

# A Perpetual Ministry




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *John 4:7–30, Acts 2:42, 11:19–23, 2 Tim. 2:1–7, 2 Cor. 5:18–20.*

**Memory Text:** “ ‘What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches’ ” (*Luke 13:18, 19, NKJV*).

**Key Thought:** Evangelism and witnessing are the means by which the mustard seed (the church of God) becomes a huge tree that fills the whole world.

**Y**ou may have heard it said—you may even have said it yourself—“I have done my bit; I will now leave it to the younger people.” Or, “I have been evangelism leader for years, let some of the new people take over now.”

In one sense these kinds of statements are understandable. People get older, sometimes their health fails, or other life circumstances prevent them from maintaining their leadership in church ministries. Sometimes people just burn themselves out and need a break. Some may believe the Lord requires them to fulfill His will in other areas of church work.

There is, however, a great difference between changing ministry emphasis and ceasing to minister; as long as we have breath we should, in one capacity or another, continue to minister.

This week we will focus on our need to stay involved in witnessing and evangelism ministries. No matter what our role is in the church, there are always going to be opportunities for us to minister.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 30.*

## Never-ending Witnessing and Evangelism

It must be emphasized again that witnessing and evangelism must continue as long as there are people who need salvation. It is God's plan to save as many people as possible. Meanwhile, those who have accepted Jesus as their personal Savior are called upon to work with God in this soul-saving work. No matter who we are, where we are, and in what situations we find ourselves, if our hearts are tuned to Christ, if we have a deep-seated appreciation for what He has done for us and for what He asks us to do in response, we will always have opportunity for witness and ministry.

**Review** Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4:7–30. What was it about Jesus and what He said that she was excited to share with her townspeople? What principles of witnessing can we take from this account that can help us as we seek to reach others?

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It seems that Jesus followed a simple “formula” when He spoke to the woman of Samaria. (1) He arrested her attention: “ ‘Give Me a drink’ ” (*vs. 7, NKJV*); (2) He secured her interest: “ ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ ” (*vs. 9, 10, NKJV*); (3) He created a desire: “ ‘Sir, give me this water’ ” (*vs. 15, NKJV*); (4) He brought a conviction: “ ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a Prophet’ ” (*vs. 19, NKJV*); and (5) actions followed: “ ‘Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’ ” (*vs. 29, NKJV*).

These five stages of evangelism do not necessarily need to take place all in one meeting as they did with Jesus and the woman at Jacob's well. They may happen over a period of time as you continue to witness to someone. The situations will vary greatly, but the principles seen in this passage can be broadly applied to our attempts to reach souls.

In addition, although the initial conversation is concerned with literal water, Jesus' goal is to create in the Samaritan woman a desire to drink the Water of Life. In the end, although we are called to help people in whatever situation we find them, and to minister to their needs however we can, we must never forget that their greatest need is salvation in Jesus.

**How often do you take advantage of opportunities to witness or to minister? Isn't it true that so often we go about our lives, meeting people who—despite their interaction with us—have no idea of what we believe, what we stand for, or the hope that we have? How can we change so that we can be better witnesses?**

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## A Nurturing Environment

A vital part of evangelism takes place in church every week. This aspect of evangelism is called “nurture” and “incorporation.” We have been very good at inviting people to our churches, but we have not always done so well in the creation of an environment that will encourage them to return and settle into the fellowship. If we are to make disciples, we must give attention to the establishment and nurture of every new Christian.

What does this mean? “Establishment” gives the idea of setting something up on a firm and permanent basis. It is to help provide new members with a foundation of faith and fellowship. To “nurture” is usually explained by concepts such as “to rear,” “to bring up,” “to care for,” “to foster,” “to train,” and “to educate.” When someone accepts the Lord Jesus as his or her personal Savior, all of these areas of establishment and nurture must be applied spiritually and socially within the Christian fellowship. In other words, a new Christian needs to be brought up, cared for, fostered, trained, and educated in the ways of the Lord.

Fellowship is key. This is how lives touch and affect one another. People who join a church must be cared for through spiritual fellowship.

**What** do the following texts tell us about the importance of spiritual fellowship among believers? Why are these things especially important in the case of new believers, those who have come into the church through our evangelism and outreach? *1 John 1:7; Acts 2:42; 11:19–23; 20:35; and Rom. 1:11, 12.*

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The word *we* in 1 John 1:7 impresses upon us that, although we are to walk in the light as individuals, we are to walk in the light together. If believers walk in the light, there will be fellowship and unity. Consequently, there will be a nurturing environment where people are focused both upon God’s will for their lives and the encouragement of one another along the Christian path. While it is important to help new members be happy and contented in church, it is also important to lead them to become disciples in the fullest sense of the word, which includes developing the ability to lead others into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus.

