

A Continuing Ministry (Work Done for God)



SABBATH—JUNE 23

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: John 4:7–30; Acts 2:42; Acts 11:19–23; 2 Timothy 2:1–7; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘What is God’s kingdom like? What can I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed. Someone took the seed and planted it in a garden. It grew and became a tree. The birds sat in its branches’ ” (Luke 13:18, 19, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Evangelism¹ and witnessing provide (give) the way for the mustard seed (the church of God) to become a huge tree that fills the whole world.

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD IT SAID, OR YOU may even have said it yourself, “I have done my bit; I will now leave it to the younger people.” Or, “I have been the evangelistic leader for years. Let some of the new people take over now.”

In a way we understand these kinds of sayings. People get older. Sometimes their health fails. Or other life situations prevent them from continuing their leadership in church ministries. Sometimes people just burn out and need a break. And some people may believe that the Lord requires them to do His will in other areas of church work.

But there is a great difference between changing ministries and no longer ministering (serving God) at all. As long as we have breath we should continue to work for the Lord.

This week we will focus on our need to stay involved in witnessing and evangelistic ministries. No matter what our part is in the church, there are always going to be opportunities for us to do the Lord’s work.

1. evangelism—the act of spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

SUNDAY—JUNE 24**NEVER-ENDING WITNESSING
AND EVANGELISM (John 4:7–30)**

Witnessing and evangelism must continue as long as there are people who need salvation. It is God's plan to save as many people as possible. Those who have accepted Jesus as their personal Savior are asked to work with God in this soul-saving work. No matter who we are or where we are, we will always have opportunities for witness and ministry. This is true if our hearts are tuned to Christ, if we appreciate what He has done for us, and if we are willing to do what He asks us to do in answer to His love.



If our hearts are tuned to Christ, we will appreciate what He has done for us.

Review Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4: 7–30. What was it about Jesus, and what He said, that she was excited to share with her neighbors? What principles (important rules) of witnessing can we take from this story that can help us as we try to reach others?

It seems that Jesus followed a simple plan when He spoke to the woman of Samaria. (1) He caught her attention: “ ‘Give Me a drink’ ” (verse 7, NKJV); (2) He held her interest: “ ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ ” (verses 9, 10, NKJV); (3) He created a desire: “ ‘Sir, give me this water’ ” (verse 15, NKJV); (4) He made her believe: “ ‘Sir, I perceive [see] that You are a Prophet [special messenger of God]’ ” (verse 19, NKJV); and (5) Actions followed: “ ‘Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’ ” (verse 29, NKJV).

These five steps of evangelism do not necessarily need to take place all in one meeting as they did with Jesus and the woman at Jacob's well. They may happen over a period of time as you continue to witness to someone. The situations will be different. But the principles in these verses can be widely used in trying to reach souls.

The beginning conversation is concerned with real water. But Jesus' goal is to cause the Samaritan woman to desire and drink the water of life. In the end, we are called to help people in whatever situation we find them and to minister to their needs. But we must never forget that their greatest need is salvation in Jesus.

How often do you take advantage of opportunities to witness, or to minister? It is true that so often we go about our lives meeting people who have no idea of our beliefs in, and hope for, Christ. How can we change so that we can be better witnesses?



Jesus' true goal is to cause the Samaritan woman to desire the Living Water.

MONDAY—JUNE 25

A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT² (1 John 1:7)

An important part of evangelism takes place in church every week. This part of evangelism is called “nurture.”³ We have been very good at inviting people to our churches. But we have not always done so well in the creation of an environment (atmosphere; mood) that will encourage them to return and settle into the fellowship. If we are to make disciples, we must give attention to the establishment (a strong place) and nurture of every new Christian.

What does this mean? “Establishment” suggests the idea of setting up a strong and long-lasting place. This place is there to help give new believers a foundation of faith and fellowship. To “nurture” usually means “to raise,” “to bring up,” “to care for,” “to train,” and “to educate.” When someone accepts

the Lord Jesus as his or her personal Savior, all of these meanings are important to remember as we help the new believers grow spiritually and socially within the Christian fellowship. In other words, a new Christian needs to be brought up, cared for, trained, and educated in the ways of the Lord.

