

Evaluating Witnessing *and* Evangelism



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Cor. 13:5, 6; Heb. 10:24, 25; Deut. 10:12, 13; Matt. 23:15; Rev. 14:6, 7.

Memory Text: “To one who listens, valid criticism is like a gold earring or other gold jewelry” (Proverbs 25:12, NLT).

Key Thought: It is a mistake to become involved in God's great task of evangelism without effective evaluation.

Too often we are satisfied with minimal results through evangelism when we could have had greater impact and significantly better success if we had evaluated previous witnessing and evangelistic endeavors and allowed our findings to influence future direction and strategy.

Sometimes large sums of money are spent on witnessing and evangelism ministries that give minimal results. This has led to suggested changes in budget allocations and/or procedures. If done with a non-critical spirit, these questions can be a part of valid evaluation. We must quickly add, however, that we really don't know the full results of any specific program because we can focus only upon the tangible results (such as the number of people being baptized) and are unaware as to what extent gospel seeds have been sown. Nevertheless, there is still the need to evaluate in a way that involves making judgments but abstains from being judgmental.

This week we will consider evaluation as a biblical principle and explore its value as an ongoing procedure in local church life today.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 23.*

Why Evaluate?

Evaluation will take place whether we realize it or not. Evaluation is being undertaken every Sabbath and at every public meeting. People evaluate the content, clarity, and even the length of the sermon, and those who attend public meetings expect a high level of professionalism. Wherever and whenever people have expectations there will be evaluation. Although we cannot point to a text where formal evaluation was carried out, it is evident that evaluation was a serious part of early church life.

What do the following texts tell us about the importance of evaluation? And what kind of evaluation do the following verses suggest? *1 Tim. 3:1–13; 1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5, 6.*

When God’s Word sets a standard, expects or prescribes specific actions, or issues a command, our responses are open to evaluation. Evaluation asks very important questions: “How are we doing in this particular ministry?” “How can we be more effective?”

The fact that Paul gave certain qualifications for deacons and elders shows that some kind of evaluation was to take place. This would be an evaluation of fitness for the position and also an evaluation of effectiveness in that ministry.

Read through the gospel commission of Matthew 28:19, 20. What evaluative questions would you ask when considering your church’s response to this command?

As God’s servants we are entrusted with the immeasurably valuable gospel truth. Considering that this gospel message is to go to all the world, it should not surprise us that God also has an evaluative process. God is interested in the progress of the work that is entrusted to those who have responded to His call to be co-laborers for souls.

Read again 2 Corinthians 13:5. What does the text say to you personally? How can you apply it to yourself? What evidence do you have that “Jesus Christ is in you”?

Evaluate Kindly

While there are many benefits to evaluation, there are some pitfalls that we must be aware of and avoid. If we are overly active in evaluation and focus mostly on the negatives, there is the potential to create a critical environment that will discourage and decrease your pool of volunteers. To avoid evaluation being perceived as criticism, it must be accompanied by genuine affirmation. Indeed, most often we forget to affirm our workers, particularly those who have served in their chosen ministry for a considerable time. They are always there and always do the job, and we come to expect that they always will be there to do the job. Evaluation will give you the opportunity to affirm them.

What affirmation do you see in the following verses? In what ways could such affirmation be given today to individual workers or teams? *Acts 16:1, 2; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 11:2; Phil. 4:14.*

On many occasions the apostle Paul had to set the church or individuals straight in matters of attitude, behavior, or doctrine. This shows that some evaluation had taken place. Whenever he could, Paul also affirmed people for their support of him personally or for their faithfulness to God or for the faithful performance of a specific ministry.

To be fair in evaluation, we must evaluate not only the outcomes but also the processes. Outcome evaluation asks whether a program achieved its planned results. Process evaluation reviews internal project management.

Carefully read Hebrews 10:24, 25. What does “consider one another” mean here? What evaluative principles are suggested?

These verses are more than a suggestion. They strongly admonish us to take the spiritual growth and development of one another seriously. If we are to consider what God requires in our Christian lives and also fulfill a need to consider the point at which each of us is at in our experience, then it also follows that appropriate evaluation will be undertaken as we “consider one another.”

Think about how encouraging it is when someone affirms you for either simply who you are as a person and/or your ministry. It’s amazing how just a few simple words can do so much! What’s your general attitude toward others? Do you tend toward criticism or toward affirmation? If the former, how can you change this destructive character trait?

What the Lord Asks

Read the following verses and then, keeping in mind the context of this week (the whole quarter, actually), answer the questions that follow: “ ‘And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?’ ” (*Deut. 10:12, 13, NKJV*).

How would you summarize the essential meaning of these two verses?