**Does your church have an intentional focus on establishing new members in their faith? How can you become better involved in helping to nurture new members (or even “old” ones, for that matter)?**

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## Training Trainers

We live in a world where people are highly mobile. Local churches seem to regularly process transfers out and transfers in and often lament the loss of capable members who have been involved in significant ministries. Because of this potential transfer of skills, and because the local church's evangelism and witnessing ministry should continue expanding, there is a great need to multiply these ministries.

**What** principles concerning the training of trainers can we glean from Paul's instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1–7? How should all these words apply to us today in our work for the Lord, in whatever capacity we find ourselves?

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Paul communicates to Timothy the importance of seeing the big picture of the church's work, both regarding extent and duration. The pastoral and teaching ministries are not to be centered in just one man. They are to be the work of a multiplied number of witnesses and evangelists in the church. Primarily, Paul is telling Timothy to train up others for leadership in the church because, eventually, the older generation of leaders will have passed on. Implicit in this instruction to Timothy is that those he instructs will also, in turn, teach others, thereby ensuring that the church's mission in the world will be continuous and expansive. This process is in harmony with Jesus' call for more laborers for the harvest.

It has been said, "Give a man a fish, and you will feed him for a day; teach him how to fish, and you will feed him and his family for as long as he lives." The problem is that if the man does not pass his fishing skill on to his children, the next generation will go hungry. Perhaps the saying should be modified to say, "Give a man a fish, and you will feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and to pass on his knowledge and techniques, and untold numbers of people will continue to be fed." This is the difference between training someone and training them to be trainers.

**Think through your experience in our church. Has anyone ever taught you how to witness to others? Have you ever asked to be trained to witness to others? Discuss your answer in class on Sabbath.**

## Reclaiming Former Members

*Backslider* is a word we wish did not exist in the Christian vocabulary. It is a fact, however, that many people slide away from church and from a saving relationship with the Lord. Although people do, at times, leave us over doctrine, most of the time they leave over other things, usually personal disputes and so forth. Whatever the reasons, we need to do all that we can to create a loving and nurturing environment that will help those who join us want to stay among us, despite whatever personal issues inevitably arise.

At the same time, we should have a ministry to former and non-attending members as an intentional part of our witnessing and evangelism program. A quick look at the various churches' lists of members will likely reveal that there are many more names listed there than those who attend worship each Sabbath. These names could form the beginnings of a special ministry to people whom God has never ceased to love supremely.

**Thoughtfully** consider 2 Corinthians 5:18–20. Although the context is somewhat different from ours, the principle is important. In what ways is a “ministry of reconciliation” special to those who once followed God but have slidden away?

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Reclaiming former members is a special ministry. Furthermore, this ministry is as evangelistic as when we reach out to people who have never accepted Christ before. The very word *reconciliation* implies that there was a former unity and fellowship between humankind and God that has now been restored through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we are now given a ministry of reconciliation that includes reaching out to those who once worshiped with us.

In fact, one could argue that in Matthew 10:5, 6 Jesus sent His disciples to win back members of the Jewish nation who had fallen away from a saving relationship with their Lord. Thus, it is entirely appropriate that we today also enter into a work for those people who have a special history with God and His church.

**Think about those who have left the church and the reason why they did. Is there any one person with whom you could re-establish contact and resume friendship—ministering to them and seeking to reconnect them with the church? Pray about how you could go about doing this.**

## The Back Door

Have you ever noticed that people often lament the fact that members slip out “the back door”? They even state firmly that the church’s back door needs to be closed but fail to tell us how to close the door or even the location of the door. Some growing churches may think that their back door is closed, but in reality it may be simply that more people are coming in the front door than are going out the back. And while that is better than more going out the back than coming in the front (which is true in some places), we still want to do what we can to retain our members.

Discovering the back door and attempting to close it will take strategies that are indeed evangelistic given that our mandate is not simply to win people for God but to hold them.

**Read** Hebrews 10:25. Why is it important that Christians meet together regularly? When in fellowship together, how much “encouraging” do we give one another? How can we do even more than we are now?

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The decision to leave the fellowship is usually not a sudden one. Rather, most people go through a process of quietly leaving. Just as coming to Christ and His church was a journey, the process of leaving is a journey. Most often for those who leave, this is not a consciously planned strategy. They just start to slowly get disconnected, disenchanted, and dissatisfied with things in the church. Maybe, even in some cases, this is justifiably so. We should, therefore, seek to be aware of the journey of those around us at church.

**Read** Romans 14:13, Galatians 5:13, and Ephesians 4:32. How would living in harmony with these admonitions help to keep the back door closed? What can you and your church do to live out these important truths?

