

Evangelism *and* Witnessing *as a Lifestyle*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: 2 Cor. 3:2, 3; Matt. 9:36–38;
1 Cor. 9:20–22; Mark 5:1–19; John 17:11–19.

Memory Text: “At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did” (Acts 9:36, NKJV).

Key Thought: Whether we acknowledge it or not, all believers preach a message by the example of their lives.

It has often been said that Christianity is not just an adherence to a set of beliefs; it is also a way of life, a lifestyle. After all, what we believe will, ultimately, impact the choices we make and the kind of lives we live.

It is also true that those who claim to be Christians are keenly observed by others who are looking to see whether their lives match their professed beliefs. Even if we don't intend it, those who watch us do learn from us. So, the important question is not, “Are we influencing other people and passing things on to them?” but rather, “*How* are we influencing other people, and what are we passing on to them?”

While we should always remember the importance of our unintentional influence on those around us, we must also intentionally plan to help people to make a connection between faith and lifestyle. This week we will study how the Christian's lifestyle can demonstrate the relevance of faith in everyday existence.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 28.*

Silent Sermons

How would you have recognized the followers of Jesus back in the first century? You could recognize the priests and the Pharisees by the way they dressed. Likewise, you would recognize a fisherman, a peasant, or a Roman soldier by their clothes. But, again, how would you recognize a Christian?

Read John 13:35. According to Jesus, what is one special way His followers are identified? What does that mean in practical terms?

Jesus said that if we love one another, others will know that we are His disciples. How will they know? Because love in action will convince them. The love we have for Jesus and for fellow believers will determine how we respond to God's will and, in turn, how we treat one another. Furthermore, the love and concern that we have for those outside of God's fold will determine how we treat them too. This is the sermon that they will see and observe, and it speaks louder than anything you could ever say. Many parents have noticed that very early in life their children develop an internal "hypocrisy detector" that becomes enhanced and fine-tuned as they grow older. We must be aware, therefore, that many of the people we associate with, and witness to, also have a highly developed ability to recognize the difference between a genuine spiritual experience and a mere profession of spirituality.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:2, 3. What is Paul saying about the way in which God wants to use His people to influence the lives of others?

We must not underestimate both our intentional and unintentional influences on those around us. The Christian's life is to be like a letter sent from Jesus Christ to the world. From a heart that is renewed by divine grace, this letter will demonstrate the power of the gospel to transform lives and thereby will witness for the Lord.

How have you been affected by those whose actions matched their profession? How have you been affected by those whose actions *didn't* match their profession? What will help you to always remember that your actions will influence others, one way or another?

Having Compassion for People

Each day we all fleetingly brush past people we don't know. We pass them on the street, sit near them in cafés, and wait with them in lines. Sometimes we even acknowledge their presence with a nod or a smile as we move past them. Although we could never personally contact each person we see each day, God's desire is for all these people to accept Him into their lives. For someone, somewhere, we can be a part of God's plan to save him or her.

Read Matthew 9:36–38. **Though spoken in a specific and unique context, the sentiments Jesus expressed are not limited to just that context. What was Jesus saying, and how do those words apply to the field in your immediate area?**

The multitude that Jesus saw on this occasion was troubled and distressed. The people were so downcast that they had all but given up on any remnants of a religious experience they had left. Those whom God had placed in charge of the spiritual welfare of His people had neglected their duty. Consequently, the people were scattered and disheartened. Jesus had compassion for them because He knew that they needed a spiritual shepherd.

Among the masses of people with whom we mingle, many are committed to Jesus Christ. But many more also desperately need the Good Shepherd. Somehow they must be reached for Christ.

Jesus, the disciples, and a few other followers had been engaged in the gospel harvest, but as the harvest grew, so did the need for more laborers. Although Jesus' invitation to pray for more reapers was probably also calculated to get some followers to consider their own call to the harvest field, it also promises that God understands the need for more workers and will supply them.

