

Every Member Ministry



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Eph. 4:12, 2 Cor. 5:15–20, John 4:35–41, 1 Thess. 1:5–8, Acts 14:27.*

Memory Text: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9, NKJV).

Key Thought: Too often evangelism and witnessing are seen as the pastor's job alone; this attitude is wrong.

According to Peter, God's people are chosen, called to be a “royal priesthood.” Because the priests were given a ministry, it follows that if we are called to the “priesthood,” then we have a ministry, as well. We must understand, however, that we are not called merely in order to perform a ministry. First and foremost, God is calling us into a relationship with Himself, and it is out of that relationship that we are compelled to share with others the great things that God has done, and is doing, for us. This is at the heart and soul of personal witness.

Each of us, therefore, has a personal ministry to perform, and it involves proclaiming the praises of Him who has called us “out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

This week we will explore the concept of “every member ministry” and see how each individual experience contributes to the church's corporate ministry. The point is that each of us has a role to play in the work of outreach and evangelism.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 14.*

Every Member Ministry

Too often we hear Christians lament that they are not talented enough to do anything significant for God. While the devil would certainly like us to think this way, the Bible tells us that all Christians have a God-given ministry. We need to know what it is and then determine by God's grace how to use it for His glory.

Examine Ephesians 4:12 and 2 Corinthians 5:15–20. What do these verses say about each believer's ministry?

Paul clearly says that the saints are to be equipped for a ministry. Everyone who has been reconciled to God through the sacrifice of Jesus is given the ministry of reconciliation and is an ambassador for Christ. An ambassador is one who personally represents a sovereign or head of state. This concept emphasizes the personal relationship between Christ and all who have been reconciled as they carry the message of His love and grace into the world.

There is much confusion over the word *ministry*. Today ministry is seen to be something that the pastor does; after all, he or she is "in the ministry." Although some engaged in pastoral ministry do have certain special areas of work and expertise, Scripture is adamant that part of the work of the pastor is to equip the members for a personal ministry.

The New Testament gives evidence that the early believers understood the concept of every member ministry. Wherever they went and in whatever circumstances they found themselves, they all preached about the Lord Jesus (*see Acts 8:1–4*).

There is another way in which Jesus shows that we all have a special ministry to perform. He clearly stated that He did not come to be served but to serve (*see Matt. 20:28, Luke 22:27*). He also clearly said that His followers are to be servants also (*see Matt. 23:11; 20:26, 27*). If that's not ministry, true ministry, then what is?

Jesus is not simply ordering us to be servants; He is leading us to understand that a servant ministry is a result of our connectedness with Him. These verses describe the life of the person who has fellowship with the Suffering Servant Jesus Christ. They also affirm that to be in Christ is to continue His ministry.

How willing are you to serve others? Is it your natural inclination, or do you tend to try to *get* from others rather than to give? How can you further acquire the attitude of service?

The Need for Laborers

Sometimes we are sent to reap where others have turned the soil, sown the seed, and watered the crop. Although there may be the rare occasion when one person digs, sows, waters, and reaps all in one field, this is certainly not the rule. In our fast-paced modern world, people move into and out of our sphere of influence, and we must be ready to build upon the evangelistic work that others have begun.

Read John 4:35–41. While we often get excited at the reaping stage of a person’s Christian growth, what do these verses tell us about rejoicing with others who have contributed along the way?

Usually when we refer to reaping, we are specifying a certain time of year when the crops are ready to be harvested. For most crops there is a specific reaping season. In the spiritual realm, however, there is no set time for reaping. Jesus makes this point strongly in John 4:35. In agricultural terms, the harvest may well have been four months away, but in regard to those who are ready to accept Jesus, some part of the field is ever ripe for harvest.

At Jacob’s well, Jesus sowed the gospel seed in the heart of the Samaritan woman. She, in turn, sowed the seed among the people of Sychar, and now the Samaritans walk toward Jesus past unripe grain fields. As it was with the disciples, the Lord encourages us to be ready to reap from the continually ripening field of the world.

Consider 2 Peter 3:9. Why is God so keen for laborers to go out into the harvest?

It is because of God’s great love and compassion for humankind that He desires laborers to go into the harvest (*see Matt. 9:36–38*). As we consider the world field today, the harvest still seems great and the laborers few. The disciples were told to pray that reapers would be sent out into the harvest. As we modern-day disciples pray for laborers, the Holy Spirit will open the way for us to do that which He has called us to do.

Think over the past few days. How many chances did you have to witness for your faith, to plant a few seeds that could one day reap a harvest? How many of those times did you do it? How many opportunities did you pass up?

