

A Perpetual Ministry



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 4:7–30, Acts 2:42, 11:19–23, 2 Tim. 2:1–7, 2 Cor. 5:18–20.*

Memory Text: “‘What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches’ ” (*Luke 13:18, 19, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Evangelism and witnessing are the means by which the mustard seed (the church of God) becomes a huge tree that fills the whole world.

You may have heard it said—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 evangelism leader for years, let some of the new people take over now.”

In one sense these kinds of statements are understandable. People get older, sometimes their health fails, or other life circumstances prevent them from maintaining their leadership in church ministries. Sometimes people just burn themselves out and need a break. Some may believe the Lord requires them to fulfill His will in other areas of church work.

There is, however, a great difference between changing ministry emphasis and ceasing to minister; as long as we have breath we should, in one capacity or another, continue to minister.

This week we will focus on our need to stay involved in witnessing and evangelism ministries. No matter what our role is in the church, there are always going to be opportunities for us to minister.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 30.*

Never-ending Witnessing and Evangelism

It must be emphasized again that 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. Meanwhile, those who have accepted Jesus as their personal Savior are called upon to work with God in this soul-saving work. No matter who we are, where we are, and in what situations we find ourselves, if our hearts are tuned to Christ, if we have a deep-seated appreciation for what He has done for us and for what He asks us to do in response, we will always have opportunity for witness and ministry.

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 townspeople? What principles of witnessing can we take from this account that can help us as we seek to reach others?

It seems that Jesus followed a simple “formula” when He spoke to the woman of Samaria. (1) He arrested her attention: “ ‘Give Me a drink’ ” (vs. 7, *NKJV*); (2) He secured her interest: “ ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ ” (vs. 9, 10, *NKJV*); (3) He created a desire: “ ‘Sir, give me this water’ ” (vs. 15, *NKJV*); (4) He brought a conviction: “ ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a Prophet’ ” (vs. 19, *NKJV*); and (5) actions followed: “ ‘Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’ ” (vs. 29, *NKJV*).

These five stages 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 vary greatly, but the principles seen in this passage can be broadly applied to our attempts to reach souls.

In addition, although the initial conversation is concerned with literal water, Jesus' goal is to create in the Samaritan woman a desire to drink the Water of Life. In the end, although we are called to help people in whatever situation we find them, and to minister to their needs however we can, 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? Isn't it true that so often we go about our lives, meeting people who—despite their interaction with us—have no idea of what we believe, what we stand for, or the hope that we have? How can we change so that we can be better witnesses?

A Nurturing Environment

A vital part of evangelism takes place in church every week. This aspect of evangelism is called “nurture” and “incorporation.” 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 that will encourage them to return and settle into the fellowship. If we are to make disciples, we must give attention to the establishment and nurture of every new Christian.

What does this mean? “Establishment” gives the idea of setting something up on a firm and permanent basis. It is to help provide them with a foundation of faith and fellowship. To “nurture” is usually explained by concepts such as “to rear,” “to bring up,” “to care for,” “to foster,” “to train,” and “to educate.” When someone accepts the Lord Jesus as his or her personal Savior, all of these areas of establishment and nurture must be applied spiritually and socially within the Christian fellowship. In other words, a new Christian needs to be brought up, cared for, fostered, trained, and educated in the ways of the Lord.

Fellowship is key. This is how lives touch and affect one another. People who join a church must be cared for through spiritual fellowship.

What do the following texts tell us about the importance of spiritual fellowship among believers? Why are these things especially important in the case of new believers, those who have come into the church through our evangelism and outreach? *1 John 1:7; Acts 2:42; 11:19–23; 20:35; and Rom. 1:11, 12.*

The word *we* in 1 John 1:7 impresses upon us that, although we are to walk in the light as individuals, we are to walk in the light together. If believers walk in the light, there will be fellowship and unity. Consequently, there will be a nurturing environment where people are focused both upon God’s will for their lives and the encouragement of one another along the Christian path. While it is important to help new members be happy and contented in church, it is also important to lead them to become disciples in the fullest sense of the word, which includes developing the ability to lead others into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Does your church have an intentional focus on establishing new members in their faith? How can you become better involved in helping to nurture new members (or even “old” ones, for that matter)?

Training Trainers

We live in a world where people are highly mobile. Local churches seem to regularly process transfers out and transfers in and often lament the loss of capable members who have been involved in significant ministries. Because of this potential transfer of skills, and because the local church's evangelism and witnessing ministry should continue expanding, there is a great need to multiply these ministries.

What principles concerning the training of trainers can we glean from Paul's instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1–7? How should all these words apply to us today in our work for the Lord, in whatever capacity we find ourselves?

