

Let *the* Church Know



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 4:1–31, 21:19–25, 1 Cor. 9:19–23, Num. 13:17–33, Acts 11:1–18.*

Memory Text: “Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught” (*Mark 6:30, NKJV*).

Key Thought: As a report of the early church's missionary endeavors, the book of Acts is filled with lessons for us today.

The incredible growth of the early church has caused many to study the book of Acts. Consequently, many areas of church life have been examined in the light of the book—areas such as church growth, foreign missions, church administration, and evangelism. Though much has been gleaned from Acts on these topics, there are other areas, such as reporting, that have not received the attention they deserve.

Reporting in the book of Acts builds upon the reporting in the Gospels and shows that this important activity of church life has a significant impact upon the success of witnessing and evangelism. Quite simply, we need to know what is going on, what works, and what doesn't.

This week we will examine how the early evangelists reported to their leaders and to the church as a whole. The aim is to understand the importance of reporting and to see where it can positively enhance the witnessing and evangelism strategies of a local church.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 16.*

A Biblical Principle

As soon as someone mentions reports, you may imagine reams of paper filled with facts and statistics that will probably do little more than gather dust. However, reporting is not a modern invention designed to frustrate those involved in witnessing and evangelism. It is a biblical principle. As our memory text for this week reveals, when the disciples returned from a missionary tour, they reported to Jesus all that they had done and taught. This seems to be a central part of the work of the gospel.

While we cannot point to one specific Bible text that says, “You must report because,” there is ample evidence that reporting was important in both the Old and New Testaments. Reporting is an activity in a chain of events. That is, someone prepares a report, someone receives the report, the report is evaluated, and then decisions are made and actions are planned in response to what was reported.

Examine Acts 4:1–31. What did Peter and John report back to their companions, and what did this report prompt the church to do? What lessons are there for us today?

Consider that without newspapers, radios, or satellite television, word of mouth was the primary way of spreading the good news about Jesus. If these early believers had given in to the threats made against them, their influence for God would have been severely curtailed. So, they gathered together, listened to the reports, and then decided upon a strategy that would enable them to be true to their evangelistic calling.

Central to it all, of course, was their praying and their reading of Scripture. If we take nothing else from this story, we can see how important prayer and reliance on the Word of God was to them. It shouldn’t be any different for us today.

Although we don’t have details of what they might have planned, verse 29 shows that in spite of the threats made against them, they were going to continue to speak about Jesus.

John and Peter quoted Scripture before both the leaders in Israel and the other Jewish believers, showing how crucial it was to their faith and their witness. How central and crucial is Scripture in your own life? (Hint: you can discover the answer by asking yourself how much time you spend with it.)

“What God Had Done”

We are continually reminded that in most areas of life, effective communication is the key to understanding and harmony. As we consider the church family we see that the reporting of activities and their results is a vital part of internal communication. In many churches there is much activity, but only those involved in each ministry know what is happening there. Because of this, there is a corresponding feeling among those who lead ministries that there is not much interest in what they are doing. These feelings are not surprising if leaders never share their goals and strategies with the church and never report their activities and results.

Read Acts 21:19–25. How was the church affected when it heard the missionary reports of the apostle Paul? At the same time, even amid the good reports, there were indications of division among the believers. What were those problems, how did Paul respond, and what lessons are there for us today? See also 1 Cor. 9:19–23.

Returning to Jerusalem from a missionary journey, Paul reported to James and all the elders of how God had blessed his ministry among the Gentiles. As Paul related one by one the many gospel advances, the church leaders responded with spontaneous and genuine praise to God.

At the same time, however, evidence of division and confusion existed, even amid the good news of Paul’s witnessing.

“Many of the Jews who had accepted the gospel still cherished a regard for the ceremonial law and were only too willing to make unwise concessions, hoping thus to gain the confidence of their countrymen, to remove their prejudice, and to win them to faith in Christ as the world’s Redeemer. Paul realized that so long as many of the leading members of the church at Jerusalem should continue to cherish prejudice against him, they would work constantly to counteract his influence. He felt that if by any reasonable concession he could win them to the truth he would remove a great obstacle to the success of the gospel in other places. But he was not authorized of God to concede as much as they asked.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 405.

Today we also struggle with division among us as to how to best reach souls. What are some of the struggles particular to the church in your part of the world, and how can you help to bring about resolution?

The Importance of Reporting

The importance of reporting evangelism and witnessing activities and their results has not always been seen and, consequently, not always undertaken. In all areas of our modern busy lives, importance is placed upon things in proportion to their perceived value. Things that are seen as a waste of time and effort generally don't receive a lot of our time and attention. Therefore, the importance of reporting needs to be demonstrated. That is, the church members need to see what any evaluation of reports is achieving.

