

# Personal Evangelism *and* Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Acts 4:13, 14; John 1:37–50; Psalm 139; 1 Pet. 3:1–15; John 4:37, 38.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘You are My witnesses,’ says the LORD, ‘and My servant whom I have chosen’ ” (*Isaiah 43:10, NKJV*).

**Key Thought:** Those who have the joy of assurance of salvation will want to lead others to experience the same.

Although many people will hear the good news about Jesus through a church's witnessing and evangelism endeavors, there is a special sense in which the individual's influence contributes significantly to the success of the corporate church program. Over the last few decades, surveys have shown that friends, relatives, neighbors, or acquaintances (all under the power of the Holy Spirit) were the most influential factors in leading people to give their hearts to Christ. Research has shown that up to 83 percent of new members surveyed stated the influence of their church-member friends, relatives, and acquaintances as being significant. Of those who attended some form of public evangelistic meetings before joining the church, 64 percent attended at the invitation of someone in their close-people network.

This week we will review some biblical examples of networking and consider our connectedness to Jesus and our personal influence on those close to us.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 12.*

## My God and Me

Our personal relationship with Jesus will have a direct bearing upon our success in witnessing for Him. It is so easy to learn some witnessing and evangelism formulas and then rally forth in our own assumed wisdom and strength. While God can still bless our efforts, we must ever remind ourselves that it is His work, and we accomplish it through His power. Do we want to merely impart knowledge (albeit important knowledge), or do we want to encourage a vital spiritual relationship? And how can we pass on to others what we don't have in and of ourselves?

Of course, there are always examples of people—however weak in faith themselves, however close to tottering on the edge of apostasy and backsliding—who nevertheless are used by God to lead others to Jesus. In a large city a number of years ago, a young woman, having joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church, worked tirelessly to reach her brother. After years, the brother was baptized. One month later, the sister left the faith and, as of now, still renounces it. Although cases like this happen, the fact is that the stronger our own connection with Jesus, the more powerful a witness we will be.

**Read** Acts 4:13, 14. **What do these verses reveal about the relationship that Peter and John had with Jesus and what this connection enabled them to accomplish? Think through what was meant when it says that “they realized that they had been with Jesus.” What does that mean? What should a person who has just “been with Jesus” be like?**

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The lesson in God's Word is pretty clear. As we think about our personal mission fields, as we assess the ripeness of the grain and the urgent need of laborers, we need to allow the Lord to draw us into a close and powerful relationship with Him; a relationship that will give us power that, otherwise, we wouldn't have.

**How is your own personal relationship with the Lord? How does your mere presence, the way you talk, act, and treat people, reveal your relationship with God? Be as painfully honest with yourself as you possibly can.**

## My Personal Mission Field

When Jesus looked at the crowds of people, He was filled with compassion (*see Matt. 9:36*). Sometimes we may think that Jesus simply saw the crowd, but, in reality, He saw each *individual* that made up the crowd. In the same way, we should be aware of the individuals in the crowds through which we walk and those in which we live. Our church can be aware of individuals in the crowd only if church members interact on an individual basis with those who are in their sphere of influence.

Those with whom we personally interact on various levels of intimacy are, in reality, our personal mission field. From our closest family relationships we can move outward to other relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Occasionally others may fleetingly move in and out of our sphere of influence and, for a brief time, become a part of our personal mission field.

**Read** John 1:37–42. Why do you think Andrew told his brother about finding the Messiah before he told anyone else?

Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist, and as John’s ministry was to prepare the way for Jesus, it is understandable that some disciples made the transition to following Jesus. Andrew’s conversation with Jesus excited him so much that he immediately went looking for the person closest to him, the brother with whom he had spent many long nights fishing on the Sea of Galilee.

**Read** John 1:43–50. Look at what is going on here. What interpersonal relations are revealed? In what way does Philip respond to Nathanael’s skepticism? What lessons can we take from this story that can help us to understand how personal witnessing works?

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The early movement to follow Jesus seems to have gained momentum through social networking in the Capernaum and Bethsaida areas. Notice that Philip does not argue when Nathanael has doubts that the Messiah would come from a small, insignificant, rural village. He just issues a simple invitation, “Come and see.”

**How much self-sacrifice will it take on your part for you to be a better witness to those in your vicinity?**

## My Personal Potential

When our personal ministries leaders call for volunteers to be involved in witnessing and evangelism, we often think that many people are more qualified and gifted than we ourselves are. Others seem more confident and capable. However, the Bible reveals to us that God is not necessarily looking for those who are the most qualified as much as those who are willing to be used, whatever their gifts and talents.