Paul communicates to Timothy the importance of seeing the big picture of the church's work, both regarding extent and duration. The pastoral and teaching ministries are not to be centered in just one man. They are to be the work of a multiplied number of witnesses and evangelists in the church. Primarily, Paul is telling Timothy to train up others for leadership in the church because, eventually, the older generation of leaders will have passed on. Implicit in this instruction to Timothy is that those he instructs will also, in turn, teach others, thereby ensuring that the church's mission in the world will be continuous and expansive. This process is in harmony with Jesus' call for more laborers for the harvest.

It has been said, "Give a man a fish, and you will feed him for a day; teach him how to fish, and 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, the next generation will go hungry. Perhaps the saying should be modified 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 techniques, and untold numbers of people will continue to be fed." This is the difference between training someone and training them to be trainers.

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

Reclaiming Former Members

Backslider is a word we wish did not exist in the Christian vocabulary. It is a fact, however, that many people slide away from church and from a saving relationship with the Lord. Although people do, at times, leave us over doctrine, most of the time they leave over other things, usually personal disputes and so forth. Whatever the reasons, we need to do all that we can to create a loving and nurturing environment that will help those who join us want to stay among us, despite whatever personal issues inevitably arise.

At the same time, we should have a ministry to former and non-attending members as an intentional part of our witnessing and evangelism program. A quick look at the various churches' lists of members will likely reveal that there are many more names listed there than those who attend worship each Sabbath. These names could form the beginnings of a special ministry to people whom God has never ceased to love supremely.

Thoughtfully consider 2 Corinthians 5:18–20. Although the context is somewhat different from ours, the principle is important. In what ways is a “ministry of reconciliation” special to those who once followed God but have slidden away?

Reclaiming former members is a special ministry. Furthermore, this ministry is as evangelistic as when we reach out to people who have never accepted Christ before. The very word *reconciliation* implies that there was a former unity and fellowship between humankind and God that has now been restored through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, 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 who had fallen away from a saving relationship with their Lord. Thus, it is entirely appropriate 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 re-establish contact and resume friendship—ministering to them and seeking to reconnect them with the church? Pray about how you could go about doing this.

The Back Door

Have you ever noticed that people often lament the fact that members slip out “the back door”? They even state firmly that the church’s back door needs to be closed but fail to tell us how to close the door or even the location of the door. Some growing churches may think that their back door is closed, but in reality it may be simply that more people are coming in the front door than are going out the back. And while that is better than more going out the back than coming in the front (which is true in some places), we still want to do what we can to retain our members.

Discovering the back door and attempting to close it will take strategies that are indeed evangelistic given that our mandate is not simply to win people for God but to hold them.

Read Hebrews 10:25. Why is it important that Christians meet together regularly? When in fellowship together, how much “encouraging” do we give one another? How can we do even more than we are now?

The decision to leave the fellowship is usually not a sudden one. Rather, most people go through a process of quietly leaving. Just as coming to Christ and His church was a journey, the process of leaving is a journey. Most often for those who leave, this is not a consciously planned strategy. They just start to slowly get disconnected, disenchanted, and dissatisfied with things in the church. Maybe, even in some cases, justifiably so. We should, therefore, seek to be aware of the journey of those around us at church.

Read Romans 14:13, Galatians 5:13, and Ephesians 4:32. How would living in harmony with these admonitions help to keep the back door closed? What can you and your church do to live out these important truths?

A caring church, one that continues to care, is a place where each individual is focused upon his or her personal relationship with Jesus. They have a clear concept of the value that Jesus places upon each individual. Closing the back door involves getting close to people, discovering their needs as they are willing to share, and meeting those needs when appropriate. This is something no church program can provide. Only loving, caring individuals can.

Further Study: Planning to Continue and Grow Your Ministry

Everyone involved in a witnessing and evangelism ministry should give attention to how he or she can ensure that it will continue rather than be a one-time event. There are many things we can do to ensure this. We will review a few of the vital ones.

1. Be comfortable with sharing leadership rather than being a one-person band. Maintain a team approach where both the work and the affirmation are shared.

2. Do whatever you can to keep the importance of your team's ministry before the church. This will include regular reports to major evangelism committees, bulletin inserts, newsletters, notice board posters, and requests for budgets.

3. Be on the constant 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; however, it will be better to personally invite people instead of sending out a general invitation for volunteers.

4. Regular training events are a must, especially concerning witnessing and evangelism activities.

Discussion Questions:

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

2 "We are to be channels through which the Lord can send light and grace to the world. Backsliders are to be reclaimed. We are to put away our sins, by confession and repentance humbling our proud hearts before God. Floods of spiritual power are to be poured forth upon those prepared to receive it."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 46. What is needed, and why, to help bring people back into this church and the wonderful "present truth" message that, in fact, no one else is preaching to the world?