A difference exists between the simple reporting of cold hard facts and the sharing of how the activities that these facts represent are a successful part of the church's endeavors to reach people for Christ. It is the responsibility of those reporting to make sure that they convey the excitement and joy of success that come from being involved in the reported ministry.

If we removed all reports of evangelistic activity from the book of Acts, what exciting and encouraging information would we miss that is provided in the following verses? *Acts 5:14; 8:4, 12; 11:21; 14:21.*

The amazing church growth that is reported in the book of Acts did not simply happen. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, and remembering Jesus' promise of success, the believers engaged in activities that brought about these results. They were focused on what they wanted to achieve and on how best to achieve it. It is reported that through the preaching of the gospel, multitudes of men and women turned to the Lord and were baptized as part of their discipleship process. This again underscores the importance of reporting the results and the activities in as much detail as possible. In fact, the Bible records the results of the witnessing and evangelism activities more than the details of the activities themselves.

Those very early missionaries went everywhere they possibly could, preaching about Jesus and His kingdom. Because of the reported and recorded results, we can assume that they also issued powerful invitations to their hearers. This continual preaching and appealing caused the dramatic results in church growth recorded in the book of Acts.

It is, of course, encouraging when we hear stories of successful evangelistic efforts. How do we respond, however, when things don't go so well, when our plans seem to fail, when our efforts appear to do no good at all? What should our response be? Discuss your answer in class on Sabbath.

Reporting and Motivation

When we speak of motivation, we are referring to the deep-seated reasons for why we believe or do things. This is also true of reporting. When we report, we do so for a reason or for reasons. Our reasons could simply be an attempt to convince a committee to continue funding. Or we could report in a way that will convince people to discontinue a program or change leadership personnel. If selected information is reported or emphasized, then perhaps decisions made on the evaluation of such reporting may not be the best. Hence, our reporting needs to be honest and fair.

Read Numbers 13:17–33. All twelve spies saw the same things; what caused only two of the twelve to respond as they did? What lesson should we take from this incident for ourselves, today?

God had promised that the children of Israel could certainly take the land. Joshua and Caleb gave a good report of the land and suggested that they go at once to possess it (*vs.* 30). Others who were with them when they spied out the land gave a bad report, emphasizing the obstacles to possessing it and suggesting that they return to Egypt.

As we formulate reports, we must do so with thought to the revealed will of God and in the light of His blessings. We will not just report on how well we are doing but how well we are doing the will of God (*see Matt. 7:21*). There is always the potential to get caught up in the latest models of evangelistic ministry and measure our successes by how well we are implementing the principles in comparison with other churches. As we report on our apparent successes, we may be more interested in appearing successful than in seeking God’s will for our church and pursuing that by His grace.

This is a challenge to our churches today as we seem to be bombarded by never-ending “better” ways of outreach. In the report of the spies, Joshua and Caleb surely also saw the obstacles to taking the land, but they also knew God’s will. Therefore, an important part of their report assured the people that possessing the land was surely possible. On the other hand, those spies whose thinking did not include reflections on God’s will brought back a completely negative report calculated to convince the people that returning to Egypt was a better option.

How do we strike a harmony between living by faith, claiming God’s promises, and acting on them—as opposed to living by presumption and doing things that might not be the wisest but utilizing dubious claims of God’s “leading” in order to justify them? How can we do the first and avoid the latter?

Giving Him the Glory

Some people are hesitant to turn in successful reports because they wonder if it is a form of boasting in human achievement. In reality, however, God is glorified by faithful reporting, and His church is strengthened in the faith and resolve to continue working for Him. While it is true that occasionally someone may report with less than honorable motivation, this should not stop humble believers from sharing the mighty things that God has wrought through them as He has empowered them to be witnesses and evangelists for Him. If done with humility, enthusiasm, and a love for souls, reporting can greatly encourage other church members also to get involved in the work of evangelism and soul-winning.

Read Acts 11:1–18. How did the leaders and members of the Jerusalem church respond to Peter’s report of the work among the Gentiles? How could the principles revealed there prove important for us today?

There had been criticism of Peter and the others who had ventured to witness and evangelize outside of Jewish circles; then, however, as a result of Peter’s report to the Jerusalem church, the criticism ceased and the other Jewish believers glorified God.

From our perspective today, it’s not easy to understand the issues at stake then. Of course, the gospel is to go to everyone, Jew and Gentile—even if to “the Jew first” (*Rom. 1:16*). Everyone knows that. Yet, in the context of the book of Acts, the idea of the covenant promises extending to the Gentiles would have required a major shift in Jewish thinking. However, because of the reports of God’s activity and blessing, the church members gained a new understanding of God’s desire to save all people everywhere, even though it had always been God’s plan from the start to save everyone who would be saved (*Eph. 1:1–4, Isa. 53:6, Heb. 2:9*).