Most churches are surrounded by such a large harvest field that it is not practical to leave the reaping up to a few members. When we have compassion for the people who live around our churches and our homes, in some cases numbered in the thousands, we again will sense the need to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers, and perhaps, in turn, we will realize our potential as laborers for the Lord.

As we focus on outreach and evangelism, it is important that we continually review our potential local harvests. These local people, many of whom are already seeking God, will be impacted for good by the compassion we show them.

Discuss what the word *compassion* means. How can you learn from your own suffering and your own need for compassion? How can you be more compassionate to those around you?

Walking in Their Shoes

Here's an important point: rather than providing what we think people need, we must learn to recognize what *they see* as important priorities. What are they concerned about? What are their problems? What do they feel that they need?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:20–22. What do these verses tell us about Paul's approach to different peoples and his desire to identify with their needs and concerns? What can we take from this for ourselves in our attempts to reach out to those around us? See also Heb. 4:15.

Without compromising on matters of principle, the apostle Paul was willing to go anywhere and do anything he could to be in a better position to convince people of the truth of the gospel. In other words, he was willing to walk in their shoes in an attempt to understand them and to determine the best way to reach them for Jesus Christ.

The point is that often we try to provide what we think people need. Yet, we should seek first to understand what they see as their needs. To walk in the shoes of another means that we attempt to understand life and all its intricacies and issues from their perspective; it is to try to understand their hurts and joys. In other words, to meet them where they are.

Of course, this is what Jesus did. His earthly life was one of identifying with those He came to save. He can understand our struggles and pain because He experienced the same. He had great disappointments, endured false accusations, rejection, and unfair punishment. He was "God with us" in the fullest sense of entering into our lives.

Furthermore, because He entered into our experiences, He can meet people where they are. As we read through the Gospels we discover that Jesus did not have just one method of evangelism and witnessing. He reached out to people in their own life context. When He met the woman at Jacob's well, He spoke about living water. To farmers, He told stories about sowing seeds, harvest time, and the weather. To fishermen, He spoke about fish, nets, and storms. Jesus had a wonderful way of presenting great spiritual truths as He identified with the normal issues of daily life, and those who listened learned about the water of life and the need to sow the gospel seed. Many of them even became fishers of men.

A Hospitable Lifestyle

There is a saying that is often voiced when we speak of reaching people for Christ. “People don’t care how much we know until they know how much we care.” The point is that we can teach and preach all we want, but if people feel misunderstood, unloved, and unaccepted, then our witness will be severely hampered, no matter how eloquent our preaching or how reasonable and true our teachings.

This leads to the simple idea of hospitality. Hospitality includes the areas of acceptance, welcoming, openness, caring, generosity, kindness, and friendship. These qualities all have to do with the way that God would have Christians relate both to one another and to those whom they seek to reach for the Lord.

Read the story of the demon-possessed man in Mark 5:1–19. What did Jesus tell this man that illustrates the principle that friends are more receptive to our sharing the gospel? How can we learn to apply this principle in our own work of personal witness and ministry?

Jesus could have directed this man to go back to his town and tell everyone about his healing experience. The fact that the Lord specifically directed him to seek out his friends underscores the truth that those with whom we already have relationships are the most receptive to the good news that we want to share about His love, grace, and deliverance. Those friends would then share the exciting news with their other friends, and so the gospel message goes forward.

Important to this whole process is that we have friendships outside of our circle of believers. Because many work out in the world, they will naturally have many acquaintances, but acquaintances are not close friends. However, acquaintances can become friends through what has been called hospitality evangelism, and hospitality evangelism flows out of a hospitable lifestyle. In other words, hospitality evangelism is not something that is turned off on occasion; rather, it is the way we live. *See also Luke 14:12–14.*

In what ways could you be more hospitable to those around you? How can you learn to be more willing to give of yourself in order to meet the needs of those whom you are seeking to reach?

