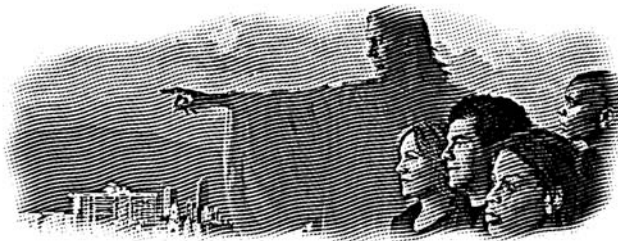


Defining Evangelism *and* Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 4:33, 13:48, 1 John 1:3, Acts 13:1–49, 22:2–21, 1 Pet. 3:15.*

Memory Text: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (*Matthew 28:19, 20, NKJV*).

Key Thought: If we are to be involved in fulfilling the great gospel commission, we must understand what we mean by “evangelism” and “witnessing.”

An employee often is given a job description. It's a detailed account of expected duties.

The Bible also speaks about a job description, and in this case it's one for God's people. In 1 Corinthians 15:58 (*NKJV*), the apostle Paul admonishes the Corinthian believers to “always [abound] in the work of the Lord.” While Paul does not specify the work to which he is referring, a similar phrase is used in 1 Corinthians 16:10, with reference to the work of the Lord done by Timothy and Paul in evangelism and witnessing about Jesus Christ and the plan of salvation. Thus, Paul's admonition in chapter 15 certainly included the work of spreading the gospel.

This week we will explore what evangelism and witnessing actually are; in other words, we'll seek to uncover our biblical “job description.”

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 7.*

Evangelism Is . . . ?

We get a clear picture of what evangelism is as we review the activities of the first evangelists. Regardless of the major differences between their world and ours, both worlds were (and are) sinful, fallen, and in disrepair—thus in need of hope and salvation. More than a century ago, German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer somewhat exaggeratedly (he wasn't known as "the philosopher of pessimism" for nothing) expressed the human condition like this: "No one has ever lived who has not more than once wished that he did not have to live through the following day."—*The World as Will and Idea: Abridged in One Volume* (London: Everyman, Orion Publishing. Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2001), p. 204. Little has changed since the apostles' time, Schopenhauer's, or during ours. Thus, the main points of the first century evangelistic preaching also should be the main points of ours today.

Read Acts 4:33, 5:42, 2:36–39, 7:56, 13:48. What are some specific themes about which the disciples preached that should be included in today's evangelistic presentations?

To be an evangelist in any sense of the word, one must have personal understanding and experience of "the everlasting gospel." It is this gospel that ultimately brings belief, confession, conversion, baptism and discipleship, and the promise of eternal life.

The Jewish leaders saw something in the boldness of the apostles that convinced them that the apostles had been with Jesus (*see Acts 4:13*). Most likely the leaders formed this conclusion because they were confronted with a group of men who seemed unable to talk about anything other than Jesus' life and teachings. Evangelism and witnessing surely have to do with speaking about the life and teachings of Jesus, the difference those teachings and beliefs have made in the individual believer's life, and the difference Jesus can make in anyone's life if He is accepted as Lord and Savior.

It is important to view evangelism and witnessing as a continual process rather than as a single program or event. A vital part of the process is establishment and nurture. The word *steadfastly* in Acts 2:42 indicates a strong commitment on the part of the new believers to an ongoing strategy for their spiritual nurture. Clearly, the early church saw evangelism as much more than just the preaching of a message. Their evangelistic process was not complete until people had become disciples and were thoroughly incorporated into the local group of believers.

Of all the gospel promises, which one offers you the most hope? How can you learn to cling to that promise and make it your own, no matter how difficult your circumstances?

Witnessing Is . . . ?

A witness is one who gives a testimony, one who attests to something that he or she knows from personal experience. A Christian's personal testimony regarding the work of God in his or her life can be very powerful. On one occasion Jesus healed a demon-possessed man (*see Mark 5:1–19*). When the healed man wanted to follow Jesus, Jesus told him to “‘go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you’” (*Mark 5:19, NKJV*).