Individuals but Together

The local church is not simply a number of disconnected people who sit in the same building for a couple of hours once a week. According to Scripture, the church is a group of people who are as closely joined as are the parts of a human body. The possibility does exist, however, that people can meet together regularly without being a part of the body in a biblical sense. Although this unfortunate fact can be true in many areas of church life, we are focusing on the need to be united in the areas of evangelism and witnessing.

Consider Ephesians 4:16. What would happen to the growth and effectiveness of a body if it lost its elbow, wrist, or knee joints? And what does Paul's analogy say about the church as a body of believers that has been given an evangelistic mission?

The apostle Paul says that a church body grows when all of the members do their share. What does this say about churches that are not growing? Our first reaction might be to blame those whom we consider to not be doing their share. That might be true, but think about this: how often do churches deprive members of an opportunity to contribute to the body? If church leaders don't understand the *ministry of all believers* principle, they will not intentionally work for maximum involvement of the membership in church life and ministries.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5–8. What did the Thessalonian church do with the gospel which it had received from Paul?

The church at Thessalonica is an example of a church that received the gospel and passed it on. It is still God's will that His church function in this manner.

The blessings received when each individual member works within a church-planned, evangelistic strategy are many. We will focus here on the important areas of encouragement and accountability. Working as a team enables us to consider these areas seriously. A lack of team encouragement has been the death of many a worthwhile lay ministry. While individuals may possess special talents and gifts, working toward common goals through corporate strategies is still the ideal. Likewise, the group dynamic encourages accountability, not in the sense of judgment but in the sense of review and evaluation.

In what ways could you work more closely with church members in the effort of reaching out to others? Why is it so easy to get complacent, sleepy, and inwardly focused?

Working Together With God

Yesterday we noted the importance of working together evangelistically as a church. We must also understand that we are working together to accomplish a divine objective. Therefore, when a church considers witnessing and evangelistic strategies, members must feel strongly that they are working together with God, who motivates, directs, empowers, and gives the increase.

Read Acts 2:47 and 1 Corinthians 3:5–9. What is the result of God’s influence in the church’s attempts to share the gospel?

Read 2 Peter 3:9 and Titus 2:11. What motivates and empowers believers to work together with God?

The Scriptures abound with evidence of God’s love for the crowning act of His creation: human beings. It is not surprising, therefore, that He has taken the initiative in the salvation of humankind. In truth, the Cross alone provides all the proof we would ever need regarding how much God loves us and how much He wants us to be in His eternal kingdom. The Lord has, indeed, reached out and blessed us through His grace; and this amazing grace, as revealed through the Cross, creates in us a desire to share that which we have freely received (*see Matt. 10:8*).

Although sometimes the disciples tried to work alone (*see Matt. 17:14–21*), for the most part their experience was one in which the divine and human worked together.

Jesus called the first disciples and promised to make them fishers of men. He taught and equipped them, and through their ministry many others became believers. However, there was still another divine aspect that they would need after Jesus had returned to heaven. That was, of course, the Holy Spirit, who would empower the early church in its witnessing and evangelism mission.

Those who become involved in evangelism today are still co-laborers with God for the salvation of others. We must pray that the Holy Spirit will teach us how to present God’s love and provision in ways that will reach the hearts of those in need of the Savior. We need to be aware that we cannot do anything apart from the Lord and that only by an attitude of faith, submission, humility, and willingness to die to self and to serve others can we be the most effective witnesses in God’s hands. Self must be put aside in order for the Lord to use us as effectively as possible.

Reporting to the Church

This week we have noted some important aspects of a believer's work for God. We now can touch on the topic of "reporting" (we will look at this in more detail in week 12). Reporting to the church on witnessing and evangelism activities builds a climate of encouragement and blessing. Those reporting can receive the encouragement of the church membership, and those hearing the reports are blessed as they realize what God is accomplishing through His people.

Read Acts 14:27 and 15:4. Why do you think that reports were brought into the church?

A reading of the context of the above verses reveals that reports were brought into the church after some extended period of cross-cultural evangelistic preaching. These reporting sessions show the church's interest in, and support for, spreading the gospel.

The whole book of Acts is a report of the early church's missionary endeavors, and it is filled with lessons for the modern-day church. The importance of reporting is underscored as we imagine what it would do to the book of Acts if all reports of evangelistic activity were removed.

Read Mark 6:30. Why do you think the disciples reported to Jesus what they had done?

While it is true that there is personal witnessing and evangelism that happens spontaneously, it is also true that the church as a whole must have an intentional planned approach. Working with an overall church strategy helps to maintain focus and the logical progression of activities. It also brings regular opportunities to evaluate and report. Reporting is not simply listing the things we have done. Through reporting, the church and those witnessing can again see that they are coworkers with the Lord.