“Fellowship” is very important. This is where lives touch and influence each other. People who join a church must be cared for through spiritual fellowship.

What do 1 John 1:7; Acts 2:42; Acts 11:19–23; Acts 20:35; and Romans 1:11, 12 tell us about the importance of spiritual fellowship among believers? Why are these things very important for new believers who have come into the church through our evangelism and outreach?

The word *we* in 1 John 1:7 gives us an important idea. For example, we are to walk in the light as persons. But we are to walk in the light together. If believers walk in the light, there will be fellowship and unity (oneness). As a result, there will be a supportive environment in which people are focused upon God’s will for their lives. And they, too, are to encourage and support one another along the Christian path. It is important to help new members to be happy and satisfied with the church. But it is also important to lead them to become active disciples (followers of Christ). This includes developing the

2. environment—our surroundings. In this lesson, the environment means our church.

3. nurture—the things we do and the love we show to help believers become spiritually stronger.

ability to lead others into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Does your church have a careful plan for establishing (creating) new members? How can you become better involved in helping new, as well as old, members to grow spiritually?



We are to walk in the light of Jesus.

TUESDAY—JUNE 26

TRAINING TRAINERS (2 Timothy 2:1–7)

We live in a world where people are always on the move. Local churches always seem to have many members transferring in and out. As a result churches often feel bad about losing members who have been active in important services. But the local church's evangelistic and witnessing ministry should continue growing. So, there is a great need to keep these services and ministries growing.

What principles (important rules) about the training of trainers can we learn from Paul's instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1–7? How should all these words help us today in our work for the Lord, in whatever we do for Him?

Paul communicates to Timothy the importance of seeing the big picture of the church's work. The pastoral and teaching ministries are not to depend on just one person. They are to be the work of many witnesses and evangelists in the church. Paul is telling Timothy to train up others for leadership in the church. This is because, sooner or later, the older generation of leaders will pass on. It is also understood that the trainees are to become future trainers of others. In this way the church's mission in the world will be continuous and growing. This agrees with Jesus' call for more workers for the harvest.

It has been said, "Give a man a fish, and you will feed him for a day. But if you teach him how to fish, then you will feed him and his family for as long as he lives." The problem is that if the man does not pass his fishing skill on to his children, then the next generation will go hungry. Perhaps the wording should be changed to say, "Give a man a fish, and you will feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and to pass on his knowledge and methods, then a great many people will continue to be fed." This is the difference between training someone and training him or her to be a trainer.

Think about your experience in our

church. Has anyone ever taught you how to witness to others? Have you ever asked to be trained how to witness to others? Discuss your answer in class on Sabbath.



Teach a man to fish and a great many people will be fed.

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 27

BRINGING FORMER MEMBERS BACK TO CHURCH (2 Corinthians 5:18–20)

*Backslider*⁴ is a word that should not be in the Christian vocabulary. But it is a fact that many people slide away from church and from a saving relationship with the Lord. People sometimes leave because of doctrine.⁵ But most of the time they leave because of personal quarrels or other things. Whatever the reason, we need to do all that we can to create a loving and supportive environment. That would help those who join us to want to stay among us, no matter what the problems are.

4. backslider—a person who falls off the path of righteousness (holiness) and leaves his or her church.

5. doctrine—church teachings.

6. reconciliation—the method of making peace with former members or restoring (making new) them to regular church membership.

7. evangelistic—having to do with spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

At the same time, we should have a ministry to former and nonattending members as an important part of our witnessing and evangelistic program. A quick look at the different churches' lists of members will show that there are many more names listed there than who attend worship each Sabbath. These names could begin a special ministry to people whom God has never stopped loving.

Think deeply about 2 Corinthians 5:18–20. The setting may be somewhat different from ours. But the principle is important. In what ways is a “ministry of reconciliation”⁶ special to those who once followed God but have slid away?