Without question, the short time that Jesus spent with this man was insufficient to tutor him in the art of teaching or preaching. Nevertheless, Jesus told the healed man to witness about what he knew. That is why Jesus said to him, “‘Go . . . and tell.’”

Read Mark 5:18–20; Acts 22:15, 16; and 1 John 1:3. What common and important point is being made by all these texts?

God has given us the responsibility of sharing the ways in which He has changed our lives, just as He did to the formerly demon-possessed man at Gadara and to His other followers.

Witnessing, that is, sharing one's personal experience of God—all with the intention of encouraging others to accept Christ—is not necessarily as organized or as intentional as radio, television, or crusade evangelism. Being a witness can be very spontaneous given that the opportunity to share the good news about Jesus can arise anywhere at any time with anyone. We must, therefore, be ever alert for opportunities to share our knowledge and experience.

As to the relationship between witnessing and evangelism, we can say that they are each essentially different strategies for reaching the goal of winning souls for Christ. Witnessing is more spontaneous and short term, while evangelism tends to be more long term and intentional. Sometimes planned evangelism is enhanced by the personal witnessing of those involved, and sometimes spontaneous witnessing leads people into a more planned program. However it happens, both are vital components in the overall process. When we share what Jesus has done for us, those who are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit will want to know more. Also, it's a lot easier for people to argue against your doctrine, your theology, your beliefs. It's not, however, so easy for them to argue against your own personal testimony.

When was the last time you had a chance to witness to someone about what Christ has done for you? What was the reaction? How has Christ changed your life? What is there in your life that would make someone want to learn more about Jesus?

The Biblical Evidence

The early believers, no doubt, had obstacles to overcome as they committed themselves to spreading the good news about Jesus. Not the least of these obstacles would have been that most were untrained in the religious schools of the day, and, therefore, would have had little or no credibility in the eyes of the established church.

Nevertheless, in spite of all obstacles, the apostles and other believers felt strongly called by God to continue in evangelism and witnessing. The blessings of forgiveness and assurance that they had personally experienced compelled them to share. Witnessing was a natural result of conversion.

Read Acts 13:1–49. What work did the Holy Spirit call Barnabas and Saul to do?

The “Word of God” that was preached everywhere most certainly included the messianic passages of the Old Testament. Those Scriptures that foretold the death and resurrection of the Savior, and His consequent forgiveness and justification of sinners, were presented as being fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

The New Testament clearly reveals that the early believers committed themselves to preaching and sharing. Among their regularly emphasized main points were: Jesus as Lord and Christ, salvation through His righteousness, the coming kingdom of God, and the promise of eternal life.

Study Acts 6:1–7. Focus particularly on verses 4 and 7. What enabled the early church to have so much evangelistic success with the professional clergy in Jerusalem?

Many people believed in Jesus and accepted Him as their personal Savior because of the testimonies of believers who had shared their own life-changing experiences and not simply because people had observed miraculous events.

However powerful and compelling the testimonies and witness of these first evangelists, these people were constantly referring to the Scriptures. That is, they were using the Bible to interpret their experiences. How well do you know the Bible, and how can you get grounded in it to such an extent that you can use it in your own witnessing?

Telling Our Stories

As stated earlier, the most powerful witnessing that a believer can do for Jesus is to share his or her personal testimony. That is, the sharing of what *God has done for me and how He has affected my life and experience*. Usually a personal testimony is expressed in three distinct sections. The first part is a short review of the believer's life before accepting Jesus as personal Savior. The second part is an explanation of how the person met the Lord. The third is a declaration of the life experience after getting to know Jesus.

Read through Acts 22:2–21. Paul's defense speech before the Jerusalem council is in the form of a personal testimony. What are some of the points he makes in each section of his testimony?