Of which New Testament text does this remind you, and why does this show us the great importance of the admonition of these verses in Deuteronomy?

The texts say that God “requires” (or “asks”) these things of us. How are we to understand the meaning of this in the context of salvation by faith alone?

The texts themselves deal greatly with our heart, our soul, with love and with fear—things that are often hard to judge from outward appearances. What outward manifestations of these inward things do the verses talk about? How does the link here between the inward and outward fit in with our understanding of Revelation 14:6–12?

In Matthew 23:15, Jesus gave the scribes and the Pharisees a stern evaluation of their “witnessing” and “evangelism” outreach toward the Gentiles. Thus, in a well-meaning quest to fulfill the gospel commission, we must always keep the deep truths expressed in Deuteronomy 10:12 and 13 before us. After all, with all our outreach efforts, the last thing we want to do is create more “son[s] of hell.”

Evaluating for Spiritual Growth

“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’ ” (*1 Sam. 16:7, NKJV*).

Previously in this study guide we have noted that any goals set by individuals or churches must be able to be evaluated. While it is relatively easy to monitor and evaluate numerical growth, it is true that there is more to church than numbers.

It’s obvious (or should be, anyway) that we don’t simply want to fill the church with people. We want to fill it with people who are growing in their relationship with Jesus, who love the Lord, and who express that love in obedience to His commandments. The last thing we want to do is what Jesus said the scribes and Pharisees did: to “travel land and sea” (that is, engage in missionary efforts) to make a new convert and make him “twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (*Matt. 23:15, NKJV*). That strong rebuke of their “outreach efforts” shows us how important it is that we give attention to the evaluation of spiritual growth, not only of those whom we bring into the church but, even more so, of ourselves.

Read Matthew 26:41; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Romans 8:6; Ephesians 6:17, 18; 2 Timothy 2:15, 16; and Psalm 1:2. What spiritual disciplines do these verses suggest are important? In what ways are all of these things crucial to our spiritual growth?

How do we, as sinners in need of divine grace ourselves, evaluate something as “intangible” as the spirituality of others? The fact is that there is no documented spirituality scale against which we can evaluate personal spirituality. It is therefore more appropriate and profitable to consider whether each believer is on a spiritual journey, rather than to determine at what point he or she is on that journey. Indications of a spiritual journey are the spiritual disciplines in which we become involved. The things listed in the verses above certainly are indicators; yet, we always need to be careful regarding how we judge the experience of others. At the same time, especially if we are dealing with new members, we should—in a kind and loving way—help them to understand how important things such as prayer, Bible study, and obedience are to their spiritual growth.

Evaluating for Church Growth

The very reason why our church exists is the reason why we evaluate. We believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been raised up at this particular time in earth's history as part of God's plan to take the gospel to the world. In other words, we exist to win souls for the kingdom.

Read Revelation 14:6, 7. How do we understand these verses in relationship to our identity as Seventh-day Adventists?

Evaluating how we are doing is a method of keeping true to the task in the most effective way possible. Any evaluation of what the church does should be an assessment of how the evangelism and witnessing strategies are affecting church growth. How is that in which we are involved helping us to reach the goal?

Read Matthew 6:33, 10:7, 24:14, and Luke 4:43. What are these texts talking about? How should their meaning impact both us as a church and our work of witnessing and evangelism?

The record of Jesus' ministry on earth contains numerous references to preaching as a way of winning souls to the kingdom of God. Jesus preached that the kingdom of God was at hand. He chastised the religious leaders for shutting up the kingdom of God and making it difficult for people to enter. He sent His disciples out to preach the kingdom of God. Clearly, the overriding goal of Jesus, the apostles, and the church was the winning of people for the kingdom.

The reports of the numbers of people who were added to the church at various times, and the reports of churches being established among the Gentiles, are evidence that evaluation was being carried out in regard to how the church was reaching the goal of kingdom growth.

Jesus made a very powerful and blunt statement that if you are not with Him, you are *against* Him (Matt. 12:30), that if you are not gathering with Him, you are scattering. Put aside your profession of faith or your name on a church book. Are you gathering or scattering? How do you justify your answer?

Further Study: Inviting Others to Join Your Ministry

Have you ever heard of a one-man band? This is a band in which one person plays all the instruments. The drum is strapped to his back and operated by a foot pedal; cymbals are strapped between the knees and so on. In the metaphorical sense, a one-person band is one in which one individual plays all parts.

One-person bands have the potential to burn out because they have no physical or emotional team support. One-person bands sometimes complain about the lack of church support, but the congregation has probably not been asked to be involved in any way other than financially.