For the average reader, it will probably take less than two minutes to read Peter’s report in Acts 11:1–18. We can safely assume that his report, and the ensuing questions and further report responses, would have taken considerably longer. Furthermore, although Peter refers to himself throughout the report, and although some members would surely have said, “Well done, Peter,” all the glory was given to God, and the church leaders were encouraged as they understood better that the gospel commission to the entire world could become a reality.

Further Study: Reporting Your Ministry

As we have seen this week, others need to know what you are doing. Specific reports such as attendance figures and financial statements are certainly necessary. It is also important that you present reports at church evangelism councils and church boards. While a verbal report may touch briefly on the main points, you should hand in a written report that contains as much detail as possible.

Not only will this information keep people interested in your ministry and make it easier to encourage involvement, it will directly enhance evaluation and future planning and direction.

Make sure that your reports are given with reference to the overall evangelism plans of the church. Explain how your ministry is part of a strategy that is contributing to the achievement of church goals.

Challenge yourself regarding your motivation for reporting. To what extent are you focused on both the will of God for your church and the saving of souls?

Discussion Questions:

❶ Go back to the last question on Tuesday. How do we report “bad news”? It’s only natural that we talk about the successes we experience. People do that even in the mundane things of life. But what about in the work of evangelism? What do we do if a church program isn’t working? How should it be discussed and reviewed in ways that will bring about needed changes? Also, discuss this question: If we attribute success in evangelism to the Lord, whom do we blame if things aren’t going so well?

❷ Think about the change in attitude that the Jewish believers needed in regard to the work among the Gentiles. Look around at your own church, culture, and society. However much we might dogmatically assert our belief that the gospel is for all the world, in what ways might our own cultural and social prejudices need the same kind of shift as the one experienced by these early Jewish believers?

❸ Although this week’s context was about reporting evangelistic activities, think about the whole concept of giving any kind of report in any kind of situation. How can we make sure that we are always honest and truthful and not dishonestly slanting information in ways that will give us what we want, regardless of how skewed our words are? Why is that so easy to do, and why is it so easy to fool ourselves as we do it?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Mark 6:30*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Outline the benefits that result from reporting the results of witnessing and evangelism to the rest of the church body.

Feel: Share the enthusiasm and encouragement that joy in God’s work awakens in his or her heart.

Do: Report honestly on the fruits of his or her labors in order to inform the church and aid it in the evaluating and planning for future work in the harvest field.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Reporting the Results

A How does the reporting of results of witnessing and evangelistic efforts help the church to glorify God?

B Why is the act of reporting important for future efforts in the harvest fields?

C How does the act of reporting help to draw the church together in prayer and praise?

II. Feel: Sharing the Joy

A What were the communal responses to the reports that the apostles gave to the early church?

B Why is it important to share the joy of the harvest with the church body?

III. Do: Talking the Walk

A How do we benefit by not only “walking the talk” but also “talking the walk” with others in our church family?

B What have you learned recently in your work for God that you can share with your fellow servants?

► **Summary:** As we seek to do God’s will in the harvest fields, reporting on our work helps to encourage others to get involved, plan for the future, and glorify that which God has done as we have labored with Him.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: While the act of reporting on our witnessing and evangelistic endeavors is not as important as the news of the gospel itself, it does represent a key link in the chain of God’s plan to save lost humanity. Communicating God’s activity throughout the church is essential.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson examines the communication mechanisms of the early church, placing special emphasis on the effect that communication has on both leaders and laity. As you prepare the class for study, begin with a brief discussion of today’s media-dense environment.

We live in a media-saturated world. There are profound benefits to living at a time when news travels at the speed of light. When a massive earthquake devastated Haiti in 2010, news of the destruction galvanized worldwide support for the victims. The relief effort even pioneered a new form of giving: donation by text message.

But what technology gave, it also took away. Once the news media “changed the channel” on Haiti, the world quickly followed suit. Today there is scarcely a mention of the Haitian crisis in the news. What do we learn from this? A crisis sells, but only for a time.

Consider This: Ask your students to share how they tend to react to news of the crises occurring throughout the world. If shocking world events cannot hold people’s attention for a sustained amount of time, what chance does the news of salvation have in doing so? Discuss.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: This section will consider that which motivated early evangelists to report gospel results to the growing family of faith. The disciples were energized by Jesus’ resurrection, challenged by the Great Commission, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Bible Commentary

I. **New Fire** (*Review Luke 24:36–49 and Acts 21:19–25 with the class.*)

Wednesday's study considers some of the reasons that we believe or do certain things. It bears remembering that the initial telling of the news of salvation was fueled by a supernatural event. At the end of his book, Luke describes a stunned group of disciples struggling desperately to come to terms with the reappearance of their recently crucified Savior.