3 When people leave, let's love them, let's keep in touch, let's not judge and call them "apostates," or, even worse, let's not hurl at them Ellen White quotes about people falling away. Instead, let's use these sad experiences, as Paul said, to "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5) and ask what we might've done differently, if anything, that could have helped to keep these souls among us. Most important, let's not do anything that would make it harder for them to come back should they change their minds. How can we as a church apply these principles toward those who, for whatever reason, have left us?

My Sister's Faith

My family is Buddhist, the traditional religion of Mongolia. I often visited the Buddhist temple to pray and even learned to chant some Buddhist prayers. I planned to become a Buddhist nun when I finished college.

Then my younger sister, Mungu, began attending the Seventh-day Adventist church. I told Mungu that her religion was foolish, but she continued attending church and even invited me to go. I began noticing that Mungu no longer stayed out until late at night, and refused to argue over petty issues when I tried to pick a fight. The changes in her life were remarkable.

Mungu often brought books home from church and left them for me to read. I read the books and became curious about what her church teaches. So the next time Mungu invited me to church, I went.

The people were friendly, and even the church leaders stopped and talked to us. I decided to return to the church. I learned about heaven and hell, Jesus' second coming, and faith in God. I believed what they were saying. I kept coming. My ideas of what Buddhists believe were vague, but these Christians were very clear about what they believe.

Little by little I gave up my desire to become a Buddhist nun and embraced God's love and claim on my life. My sister and I were baptized together. Our parents tried to talk us out of joining a Christian church. But as they saw the changes in our lives that Jesus made, they let us attend.

Mungu and I share our faith with our parents and elder sister. Our sister believes in God and knows that He has answered her prayers in the past. But according to Buddhist traditions, the eldest child must remain a Buddhist so that when our parents die there will be someone to open the door to the next life. Mungu and I pray that our parents will give their lives to God and give up their beliefs in reincarnation. Then my elder sister will be released from her obligations and can follow God.

The church in Mongolia is still young and small. Most members are under 30 years old, and many are still in school. Your mission offerings help support the growing and maturing church in Mongolia. And recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings have helped to build or buy church buildings, establish a dormitory for Seventh-day Adventist students in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, and helped to buy a youth training center where we can learn to become the leaders of the church in Mongolia for many years to come. Thank you!

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The Thessalonians faced stress, strains, struggles, even outright persecution. In other words, life for them, as for all of us, had its hard moments. Despite these moments, the Thessalonians had a sure hope, a hope based on what Christ had done for them, a hope that pointed to the greatest promise of all—the Second Coming. Though Paul had chided the Thessalonians, they had issues in the church—behavioral as well as theological (sound familiar?)—it was to them, and us, that Paul wrote some of the most incredible, uplifting, and hopeful words in all inspiration.

In this quarter's Bible study guide on 1 and 2 Thessalonians by Jon Paulien, we will get a glimpse into the life of an early Christian church. We will see some of the struggles and challenges that it faced, including the difficulties that arose from the fact that Christ had not yet returned. Fascinating, too, is that however different their circumstances, so often the principles reflected in Paul's words to them deal with the issues and challenges that we, too, confront as we await the return of our Lord Jesus, whose death on the cross at the first coming guarantees His return in glory at the Second.

Lesson 1—The Gospel Comes to Thessalonica

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Preachers Pay a Price** (*Acts 16:9–40*)

MONDAY: **Paul's Preaching Strategy** (*Luke 24:25–27, 44–46*)

TUESDAY: **Two Views of the Messiah** (*Isa. 9:1–7, Isa. 53:1–6*)

WEDNESDAY: **Suffering Before Glory** (*Luke 24:26*)

THURSDAY: **A Church Is Born** (*Acts 17:1–4, 12*)

Memory Text—*1 Thessalonians 2:13*

Sabbath Gem: Our assurance of God's promises must be based on our confidence in His Holy Scriptures.

Lesson 2—Preserving Relationships

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Opposition in Thessalonica** (*Acts 17:5–9*)

MONDAY: **The Episode in Berea** (*Acts 17:10–15*)

TUESDAY: **Interlude in Athens** (*Acts 17:16–34*)

WEDNESDAY: **Arrival in Corinth** (*1 Cor. 1:18–2:22*)

THURSDAY: **Paul Reveals His Heart** (*1 Thess. 2:17–3:10*)

Memory Text—*1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20*

Sabbath Gem: True evangelism leads to relationships that can stand the test of time and last for eternity.

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