Whether you are just beginning a ministry or evaluating an existing one, the following are some suggestions regarding ways in which to multiply your ministry by getting others involved:

1. Review what is involved in every aspect of the ministry you are undertaking and see how many people could take part.
2. Decide on the areas where significant help is needed and look for key people to fill these major roles. Think about some team leaders.
3. Prepare a fairly detailed written outline of all aspects of the ministry. This will be useful when talking to prospective team members. They will be able to understand exactly what is required of them.
4. Report regularly to the whole church. This will let everyone see that your ministry is a part of the local church's overall witnessing and evangelism strategy, and they will be more likely to get involved.
5. Have regular team meetings. Affirm team members and review progress. Ask the questions, "How have we done?" "How are we doing?" and, "Where do we go from here?"

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ When and how do you cross the line between evaluation and the kind of judgment that we are warned against in Scripture?
- ❷ Dwell more on the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:15. How can we, as a church, prevent this from happening, especially when new converts are so often full of zeal? How can we make sure that zeal is focused in the right direction so that we don't create more " 'son[s] of hell' " in our midst?
- ❸ Consider a current ministry in your church and suggest a good evaluation process of the program, the process, and the personnel.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Proverbs 25:12*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Explain the need to evaluate his or her evangelistic results while keeping in mind the requirements that God has given for growth.

Feel: Sense the solemnity of the times in the context of the church's call to proclaim the three angels' messages.

Do: Evaluate his or her soul-winning efforts in the light of God's requirements and the coming judgment.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Why Evaluate?

A What has God asked His people to do for Him in light of the coming judgment?

B Why is it important for the church to evaluate the growth of its membership and ministry programs?

C Why does development of spiritual disciplines in our personal practices require evaluation, as well as numbers and other indicators of church growth?

II. Feel: Solemn Times

A How do the three angels' messages lend impetus to the church's need to monitor spiritual discipline and church growth?

B What role do encouraging comments and positive affirmations play in the evaluations of church members who work in evangelism and other areas of ministry?

III. Do: Spurring One Another On

A What are we doing to proclaim the three angels' messages, and how can we know that our work is successful?

B How can we build up one another in the spiritual disciplines that are required to share the gospel?

► **Summary:** Our work in God's cause needs to be evaluated in the light of God's requirements, as echoed in the three angels' messages for these last days of earth's history.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Evaluating our witnessing and evangelistic efforts is a method of keeping true to the task in the most effective way possible.

Just for Teachers: Share the following story in your own words. The objective of the story is to get the class thinking about the necessity of evaluating our work in soul winning.

There is a story told of an African village where Christianity had taken root. Members of the community had given their lives to Christ and set about learning the spiritual disciplines that make for a strong, vibrant walk with God. Prayer was one of the disciplines that the early believers began to practice. The high grass surrounding each home revealed those who were faithful in prayer and those who were not.

One day a tribesman in the village began to get concerned after he noticed that a fellow villager's prayer spot had become overgrown. He approached his friend and said, "Brother, is everything OK?"

"Why do you ask?" came the reply from the startled tribesman.

"Well, brother, the grass is growing on your path."

Consider This: In today's politically correct world, few people would have the gumption to approach a friend about his or her prayer life. Yet, as we have been studying this week, God asks us to subject our ministry to a process of evaluation. Why do most people dread being assessed?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: The apostle Paul and the leaders of the early church went to great lengths to build into their rapidly growing faith a means of measuring its effectiveness. They did not shy away from personally evaluating those who served in ministry. This section examines Paul's evaluation guidelines and some of those that were used and taught by Christ.

Bible Commentary

I. A Few Good Leaders (*Review 1 Timothy 3:1–13 with the class.*)

New Testament Christianity is marked by an inclusiveness that runs against the current of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, ministry is seen as belonging to anyone who claims faith in Jesus Christ. In Matthew 11:25–30, Jesus encouraged burdened men and women to come and rest in Him. Those who followed Him were prepared for ministry. This same spirit is seen in the work of the apostles. They welcomed all to fellowship and ministry, but leadership required more than a cursory welcome.

In 1 Timothy 3:1–13, we notice that the leaders had to be individuals of proven maturity and sterling character. After all, they were being called upon to lead the church in worship, outreach, service, and the fulfillment of individual spiritual gifts. The qualification guidelines for leadership that were handed down by Paul do not emphasize family lines as Old Testament guidelines did. Paul's focus was the long-term demonstration of ethical character and moral rectitude. Any man who lived such a life could be considered for leadership.

Paul may have also had another reason in mind for instituting such stringent standards for the evaluation of bishops. *The SDA Bible Commentary* notes, “Christianity would have little appeal if its leaders were as lacking in integrity as men outside the church too often are.”—Volume 7, p. 299.

