

Evangelism¹ and Witnessing as a Lifestyle



SABBATH—APRIL 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Corinthians 3:2, 3; Matthew 9:36–38; 1 Corinthians 9:20–22; Mark 5:1–19; John 17:11–19.

MEMORY VERSE: “In Joppa there was a believer named Tabitha. Her name in the Greek language was Dorcas. She was always doing good and helping poor people” (Acts 9:36, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Whether we admit it or not, all believers preach a message by the example of their lives.

IT HAS OFTEN BEEN SAID THAT CHRISTIANITY IS NOT JUST ACCEPTING A SET OF BELIEFS. It is also a way of life: a lifestyle. After all, what we believe will influence the choices we make and the kind of lives we live.

Those who claim to be Christians are closely watched by others who are looking to see if Christians practice their beliefs. Even if we do not plan it to be that way, those who watch us do learn from us. So, the important question is not, “Are we influencing other people and passing things on to them?” Instead, the really important questions are, “How are we influencing other people?” and “What are we passing on to them?”

We should always remember how important our influence is on those around us. But we must also plan to help people to make a connection (association) between faith and lifestyle. This week we will study how the Christian's lifestyle can show how important faith is to everyday life.

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

SUNDAY—APRIL 22**SILENT SERMONS (John 13:35)**

How would you have recognized the followers of Jesus back in the first century? You could have recognized the priests and the Pharisees² by the way they dressed. In the same way that you would have recognized a fisherman, a peasant, or a Roman soldier by his or her clothes. But, again, how would you have recognized a Christian?

Read John 13:35. According to Jesus, what is one special way we can “know” who His followers are? What does that mean?

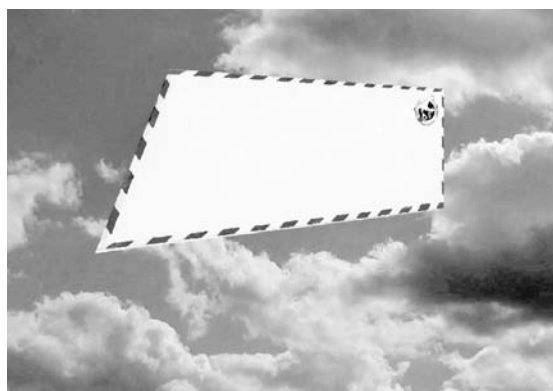
Jesus said that if we love one another, others will know that we are His disciples. How will they know? Because love in action will help them to see the difference. The love we have for Jesus and for fellow believers will decide how we obey God’s will and how we treat one another. So, the love that we have for people outside of God’s church will decide how we treat them, too. This is the sermon that they will see and know. It speaks louder than anything you could ever say. Many parents have noticed that very early in life their children develop a special ability to “seeing” hypocrisy³ in people. This sense becomes stronger as the children grow older. We must understand that many of the people we know also

have this special sense of recognizing the difference between a true spiritual experience and a false claim of being spiritual.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:2, 3. What is Paul saying about how God wants to use His people to influence the lives of others?

We must not fail to recognize the power of our influences, good or bad, on people around us. The Christian’s life is to be like a letter sent from Jesus Christ to the world. From a heart that is renewed by God’s grace,⁴ this letter will show the power of the gospel to change lives and will witness for the Lord.

How have you been influenced by people who showed that they were true Christians? How have you been influenced by those who were hypocrites?⁵ How can you always remember that your actions will influence others, one way or another?



We are God’s letters of love to the world.

2. Pharisees—a religious group among the Jews in Jesus’ day who believed that a person must keep God’s law to be saved.

3. hypocrisy—two-facedness; people saying one thing but doing another.

4. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

5. hypocrites—people who show two “faces.” They say one thing but do another.

MONDAY—APRIL 23**HAVING COMPASSION (MERCY)
FOR PEOPLE (Matthew 9:36–38)**

Each day we all see and pass by people we do not know. We pass them on the street, sit near them in cafes, and wait with them in lines. Sometimes we even nod our heads or raise an eyebrow as we move past them. We could never personally contact everyone we see each day. But God's desire is for all these people to accept Him into their lives. For someone, somewhere, we can be a part of God's plan to save him or her.

What was Jesus really saying in Matthew 9:36–38? How can you make good use of His words in your everyday life?

