

Evangelism *and* Witnessing *as a Lifestyle*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Cor. 3:2, 3; Matt. 9:36–38;
1 Cor. 9:20–22; Mark 5:1–19; John 17:11–19.

Memory Text: “At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did” (*Acts 9:36, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Whether we acknowledge it or not, all believers preach a message by the example of their lives.

It has often been said that Christianity is not just an adherence to a set of beliefs; it is also a way of life, a lifestyle. After all, what we believe will, ultimately, impact the choices we make and the kind of lives we live.

It is also true that those who claim to be Christians are keenly observed by others who are looking to see whether their lives match their professed beliefs. Even if we don't intend it, 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?” but rather, “*How* are we influencing other people, and what are we passing on to them?”

While we should always remember the importance of our unintentional influence on those around us, we must also intentionally plan to help people to make a connection between faith and lifestyle. This week we will study how the Christian's lifestyle can demonstrate the relevance of faith in everyday existence.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 28.*

Silent Sermons

How would you have recognized the followers of Jesus back in the first century? You could recognize the priests and the Pharisees by the way they dressed. Likewise, you would recognize a fisherman, a peasant, or a Roman soldier by their clothes. But, again, how would you recognize a Christian?

Read John 13:35. According to Jesus, what is one special way His followers are identified? What does that mean in practical terms?

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 convince them. The love we have for Jesus and for fellow believers will determine how we respond to God's will and, in turn, how we treat one another. Furthermore, the love and concern that we have for those outside of God's fold will determine how we treat them too. This is the sermon that they will see and observe, and it speaks louder than anything you could ever say. Many parents have noticed that very early in life their children develop an internal "hypocrisy detector" that becomes enhanced and fine-tuned as they grow older. We must be aware, therefore, that many of the people we associate with, and witness to, also have a highly developed ability to recognize the difference between a genuine spiritual experience and a mere profession of spirituality.

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

We must not underestimate both our intentional and unintentional influences on those 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 divine grace, this letter will demonstrate the power of the gospel to transform lives and thereby will witness for the Lord.

How have you been affected by those whose actions matched their profession? How have you been affected by those whose actions *didn't* match their profession? What will help you to always remember that your actions will influence others, one way or another?

Having Compassion for People

Each day we all fleetingly brush past people we don't know. We pass them on the street, sit near them in cafés, and wait with them in lines. Sometimes we even acknowledge their presence with a nod or a smile as we move past them. Although we could never personally contact each person we see each day, 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.

Read Matthew 9:36–38. **Though spoken in a specific and unique context, the sentiments Jesus expressed are not limited to just that context. What was Jesus saying, and how do those words apply to the field in your immediate area?**

The multitude that Jesus saw on this occasion was troubled and distressed. The people were so downcast that they had all but given up on any remnants of a religious experience they had left. Those whom God had placed in charge of the spiritual welfare of His people had neglected their duty. Consequently the people were scattered and disheartened. Jesus had compassion for them because He knew that they needed a spiritual shepherd.

Among the masses of people with whom we mingle, many are committed to Jesus Christ. But many more also desperately need the Good Shepherd. Somehow they must be reached for Christ.

Jesus, the disciples, and a few other followers had been engaged in the gospel harvest, but as the harvest grew, so did the need for more laborers. Although Jesus' invitation to pray for more reapers was probably also calculated to get some followers to consider their own call to the harvest field, it also promises that God understands the need for more workers and will supply them.

Most churches are surrounded by such a large harvest field that it is not practical to leave the reaping up to a few members. When we have compassion for the people who live around our churches and our homes, in some cases numbered in the thousands, we again will sense the need to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers, and perhaps, in turn, we will realize our potential as laborers for the Lord.

As we focus on outreach and evangelism, it is important that we continually review our potential local harvests. These local people, many of whom are already seeking God, will be impacted for good by the compassion we show them.