Consider This: Paul's evaluation procedure was designed to ensure that the gospel ministry given to Timothy be built on a strong foundation. What happens to a church when its leaders are unethical or immoral?

II. What Jesus Did (Review Hebrews 10:24, 25 and John 8:1–11 with the class.)

Monday's study encourages us to evaluate carefully, always with an eye to the affirmation of one another in Christ. The apostle Paul would often go out of his way to affirm individuals and groups when he saw something in them that was worthy of praise. To the believers in Ephesus he wrote, “Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (*Eph. 1:15, 16, NKJV*). Paul encouraged the saints whenever possible. He was always on the lookout for good spiritual fruit, always checking to see the ways in which he might encourage the saints toward good works.

No doubt Paul learned the ethics of nurture from the life of Jesus. Christ seemed to reserve special care for people who had been evaluated and written off by the religious leaders of the day. Of the woman caught in adultery, Ellen White writes, “Jesus looked for a moment upon the scene—the trembling victim in her shame, the hard-faced dignitaries, devoid of even human pity. His spirit of stainless purity shrank from the spectacle. Well He knew for what purpose this case had been brought to Him. He read the heart, and knew the character and life history of every-

one in His presence. These would-be guardians of justice had themselves led their victim into sin, that they might lay a snare for Jesus. Giving no sign that He had heard their question, He stooped, and fixing His eyes upon the ground, began to write in the dust.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 461.

Jesus had “weighed” the woman’s accusers at a level deeper than any human could. He read their hearts and wrote the evaluation of their contents in the dust for all to see.

Consider This: The Pharisees of Jesus’ day brought the woman to Jesus in an effort to trap Him. They cared nothing about her and even had led her into sin. In other words, they attempted to use her failing to achieve their ends. How can we be certain when we evaluate people—or ministries, for that matter—that we are judging without being judgmental?

III. Check the Fruit (*Review 1 Samuel 16:7 and Matthew 7:15–19 with the class.*)

Wednesday’s portion of the study guide took on the thorny issue of the ways in which we can evaluate personal spiritual growth. We are fallen, fallible human beings from a race marred by 6,000 years of sin. Apart from God, our judgment is faulty and imperfect and hardly qualified to “evaluate something as ‘intangible’ as spirituality in others”; yet, we are called to do just that at times. For instance, in Matthew 7:15, Jesus gives us guidelines for the evaluation of false prophets who “come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves.” He seems to complicate the matter further by opening this final stanza of the Sermon on the Mount with an oration armed against the judging of one another. Is it possible to ascertain a person’s fruit and not judge him or her? How are we to tell a true prophet from a false one? We are to watch the fruit growing on the tree of his or her life.

How is the watching of fruit different from judging? *The SDA Bible Commentary* notes that when Jesus cautioned His listeners not to judge that they be not judged, He was referring “particularly to judging another’s motives, not to judging the right or wrong of his acts. God alone is competent to judge men’s motives, because of the fact that He alone is able to read men’s innermost thoughts.”—Volume 5, pp. 354, 355.

Jesus told His audience that they would know (the Greek word for *know* used in Matthew 7:16 means “to know fully”) those who were false by the words that they spoke, the acts that they committed, the way that they lived. However, He never asked His audience to judge the motivation of their hearts.

Consider This: When did Jesus openly rebuke the sin of others during the course of His ministry? Under what circumstances is it appropriate to bring to light the rotten fruit in someone’s life? How is this to be carried out? What answers does Jesus’ example give us?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: How do we apply evaluative processes to our personal lives? As class members respond to the questions below, encourage them to pull their answers from the reservoirs of their personal experiences with God.

Thought Questions:

- 1 In what ways does God evaluate us? What tools does He use to measure our fitness for the work of ministry?
- 2 Read Matthew 7:21–23. What separates those whom Jesus knows from those He does not? How does the context of Matthew 7 contribute to a deeper understanding of these verses?

Application Questions:

- 1 If you were called upon to devise a plan that would help members of your local church to grow in their spiritual walk with God, where would you begin? How would you evaluate the present condition of the church?
- 2 What role does the Holy Spirit play in the guiding of the evangelistic efforts of God’s remnant church? What role does the Spirit play in the assessment of ministry goals and objectives?

Questions for Witnessing:

- 1 Why might some believers place much importance on the number of people baptized in a year while others do not? How do we tend to look upon churches or groups whose growth appears to be stagnant? What conclusions do we sometimes draw about their commitment to the gospel commission?
- 2 What are your personal goals for sharing the gospel? Why is it essential to set such goals and assess them periodically? How can we do this without becoming legalistic?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: Ask the class to discuss the following question: while we need to be careful when judging others, what about when judging ourselves?