Luke comments, "He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures" (*Luke 24:45, NKJV*)—scriptures that related to His coming, death, resurrection, and ascension. The post-Resurrection moments that the disciples shared with Jesus left an indelible mark on their consciousness. How could they possibly go about their daily lives and not tell the wondrous news of their Savior who had conquered death?

Ellen White writes that as the resurrected Savior explained the prophecies regarding His life's work to the disciples, "they began to realize the nature and extent of their work, to see that they were to proclaim to the world the truths entrusted to them. The events of Christ's life, His death and resurrection, the prophecies pointing to these events, the mysteries of the plan of salvation, the power of Jesus for the remission of sins—to all these things they had been witnesses, and they were to make them known to the world."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 27.

Consider This: The disciples were motivated to share the news of salvation when they understood Christ's work and ministry. What does this tell us about the importance of knowing and understanding who Jesus is and what He came to accomplish?

II. A Great Commission (*Review Matthew 28:18–20 and 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 with the class.*)

Countless volumes have been written on the gospel commission, Jesus' call to lead men, women, boys, and girls to a saving knowledge of Him. All of Christ's disciples are called to this work. When the commission is lived and practiced, people will take notice. There will be a "buzz."

Gospel reporting, then, is no exercise in narcissism. In fact, as Thursday's study makes clear, when the works of God are reported, there is little to do but give Him glory and praise.

Why is that the case? Perhaps it has something to do with the nature and scope of the gospel commission. "Christianity was the first religion to assume a truly international character. Pagan religions were largely devoid of missionary zeal and activity. They were primarily national in character and did not set out to make converts of other national groups. The gospel commission effectively eliminates boundaries, and men of all nations find themselves members of one great brotherhood."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 557.

This boundary-breaking faith was a marvel to the world in which the apostles ministered, and it remains a wonder today.

Consider This: The gospel commission, when practiced in its fullness, demonstrates the power of unity and love in a fractured world. How does the substance of our faith impact the news reports that people carry to others about that faith? What are people saying about Christianity, based on our practice of it?

III. The Work of the Spirit *(Review Acts 1:8 and 11:15 with the class.)*

The Holy Spirit was indispensable to the work of the early disciples. It was the outpouring of the Spirit that made them vessels in God's hand used by Him in His work of saving fallen human beings.

Peter testified to the Spirit's movements in Acts 11:1–18. One gets the sense here that Peter is not so much arguing a case for the inclusion of Gentile believers in the family of faith but simply recounting the activity of God. God had given the Gentile believers the gift, and Peter could do nothing to change God's plan (*vs. 17*).

In Acts, the Spirit is seen filling believers (*Acts 2:4*), falling on those who repent and are baptized (*Acts 15:8*), and leading and guiding leaders in the church (*vs. 28*). These are but a few of the Spirit's exploits in the book of Acts.

The beautiful reports of the early believers testified to something new, powerful, and dynamic at work in their lives and the lives of those whom they sought to reach. God was at work in them and through them.

Consider This: In what ways do we see similar evidence of God's work in the world today? How can we ensure that there is substance to the reports that we carry? What is the danger of relaying puffed-up reports that make us feel good about our meager efforts for God?

►STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

❶ If Jesus thought it important enough to unfold the prophecies regarding His life and work to His disciples (*Luke 24:45*), why do some today discount the study of biblical prophecy? How does this reluctance affect the spread of the gospel?

2 If God is not at work in our lives, how will we recognize His moving in the world? The early evangelists often gave personal testimonies of God’s leading and work in their lives and the lives of others. Which is more important, and why: the report of what God is doing in your life or the report of what He is doing in the life of the church?

Questions for Witnessing:

1 How can a shy, introverted person share the gospel message? List three options that he or she might explore in order to help fulfill God’s commission.

2 This week’s lesson noted that not everyone was pleased with God’s exploits, as reported by the early evangelists. What should the church do when some members disagree with what others see as the moving of God? How do we handle substantive ministry conflicts? How do these conflicts affect new believers?

► STEP 4—Create

Activity: It is difficult to exaggerate the effect that “megachurch culture” is having on today’s concept of Christianity. Fledgling congregations question whether they are indeed doing the will of God because they lack the sheer numbers of larger churches.

There is much talk of houses, cars, clothing, and influence—blessings that should attend all who claim the name of Christ, some say. Many ministries have developed slick media campaigns to better “market” the gospel in an effort to “compete” for souls. In some cases, entertainment culture has crept into church.

Look at the following statements and discuss whether or not you agree with what is being said. Give your reasons.

1. The church should avoid all forms of media, focusing instead on door-to-door, face-to-face ministry.
2. The church should use all forms of technology in order to share its message with the membership and the world.
3. The church should avoid glitzy advertising campaigns. The gospel doesn’t need to be dressed up.
4. Through the careful use of media, the church should manage its image. In doing so, members will take pride in their church, and new believers will come to admire the church’s work and practice.