A good example of this is God's calling Moses to deliver His people from Egyptian slavery. Moses could see many reasons why someone else would be more qualified to do what God proposed (*see Exod. 3:11, 4:10*). In Moses' mind, he had what he thought were good reasons not to do what the Lord asked of Him.

In response to a call to evangelistic action, many modern-day believers echo some of Moses' concerns—"Who am I to be considered for such a task?" "What if they ask me some hard questions?" "I am not a good enough speaker." We can smile at Moses for thinking that God needed to reconsider His personnel-recruitment strategy, but God knew Moses' potential, and despite his personal fears and concerns, he was the right person for this special task.

The calling of Moses to lead God's people is one that convinces us that God knows us infinitely better than we know ourselves. God does not focus upon past performance but upon personal potential. Each believer has tremendous potential to contribute to the Lord's work.

On the other hand, we must guard against overconfidently running before the Lord. While it is true that we should often search our own hearts in order to evaluate where we are spiritually, we need also to understand that the human heart can be less than objective with self-evaluation. Therefore it is also good to ask God to examine us and show us our true condition, because our condition affects our potential.

**Read Psalm 139. Why did David ask God to search His heart? What lessons are here for us, not just in terms of witnessing but regarding our walk with the Lord, in general? What can we take away from this psalm for ourselves right now? What comfort, hope, and encouragement is there for you? At the same time, what does it say to you about the changes that you need to make in the way you live?**

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## The Witness of a Righteous Life

Do actions really speak louder than words? Yes, immensely so. It is true, therefore, that while a message can be given through actions without words, an equally strong message can be given through words without actions. There is something very powerful about a message that incorporates both actions and words that are in agreement. To profess to love God and then act as if you don't is hypocrisy, and the worst witness that can be given is profession and action that are not in harmony.

Consistency speaks loudly. While your family and friends may not seem to be listening to what you say, they are watching to see if it is in harmony with what you do and how you live.

**Read 1 Peter 3:1–15.** What do these verses tell us about the power of a Christian life and its potential to win unbelievers to Christ? Imagine the power that would attend our witness were we to live as we are told to in this passage. What message especially does verse 15 give in the whole context of our personal witness? *See also Matt. 5:16.*

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We can imagine the strife that could have arisen when a pagan woman accepted Jesus as her Savior while her husband remained in paganism. Her burden for his salvation could lead her to exhibit an argumentative and nagging spirit as she considered him to be part of her personal mission field. On the other hand, as Peter suggests, she could be faithful to her God and hope and pray that her godly life would win her unbelieving husband to the Master. In other words, she could let the actions of her daily life be a constant and powerful witness.

Letting our light shine incorporates all the possibilities of influencing lost men and women for the kingdom. Those around us must not only hear our good words, they must also see our good works, for in so doing they will see the power of God working through us, and the Spirit will challenge them to recognize the possibility and blessing of God's presence in human lives. People must be convinced that Christianity is not only a title that we claim but also an empowering relationship that we enjoy. Using examples is an important method of teaching, and Christians are examples, whether intentionally or unintentionally. We witness by what we do and who we are even more than by what we say or profess to believe. If that's a scary thought, it ought to be.

## My Contribution to the Whole

This week we have been considering our personal mission field and our witnessing and evangelism potential. It is also important to grasp the truth that, because the church consists of all the members, each one's individual effort contributes to the church's overall corporate evangelism. Are you aware of what strategies your church has in place in its work to lead people to Jesus? You may be able to invite people from your personal mission field to attend church functions and programs. On the other hand, are your church's evangelism leaders aware of what you are doing in your personal mission field? They may be able to support you through prayer and with specific resources.

**Read** John 4:37, 38. What encouragement can we get from Jesus' words, " ' 'One sows and another reaps' ' ' "? What is He saying here, and how have you seen that truth realized in your own experience?

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It is very probable that on this occasion Jesus was making reference to the gospel seed sown by Himself, John the Baptist, and the Samaritan woman. The disciples were reaping where others had sown, and the time had indeed arrived when sowers and reapers were rejoicing together.

When Jesus said " ' 'One sows and another reaps,' ' ' " He was not saying that, as individuals, we are either sowers or reapers. Although our churches have probably put more emphasis upon the reapers, it is true that, were there no sowers, the reapers would wait in vain for a harvest. We are all called to sow and to reap, and in any local church scene there are many combinations of sowing and reaping activities. It may be that your sowing in your personal mission field will be reaped at a corporate church reaping process. It may also be that the seeds that others have sown will be reaped as people come into your personal mission field.

As we consider the ways in which each individual contributes to the whole (*see 1 Cor. 12:12–27*), the farming process reminds us that even before the seed is sown, someone else has cleared the ground and ploughed the soil.