The crowd of people that Jesus saw was troubled and discouraged. The religious leaders in Jesus' time had failed to do their duty. As a result, the people were scattered and disheartened. The people became so depressed that they almost gave up on religion. Jesus had compassion (mercy) for them because He knew that they needed a spiritual shepherd.

In the crowds of people around us, many have accepted Jesus Christ. But many more also need the Good Shepherd. Somehow we must reach them for Christ.

Jesus, the disciples, and a few other followers had been involved in the gospel harvest. But as the harvest

grew, more workers were needed. Jesus invited His disciples to pray for more reapers (harvesters) and probably for some followers to consider their own call to the harvest field. This story shows that God understands the need for more workers and will supply (give) them.

Most churches have such a large harvest field that it is not wise to let a few members be responsible for the harvest. When we have compassion (mercy) for the thousands of people who live around our churches and our homes, we again will sense the need to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out more workers. Then, we probably can fulfill our promise and responsibility for becoming workers for the Lord.

As we focus on outreach and evangelism, it is important that we continually review our local harvests. These local people may be already seeking God. So, they will be influenced by the compassion we show them.

Discuss what you think the word *compassion* means. How can you learn from your own suffering and your own need for compassion? How can you learn to be more compassionate (merciful) to those around you?

TUESDAY—APRIL 24**WALKING IN THEIR SHOES⁶
(1 Corinthians 9:20–22)**

Here is an important point: do not give people what you think they need.

6. walking in their shoes—putting ourselves in the place of others by imagining what they feel or have experienced; to meet others where they are.

Instead, learn what they see as important. What are they worried about? What are their problems? What do they feel that they need?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:20–22. What do these verses tell us about Paul’s method of reaching different groups of people? What about his desire to know them and recognize their needs? What can we learn from this to help us to reach out to those around us? Read also Hebrews 4:15.

Without giving up his principles (important rules) of faith, Paul was willing to go anywhere and do anything he could to be able to teach people about the truth of the gospel. In other words, Paul was willing to walk in their shoes while trying to understand them and to decide on the best way to reach them for Jesus Christ.



To walk in another person’s shoes means to meet them where they are.

We try to give what we think people need. But we should try first to understand what they see as their needs. To walk in the shoes of another per-

son means that we try to understand life and all its situations and problems as he or she understands these things. It is to try to understand their hurts and joys. In other words, we are to meet them where they are.

Of course, this is what Jesus did. He walked in the shoes of the people whom He came to save. He can understand our struggles and pain because He experienced the same. He had great disappointments and faced false charges and unfair punishment. He was truly “God with us” because He “entered” into our lives.

Because Jesus entered into our experiences, He can meet us where we are. But as we read through the Gospels, we discover that Jesus did not have just one method of evangelism and witnessing. He reached out to people in their own life situation. When Jesus met the woman at Jacob’s well, He spoke about Living Water (God). To farming folk, He told stories about the sowing of seeds, harvest time, and



To the woman at the well, Jesus spoke about Living Water.

the weather. To fishermen, He spoke about fish, nets, and storms. Jesus had a wonderful way of giving great spiritual truths from the normal situations of daily life. Those who listened learned about the Living Water and the need to sow the gospel seed. Many of them even became fishers of men.

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 25

A HOSPITABLE LIFESTYLE⁷ (Mark 5:1–19)

There is a saying that we often use when we speak of reaching people for Christ. It is: “people do not care how much we know until they know how much we care.” The point is that we can teach and preach all we want. But if people feel they are not understood, loved, or accepted, then our witness will not succeed very well. It does not matter how well we preach or how true our teachings are.

This leads to the simple idea of hospitality.⁸ Hospitality includes the areas of acceptance, welcoming, openness, caring, kindness, and friendship. These show the ways that God would have Christians work with other people, especially the people whom they try to reach for the Lord.

Read the story of the demon-possessed man in Mark 5:1–19. What did Jesus tell this man that shows how open our friends are to our sharing the gospel? How

can we learn to use this principle (important rule) in our own work of personal witness and ministry (work done for God)?

Jesus could have commanded this man to go back to his town and tell everyone about his experience of being healed. But the Lord commanded him to go find his friends. This shows that those with whom we already have relationships are quick to receive the good news that we want to share about His love, grace, and salvation. Those friends may then share the exciting news with their other friends. And so the gospel message goes forward.

