

Personal Evangelism *and* Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Acts 4:13, 14; John 1:37–50; Psalm 139; 1 Pet. 3:1–15; John 4:37, 38.*

Memory Text: “ ‘You are My witnesses,’ says the LORD, ‘and My servant whom I have chosen’ ” (*Isaiah 43:10, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Those who have the joy of assurance of salvation will want to lead others to experience the same.

Although many people will hear the good news about Jesus through a church’s witnessing and evangelism endeavors, there is a special sense in which the individual’s influence contributes significantly to the success of the corporate church program. Over the last few decades, surveys have shown that friends, relatives, neighbors, or acquaintances (all under the power of the Holy Spirit) were the most influential factors in leading people to give their hearts to Christ. Research has shown that up to 83 percent of new members surveyed stated the influence of their church-member friends, relatives, and acquaintances as being significant. Of those who attended some form of public evangelistic meetings before joining the church, 64 percent attended at the invitation of someone in their close-people network.

This week we will review some biblical examples of networking and consider our connectedness to Jesus and our personal influence on those close to us.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 12.*

My God and Me

Our personal relationship with Jesus will have a direct bearing upon our success in witnessing for Him. It is so easy to learn some witnessing and evangelism formulas and then rally forth in our own assumed wisdom and strength. While God can still bless our efforts, we must ever remind ourselves that it is His work, and we accomplish it through His power. Do we want to merely impart knowledge (albeit important knowledge), or do we want to encourage a vital spiritual relationship? And how can we pass on to others what we don't have in and of ourselves?

Of course, there are always examples of people—however weak in faith themselves, however close to tottering on the edge of apostasy and backsliding—who nevertheless are used by God to lead others to Jesus. In a large city a number of years ago, a young woman, having joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church, worked tirelessly to reach her brother. After years, the brother was baptized. One month later, the sister left the faith and, as of now, still renounces it. Although cases like this happen, the fact is that the stronger our own connection with Jesus, the more powerful a witness we will be.

Read Acts 4:13, 14. What do these verses reveal about the relationship that Peter and John had with Jesus and what this connection enabled them to accomplish? Think through what was meant when it says that “they realized that they had been with Jesus.” What does that mean? What should a person who has just “been with Jesus” be like?

The lesson in God's Word is pretty clear. As we think about our personal mission fields, as we assess the ripeness of the grain and the urgent need of laborers, we need to allow the Lord to draw us into a close and powerful relationship with Him; a relationship that will give us power that, otherwise, we wouldn't have.

How is your own personal relationship with the Lord? How does your mere presence, the way you talk, act, and treat people, reveal your relationship with God? Be as painfully honest with yourself as you possibly can.

My Personal Mission Field

When Jesus looked at the crowds of people, He was filled with compassion (*see Matt. 9:36*). Sometimes we may think that Jesus simply saw the crowd, but, in reality, He saw each *individual* that made up the crowd. In the same way, we should be aware of the individuals in the crowds through which we walk and those in which we live. Our church can be aware of individuals in the crowd only if church members interact on an individual basis with those who are in their sphere of influence.

Those with whom we personally interact on various levels of intimacy are, in reality, our personal mission field. From our closest family relationships we can move outward to other relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Occasionally others may fleetingly move in and out of our sphere of influence and, for a brief time, become a part of our personal mission field.

Read John 1:37–42. Why do you think Andrew told his brother about finding the Messiah before he told anyone else?

Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist, and as John’s ministry was to prepare the way for Jesus, it is understandable that some disciples made the transition to following Jesus. Andrew’s conversation with Jesus excited him so much that he immediately went looking for the person closest to him, the brother with whom he had spent many long nights fishing on the Sea of Galilee.

Read John 1:43–50. Look at what is going on here. What interpersonal relations are revealed? In what way does Philip respond to Nathanael’s skepticism? What lessons can we take from this story that can help us to understand how personal witnessing works?

The early movement to follow Jesus seems to have gained momentum through social networking in the Capernaum and Bethsaida areas. Notice that Philip does not argue when Nathanael has doubts that the Messiah would come from a small, insignificant, rural village. He just issues a simple invitation, “Come and see.”

How much self-sacrifice will it take on your part for you to be a better witness to those in your vicinity?

My Personal Potential

When our personal ministries leaders call for volunteers to be involved in witnessing and evangelism, we often think that many people are more qualified and gifted than we ourselves are. Others seem more confident and capable. However, the Bible reveals to us that God is not necessarily looking for those who are the most qualified as much as those who are willing to be used, whatever their gifts and talents.

A good example of this is God’s calling Moses to deliver His people from Egyptian slavery. Moses could see many reasons why someone else would be more qualified to do what God proposed (*see Exod. 3:11, 4:10*). In Moses’ mind, he had what he thought were good reasons not to do what the Lord asked of Him.