Clearly the sowing and reaping are parts of a process that continues after a person has joined the body. The harvest must not be left in the fields but gathered into the barn.

**How can you be more involved in the sowing and reaping process in your church? In what ways have you discovered that by working for the salvation of others, your own faith is strengthened? Why do you think that is so?**

**Further Study:** Spiritual Preparation for a Personal Ministry

While we would not deny the importance of Bible knowledge and the proven procedures of witnessing and evangelism, we must be careful not to neglect an emphasis on personal spiritual preparation. The essential ingredient in personal spiritual growth is, of course, the Holy Spirit, and to experience the Holy Spirit's power for evangelism we must give Him access to our lives.

As Christians begin to serve their God, they become more aware of personal spiritual needs. As they then request, and receive, a greater indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they are empowered for a continuing ministry.

The key is a daily surrendering of our will to God, a daily willingness to die to self, a daily keeping of the grace of Christ before us, a daily remembrance of what we have been given in Christ and what He asks of us in response to that gift.

**Discussion Questions:**

**1** In regard to winning souls, Ellen G. White wrote this challenging statement: "Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 193. What important point is she making here? After all, how often do we see people turn away from the powerful and convincing evidence for our message? So often doctrine itself—no matter how biblical, logical, uplifting, and sensible—will not impact a person with a closed heart. How, then, do we reach the heart? In this context, how much more important is it to live out what we profess rather than just profess it?

**2** Ponder the following statement as you consider the ways in which you can share your personal experience with others: "The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416. The question is, How do we in a daily and practical way "manifest His glory"? How often in the past 24 hours have you manifested God's glory in your life? What kind of witness for your faith does your lifestyle reveal? How can your local church as a whole "manifest His glory"?

## Fwachi's Faith

"I hear you're attending the Adventist church," Fwachi's mother greeted her. "I hope you haven't been baptized!"

Fwachi stood silent, unsure of what to say. She had come home from Zambia Adventist University planning to tell her mother that she had been baptized. Now what should she say?

Fwachi had grown up in a Christian home. Her sister invited her to visit the Seventh-day Adventist church, but Mother refused to let her go. However, when Fwachi finished high school, she wanted to study at Zambia Adventist University. Her sister agreed to pay her school fees, so her mother allowed her to go. "Just don't join the church," Mother warned.

At school Fwachi enjoyed her Bible classes and was drawn closer to Christ. During the Week of Prayer, Fwachi rededicated her life to Christ, but for months she resisted the invitation to be baptized.

The next year during the Week of Prayer, Fwachi decided to follow Christ, even if it angered her mother. She waited to tell her mother until her school break. Then her mother greeted her by saying, "I hear you're attending the Adventist church; I hope you haven't been baptized!"

"I do enjoy going to the Adventist church," Fwachi stammered, lost for words. *Maybe it's best to wait to tell Mother of my decision*, she thought. As Sabbath drew near, Fwachi made an excuse to visit her cousin in town, where she could attend church. Her vacation ended, and Fwachi hadn't told her mother that she was an Adventist.

Then Fwachi's sister died. Fwachi was devastated; her faith was shaken. *So many people were praying for her*, she thought. *How could God let my sister die?* She found comfort in the songs of faith that her sister often sang. As she sang the precious songs, she no longer felt forsaken. Still, she faced the question of who would pay her school fees.

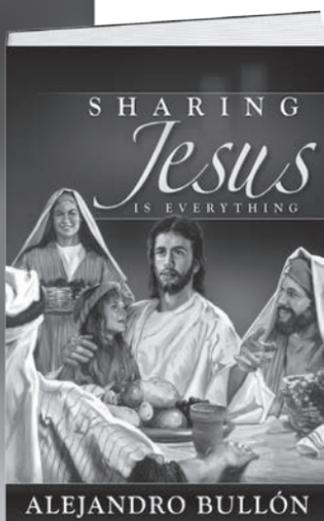
She told her mother of her baptism, expecting her mother to be angry. Instead her mother nodded. She even agreed to help pay Fwachi's tuition. Although Fwachi works at school, it still isn't enough to pay her fees. She trusts God will provide the rest.

One day Mother called Fwachi to tell her she'd visited the church. She hasn't attended again, but Fwachi feels this was one small step of faith. "There will be other steps," Fwachi says. "I pray that God will use me to draw my mother to Him again."

Zambia Adventist University is one of hundreds of Adventist schools around the world that receive help from the mission offerings. These schools make a difference in the lives of their students and the communities they serve. Thank you for giving to mission so that others can meet the Savior who loves them.

FWACHI MTONGA lives in Zambia, Africa.

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