His life before he knew the Lord Jesus (vss. 3–5):

How he met the Lord (vss. 6–16):

His life experience after his conversion (vss. 17–21):

Even if you were raised in a Christian home and did not experience a dramatic conversion experience, you certainly had a special time when you made your personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Think back on your experience and write out some points that will help to form your own personal testimony.

My life before I knew the Lord Jesus (or before I made a commitment to Him):

How I met Jesus (or what influenced my commitment to Him):

My life after I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior:

A personal testimony should not be a long and detailed autobiography. We mentioned earlier that witnessing is a more spontaneous way of sharing Jesus than is a planned evangelistic approach. Christians should be able to give their testimony in a short space of time, because we don't know when the opportunity may arise to speak of Jesus. It could be in any number of unplanned situations. It may be on a plane or at a bus stop. It may be during a short telephone call. However the situation arises, we should be ready and willing to speak about what the Lord has done for us, what reasons we have for our faith, and the hope that God offers not just to us but to others.

Consider the eternal difference between the lost and the saved, between eternal death and eternal life. In the long run, what else really matters?

Our Job Description

Read 1 Peter 3:15. What is this text teaching us about witnessing? How does it fit in with that which we have been looking at so far?

By now we have considered evangelism and witnessing sufficiently in order to be able to suggest what we deem as an adequate biblical job description. We don't need to create a definition of evangelism and witnessing that everyone agrees with in every detail, but we must make sure that any definition that we accept includes the essential ingredients of sharing the truth about Jesus and what He offers the world.

Consider the following definition of *evangelism*. Do you consider it an adequate definition? What would you add or take away? **Evangelism is the process of clearly and persuasively proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ so that individuals will accept Him as their personal Savior and follow Him as Lord in order to become disciples and disciple makers.**

While a definition of a task is not necessarily a detailed job description, it does give some overall guidance. Of course, when it comes to witnessing, the individual situation and the believer's own experience with God will determine the approach. However, an understanding of God's desire to reach a lost world through His church will cause us to consider a planned approach to witnessing and evangelism.

The rapid growth of the early church was due in no small part to the conviction and commitment of its members. This in turn was based upon their personal experiences with Jesus and the special empowering outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The teachings of Jesus Christ and the influence of the Holy Spirit remain basic and crucial to all witnessing and evangelism.

"Thousands can be reached in the most simple, humble way. The most intellectual, those who are looked upon as the world's most gifted men and women, are often refreshed by the simple words of one who loves God, and who can speak of that love as naturally as the worldling speaks of the things that interest him most deeply. Often the words well prepared and studied have but little influence. But the true, honest expression of a son or daughter of God, spoken in natural simplicity, has power to open the door to hearts that have long been closed against Christ and His love."—Ellen G. White, *The Colporteur Ministry*, p. 39.

Further Study: Think about your personal testimony and make sure that you are able to give it when the opportunity arises.

Take some time to sit quietly and consider what areas of church life you enjoy being involved in or the areas that you would consider being involved in if you were asked. Write them down. You may be interested in evangelistic areas in which your church is not currently involved. List these areas too.

Begin to consider the ways in which you can become involved in an evangelistic ministry in your church. If you are already involved in a ministry and desire to stay there, pray that God will continue to bless that ministry. If you are not presently involved, pray that God will reveal to you where He wants you to work for Him.

Discussion Questions:

❶ In the gospel commission of Matthew 28:19, 20, there are four action verbs: *go*, *make disciples*, *baptize*, and *teach*. The commands to go, baptize, and teach are all subordinate to the imperative that says, “make disciples.” Considering this clear emphasis, discuss what it means to be a disciple and how disciples are made.

❷ Consider the following quote and then discuss the question, How do we as individuals and as a church group become a part of God’s channel of communication to a lost world? “As His representatives among men, Christ does not choose angels who have never fallen, but human beings, men of like passions with those they seek to save. Christ took upon Himself humanity, that He might reach humanity. Divinity needed humanity, for it required both the divine and the human to bring salvation to the world. Divinity needed humanity that humanity might afford a channel of communication between God and man.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 296.