In response to a call to evangelistic action, many modern-day believers echo some of Moses’ concerns—“Who am I to be considered for such a task?” “What if they ask me some hard questions?” “I am not a good enough speaker.” We can smile at Moses for thinking that God needed to reconsider His personnel-recruitment strategy, but God knew Moses’ potential, and despite his personal fears and concerns, he was the right person for this special task.

The calling of Moses to lead God’s people is one that convinces us that God knows us infinitely better than we know ourselves. God does not focus upon past performance but upon personal potential. Each believer has tremendous potential to contribute to the Lord’s work.

On the other hand, we must guard against overconfidently running before the Lord. While it is true that we should often search our own hearts in order to evaluate where we are spiritually, we need also to understand that the human heart can be less than objective with self-evaluation. Therefore it is also good to ask God to examine us and show us our true condition, because our condition affects our potential.

Read Psalm 139. Why did David ask God to search His heart? What lessons are here for us, not just in terms of witnessing but regarding our walk with the Lord, in general? What can we take away from this psalm for ourselves right now? What comfort, hope, and encouragement is there for you? At the same time, what does it say to you about the changes that you need to make in the way you live?

The Witness of a Righteous Life

Do actions really speak louder than words? Yes, immensely so. It is true, therefore, that while a message can be given through actions without words, an equally strong message can be given through words without actions. There is something very powerful about a message that incorporates both actions and words that are in agreement. To profess to love God and then act as if you don't is hypocrisy, and the worst witness that can be given is profession and action that are not in harmony.

Consistency speaks loudly. While your family and friends may not seem to be listening to what you say, they are watching to see if it is in harmony with what you do and how you live.

Read 1 Peter 3:1–15. What do these verses tell us about the power of a Christian life and its potential to win unbelievers to Christ? Imagine the power that would attend our witness were we to live as we are told to in this passage. What message especially does verse 15 give in the whole context of our personal witness? See also *Matt. 5:16*.

We can imagine the strife that could have arisen when a pagan woman accepted Jesus as her Savior while her husband remained in paganism. Her burden for his salvation could lead her to exhibit an argumentative and nagging spirit as she considered him to be part of her personal mission field. On the other hand, as Peter suggests, she could be faithful to her God and hope and pray that her godly life would win her unbelieving husband to the Master. In other words, she could let the actions of her daily life be a constant and powerful witness.

Letting our light shine incorporates all the possibilities of influencing lost men and women for the kingdom. Those around us must not only hear our good words, they must also see our good works, for in so doing they will see the power of God working through us, and the Spirit will challenge them to recognize the possibility and blessing of God's presence in human lives. People must be convinced that Christianity is not only a title that we claim but also an empowering relationship that we enjoy. Using examples is an important method of teaching, and Christians are examples, whether intentionally or unintentionally. We witness by what we do and who we are even more than by what we say or profess to believe. If that's a scary thought, it ought to be.

My Contribution to the Whole

This week we have been considering our personal mission field and our witnessing and evangelism potential. It is also important to grasp the truth that, because the church consists of all the members, each one's individual effort contributes to the church's overall corporate evangelism. Are you aware of what strategies your church has in place in its work to lead people to Jesus? You may be able to invite people from your personal mission field to attend church functions and programs. On the other hand, are your church's evangelism leaders aware of what you are doing in your personal mission field? They may be able to support you through prayer and with specific resources.

Read John 4:37, 38. **What encouragement can we get from Jesus' words, " "One sows and another reaps" " " ? What is He saying here, and how have you seen that truth realized in your own experience?**

It is very probable that on this occasion Jesus was making reference to the gospel seed sown by Himself, John the Baptist, and the Samaritan woman. The disciples were reaping where others had sown, and the time had indeed arrived when sowers and reapers were rejoicing together.

When Jesus said " " "One sows and another reaps," " " He was not saying that, as individuals, we are either sowers or reapers. Although our churches have probably put more emphasis upon the reapers, it is true that, were there no sowers, the reapers would wait in vain for a harvest. We are all called to sow and to reap, and in any local church scene there are many combinations of sowing and reaping activities. It may be that your sowing in your personal mission field will be reaped at a corporate church reaping process. It may also be that the seeds that others have sown will be reaped as people come into your personal mission field.

As we consider the ways in which each individual contributes to the whole (*see 1 Cor. 12:12–27*), the farming process reminds us that even before the seed is sown, someone else has cleared the ground and ploughed the soil.

Clearly the sowing and reaping are parts of a process that continues after a person has joined the body. The harvest must not be left in the fields but gathered into the barn.

How can you be more involved in the sowing and reaping process in your church? In what ways have you discovered that by working for the salvation of others, your own faith is strengthened? Why do you think that is so?