It is very important that we have friendships outside of our circle of believers. Because many people work out in the world, they will naturally have many friends. Friends at work are not always close friends. But those friends can become close friends through what has been called hospitality evangelism.⁹ Hospitality evangelism flows out of a hospitable lifestyle. So, hospitality evangelism is not something that can be dropped at any time. Instead, it is the way we live. (Read also Luke 14:12–14.)

In what ways could you be more hospitable to those around you? How can you learn to be more willing to meet the needs of those whom you are trying to reach?

7. hospitable lifestyle—living a life that is generous and friendly to guests and visitors.

8. hospitality—the method of making people feel welcome or comfortable in your presence.

9. hospitality evangelism—evangelism based on making people comfortable and welcome and accepted.

THURSDAY—APRIL 26**WIDENING YOUR FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE¹⁰ (John 17:11–19)**

Sometimes a searching soul may meet a Christian and ask, “What must I do to be saved?” But often believers must go out looking for the lost sheep. Some suggest that the church acts too much like a fortress (strong building). A few people go out from the fortress on a mission to win several souls. Then the new believers are warned not to get too close to the world from which they have been saved. Whether or not this understanding is true is not the point. The point is that many Seventh-day Adventists have few, or no, meaningful relationships outside of the church fellowship. It is important for us to avoid worldly people who may have a negative influence on our lives. But separating ourselves from the world may harm our ability to reach people with the gospel message.

Examine closely John 17:11–19. What do these verses show about the Christian’s place in the world? Read also Colossians 4:2–6.

From these verses we can list the following truths about Jesus’ disciples and the world:

They are in the world (verse 11).

They are not of the world (verses 14, 16).

They are not yet to be taken out of

the world (verse 15).

Jesus sent them into the world (verse 18).

We are all born into this world. While we are here, God also has a work for us to do in it. Jesus sent His first disciples into the world. In the same way, He has sent us into the world to introduce people to Jesus and to tell them of the promise of salvation that He offers all people.

The challenge for each one of us is to make our personal mission field larger. This may mean adjusting our lifestyle so that we are around more unchurched people. No, this does not mean that we compromise (give up) principles, beliefs, and values. But it does mean that we look for opportunities where we can make friends without giving up our principles and win them to Christ. Then we can become channels (spokesmen) of God’s truth.

Often we are good at sending out invitations for the people to come to us. But Jesus really told us to go to them. So, we need to ask ourselves if we have withdrawn too much from the world. And if we have lost our ability to do evangelism.

Look at yourself: do you keep yourself away from the world too much? Or, perhaps, are you too close to the world? How can you better learn to be in the world (and to witness to others) and still not be influenced negatively by it?

10. friendship circle—the group of friends you have around you and are close to.



Believers must go looking for the lost sheep.

FRIDAY—APRIL 27

ADDITIONAL STUDY:

Discover where your ministry fits into your church's plans for evangelism.

Most local church departments may have a well-organized program and be quite busy. But those people involved in each department may not know much about what is happening in other areas of church life. So, there may not be a complete (full) evangelistic plan. For the purposes of encouragement, support, and review, it is best that your evangelistic and witnessing ministry be a part of a complete church plan. To achieve this goal, the following suggestions are important:

① Meet with your pastor, elders, or evangelistic leaders to understand what evangelism and witnessing goals are in place and what plans are being made to reach these goals. Remember, you are trying to discover where your chosen evangelistic and witnessing ministry will fit with the church's plans to help

to reach its goals.

② Suppose there is much evangelistic work in your church. But there are no goals or plans. If so, ask for a meeting with the pastor, elders, or evangelistic leaders. Then ask them what their personal goals for evangelism are. Take some notes during your discussions. You are building up a picture of your leadership's evangelistic vision that will help you to suggest goals and ways of reaching others.

③ At this time, you may decide to join with a well-planned evangelistic ministry. Or your chosen ministry may be in a new area of evangelism or witnessing. Then you will need to get together a small group of people who share your vision. Make a list of your goals and the plans you will use to reach those goals.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① "Too often the sermon preached by a pastor does not agree with the sermon preached in the lives of Christians who claim to follow truth."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, page 21. As a Christian, does the witness of your life compare with your words?

② Think about your church as a whole. How involved is your church in the community? If your church vanished (disappeared) tomorrow, how much difference to the community would that make? Would it make any difference at all?