❸ Take a look at your own life. What kind of example do you present to the world? In what ways do your words, actions, dress, demeanor, and attitude impact those around you? In short, what kind of witness do you present to the world, even when you are not actively “witnessing”? In which areas can you definitely improve?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Matthew 28:19, 20*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Compare and contrast the job descriptions of evangelism and witnessing for members of Christ's body.

Feel: Sense the compelling urgency of the gospel message and its eternal consequences for every soul.

Do: Do his or her part in both the individual and the corporate work of the sharing of the gospel.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Job Descriptions

A What are the similarities between witnessing and evangelism, and how are they different? Why are both ways of sharing the gospel important?

B How do the experiences of the early church inform us regarding the importance of both personal witness and corporate evangelism?

II. Feel: The Everlasting Gospel

A Why is the gospel such an urgent message to share?

B How does personal testimony make witnessing more compelling?

III. Do: Individual and Corporate Work

A How can you share your witness of what God has done for you this week? How is your story one that no one else can share? Why is it important that you share your experiences about your relationship with God with your friends, family, and coworkers?

B What part can you play in the evangelistic work of the church that would give you great joy as you bless others?

▶ **Summary:** Sharing our stories of what Christ has done for us is an important individual witness on a one-to-one basis. Our individual work for God may also be a critical part of the church's long-term evangelistic work.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Having spent time with Jesus, His original followers shared their experience with others. Witnessing was a natural and life-changing result of the time they had spent with Him. But it was also a specific task that Jesus gave them—and us—to do.

Just for Teachers: When we hear about someone being described as a witness, the typical image that comes to mind is that of an individual standing up in a court of law to talk about what he or she has seen. In court there are rules that restrict the witness to talking about his or her own experience; if someone makes comments about things that he or she does not know about directly, little credibility is given to such testimony. So it is with being a witness for Jesus. We are witnesses of what we have experienced. This is what makes witnessing credible. It also makes a difference in how we go about witnessing.

Opening Activity: Ask class members to pair up, preferably with someone they do not know very well. Assign each person the task of introducing his or her partner to the rest of the group, sharing the most positive thing that happened to this person during the past week. If the class members already know one another well, perhaps ask each person to find out a new fact about his or her partner. Give the people in each pair a couple of minutes to talk to each other; then, in turn, invite each person to introduce his or her partner to the group. Preface the invitation with a brief discussion of the vital importance of knowing someone well in order to be able to introduce him or her to others.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: This section provides an opportunity for the class to explore key aspects of Jesus' command to be His witnesses and examines different ways of doing this.

Bible Commentary

I. Jesus Said Just Do It (Review Matthew 28:1–20, Mark 16:15–18, Luke 24:47–49, John 20:21, and Acts 1:6–8 with the class.)

Have members of the class read aloud the five texts referenced. Then ask them to compare and contrast the different contexts and emphases among these various versions of Jesus' command to His disciples—from that time forward and in the future—in order to tell His story. In the case of the four Gospel accounts, these commands come as part of the ending of each story: each story climaxes with Jesus' death and resurrection, followed by the story's logical conclusion that the people who had seen and experienced what had happened would go and do something about it. These commands have the weight of the gospel stories behind them to give each conclusion its punch. By contrast, the command in Acts is the beginning of a new story, and the rest of the book of Acts—and the bulk of the New Testament—is a record of what happened as those first disciples went forth to do as they had been instructed.

Consider This: What can we learn from the differences between these five passages?

