

Equipping for Evangelism and Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 4:19, 11:1–11, 10:1–14, 1 Pet. 5:8, 2 Pet. 3:9.*

Memory Text: “Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’ ” (*Matthew 4:19, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Whatever the important proper training, we must first be grounded in our relationship with Jesus before we can be “properly equipped” to effectively witness for our faith.

It is highly unlikely that a person who has no personal assurance of salvation will be able to lead another into an intimate saving relationship with Jesus (although it does happen). They might be able to convince others to believe some Bible doctrines and some facts, biblical dates, and charts. Such convictions and beliefs may even cause people to make significant lifestyle changes. However, because good deeds can be performed apart from Jesus Christ, it is imperative that any witnessing and evangelistic training feature both the doctrinal and the spiritual. To be a true evangelist, one must have a firm grasp and experience of “the everlasting gospel.” It is this gospel that ultimately brings belief, confession, conversion, assurance, and discipleship.

This week we will see that spiritually and skillfully equipping people for evangelism and witnessing is indeed a biblical principle and that we need to encourage people to make this a reality in their local church.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 26.*

The Need for Training

In Matthew 9:37 Jesus told the disciples that the harvest was plentiful but the laborers few. Today the harvest is infinitely larger and the laborers are still relatively few. There is a great need to send out harvest workers who are thoroughly trained and equipped. While it ever remains true that the Holy Spirit's influence is the major factor in the success of witnessing and evangelism, it is still important that those whom God calls to service be trained through formal instruction, observation, and participation. According to Ephesians 4:11, 12, there should be a definite endeavour to equip people for the many and varied aspects of ministry and service.

God has promised to bless leaders with certain gifts that will help them to function as leaders and trainers for ministry. We can't stress enough, however, that evangelists, pastors, and teachers are not following scriptural guidelines if they are doing all the work themselves and are not equipping others for service. Everyone who is training for witnessing and evangelism work must be brought to the strong conviction that it is indeed God's will that the world be saved from sin, that the God-given work of the church is to reach out to a lost world, and that it is God's will that His church in the world will grow.

Read Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:17 in the context of Matthew 28:19. **What significance do you see in the fact that the first recorded command of Jesus was “ ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’ ”? What should those words mean to us today as Seventh-day Adventists with our understanding of the three angels' messages? How much “fishing for men” are we really doing as opposed to just “tending to our own boats”?**

It is significant that Jesus did not simply call the disciples to be fishers of men. He did not say “Follow Me, and be fishers of men.” He said, “ ‘Follow Me, and *I will make you* fishers of men’ ” (ital. supplied). Right at the beginning of their formal association with Jesus these men understood that they were embarking upon important training. Jesus called them into a learning environment where they would be trained for the task to which He had called them. The disciples would learn much through watching and doing. Only when they had learned, on the local scene, what to do and how to do it would Jesus issue to them a worldwide commission. Without the appropriate training, instruction, and personal spiritual development of workers, the task of taking the gospel to our neighborhoods would seem impossible.

Learning by Observing

There are two aspects to learning for those who wish to serve the Lord, and one leads to the other. First there is learning to know Jesus; then comes learning how to share Him and what He offers to the whole fallen human race.

Read about the time Jesus fed the 5,000 (*Matt. 14:13–21, Mark 6:30–44, Luke 9:10–17, John 6:1–14*). **List the things that the disciples would have observed that would help to equip them for their future ministry. What things can we safely assume they observed that are not specifically mentioned in the Gospel accounts? Read also what Ellen White adds to this story in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 364–371.**

How exciting not only to listen to the greatest preacher but to observe His presentation as He preached about the kingdom of God (*Luke 9:11*) in a way that would have created a desire for the kingdom in every heart.

The principle of learning through observation is applicable to everyone. Book learning, or listening to instruction, must always be built upon through observation and involvement. Jesus expected the disciples of John the Baptist to learn from what they had observed.

Examine Matthew 11:1–11. **What had the disciples of John the Baptist observed, and what did Jesus expect them to tell John as a result of their observations? What was the lesson that Jesus was teaching to not only John but His own disciples?**

John the Baptist had previously presented Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But then John was imprisoned with no opportunity to preach, and he heard only secondhand reports of Jesus' ministry. It seems that his prison experience caused some doubts to surface in his mind regarding Jesus. When doubts arise we should go to Jesus, and that is exactly what John did. Jesus sent John's disciples back to tell him what they had heard and seen. As their reports encouraged John, we are left to wonder how the things that they had seen impacted their own witnessing and evangelistic ministry.

