

Witnessing and Evangelism

Releasing into Ministry

Lesson #9 for June 2, 2012

Scriptures: Exodus 18:13-26; Matthew 7:17,18; Acts 6:1-8; John 4:36; Acts 15:36-40.

1. This lesson is about available resources, obstacles, hindrances, and final preparations before actually beginning an evangelism and witnessing program in the church.
2. It should be pretty clear by now that for a church to grow, it needs an intentional witnessing and evangelism program. People may have been trained, and they may be ready. However, until things are properly organized and the program is started, nothing really happens.
3. Has your church discovered when and how each member can contribute to the witnessing and evangelism strategies of the church? Read Exodus 18:13-26. Jethro was Moses' father-in-law and a descendant of Abraham through Midian. Moses had lived with Jethro for forty years before leading the Israelites out of Egypt. When Jethro arrived at the Israelite camp and observed how hard Moses was working from early morning until late at night dealing with problems in the camp, it was clear to him that responsibility needed to be shared. He suggested a plan which seemed very rational and proved to be effective in lightening Moses' load. What can we learn from that experience that might help us in sharing our responsibilities for witnessing at the present time? Are our church leaders encouraging leadership among members? Are they willing to share responsibility? If not, what are the hindrances involved? Is "politics" a factor?
4. Notice that Moses was encouraged to pick people with well-recognized qualities who were accustomed to handling responsibility and then to give them tasks suitable to their skills. Why do you think Moses had not done that earlier? Was he waiting for God to direct him to do so? Couldn't God have instructed Moses directly?
5. There is a feeling among some in the Adventist Church today that only people who have been professionally trained are really qualified to evangelize or to witness. Why do you think that opinion is still current? Does God intend for the pastors to do all of the witnessing and to experience all the joy of bringing others into the faith? Is the Holy Spirit reluctant to bless laity to do witnessing? What should we learn from Matthew 17:14-20; DA 431?
6. Read Matthew 7:17,18. What is implied by the idea that only good trees produce good fruit? Should people who are willing to do personal witnessing be given an opportunity, and then, should they be discouraged from witnessing if they do not do a good job? Should the entire church be involved in encouraging or discouraging a given individual to witness? Are we capable of judging another person's spiritual qualifications to witness? Most of us could probably think of someone who has been a member of our current church (or some previous church to which we have belonged) that did not seem like a good candidate to do witnessing! On the other hand, are there people in your congregation who are qualified to witness but are afraid to do so because they are not appreciated? And are there others who are qualified but do not have self-confidence?
7. One of the challenges that the church must consider is that witnessing is most effective when those who are witnessing are fairly carefully matched to those to whom they are witnessing. Ideally, people should be matched, especially for language, but also for cultural and social standing as well as age, if possible. Ideally, they should be people who are spiritually mature and have a good knowledge of biblical materials. No matter how well-qualified the pastor is, he cannot be a match for everyone in any congregation or for everyone in your community to whom witnessing is needed.

8. Read Acts 6:1-8. A problem arose in the early Christian church. That problem involved assistance being given to Greek-speaking Jewish widows. What did the disciples do? Did they hesitate to give responsibility to others? When they were aware of the problem, they accepted suggestions. They appointed people they thought would be well-qualified to deal with the issue, and the church progressed along even better than before. The deacons who were chosen—including Stephen and Philip—turned out to be great evangelists as well. What are we supposed to learn from this story?
9. There are times when a personal sacrifice needs to be made to promote the gospel and witnessing. Timothy allowed himself to be circumcised (Acts 16:1-5) so that he could work with Jewish members. Barnabas sold property and contributed the money to the church so the work could go forward. (Acts 4:36,37) What personal sacrifices might we need to make to promote evangelism within our own spiritual community? Compare Mark 12:42.
10. Read John 7:14-17. Jesus was in the temple in Jerusalem. He had spent one year ministering and training His disciples in Galilee; and then, He spent six months training His disciples while traveling privately, mostly in non-Jewish areas. He finally returned to Jerusalem after a considerable absence. He walked into the temple and began teaching. Even the Pharisees and scribes were amazed at His knowledge and wanted to know where He got His education! (John 7:15) Where *did* Jesus get His education? Even at the age of twelve, His knowledge of the Scriptures and of God's plans was superior to that of the experts. He had been trained at His mother's knee and by angels and perhaps by God Himself in the fields around Nazareth during the early morning hours.

The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. **The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother's knee.** As He advanced from childhood to youth, He did not seek the schools of the rabbis. He needed not the education to be obtained from such sources; for **God was His instructor.** {DA 70.1}

Thus to Jesus the significance of the word and the works of God was unfolded, as He was trying to understand the reason of things. **Heavenly beings were His attendants, and the culture of holy thoughts and communings was His.** From the first dawning of intelligence He was constantly growing in spiritual grace and knowledge of truth. {DA 70.3}

Joseph and Mary hoped that He might be led to reverence the learned rabbis, and give more diligent heed to their requirements. **But Jesus in the temple had been taught by God. That which He had received, He began at once to impart.** {DA 78.3}

Every child may gain knowledge as Jesus did. [-from the works of nature and the pages of God's holy word - CSW 40.1]. As we try to become acquainted with our heavenly Father through His Word, angels will draw near, our minds will be strengthened, our characters will be elevated and refined. {DA 70.4; CG 51.2}

11. He appeared in the temple at Jerusalem with fresh new teachings from the Scriptures. His arguments were so clear and convincing that no one could answer them. So, in effect, Jesus said to them, "If you are willing to do God's will, you will know what is the truth." (See John 7:17) How does that actually work? Revelation 1:3 states that happy and blessed are those who read, those who listen to the words spoken, and those who obey what is written.

