

# 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?

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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?

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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?

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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 that they 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 planned church 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 inward 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.

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**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?**

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

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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 collaborators 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?

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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?

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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 co-workers 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 In.

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 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:**

**1** 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.

**2** 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?

## Jewels of Truth

Afet knew that she had found great truth at the small group meeting that she and her mother and sister had been attending. Within a year all three were baptized.

Afet's heart burned to share her faith with others, but it wouldn't be easy. Most people in her country consider Christians to be infidels. Afet prayed for wisdom, and God showed her texts in the dominant religion's holy book that could help to lead people to Jesus. Afet printed these texts out and gave them to people.

"Your holy book says that Jesus will come again," she told people as she gave them the cards that she'd made. As people read the verses, God opened their hearts to hear about Jesus. "I tell them that the Bible teaches many of the same things their holy book teaches, sometimes in greater detail," says Afet. "They are surprised. I show them verses from their holy book that say that the Bible is the word of God and it never changes." Using this approach, Afet and her fellow believers have led many to Christ and organized several small groups.

With help from the church headquarters in her country, Afet and her fellow believers bought 10,000 books to sell door-to-door in their city of 800,000 people, where very few people are Christians.

One day an older man answered Afet's knock. He saw that Afet was selling books and sent his son to fetch a young man who sells religious books of his own faith. Afet prayed for wisdom and asked God to guide her words. When the young man arrived, the home owner took a copy of *Steps to God [Steps to Christ]* from Afet and showed it to the young man. "Do you sell this book?" he asked. The young man said that he didn't know the book. The older man bought two copies of *Steps to God* and gave one to the young man to read. He kept the other for himself and thanked Afet for the opportunity to read more about God.

A girl on the second floor had seen Afet going door-to-door. She hurried to catch Afet before she left the building. She asked to see Afet's books and picked up *Steps to God*. "I saw this book in a dream!" she said. "I must have it!"

God is using Adventist books to lead these people to the Bible and to the Savior. Your mission offerings help to support ministries such as this in countries where it's difficult for Adventists to share their faith.

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*AFET shares her faith as a Global Mission pioneer in a country in central Asia. To protect her identity, her full name hasn't been used.*