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A caring church, one that continues to care, is a place where each individual is focused upon his or her personal relationship with Jesus. The church has a clear concept of the value that Jesus places upon each individual. Closing the back door involves getting close to people, discovering their needs as they are willing to share, and meeting those needs when appropriate. This is something no church program can provide. Only loving, caring individuals can.

**Further Study:** Planning to Continue and Grow Your Ministry

Everyone involved in a witnessing and evangelism ministry should give attention to how he or she can ensure that it will continue rather than be a one-time event. There are many things we can do to ensure this. We will review a few of the vital ones.

1. Be comfortable with sharing leadership rather than being a one-person band. Maintain a team approach where both the work and the affirmation are shared.

2. Do whatever you can to keep the importance of your team's ministry before the church. This will include regular reports to major evangelism committees, bulletin inserts, newsletters, notice board posters, and requests for budgets.

3. Be on the constant lookout for people you can invite to join your team or to form another team. If someone volunteers to join your team as a result of your activities and reports, that is fine; however, it will be better to personally invite people instead of sending out a general invitation for volunteers.

4. Regular training events are a must, especially concerning witnessing and evangelism activities.

**Discussion Questions:**

- ❶ In class, go over your answers to Tuesday's final question.
- ❷ "We are to be channels through which the Lord can send light and grace to the world. Backsliders are to be reclaimed. We are to put away our sins, by confession and repentance humbling our proud hearts before God. Floods of spiritual power are to be poured forth upon those prepared to receive it."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 46. What is needed, and why, to help bring people back into this church and the wonderful "present truth" message that, in fact, no one else is preaching to the world?
- ❸ When people leave, let's love them, let's keep in touch, let's not judge and call them "apostates," or, even worse, let's not hurl at them Ellen White quotes about people falling away. Instead, let's use these sad experiences, as Paul said, to "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5) and ask what we might've done differently, if anything, that could have helped to keep these souls among us. Most important, let's not do anything that would make it harder for them to come back should they change their minds. How can we as a church apply these principles toward those who, for whatever reason, have left us?

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Luke 13:18, 19*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Describe why ministry is something that he or she passes on to others through mentorship and discipleship, but never retires from.

**Feel:** Nurture the settling into fellowship and service that ensures the ongoing growth and development of new believers and will reach out in reconciliation to those who have slid out of fellowship.

**Do:** Mentor and disciple others in the ministries in which he or she is skilled.

► **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: Eternal Ministry

**A** Why must we consider that our work toward the sharing of the gospel and the growing of the church is never done?

**B** How do we disciple others as Christ taught us to do? How do we intentionally mentor others to take up the ministries about which we are passionate?

### II. Feel: Nurturing and Reconciling

**A** What attitudes are important when nurturing fellowship and a sense of belonging in new believers?

**B** What attitudes are important as we seek to reconcile those who have become disillusioned and lost their sense of fellowship in Christ's body?

### III. Do: Discipling

**A** How do we help new believers to forge new bonds of friendship and settle into fellowship?

**B** What can we do to mentor new believers in service? How can we help them to find their own niches as workers in the kingdom of God?

► **Summary:** As long as we are children of God, we will ever seek to promote His kingdom, minister to His children, and share all that we know of His goodness.

## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The heartbeat of the Christian life is a deep, personal love relationship with God. A healthy, vibrant walk with God finds expression in a lifelong desire to see the lost saved.

**Just for Teachers:** Share the following story in your own words. The most important point that it makes is that evangelism can, at times, be difficult, but we must continue on in God’s strength.

One Sabbath afternoon a church gathered its youth and prepared to go into their local community to witness for Christ. The church had purchased a series of sharing tracts. After a few brief safety guidelines, the youth and their leaders piled into cars and drove out to sow seeds for the kingdom of God.

Stationed on several corners around the city, they began to hand out the tracts to people who passed by. Many of the youth were apprehensive at first, but with each tract delivered they grew bolder, even entering into long conversations with total strangers. That’s when “it” happened.

One of the teenagers handed a tract to a man in a car stopped at a nearby intersection. The man took the tract with a smile. He then pulled out a cigarette lighter and lit the tract on fire before dropping it on the road and speeding off with a laugh.

**Consider This:** How do you think the tract burner’s act of disdain impacted the teen who gave him the tract? What does this episode tell us about the world in which we are called to minister? What would you, as a leader, say to someone—young or old—who may have experienced a similar insult?

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Jesus’ life was one of perpetual ministry. This is the example He left with us. He never compartmentalized His life. He lived “one” life, one that enabled Him to minister so effectively to others.

## Bible Commentary

### I. A New Paradigm (Review John 4:7–30 and Matthew 28:18–20 with the class.)

Sunday’s focus on the steps of evangelism is instructive. There is a process by which people are led from a life of sin to a life of surrender to God. This kingdom work is the great calling of the Christian’s life (*Matt. 28:18–20*). As such, it requires much of those who sign on to it.

