

Corporate Evangelism *and* Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Eccles. 4:9–12; Psalm 37; Phil. 1:5–18; Eph. 4:15, 16; Col. 1:28, 29.*

Memory Text: “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2, NKJV).

Key Thought: The dissemination of the truth of God is not confined to ministers. The truth is to be scattered by all who claim to be disciples of Christ.

As we have seen, it is important that all believers recognize their God-given potential. Scripture gives many examples where believers used their gifts while working with appointed leaders in an evangelistic team ministry.

In Acts 13:13, Luke's reference to “Paul and his party” suggests that the apostle Paul was the recognized leader of a missionary group that included Barnabas (*vs. 1*). Luke tells us that sometimes the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas showed that they worked together (*Acts 13:50, 14:1*).

Sometimes it is difficult for someone to become involved in local church witnessing and evangelism because leaders are not constantly looking for gifted people to incorporate into that work.

Last week we looked at the contributions of individual members in relation to the church's witnessing and evangelism. This week we will look at some aspects of the church's corporate strategies and the way in which individuals can become involved.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 19.*

Letting the Left and Right Hand Know

Most people in the church are busy; others, for various reasons, do comparatively little. Either way, people often are not aware of what their church as a whole is planning or working toward; consequently, they don't see how the activities in which they may be involved are contributing to the church's overall goals.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9–12. What do Solomon's words tell us about working together? How might these words be helpful to you in other settings?

These verses describe the benefits of mutual help, support, and care, whatever the situation. What is true for two or three people is also true for the local church. For the blessings described in Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 to be realized, each person must be aware of the activities of the others. If one person is not aware of what the others are doing or planning, how can they know what support is needed, and when? If we consider these points with our local church's witnessing and evangelism in mind, we see again that if most members are unaware of what their church is involved in, they are not able to give support and assistance when needed. Sadly, because of a lack of support, those who are on the front line of witnessing and evangelism sometimes feel that no one cares about this vital ministry when it simply may be the case that others just don't know what is going on.

The following verses record people performing special support tasks. Write down how you think these activities contributed to the overall mission of spreading the gospel. *Acts 16:14, 15, 33, 34.*

What may at first seem to have nothing to do with the church's witnessing and evangelism strategies will, upon further consideration, be revealed as being vital to the whole process. Those who provide food and lodging for the visiting evangelist play as vital a part as those who welcome the public to the program. Many church members will volunteer to support when they are aware of the program and what is needed and when they are assured that their contribution is an integral part of the whole church program. In this context, it is important to let the right hand know what the left hand is doing.

Take a few moments to reflect upon your church's evangelism and witnessing activities. Are you aware of the corporate church goals and strategies? Do you know at what stage the church is in this year's program? How could you become more involved in your church's attempts to fulfill the gospel commission?

Planning Together

Often, when it comes to the planning of witnessing and evangelism goals and strategies, only a very few people are involved. Then when plans have been decided, those few people set about the task of trying to get others involved in the implementation stages. It is much better to get a larger group involved right from the start. This is why the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* states that a chief concern of the church board is the work of planning and fostering evangelism in all of its phases.

What do Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:40 tell us about the need to plan? What does this verse suggest may be the results of a lack of, or inadequate, planning?

There are a number of mistakes that churches can make when considering their involvement in witnessing and evangelism. They can set goals but then neglect to introduce strategies necessary to reaching them; they can try to work on some strategies without setting any firm goals; or they can attempt either of the above without considering a process of evaluation. Goals and plans go hand in hand, but goals always come first so that plans that enable the goals to be reached can be laid. Furthermore, it is the process of evaluation that helps to keep the church on track and measures progress toward its goals.

Every church should be aware of the concept of goal ownership. Those who set goals and are involved in strategic planning are typically the ones who buy into the whole direction and process. It is important, therefore, that as many people as possible have some input into all phases of the planning so that they, too, have a sense of ownership. If this does not happen, then, most likely, the long-term plans will become the property of a select few who will struggle to fulfill those plans. In this case, success is unlikely.

Read Psalm 37. What assurance can we gain from this text in relation to the success of our witnessing and evangelism activities (as well as a host of other things)? What principles and promises can we take from this passage?

Working in Teams

It is logical to think that there were times when each of the disciples would have shared their faith on a one-to-one basis, but for the most part we see them in a shared ministry with fellow disciples and being supported by other believers. There is something special about working on an overall plan and receiving support and encouragement from others on the team.