12. Is it true that if we go forth doing our best to witness, we will be blessed with guidance by the Holy Spirit and our knowledge and skills will improve? God is waiting for us!
13. Read John 4:36. Something else will happen as well. Those who work together to witness and evangelize others will form bonds which will draw them closer together as friends and as fellow Christians. Thus, we see that preparation and action work to draw us closer to the Lord and to each other.
14. This illustrates an important principle sometimes called “circular influence.” As we become involved with others in the process of witnessing, it brings harmony. That encourages others to become involved which encourages more harmony. Thus it progresses. Consider some experiences in the early church history that illustrate this fact. When the 11 disciples met together with many others—some 120 in all—they thought it was necessary to replace Judas. (Acts 1:15-26) That could have brought a lot of conflict, but it was handled wisely and with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit. Matthias was added to their group. Don't you think that both of the men whose names were chosen would have done a good job—and probably did? They were men who had been with Jesus from the beginning.
15. We often think that Jesus traveled with just 12 disciples, but we know that there were others. Read Luke 8:1-3. Apparently, there were many other men as well. Remember the 70—or 72. (Luke 10:1-12)
16. But, when a member of the group sets out to do something new and perhaps even a little unsettling, there is a great potential for misunderstanding. Paul and Barnabas had done a great work on their first missionary tour. However, after going only part way, John Mark turned back. Change often brings fear.
17. Read Acts 15:36-40. Those two seasoned apostles separated ways over this issue. Barnabas took John Mark, and Paul took Silas. Is it possible that God allowed this difference of opinion to develop so that there were two teams witnessing instead of just one? Read 2 Timothy 4:11. Later, Paul recognized John Mark's experience and skills and was happy to have him as a fellow worker.
18. What differences in your church or Sabbath school might be hindering the progress toward witnessing and evangelism? How much humility, death to self, and willingness to forgive—even to turn the other cheek—might you need in order to bring reconciliation?
19. So, what needs to happen to organize for witnessing? (See *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, June 1) 1) The church needs to decide which people will be involved, how they will be involved, and how the program must be laid out. 2) A definite timeline should be developed. Make it as detailed as you like. It should include specific training times for certain programs, including actual start and finish dates with time allowed for evaluation at the end. 3) Try to make it clear who is responsible for doing each task. 4) Look carefully at how your program fits in with other church programs. The less conflict with other interests and responsibilities, the better. 5) Think carefully about whether you want to have an ongoing program or whether you want to have a new beginning each year. We have already suggested that some people may be better suited to reach people similar to themselves in a variety of ways. What groups are best for you to target in your community? Are there other groups in the community that you could reach out to that you have not considered? Could you bring in outside speakers to encourage and inspire action?

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. There are many ways in which church members may give the message to

those around them. One of the most successful is by living helpful, unselfish, Christian lives.—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.

20. Do we believe these words? Do we know or have we discovered what role it is that God wants us to play in evangelism? Is there a feeling among those in your church that the pastor is so much better qualified than any of the members that he should do all of the witnessing? How can we overcome that obstacle? How can we discover what spiritual gifts and talents we each have individually—without being judgmental?
21. The time has come to consider how we are going to put theory into practice. For those who have been involved in the past, there was a great thrill in watching someone you have worked with actually become a member of the church. Talk with other members of your Sabbath school class or with your church to think over the obstacles which might be hindering your particular church from reaching out.
22. One of the greatest obstacles in our day is the problem of time. So many people are incredibly busy. The Devil does everything possible to keep us busy! Is that why less than 40%—according to the 2002 Adventists World Survey—of church members were engaged in sharing their faith? God calls every one of us into action. Inaction is not an option. Are the leaders in your church reluctant to let go of some of their personal control? Do they lack trust in the church members to do this most important work? Is it hard for them to believe that someone else could be as effective as they are to do the work?
23. Wouldn't it be wise for the church to follow the example that Jethro recommended to Moses and to train and teach, matching tasks to skills, and then, to mentor new leaders in the church?
24. The Adventist Church is in the middle of a long discussion about the role of women in ministry. Read Romans 16:1,2; Philippians 4:2,3; Luke 8:1-3. Clearly, Jesus and Paul had women who worked with them and were effective in their ministry.
25. Is your church actively involving minority groups such as young people, women, and ethnic and cultural minorities in your evangelistic plans? If not, why not?
26. It is so easy to slip into “comfort-zone Christianity.” How can we avoid that problem?
27. We are in the midst of the great controversy. It is a war of epic proportions, a battle for the mind of each person living on our earth. What is the Devil doing to try to prevent us in our program of evangelism and witnessing? How can we best respond to his challenges?

Our confession of his faithfulness is heavens 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*, page 347.

28. Read Ephesians 6:19,20. Would we dare to ask God to make us bold in speaking for the gospel? Considering all that God has done for us, do we have any excuse for hesitating to speak for Him? When and how do we get started?

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