In most cases we can't do the kind of miracles performed by Jesus. But with a willingness to die to self and live for others, what can we do in our own sphere that reflects the kind of work that Jesus did when here?

Learning by Doing

No matter how many books people read about their favorite sport, and no matter how many games are watched, if they want to be a player they have to put their boots on and get out on the field. We call it hands-on experience, learning by doing, and without it a person is simply not equipped for the task. This universal truth even applies to the Christian's witnessing and evangelism. Sometimes we hear people say that they don't want to get involved because they are not completely ready. They must understand that active participation is a vital part of becoming ready. Starting small, step by step, building up, is the way to go. As the Holy Spirit leads us, our skills, experience, and confidence increases.

Matthew 10:1–14 records Jesus equipping His disciples and then sending them out. However different the situation than that which we face today, what can we learn from Him sending them out that reveals how this was part of their training?

Jesus had taught the disciples “in the classroom,” so to speak. He had also taken them out into the field where they learned by observing what He did. Then after Jesus had equipped them with power to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons (*vs. 8*), He sent them out without Him. But notice the amount of instruction He gave as He sent them out. Jesus instructed them about what to preach, what miracles to perform, what not to take with them, with whom to lodge, and when to leave an unfruitful field of labor. We can safely assume that they received other instructions, as well. Only through this interaction with people would many important lessons be learned. This passage shows on-the-job training at its best. They couldn't minister to those with whom they didn't come into contact; this is a point we must never forget.

Read Luke 10:1–11. What similarities are there between the instructions that Jesus gave to the 12 and to the 70? Again, what principles can we learn for ourselves from His instructions?

Although initially Jesus sent the 70 into places where He intended to shortly go Himself (*vs. 1*), He knew what the disciples and other missionaries would encounter as they attempted to spread the gospel after His ascension when they were on their own. The instructions given to the seventy disciples as they were sent out indicates that Jesus was preparing them for what lay ahead.

How many excuses do you manage to find to not witness for your faith when the opportunity arises? What's your usual one?

Learning Through Failure

Sometimes we may fail to reach all of the goals that have been set for a particular evangelism activity. Does this mean that we have totally failed? Of course not. Regardless of the strategy we employ in our search to win the lost, we will have both successes and failures. We may even set the bar too high. For instance, if we fail to reach set baptismal goals, we may have set unrealistic goals; or this activity may have been more of a seed-sowing venture than a reaping program. In short, however much we might think the harvest is ready for reaping, it might still only be sowing time. We aren't always in a position to know.

Read 1 Peter 5:8. **What other power is dedicated to undermining your attempts to win people to God's kingdom? How can being conscious of this threat help us to better prepare and execute witnessing and evangelism strategies?**

In all of our attempts to win souls, we are up against a supernatural foe that is very active to influence people against the gospel. Sometimes when we let go of the hand of the Lord, the evil one can cause some problems with our efforts to work for God. Our only defense is the complete surrender to Christ every moment of our lives.

As with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, failure may sometimes cause us to play the blame game, one of Satan's most successful tools for bringing disharmony among God's people. Rather than looking for people to blame, we would do better to undertake serious, honest, and intensive evaluation, remembering that even Jesus, the greatest Preacher/Evangelist, did not win everyone to whom He appealed.

Compare Luke 10:17 and Matthew 17:14–20. **What did the disciples do when they encountered failure in their ministry?**

Rather than give in to despair over our perceived failures, we can learn from the disciples again. Even though they had been given the power over evil spirits and had indeed been successful in casting them out, it is evident that sometimes they failed to accomplish that for which Jesus had gifted them. On such occasions they came to Jesus and asked Him to explain what was happening and why (*see Matt. 17:19*). Here is a principle that we would do well to note; an important part of our search for reasons for failure, and how to do better, is to take our witnessing and evangelism situations to the Lord.

What have you learned from your failed attempts at witnessing to others that can help you in future attempts? How often does fear of rejection hold you back?

Learning Through Success

There are two areas in which we can learn through success: the area that can be called practical/procedural and the area that can be called spiritual cooperation. Although it can be rightly argued that there is a spiritual aspect to both areas, we will deal with them separately in order to better highlight what can be learned from success.

The practical/procedural is where we learn from what we actually do. For instance, we learn the most acceptable sequence in which to present Bible studies in our area. We learn which preaching venue is best, which advertising draws the most people, and a host of other practical and procedural choices that best fit our particular location.

Spiritual cooperation is an emphasis upon the fact that God is intimately involved in the believer's witnessing and evangelism. After all, it is God's will that everyone be saved.