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

Walking in Their Shoes

Here's an important point: rather than providing what we think people need, we must learn to recognize what *they see* as important priorities. What are they concerned 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 approach to different peoples and his desire to identify with their needs and concerns? What can we take from this for ourselves in our attempts to reach out to those around us? *See also Heb. 4:15.*

Without compromising on matters of principle, the apostle Paul was willing to go anywhere and do anything he could to be in a better position to convince people of the truth of the gospel. In other words, he was willing to walk in their shoes in an attempt to understand them and to determine the best way to reach them for Jesus Christ.

The point is that often we try to provide what we think people need. Yet, we should seek first to understand what they see as their needs. To walk in the shoes of another means that we attempt to understand life and all its intricacies and issues from their perspective; it is to try to understand their hurts and joys. In other words, to meet them where they are.

Of course, this is what Jesus did. His earthly life was one of identifying with those He came to save. He can understand our struggles and pain because He experienced the same. He had great disappointments, endured false accusations, rejection, and unfair punishment. He was "God with us" in the fullest sense of entering into our lives.

Furthermore, because He entered into our experiences, He can meet people where they are. 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 context. When He met the woman at Jacob's well, He spoke about living water. To farmers, He told stories about sowing seeds, harvest time, and the weather. To fishermen, He spoke about fish, nets, and storms. Jesus had a wonderful way of presenting great spiritual truths as He identified with the normal issues of daily life, and those who listened learned about the water of life and the need to sow the gospel seed. Many of them even became fishers of men.

A Hospitable Lifestyle

There is a saying that is often voiced when we speak of reaching people for Christ. “People don’t 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 misunderstood, unloved, and unaccepted, then our witness will be severely hampered, no matter how eloquent our preaching or how reasonable and true our teachings.

This leads to the simple idea of hospitality. Hospitality includes the areas of acceptance, welcoming, openness, caring, generosity, kindness, and friendship. These qualities all have to do with the way that God would have Christians relate both to one another and to those whom they seek 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 illustrates the principle that friends are more receptive to our sharing the gospel? How can we learn to apply this principle in our own work of personal witness and ministry?

Jesus could have directed this man to go back to his town and tell everyone about his healing experience. The fact that the Lord specifically directed him to seek out his friends underscores the truth that those with whom we already have relationships are the most receptive to the good news that we want to share about His love, grace, and deliverance. Those friends would then share the exciting news with their other friends, and so the gospel message goes forward.

Important to this whole process is that we have friendships outside of our circle of believers. Because many work out in the world, they will naturally have many acquaintances, but acquaintances are not close friends. However, acquaintances can become friends through what has been called hospitality evangelism, and hospitality evangelism flows out of a hospitable lifestyle. In other words, hospitality evangelism is not something that is turned off on occasion; rather, it is the way we live. *See 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 give of yourself in order to meet the needs of those whom you are seeking to reach?

Widening Your Friendship Circle

While a searching soul occasionally may approach a Christian and ask, “What must I do to be saved?” for the most part believers must go out in search of the lost sheep. Some suggest that the church acts too much like a fortress from which a few people go out on a campaign or mission in order to collect some converts who are then admonished not to get too close to the world from which they have been saved. Whether this is true or just a perception is not the point. The point is that many Seventh-day Adventists have few, or no, meaningful relationships outside of the fellowship. Though it is important for us to avoid unholy influences, there is a degree to which such isolation detracts from our ability to reach people with the gospel message.

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

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

They are in the world (*vs. 11*).

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

They are not yet to be taken out of the world (*vs. 15*).

Jesus sent them into the world (*vs. 18*).

We are all born into this world. While we are here, God also has a work for us to do in it. Just as with His first disciples, Jesus has sent us into the world to introduce whomever we can to Him and the promise of salvation that He offers all humanity.

The challenge for each one of us is to intentionally expand our personal mission field. This may mean adjusting our lifestyle in order to rub shoulders with more unchurched people. This is not to say that we compromise principles, convictions, and values, but, rather, that we look for opportunities where we can, in clear conscience, interact with others in a way that will allow us to become both friends and, as a result, channels of God’s truth.