Some people are hesitant to turn in reports because they wonder if it is a form of boasting in human achievement; however, by our faithful reporting, God is glorified, and His church is strengthened in faith. The early Christians glorified God when they heard the missionary reports of the apostle Paul (*see Acts 21:19, 20*).

If you were to report to the church your most recent evangelistic efforts, what would you say? What does your answer say about yourself, and what about it, perhaps, might need some changing?

Further Study: Choosing a Ministry in Which to Become Involved

Last week you were encouraged to consider all of the witnessing and evangelistic areas of church life in which you like being involved or in which you would become involved if asked. The challenge this week is for you to decide upon an evangelistic activity and to become involved in it. The following are this week's key areas of focus.

1. Review the list of evangelistic activities in which you could possibly become involved. Shorten your list down to two or three evangelistic ministry areas by considering where you feel that your talents lie and to which area of ministry you feel that God is calling you.
2. Further reduce your list by considering the amount of time you will be able to regularly devote to a ministry. Also consider being committed to a ministry that will continue for twelve months so that you will be able to move through the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages.
3. Choose a ministry and inform your pastor and personal ministries leader of your desire to become involved in your preferred area. Request a meeting with them to share your ideas and dreams. Inquire about their plans for the church's evangelism and determine how you can get involved or where your preferred ministry can complement whatever plans (if any) that the church already has in place.
4. Humbly ask your pastor and personal ministries leader to share their thoughts on your suitability for the ministry you have chosen. They will want you to be successful in whatever area of witnessing and evangelism you choose; therefore, their counsel will be invaluable.

Discussion Questions:

❶ How does the following quote relate to the biblical truth of the priesthood of all believers? How does it support the need for every member to work together? "The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 352.

❷ As a class, discuss what strategies your church could put in place that will help members to understand that they are important to the church's witnessing and evangelism. How best can you work toward maximum participation of members?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 Peter 2:9*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Discuss what it takes to have a growing, personal relationship with God, and the ways in which one can share this relationship with others.

Feel: Feel the encouragement and rejoicing that rises out of the act of collaborating with the Holy Spirit and the church body in servanthood.

Do: Work toward the common goals of the body of Christ as a fellow laborer in the harvest fields.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Harvest Workers

A How does a passionate relationship with the Lord of the harvest translate into servant ministry in the harvest?

B What are the common goals that we share with the body of Christ?

C What corporate strategies do the harvest workers use in order to strengthen the work?

II. Feel: Common Joys

A How does the reporting of progress in witnessing and evangelism add to God's glory and encourage the church?

B Why is it important to collaborate with the Holy Spirit in both individual and corporate labors? How does the Holy Spirit draw workers into unity?

III. Do: Common Goals

A In your opportunities for individual witness, how can you pass along to others that which you have received in your relationship with Christ?

B How can you encourage your fellow laborers for Christ?

► **Summary:** As members of the body of Christ, each of us has a personal ministry in the sharing of what He has done for us, as well as a responsibility to the whole body to cooperate in the local and worldwide work.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Twice called, each member receives not one but two invitations from God: to be saved and to serve. First and foremost, God calls us into a relationship with Himself, and, as a result of this relationship, He calls us to perform a personal ministry with others in the work of outreach and evangelism.

Just for Teachers: How easily we (those of us living, that is, in the individualistic cultures of our world) forget that Christianity is primarily communal. Most of the New Testament is written to “you” in the plural sense, a group of believers who believe together and work together to build God’s kingdom and share their lives. Except when addressing specific individuals by name, Paul refers to God’s people in a singular sense only when he writes to them as part of the larger body of Christ. In other words, we are “single” Christians only when we are working so closely with others that we can be described as part of the one body.

Opening Activity: Ask students to think of examples of teamwork that exist in various sectors of life. Examples could include sports teams, business and corporate teams, a group of people working on a theater production, a team of builders on a construction site, the staff of a restaurant kitchen, and so many more. When performing optimally, these groups work together for a common goal or cause. Choose one of these examples (perhaps a sports team might be one of the more familiar ones), and discuss the different roles played within such a team. Obviously, while there are different roles played within the on-field team, there are so many others off the field who also make a contribution, including coaches, managers, medical staff, and even bus drivers, cheerleaders, and water carriers. How infinitely more important is teamwork for each church member when participating in the much more vital mission of sharing with the world God’s love and message of salvation.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: This section provides an opportunity to consider and discuss Bible texts that describe the individual and team roles in the evangelistic mission that God has given to His people.