Read 2 Peter 3:9. What crucial lesson must we take from this verse that we should always keep in mind and claim in all our witnessing activities? See also 1 Cor. 3:6.

It is no use planting if no one is going to water the seeds. Likewise, it is no use watering if you don't put the water where the seeds are planted. And even if the sower and the one who waters get it all right, there is still no increase unless given by God. As we see the blessing of God bringing success to our humble efforts, we learn. We learn the extent to which God is, and wants to be, involved in our endeavors. We learn to trust Him more. We learn the importance of a close spiritual cooperation with God as we strive to reach the souls for whom Christ died because *there isn't a person you witness to for whom Christ has not died and whom He doesn't want to see saved*. How important it is that we never forget this crucial truth.

How do we take the words of Jesus in John 15:5 and make them practical and real in our lives, particularly in our work of witnessing and evangelism? How can we as individuals or as a team ministry truly experience what Christ tells us in this text? What things must we change in order to have that kind of connection with Him?

Further Study: Formulate Evangelistic Strategies.

As your church seeks to do its part in outreach, keep the following points in mind:

- At the very least, involve all of the witnessing or evangelism team in the strategic planning process. Ideally the whole congregation will be involved in the church's setting of goals and direction.
- Initially plan for the next church year. A 12-month strategy is long enough to start with. Later, you can add more plans and strategies that will continue beyond the initial period.
- Give great attention to helping strategic personnel know exactly what is expected of them and at what time. When people are not sure of what to do or when and how to do it, a church's strategic momentum toward its goals may be slowed or halted.

Discussion Questions:

1 “Every church should be a training school for Christian workers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 149. How well does your local church fare in this area? If not very well, what can be done to bring about the needed changes?

2 “Every day Satan has his plans to carry out—certain lines that will hedge up the way of those who are witnesses for Jesus Christ. Now, unless the living, human agents for Jesus are humble, meek, and lowly of heart because they have learned of Jesus, they will just as surely fall under temptation as they live; for Satan is watching and artful and subtle, and the workers, if not prayerful, will be taken unawares. He steals upon them as a thief in the night and makes them captives. Then he works upon the minds of individuals to pervert their individual ideas and frame their plans; and if brethren see danger and speak of it, they feel that a personal injury is done them, that someone is trying to weaken their influence. One draws one way, and another in an opposite direction.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 101. How can we, as we seek to do the work of witnessing, deal with the danger so graphically presented in this passage? What is our only defense?

3 In class, talk about someone or some church evangelistic project that has been successful as a whole. What can you learn from that person or project? How can you adapt what you have learned to the work in your area, realizing that every situation is different and what works in one place might not work in another?

God's Patient Pursuit: Part 2

I found a job and was doing well, but I wasn't satisfied. I sensed that God had something else in mind for me. A friend called and offered me my dream job. It was everything I wanted, and the pay was excellent. I could rise quickly to the top of my field. It seemed perfect! I agreed to interview for the job.

That same week a Seventh-day Adventist evangelist came to hold meetings in our town. His wife would hold training sessions for people interested in becoming Bible workers. I didn't plan to go to the workshop; I didn't even know what it meant to be a Bible worker. But God impressed me to attend.

As the week progressed, war raged within me. I had a chance for a perfect job and great pay, but God seemed to be calling me to work for Him. Should I quit my present job and work for God as a Bible worker? The struggle made me miserable until I surrendered to God. I quit my job and signed up for further training to become a full-time Bible worker.

I returned to India to tell my parents of my decision. I knew that they would be disappointed, and maybe even angry to learn that I was giving up a career to work for God. But the confrontation was far more difficult than I imagined. My father cried and tried to convince me to stay in India and work. Finally my step-mother convinced my father to let me do as I wished with my life.

I took a three-month Bible training course and returned to Australia to begin work as a Bible worker at Gateway, the church plant focusing on university students and young professionals in Melbourne, Australia. We meet with young people on the campus and become friends. Then we invite them to our Bible study and worship group. Most of the young people who come know almost nothing about God. They socialize, eat, study God's Word together, and pray and praise God. In one year about 90 people have come at least once, and 12 to 15 come regularly. A number of these are studying the Bible with us regularly.

Many international students come who have no concept of God. Others have attended church before but have had no personal relationship with Jesus. We tailor our Bible studies to what the students need.

This church plant has received funding from Global Mission, and the mission offerings support the ongoing work. I praise God that He called me to work for Him and that He calls each member of His church to make such ministries possible through their offerings.

To learn about other Global Mission projects that are touching lives for God, visit www.global-mission.org.

VIKRAM PANCHAL shares his faith with young adults in Melbourne, Australia.