Widening Your Friendship Circle

While a searching soul occasionally may approach a Christian and ask, “What must I do to be saved?” for the most part believers must go out in search of the lost sheep. Some suggest that the church acts too much like a fortress from which a few people go out on a campaign or mission in order to collect some converts who are then admonished not to get too close to the world from which they have been saved. Whether this is true or just a perception is not the point. The point is that many Seventh-day Adventists have few, or no, meaningful relationships outside of the fellowship. Though it is important for us to avoid unholy influences, there is a degree to which such isolation detracts from our ability to reach people with the gospel message.

Examine closely John 17:11–19. What do these verses reveal about the Christian’s place in the world? See also Col. 4:2–6.

From these verses we can extract the following truths about Jesus’ disciples and the world:

They are in the world (*vs. 11*).

They are not of the world (*vss. 14, 16*).

They are not yet to be taken out of the world (*vs. 15*).

Jesus sent them into the world (*vs. 18*).

We are all born into this world. While we are here, God also has a work for us to do in it. Just as with His first disciples, Jesus has sent us into the world to introduce whomever we can to Him and the promise of salvation that He offers all humanity.

The challenge for each one of us is to intentionally expand our personal mission field. This may mean adjusting our lifestyle in order to rub shoulders with more unchurched people. This is not to say that we compromise principles, convictions, and values, but, rather, that we look for opportunities where we can, in clear conscience, interact with others in a way that will allow us to become both friends and, as a result, channels of God’s truth.

Often we excel in sending out invitations for the people to come to us. Yet, Jesus actually told us to go to them. Thus, we need to ask ourselves if we have withdrawn too much from the world and therefore have lost some of our evangelistic effectiveness.

Look at yourself: do you tend to be too insular, too remote from the world? Or, perhaps, are you too cozy with the world? How can you better learn to be in the world (and thus witness to others) and yet not be “of it”?

Further Study: Discover Where Your Ministry Fits Into Your Church's Overall Plans.

While most local church departments may have a well-organized program and be quite busy, the chances are that those involved in each department may not know much about what is happening in other areas of church life. Furthermore, there may not be an overall church evangelistic plan of which each department group is aware and, therefore, can contribute toward. For the purposes of encouragement, support, and effective evaluation, it is best that your evangelism and witnessing ministry be a part of an overall church strategy. To achieve this, the following suggestions are important:

1. Meet with your pastor, elders, or evangelism leaders to understand what, if any, evangelism and witnessing goals are in place and what strategies are being followed to reach these goals. Remember, you are trying to discover where your chosen evangelism and witnessing activities will fit with the church's plans and help to reach their goals.
2. You may discover that although there is much evangelistic activity in your church, there are no documented goals or strategies. If this is the case, then request a meeting with the pastor, elders, or evangelism leaders, and ask them what their personal goals for evangelism are. Take some notes during your discussions. You are building up a picture of your leadership's evangelistic vision that will help to suggest goals and ways of reaching others.
3. At this stage you may decide to join with an already established evangelistic ministry. If, however, your chosen ministry is in a new area of evangelism or witnessing, you will need to gather a small group of people who share your vision. Document your goals and the strategies you will employ to reach those goals.

Discussion Questions:

❶ “Too often the influence of the sermon preached from the pulpit is counteracted by the sermon preached in the lives of those who claim to be advocates of truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 21. What kind of witness does your life, as opposed to your words or profession, reveal?

❷ Think about your church as a whole. How integrated into the community is it? If your church vanished tomorrow, how much difference to the community would that make? Would it make any difference at all?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Acts 9:36*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe how lifestyle can demonstrate to friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers the power of God in the transformation of his or her life.

Feel: Long to illustrate the beauty and goodness of God through the way in which he or she lives.

Do: Demonstrate the love and compassion of God for humankind in the ways in which he or she treats others.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Like a Book

A What aspects of everyday life illustrate to friends and neighbors that which God has done in our lives?