■ *What do some or all of these accounts have in common? What is important about these commonalities?*

II. Witnesses (Review Mark 5:18–20; Acts 4:8–13; Acts 22:15, 16; and 1 John 1:1–3 with the class.)

The amazing witnessing recorded in Acts was based on personal experiences that the disciples and the other early Christians had had with Jesus (see 1 John 1:1–3). The disciples had experienced Jesus in many ways; they had seen, touched, and associated with Him. Once the disciples had gotten to know Jesus, their lives had changed, and they were able to tell others what they had experienced. So if we think about how we get to know God and learn about Him, we can discover ways in which we can share our experience with others.

Consider This: Why is an experience with Jesus foundational to any kind of witnessing?

■ *What are some of the ways in which we can get to know Jesus that also can serve as ways in which we can share our knowledge and experience of Him with others?*

III. Evangelists (Review Acts 6:1–7 and Acts 13:1–49 with the class.)

As the group of witnesses and believers grew and new needs arose, people were appointed to minister to these needs. For example, in Acts 6, the first

deacons were appointed following a meeting called by the Twelve to discuss the distribution of food to widows. But the real purpose of this appointment was to free the Twelve to be more focused on evangelism. In a similar way, gifted individuals, such as Paul and Barnabas, were appointed in formal and informal ways to focus on specific tasks of evangelism—becoming full-time “witnesses” to the Person and mission of the early church.

Consider This: How would you explain the difference between witnessing and evangelism?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: Throughout this quarter there is sure to be quite a bit of discussion about the “how”—the rights and wrongs—of evangelism. These are important discussions, because the call to be evangelists is an invitation to present and represent God to a world of sinners who desperately need Him, even when they may not always know it. This calling requires the best of thinking, learning, praying, sharing, and working, which is what we should ardently strive to do in our study groups during this quarter.

Application Questions:

- 1 Think about how natural it was for Jesus’ first disciples to witness. If it seemed like a natural and easy thing for them to do, despite continual opposition, why is it so often awkward for us, and how can we overcome the obstacles?
- 2 To what degree should the church in Acts be a model for evangelism today? In what ways are we as a church different from the early church? How is our world different? What principles of outreach used by the church in Acts can we apply in order to meet these differences?
- 3 When we talk about witnessing, we may feel discouraged that we don’t have a strong enough relationship with God upon which to base our witnessing. How can we be confident enough in our Christianity to be able to share it with others? Conversely, how can witnessing to others actually be a factor in the growing of a stronger relationship with God?
- 4 At the outset of this quarter’s study, discuss some guidelines for appropriate witnessing. What are some things that we should not do in witnessing? Why?
- 5 How do we find a balance between not offending, upsetting, or annoying

people to whom we are trying to witness, and impressing upon them the importance of knowing Jesus?

6 What is the importance of the distinction between witnessing and evangelism?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: These activities are intended (1) to prompt class members to develop a growing awareness of their personal witness and that of their church and (2) to monitor how that awareness will progress during the course of this quarter.

Suggestions for individual activities: Provide paper and pens to class members and ask them to write down the names of three friends for whom they would like to pray during the course of this series of lessons. These three friends should be people whom the class member knows personally and whom he or she would like to see come to know Jesus and/or join the church. Challenge class members to pray every day during this three-month period for their three people and for the opportunity to be witnesses to them. Ask them to retain the piece of paper as bookmarks in their study guides or Bibles and to report back to the class at the conclusion of this quarter about the ways in which they might have seen God answer their prayers.

Suggestions for group or team activities: As a class, conduct an “audit” of your church’s witnessing and evangelism. Make a list of things that your church members participate in that might be considered evangelism, using a broad understanding of what is included in that term. When you have made a list that class members consider to be comprehensive, rank the different activities or projects as to how well they fulfill the gospel commission. (You can either order them in reflection of their importance/effectiveness or score them from 1 to 10, with 10 being excellent.) Allow for class members to express a variety of opinions in relation to these questions. Retain the list so that you may revisit it at the conclusion of this set of lessons. After completing this quarter, consider whether class members changed any of their views as to what constitutes evangelism. Also consider what is most important or effective in this task.