The Bible provides us with a blueprint for effective witnessing and evangelism, and it should not surprise us that, even today, when God raises up someone for a significant responsibility, He inspires a team to gather around the leader.

Read Matthew 10:2–4, Mark 3:16–19, and Luke 6:12–16. What simple lesson can we learn from these lists?

Without question, the early believers worked together in groups. It makes a lot of sense. Besides each one having specific gifts and talents that others don't, there's also protection in numbers. There's a sense of accountability: others are watching you, others can help guide you, others can help to protect you from wandering into directions that tragically might lead you astray. A solid team of faithful brothers and sisters, each one looking out for the other, yet all with the common goal of soul-winning, presents the ideal way of doing outreach.

Read Philippians 1:5–18. What do we see in Paul's commendations to the believers at Philippi that indicates they were engaged in corporate witnessing and evangelism?

At the beginning of his letter to the Philippians, Paul speaks of their fellowship (*partnership*, *NIV*) in the gospel (*vs.* 5). They had defended and confirmed the gospel (*vs.* 7) and had spoken the word of God without fear (*vs.* 14). He also shares his joy because Christ is continually preached (*vss.* 15–18). Remember, Paul is writing to the church, not to individuals. Of course, it would have been individuals who preached Christ, but the fact that Paul commends the church reveals that this evangelistic preaching was a corporate strategy.

Eager to witness, have you ever found yourself tempted in ways that being in a group could have protected you from? Why is it important to cultivate an attitude of humility and accountability if you are going to work with others in a group?

Every Part Does Its Share

When a unified church is focused upon the evangelistic task at hand, the Lord will bless its combined efforts. A careful study of the Bible will reveal how much of the New Testament was written to show Christians how to live and work together in harmony. “One another” passages are scattered thickly throughout its pages. We are commanded to love one another (*John 15:12*), forgive one another (*Eph. 4:32*), pray for one another (*James 5:16*), to mention just a few. Besides the “one another” passages, many scriptures relate to the corporate church, the work that it does, and the corresponding growth.

Read Ephesians 4:15, 16. How does working together contribute to the growth and edification of the church?

Paul tells us that it is God’s will that we grow into Jesus Christ. This shows that we are all on a spiritual journey, and, to a degree, it is our own spiritual journey. However, the text explains that each individual’s growth will affect the growth of the body both numerically and spiritually.

As believers grow up into Christ, something happens that is wonderful, even supernatural. They are “joined and knit together” through their personal contributions to the church as a whole. Optimum effectiveness of any church is achieved when every part does its share. According to Acts 1:12–14, what did the early believers do while they waited in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit? The answer should tell us a lot about what corporate worship meant. Indeed, it wasn’t until the Holy Spirit had come upon the early believers that they were ready for the task of fulfilling the gospel commission. This group, numbering about a hundred and twenty, were united in prayer and continued in prayer. No doubt it was Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit that united them and constantly brought them together for prayer as they waited for the power that would enable them to do the Lord’s bidding. We, as a church, should be doing the same.

As you think about your local church, ask yourself this question: How much time and effort does your church, as a corporate whole, spend in outreach, witnessing, and evangelism in contrast to the time it spends over internal issues, everything from liturgy, worship format to music, and so on? Discuss the answer on Sabbath.

The Need for Corporate Unity

It has been well said that a Christianity that does not begin with the individual does not begin, but a Christianity that ends with the individual ends. This statement underscores the importance of every new believer being incorporated into the body of believers. As with witnessing and evangelism, it is also true that incorporation cannot be left to certain individuals in the fellowship. Incorporation is the responsibility of the entire church.

Read Colossians 1:28, 29. **What specific goal did Paul place before his new converts?**

The Christian's maturity, growing into the fullness of Christ (*Eph. 3:19*), is the proper goal of the local congregation. Working for the maturity of new converts is just as important as working to get them to accept Christ and to join His church. In fact, the church's work of incorporation will help to ensure that their evangelistic efforts will not become a waste of time. Usually, before any witnessing and evangelism project gets under way, there is a time of preparing the church. This is a time when we focus on transportation, child care, greeters, prayer teams, and visitation teams. The apostle Paul would have us focus on incorporation as another important part of church preparation. Consider the following question:

Which is more important to ask, and why: How can new believers get involved in church life and its programs? How can the church enter the lives of new believers and help them to mature? Are both these concepts related and, if so, how so?

