by saying that we have no special training in evangelism. But, feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty something to drink, even being hospitable to strangers, does not require any special training or skill except loving and forgiving them. Reaching out to the needy has been a very successful tactic for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are fairly adept at winning people from the lower socio-economic group. But, what about those who are well-educated and well-off financially? How can we reach those people?
34. Christ makes it very clear that we need to keep our eyes open for those who are in need. (Matthew 25:35-40; Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Job 29:12-16; Isaiah 58:6,7)
35. What we see there is love in action. Isn't this the basic mode of operation of God's kingdom? It is the predominant motivation in the lives of true Christians. But, it is just the opposite of what motivates people of the world. So, how do we convince people that they should act out of love? Should we start practicing it here even before we enter heaven? Practicing love includes reaching out to people who are different from us in various ways. Embracing diversity is an essential part of love for our neighbors.
36. Review in your mind the basic teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and even of Christianity as a whole. What would you identify as the "milk of the Word"? (1 Peter 2:2; 3:15) What would you consider to be the "solid food"? How long do you think it should take for a person to grow up so they are ready for the solid food? How important is it for that person to feel loved and accepted even during the transition? If we find someone who is somehow reluctant to accept the more challenging doctrines, should they be abandoned?
37. What did Jesus have in mind when He talked about eating His flesh and drinking His blood? Eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking His blood is identified by Ellen White as carefully studying the Scriptures, being more eager to study them than we are to read the newspaper or some other book. She especially said we should be studying the books of Daniel and Revelation. (8T 193; TM 116, 339, 390, 5BC 1135.3-8)
38. What do you think the people of Galilee thought of when Jesus said that they were to eat His flesh and drink His blood? Did they refuse to see this as a metaphor?

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.

39. One of the most effective ways of getting people interested in the Bible and Bible study is going through the Bible book by book and asking the one all-important question: What does this book or story tell us about God? If you would like some help in taking this approach, go to our website: www.theox.org and look at the Bible Study Guides and the Teacher's Guides. With a little effort, anyone can lead a very interesting Bible study group using these guides.

© 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: April 4, 2012

Z:\My Documents\WPISSTG-Hart\Evangelism\SS-5-Evangelism-2012_05_05-Fin+.wpd