Further Study: Spiritual Preparation for a Personal Ministry

While we would not deny the importance of Bible knowledge and the proven procedures of witnessing and evangelism, we must be careful not to neglect an emphasis on personal spiritual preparation. The essential ingredient in personal spiritual growth is, of course, the Holy Spirit, and to experience the Holy Spirit's power for evangelism we must give Him access to our lives.

As Christians begin to serve their God, they become more aware of personal spiritual needs. As they then request, and receive, a greater indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they are empowered for a continuing ministry.

The key is a daily surrendering of our will to God, a daily willingness to die to self, a daily keeping of the grace of Christ before us, a daily remembrance of what we have been given in Christ and what He asks of us in response to that gift.

Discussion Questions:

❶ In regard to winning souls, Ellen G. White wrote this challenging statement: "Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 193. What important point is she making here? After all, how often do we see people turn away from the powerful and convincing evidence for our message? So often doctrine itself—no matter how biblical, logical, uplifting, and sensible—will not impact a person with a closed heart. How, then, do we reach the heart? In this context, how much more important is it to live out what we profess rather than just profess it?

❷ Ponder the following statement as you consider the ways in which you can share your personal experience with others: "The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416. The question is, How do we in a daily and practical way "manifest His glory"? How often in the past 24 hours have you manifested God's glory in your life? What kind of witness for your faith does your lifestyle reveal? How can your local church as a whole "manifest His glory"?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Isaiah 43:10*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Outline the reasons that personal witness is so effective in the saving of souls.

Feel: Emulate the attitudes and dispositions that Christ used to attract others to Himself.

Do: Live a life, through God's grace, that can win others to Christ.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Power of Being Personal

A Why are spouses, friends, and neighbors in positions to witness powerful demonstrations of what it means for Christ to live out His life in us?

B What kinds of people has God used in the past to speak for Him? What gave them the credentials to speak for God?

C What simple phrase did the woman at the well and the disciples use in order to share that which they had found in Christ?

II. Feel: Loving and Lovable

A What attitudes did Christ have that drew seekers of the truth?

B What attitudes must we have in order to win over loved ones without preaching or nagging?

III. Do: Actions That Speak

A What do we need to do in order to prepare to give a reason for the hope that lightens our way?

B What kinds of conversations that we have with our family, friends, and neighbors can the Holy Spirit use to draw souls to Christ?

C What kinds of actions speak louder than words when reflecting our relationship with God?

► **Summary:** A personal witness is an invitation for others to take a closer look at the difference that God has made in our lives.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Our own day-by-day relationship with Christ is the true basis of all that we have to share with others.

Just for Teachers: Use this opening activity in order to help your students to share their real, everyday experiences with God.

Opening Activity: Ask the following questions:

- What Bible promise have you especially depended on this week?
- In what important way has God helped to change your life?
- What answer to prayer has meant the most to you in the recent past?
- What praise do you have for a special blessing that you have received lately?
- What element has caused a major turning point in your relationship to Jesus?

Invite class members to share a recent meaningful experience with God.

Consider This: Ask your class members about how they felt when hearing from one another. What does this experience illustrate about the simplicity of witnessing? Peter noted, in 1 Peter 3:15, that it is important to be prepared to give the reason for the hope that is in us. How might we practice sharing until the simple act of speaking of our experiences and hope in God becomes second nature?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Use this study in order to help your class to examine how various Bible characters influenced others around them through the sharing of their convictions, their faith, and their hope.

I. Being With Jesus (Review Acts 4:13, 14 with the class.)

Peter and John stand arraigned before the most powerful ecclesiastical body in their nation. The rulers of the Sanhedrin—among whom are the high priest, Annas, Caiaphas, scribes, elders, and members of the high priest’s family—demand to know by whose power these two men preach and heal.

Filled with the Holy Ghost, Peter gives an eloquent defense. In response to the testimony of Peter, the Bible records that the elders do four things. First, they see the boldness of Peter and John. They could not do this if Peter and John had not given them something to witness. The two disciples don’t fail to deliver. Passionately and faithfully devoted to the gospel, they seek to share its liberating message, regardless of the threat to their lives. They had fearlessly preached the resurrection the previous day, and the effect on the people had been so powerful that, notwithstanding the public arrest of Peter and John in the temple precinct, “many of those who heard the word believed” (*vs. 4, NKJV*). Arresting the two men seemed to be the perfect solution that would quench the interest sparked by the gospel. After all, who would want to join an offshoot movement that promised temporal loss and imprisonment, possibly death? If the Sadducees thought that arresting the disciples would serve as a deterrent to the people, the strategy backfired, for “the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (*vs. 4, NKJV*).

Second, the rulers perceive that Peter and John had not been educated in the rabbinical schools and had had no formal training in Old Testament theology. Rather, they spoke by the unction of the Holy Spirit (*vs. 8*), stressing the importance of whom we know over what we know. This is not to suggest that biblical knowledge and appropriate training are not essential—they are. But without the consecrating influence of the Holy Spirit to bless our training and efforts, they are as the apostle Paul says, “nothing” (*1 Cor. 13:3*).