Often we see the work of follow-up and incorporation as the work of the one who has led the person to Jesus Christ. We only have to realize how impossible it would have been for the apostle Paul to nurture all who believed through his ministry in order to see that this is not the biblical way. Follow-up is not just the work of one or two designated leaders, it is the work of the whole church.

Too often we lament the fact that new people come in the front door and leave by the back door soon after. This is a tragedy of eternal consequence.

Think about new members in your local church. How can you—not the pastor or the elder, but you—get involved in helping them to become solidly grounded in the church community and its teachings?

Further Study: Setting Realistic Evangelism Goals

Both as a church and as a smaller ministry team, we must make sure that all witnessing and evangelistic goals are realistic. The following are some key areas to consider.

Affordable. Finances play a big part in many church strategies today. Consider the costs of advertising, transportation, resources, postage, venue hire, refreshments, to mention just a few of the expenses incurred in evangelistic activities.

Achievable. Are the set goals realistically achievable? Do we really have the money, time, support, facilities, and personnel needed to achieve the planned outcomes? It is better to start small and build into a larger project as others join the team and key support is given in other important areas.

Sustainable. If a witnessing and evangelism ministry is successful, it is surely worth repeating. It may also be that your ministry is part of an ongoing strategy, in which case you will need to keep looking ahead in order to organize what is needed to sustain the ministry.

Able to be evaluated. Be sure that you evaluate all aspects of the ministry: personnel, finances, training, results, to name just a few. For ongoing ministries, definite and regular evaluation times must be set and adhered to. Also be sure to examine how this venture contributed toward the church's overall strategic plans for evangelism.

Discussion Questions:

1 Go over your answer to Wednesday's question as a class. Why is it that churches busy fighting internally rarely do outreach? In contrast, how could outreach unify a church that's otherwise preoccupied with internal strife? How can you help your church to move away from preoccupation with itself and get busy with the work of outreach? Why is that so important?

2 As you consider the following quotation, think about your local church. To what extent are the members involved in witnessing and evangelism teams? What part can you play in organizing team-training events? What is your personal attitude toward working in teams? "In laboring where there are already some in the faith, the minister should at first seek not so much to convert unbelievers, as to train the church members for acceptable co-operation."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 196. How many members of your church have even the slightest idea of how to work for the conversion of souls? If not many, how can that situation be changed?

God's Patient Pursuit: Part 1

I grew up in a non-Christian family in India. I attended a Christian boarding school and lived a highly regimented life. So I wasn't ready for the freedom I found when I moved to Australia at age 16 to study.

Many of the young people at school smoked and drank. I wasn't interested in these things and avoided the young people who were involved in these activities. I attended church for my first year in Australia, but then I quit. I told God that I wanted a break from Him, to see what life was like without Him. That was the most miserable year of my life.

I finished high school and started my university studies. One day while studying, I felt a sudden pain in my chest. I thought I was having a heart attack. Then I realized that it wasn't physical pain, but an ache for something. *Could this be God?* I wondered. I hadn't prayed in a year, but that day I prayed. "God, if this is You, please take away this unbearable pain!" The pain went away, and I forgot about it. But when the pain returned, I knew it was God speaking to me. I found a church and attended a few times. But my job in a bar required me to work Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, so I quit attending church.

One evening on the train home from work I met a young man, Daniel, and his friend Keith. Daniel struck up a conversation with me. I asked him why he had chosen to speak to me, and he said God had prompted him. We continued talking, and he invited me to his home for dinner. I gave him my phone number. I got to know Keith, and I sensed that he knew God. The peace I saw in him made me wish for a relationship with Christ. I accepted his invitation to worship with him on Saturday, but the idea of worshipping on Saturday instead of Sunday seemed strange.

I graduated and began searching for a job. I couldn't find one, and I felt frustrated and out of control. I remembered Keith and the peace he exuded. I visited him, and he invited me to a small group meeting.

I went. The group was indeed small, but the members were so genuine, friendly, and loving that I enjoyed attending. As I studied the Bible, I realized that it was the Holy Spirit who had been speaking to me all these years, urging me to let God back into my life. I had come to God broken and hurting, but God put me back together.

I learned that the small group meeting was actually a Global Mission church plant designed to attract young people just like me.

(continued next week)

VIKRAM PANCHAL *shares his faith with young people in Melbourne, Australia.*