Bible Commentary

I. Reconciling People to Him *(Review 2 Corinthians 5:15–20 with the class.)*

When we begin to appreciate that which God has done for us, we soon realize that what He has done is not just about us. Nor is it for us only. Furthermore, we realize we have something so vital and astounding that it must be shared with other people. That which God has done, thanks to His love for us, motivates us to allow Him to do still more through us. We become agents of hope and ambassadors of reconciliation. It remains God’s work, but we become a means by which that work advances in the world.

Consider This: A lack of appreciation for the acts and love of God may be one reason that many people do not prioritize evangelism. How can this be remedied?

■ *What is the significance of the word reconciliation in these verses? What does this add to our understanding of the gospel and of the sharing of it?*

II. Equipping for God’s Work *(Review Ephesians 4:11–13 with the class.)*

As Paul was traveling around and establishing churches, he demonstrated the importance of a basic church structure, explaining that God had ordained the complementary roles that different individuals might serve within the church community. Clearly, these divisions of roles and labor dictate some kind of organization or structure with the specific purpose of equipping God’s people for mission, for the doing of God’s work, and for the building up of the church.

Consider This: How do we find the balance between specific, professional ministry roles and the idea that we all have ministries and roles to play in evangelism? What are the dangers of focusing too much on specialized ministry or, alternatively, on general ministry?

III. Planting and Harvesting *(Review John 4:35–41 with the class.)*

When we talk about evangelism, our first thought is often of large-scale public evangelistic programs. This is one form of evangelism, but, in many cases, it is only part of a longer process. Increasingly, such events are being described as “reaping” events. Rather than being considered as complete evangelism, such events work best as part of a larger plan, complementing the efforts

of churches and individual members in a given community, sometimes over a period of years. Perhaps we are coming to understand more of the process that is described by Jesus in these verses.

Consider This: How can this model of planting and harvesting encourage us when we sometimes seem to see few results for our evangelistic efforts?

IV. By the Spirit’s Power to the Whole World (Review 1 Thessalonians 1:5–8 and Acts 14:27 with the class.)

Paul and Barnabas had been sent out across the then-known world to tell the good news about Jesus. On their return to their commissioning church at Antioch, they made sure that they reported back, telling these church members what the Holy Spirit had done in the regions they had visited. These were some of the first “mission stories,” a tradition that continues in the church today. Such reports, when they show successes and God at work, should encourage the church and challenge members to remain faithful to the task still to be completed.

Consider This: Why are “mission stories” important in the life of the church?

■ *How do we, in talking about the work of evangelism, find the balance between our work and that of the Holy Spirit’s?*

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: When we talk about every member as a minister, we could be tempted to think of working in isolation rather than focusing on the fact that each member should play a role in an active and effective community that in itself is a powerful witness. Lesslie Newbigin reminds us that the church community is itself one of our greatest arguments for the gospel: “How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.”—*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans® Publishing Co., 1989), p. 227.

Application Questions:

1 How does your local church work effectively as a team when reaching out to, meeting the needs of, and sharing the gospel in your community? How could this outreach be improved?

- 2 Which is more important, and why: for church members to be trained to do evangelism, or for them to see that they have the potential for evangelism?
- 3 In light of the planting and harvesting model of evangelism described by Jesus in John 4, how might we best define *evangelism*?
- 4 What might the risks be to a church that becomes “stuck” in planting mode? What might that stasis mean? What role does the Holy Spirit play in preventing this from happening?
- 5 How might the church, in upholding the “reapers,” sometimes discount the “planters”? How can we train church members to be better “planters”?
- 6 If every member is a minister and evangelist, how accountable should members be to the church in this ministry? Or are we accountable only to God? Give reasons for your answer, based on Scripture.
- 7 Mission stories can sometimes tempt us to triumphalism, self-centeredness, or even the stretching of the truth. What are some principles for the telling of better mission stories?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: This activity is intended to work as an audit of the many activities and programs conducted by the church and its members in light of the planting-and-harvest model as described by Jesus in John 4:35–41. This should prompt class members to think about the different activities that might be considered evangelism and to appreciate the roles that all members can play in the witness of the church.

Suggestion for group or team activity: As a class, spend time considering the outreach and evangelistic activities of the church as being part of the growth process of planting to harvesting. On a sheet of paper or on a blackboard or whiteboard, draw three columns, label them “Planting,” “Watering,” and “Harvesting,” and ask class members to suggest activities, events, or programs conducted by the church or individual members that could fit into these different categories. As the lists grow, look at how items in each column might fit together as an evangelistic plan. Also, consider whether the church, as a whole, has only a few items listed in any one column. If so, what could be done to focus more on this aspect of the growing of people toward God? Close with prayer for these different activities by humbly asking God to use these programs and church members to grow a harvest in your community for His kingdom.