As Jesus spied an opportunity to give “living water” to the Samaritan woman, He was conscious of all the taboos He would break by speaking to her, one of which was based in the racial hatred that existed between Jews and Samaritans (*see 2 Kings 17:23–29 and Ezra 4 for some of this history*). *The SDA Bible Commentary* states, “Racial hatred kept Jew and Samaritan so far apart that both avoided social contact, if at all possible.”—Volume 5, p. 938.

**Consider This:** What do Jesus’ actions tell us about the importance of sharing the message of salvation at all costs? What other cultural taboos did Jesus break in reaching out to the Samaritan woman? What lessons are there for us in Jesus’ ministering to this woman, despite her bad reputation?

### II. Deep Fellowship (Review Acts 2:42 with the class.)

The new believers referred to in Acts gave themselves wholeheartedly to God and to the service of one another. Most important, they ate together. Is there more intimate fellowship between friends than the sharing of a meal? But Jesus was chastised for eating with sinners (*Luke 15:2*). We must notice here that the believers do not relegate their communication and sharing to a certain day of the week or to a certain form of ministry focus. They don’t just come together because the church is going out to do ministry somewhere. Theirs is a spiritual culture of concern and sharing.

**Consider This:** Sabbath School is one of the essential ministries of the local church. How can it be a place where people experience care and nurture? Aside from providing an opportunity to study truth, for what other purpose does Sabbath School exist? How do we, after being buffeted all week by the devil, nurture those who come to Sabbath School?

### III. The Goal in Sight (Review Matthew 28:18–20 with the class.)

This week’s study closes with a dual focus on the reclaiming of lost members and the keeping of all members so that none leave the fellowship.

As new members join the church, there is a palpable sense of excitement. Established members often view this as proof that God is blessing the church and that the church is actively engaged in the ministry to which it has been called. New members are ushered into active ministry and prepared for service. Because of all this, growing churches have an aura about them. Might this lead to a sort of complacency about ministry to the wider community? Could such a church become internally focused while professing to fulfill the gospel commission?

In their challenging book *The Externally Focused Church*, authors Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson write, “Internally focused churches concentrate on getting people into the church and generating activity there. . . . These are good churches filled with good people. And what they do is vital but not sufficient for a healthy church. Worship, teaching, and personal devotions are absolutely necessary for building the internal capacity necessary to sustain an external focus, but if all the human and financial resources are expended inside the four walls of the church, then no matter how ‘spiritual’ things may appear to be, something is missing.”—*The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland, Colo.: Group Publishing,® 2004), p. 16.

**Consider This:** How can you help your local church to fulfill the gospel commission found in Matthew 28:18–20 and avoid becoming obsessed with what happens within its four walls?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

#### Thought Questions:

- 1 Some churches establish a clear process for the incorporation of new believers into the fellowship and work of the church. What things should be included in such a process? What things should not?
- 2 Read Galatians 6:2. What are members of the body of Christ supposed to do for other members? Why? In what specific ways does this ethic of caring strengthen the work of the church?

#### Application Questions:

- 1 Read Hebrews 10:25. Part of this verse conveys a sense of urgency about meeting together as a family of believers. Some members believe that they can focus better on God by worshipping online instead of at their local church. What would you say to convince them to begin attending church?

2 Some churches have a culture of fellowship that is so strong that “outsiders” can scarcely penetrate it. What can members do in order to break up a cliquish culture in the local church?

3 How can your Sabbath School class help to reclaim lost church members? What role does prayer play in the reclamation process?

### Questions for Witnessing:

1 Witnessing can be a “dirty” process. As we engage in it, our lives often get entangled with people who may have significant problems. How do we continue to minister to those who are hurting when their hurts begin to complicate our lives?

2 What contribution—besides money—can seniors make to the evangelistic efforts of the church? How might a local congregation make them an integral part of its inreach and outreach efforts?

## ► STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Ask a member of the class to read Hebrews 11:21. The objective of this closing exercise is to embrace the call to minister throughout one’s lifetime. For example, Jacob was a deeply flawed individual. He made many mistakes in his life; yet, God forgave him, blessed him, and empowered him to bless others. Make the point that in the event that we die before the coming of Jesus, we should be totally spent, having given God all!

The incident referred to in Hebrews 11:21 occurred in Genesis 48. Jacob was an old man then, blind and feeble. He had endured much and learned hard lessons at the hand of God. As he prepared for death, he continued his ministry, chiefly to his family. He blessed Joseph’s sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and worshiped God to the very end of his life.

1. What kind of life did Jacob live? What does his lack of faithfulness to God, at times, tell us about God’s mercy in His dealings with us?

2. How did Jacob’s family suffer as a result of his sins and failings as a parent?

3. What moment changed his life forever? What did God do for him (*Gen. 32:26–28*)?