Bringing former members back to church is a special ministry. This ministry is as evangelistic⁷ as when we reach out to people who have never accepted Christ before. The very word *reconciliation* suggests that there was a former unity (joining together) and fellowship between people and God. And now it has been restored (made new) through Jesus Christ. So, we are now given a ministry of reconciliation that includes reaching out to those who once worshiped with us.

In fact, one could argue that in Matthew 10:5, 6, Jesus sent His disciples to win back members of the Jewish nation. They were the people who had fallen away from a saving

relationship with their Lord. So, it is very proper that we, today, also enter into a work for those people who have a special history with God and His church.

Think about those who have left the church and the reason why they did. Is there any one person with whom you could become friends again and bring back to the church? Pray about how you could go about doing this.

THURSDAY—JUNE 28

THE BACK DOOR (Hebrews 10:25)

Have you ever noticed how people often complain that members slip out “the back door”? They even say that the church’s back door should be closed. But they fail to tell us *how* to close the door. Some growing churches may think that their back door is closed. But really, more people may be coming in the front door than going out the back. In other churches, more people may be going out the back than coming in the front. But we still want to do what we can to keep our members.

Discovering the back door and trying to close it will take planning. And such planning is really evangelistic because our job is both to win people for God and hold them.

Read Hebrews 10:25. Why is it important that Christians meet

together regularly? When in fellowship together, how much “encouragement” do we give one another? How can we give even more than we are now?

The decision to leave the fellowship is usually not a sudden one. Most people take time to quietly leave church. Coming to Christ and His church is a journey. In the same way, leaving is a journey. Most often, those who leave do not carefully plan it. They just start to slowly get disconnected, discouraged, and dissatisfied with things in the church. Maybe, in some cases, they are right. So, we should try to recognize the journey of those around us at church.

Read Romans 14:13; Galatians 5:13; and Ephesians 4:32. How would following these three pieces of advice help to keep the back door closed? What can you and your church do to live out these important truths?

A caring church is a place where each person focuses on his or her personal relationship with Jesus. Each person is to have a clear understanding of how important he or she is to Jesus. Closing the back door also means getting close to people. We are to learn of their needs as they are willing to share them and to meet those needs at the right time. This is something no church program can give. Only loving, caring people can.

FRIDAY—JUNE 29

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Planning to Continue and Grow Your Ministry

Everyone involved in a witnessing and evangelistic ministry should give attention to how he or she can make it a continuing ministry instead of a one-time event. There are many things we can do to make this certain. We will review a few of the important ones.

1. Be comfortable with sharing leadership rather than being a one-person band. Keep a team approach in which both the work and the support are shared.

2. Do whatever you can to keep the church reminded of how important your team's ministry is. This will include regular reports to important evangelistic committees, bulletins, newsletters, notice board posters, and requests for budgets.

3. Always be on the lookout for people you can invite to join your team or to form another team. If someone volunteers to join your team as a result of your activities and reports, that is fine. But it would be better to personally invite people instead of sending out a general invitation for volunteers.

4. Regular training events are a must for witnessing and evangelistic activities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① In class, go over your answers to Tuesday's final question.

② "We are to be messengers through which the Lord can send light and grace⁸ to the world. Backsliders are to be won back. We are to put away our sins, by confession and repentance.⁹ We, too, are to humble our proud hearts before God. Floods of spiritual power are to be poured forth upon people who are prepared to receive it."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 8, page 46. What is needed, and why, to help to bring people back into this church and the wonderful "present truth [Adventist]" message that no one else is preaching to the world?

③ When people leave, let us love them. Let us keep in touch with them. Let us not judge and call them "backsliders." Or let us not hurl at them Ellen G. White quotes about people falling away. Instead, let us use these sad experiences to, as Paul said, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5). Let us ask what we might have done differently that could have helped keep these souls among us. Most important, let us not do anything that makes it harder for them to come back. How can we as a church apply these principles (important rules) toward those who have left us for unknown reasons?

8. grace—God's gift of mercy that He gives us to take away our sins.

9. repentance—saying you are sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.