Often we excel in sending out invitations for the people to come to us. Yet, Jesus actually told us to go to them. Thus, we need to ask ourselves if we have withdrawn too much from the world and therefore have lost some of our evangelistic effectiveness.

Look at yourself: do you tend to be too insular, too remote from the world? Or, perhaps, are you too cozy with the world? How can you better learn to be in the world (and thus witness to others) and yet not be “of it”?

Further Study: Discover Where Your Ministry Fits Into Your Church's Overall Plans.

While most local church departments may have a well-organized program and be quite busy, the chances are that those involved in each department may not know much about what is happening in other areas of church life. Furthermore, there may not be an overall church evangelistic plan of which each department group is aware and, therefore, can contribute toward. For the purposes of encouragement, support, and effective evaluation, it is best that your evangelism and witnessing ministry be a part of an overall church strategy. To achieve this, the following suggestions are important:

1. Meet with your pastor, elders, or evangelism leaders to understand what, if any, evangelism and witnessing goals are in place and what strategies are being followed to reach these goals. Remember, you are trying to discover where your chosen evangelism and witnessing activities will fit with the church's plans and help to reach their goals.
2. You may discover that although there is much evangelistic activity in your church, there are no documented goals or strategies. If this is the case, then request a meeting with the pastor, elders, or evangelism leaders, and 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 to suggest goals and ways of reaching others.
3. At this stage you may decide to join with an already established evangelistic ministry. If, however, your chosen ministry is in a new area of evangelism or witnessing, you will need to gather a small group of people who share your vision. Document your goals and the strategies you will employ to reach those goals.

Discussion Questions:

- ① “Too often the influence of the sermon preached from the pulpit is counteracted by the sermon preached in the lives of those who claim to be advocates of truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 21. What kind of witness does your life, as opposed to your words or profession, reveal?
- ② Think about your church as a whole. How integrated into the community is it? If your church vanished tomorrow, how much difference to the community would that make? Would it make any difference at all?

Stubborn Atheist

I was an absolute atheist, a teacher of physics and astronomy on a mission to convince my students in Bulgaria that God doesn't exist.

Then my brother became a Christian—a Seventh-day Adventist Christian! I wasn't sure what he believed, but I was sure it meant trouble. My brother tried to convince me to study the Bible and give Christianity a chance, but I refused to listen. In fact, I refused to allow him to say one word about it in my presence.

He sent me Bible studies and literature, but I refused to open the envelopes. I reminded my brother that Karl Marx had said that religion is the opiate of the people, and I refused to be tainted by such superstition.

But my brother kept sending the literature. Finally, I decided to read what he sent, only so I could show him the errors of his new beliefs. I opened the first envelope, and read through the lesson. Then I read another and another. The sixth lesson talked about Jesus' second coming. Something about this lesson touched my heart. My interest was aroused. I went back and reread each lesson and filled in the study sheet. I found myself looking forward impatiently for each lesson to arrive.

I found the tiny Seventh-day Adventist church in my city and began to visit it. I began reading the Bible, too. When I finally told my brother that I was studying the Bible, we shared precious moments of discovery together. For the first time in my life I experienced the presence of God in my life as we prayed together.

At first I thought that only absolute vegetarians who wore ultra-conservative clothes were God's true children. But over time God revealed that His children don't focus on outward appearances and actions, but on being heart-right with God. As I realized this, I felt a wonderful freedom and joy. I learned to love the believers who didn't eat like me or look like me. I learned to love others because Jesus loves them, and He relies on us to be His light in this dark world.

Four years after my baptism God surprised me again. I had wanted to teach a few old women in a village how to serve God, but the conference invited me to become the women's ministries director! Imagine, me, the stubborn atheist, teaching other women to love God! He never ceases to amaze me.

God reached me through a praying brother and literature provided by the mission offerings of faithful people around the world. Imagine what He can do with your mission gifts.

TATIANA MODREVA *shares her faith in western Bulgaria.*