Third, the rulers marvel. How could these unlearned, untrained men speak with such boldness, such authority, such power, such influence? From where did these qualities come?

The answer, the Bible tells us, is clear and immediate in the rulers’ minds. And that brings us to the fourth point of the rulers’ response. They realize without a doubt that Peter and John have “been with Jesus” (*Acts 4:13*). Moses’ face glowed when he carried the law down the mountain, testifying to the fact that he had communed with the Lord. When we spend time with God, God leaves visible tokens of His presence in our lives for others to witness. “And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it” (*vs. 14, NKJV*). Why did this silence the rulers? There was no way that Peter could have faked this miracle. This man was “lame from his mother’s womb” (*Acts 3:2*). The boldness with which Peter and John spoke, despite their lack of rabbinical school training, gave clear evidence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. And the miraculous healing

of the lame man all pointed incontrovertibly to the fact that these two men had “been with Jesus.”

Consider This: What does the disciples’ response, and the rulers’ reaction to it, reveal to us about what it means to have “been with Jesus”? Just as Moses’ face glowed after his time with God, and the lame man was healed, what visible tokens of God’s presence exist in our lives that reveal to others that we, too, have “been with Jesus”?

II. “Come and See” (*Review John 1:37–39 with the class.*)

One of the first things that Jesus’ earliest disciples did, as described in the first chapter of John, was bring others to Christ. And this was a direct result of Jesus’ drawing them to Himself. As the Lord said of Himself to Moses, the “ ‘one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him’ ” (*Num. 16:5, NKJV*).

Notice Jesus’ method of disciple making. His response to Andrew and John’s following Him was to turn and ask them a question: “ ‘What do you seek?’ ” (*John 1:38, NKJV*). From this eloquently simple question we learn the value of avidly seeking to engage the interest of those who are drawn into our sphere of influence. Notice also the nature of the question itself. It is direct without being forceful or overbearing; it is invitational without being coercive. It also implies that Jesus genuinely was interested in hearing their answers and in getting to know them personally.

Next, Jesus invited them personally to witness His life. Once He was assured of their interest, Jesus took advantage of the opportunity, while the flame of their curiosity was stoked, to invite them to come and see where He was staying. This was an invitation to come and witness firsthand for themselves His life of self-denial and sacrifice. Jesus was a gracious Host. He opened His life and His heart to them ungrudgingly, showing us how much value He places on each individual and the importance of the personal touch when reaching another’s life. For the Bible tells us, “They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day” (*vs. 39, NKJV*). From this personal one-on-one contact, Jesus turned avid curiosity into a genuine, heart desire to join His ministry.

Another valuable lesson is made manifest for us here. Andrew and John turned to Jesus because they were looking for the Lamb of God. This means that they were already seeking but didn’t have the wisdom to discern who Jesus was in the crowd surrounding John the Baptist. When the Baptist pointed out Jesus to them, their curiosity was aroused enough to follow Jesus.

There are many who “follow” us in our daily lives with their eyes and

thoughts, taking note of what we say and do, weighing and judging us. God's own Spirit may, just as John the Baptist did, impress upon their hearts to "behold the Lamb of God" (*vs. 29*) in us. They may draw close to us, wanting to know more of who we are without directly asking. Like Jesus, we can ask them a question that implies an interest in their needs. We can offer them our hospitality. Notice, too, that Jesus, the great Miracle Worker and Physician, performed no visible miracle in order to draw Andrew and John to Him. No one was healed from leprosy; no one was raised from the dead. Water wasn't turned into wine in order to attract their interest. No miracles other than the simple miracles of courtesy, hospitality, and kindness. What hope this should give to those of us who feel that just because we are not great evangelists or preachers no one would bother listening to us. Just a humble invitation was extended, one that we, too, can issue: Come, see for yourself.

Consider This: When each disciple followed the invitation to "come and see" and actually came face-to-face with Jesus, He took up His part in the starting of a relationship with these new acquaintances. What did He do? What challenges did the disciples face as they developed a relationship with Christ? In what ways can Jesus' method of disciple making transform our own personal, witnessing efforts?

►STEP 3—Apply

Life Witness: How may our lives be transformed if we determine to accept everything that happens to us as permitted by Christ and falling first upon Him? How could this transformation affect all the lives that intermingle with our own?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Suggest the following activities to do during the week.

1. Plan a personal testimony service for a Friday evening, family worship. Ask each family member to tell about the most significant development in his or her relationship with God.
2. Brainstorm several ideas of ways in which you can improve your relationships with your neighbors. Consider sharing food, flowers, garden produce, or a service such as child care or respite care, for an elderly family member.