B How did Christ identify with those whom He came to serve? How did He demonstrate that He knew their needs and accepted and loved them just as they were?

II. Feel: Heart Service

A What emotions are awakened when we are thoughtfully cared for?

B How can our hospitality draw those we serve to Christ?

C What other aspects of the beauty and goodness of God are revealed in the ways in which we live?

III. Do: Hospitality Evangelism

A How can we identify with the needs of others in our neighborhoods and workplaces?

B What touches our hearts most in ministries of the church, and how can we use this understanding when reaching out to others?

C What can we do for others that may illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts?

► **Summary:** The work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is shared by the ways in which we live in loving and compassionate service for others.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: An effective, witnessing lifestyle flows naturally from a sanctified life.

Just for Teachers: In this very practical lesson we focus on living a true Christian life, where who we are (how we live) takes priority over what we merely profess. Invite students to consider the following proverbs as a way of motivating them to understand how important it is that, as Christians, we must back up our words with loving actions.

“Talk doesn’t cook rice,” states one Chinese proverb. “A promise is a cloud; fulfillment is rain,” according to an Arabian proverb. The Italians wisely observe that “between saying and doing many a pair of shoes is worn out.” “When deeds speak, words are nothing,” says an African proverb. And the wisest man who ever lived asserted, “Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool” (*Prov. 19:1, NKJV*).

Consider This: Why are actions more credible than words? What happens when the words and actions of a person do not correspond? What do you think is the cause of such a situation? If your witness were to be summed up in a proverb by others, what would that proverb state?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: With your class, carefully examine the biblical passages for each section, looking for the key points.

Bible Commentary

I. An Open Letter—Forgery or Genuine? (*Review John 13:35 and 2 Corinthians 3:2, 3 with the class.*)

What is the difference between a true and a false follower of Christ? In John 13:35, we are clearly given the sign that identifies genuine followers of Christ: those who demonstrate Christlike love without selfishness or pride. It is a love that acknowledges the dignity of every person through a demonstration of courtesy, tenderness, and benevolence.

The believers in Corinth were an “open letter” for all to read by exhibiting a genuine heart change and allowing the Holy Spirit to write on the “tablets of human hearts,” rather than just external “tablets of stone” (2 Cor. 3:3, *NASB*; compare Jer. 31:33.)

Consider This: Read the following texts and then answer the questions: Jeremiah 17:1, Exodus 31:18, Ezekiel 36:25–27, Jeremiah 32:38–40.

Note that sin uses an “iron stylus” with a very sharp diamond point to engrave itself on our hearts (*Jer. 17:1, NASB*). “The names of idols were engraved on the horns of their altars with such a tool. The idea is that Judah’s sin was . . . etched in them as if into stone. How much different to have God’s Word written on the heart ([Jer.] 31:33).”—*The MacArthur Study Bible*, note on Jeremiah 17:1, pp. 1086, 1087. Notice the type of writing instrument that God uses to write that law (*Exod. 31:18*). Iron implies that the heart of the sinner is unyielding. In contrast, the finger of God shows God’s desire to replace that hardness with flesh and to write His law there intimately and personally. How is God’s law transferred from the “tablets of stone” (*NKJV*) to our hearts? What does it mean to have God’s law written on our hearts? (See *Ezek. 36:25–27*.)

II. High Unemployment (Review Matthew 9:36–38 with the class.)

Jesus sees plenty of work to do for His kingdom and yet so few workers. Rather than urging His small group of disciples to work faster or longer hours, Christ urges them to “beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers” (*Matt. 9:38, NASB*). Notice in this phrase who is in charge of the harvest.

Discuss: Why does Jesus urge His disciples to pray for more workers rather than to work harder? How much time do we spend praying versus doing? Which act is easier, and why—to pray or to work? What is the relationship between prayer and work? How does too little prayer affect our work? How does too little work affect our prayer life?

Consider This: “As activity increases . . . there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith. Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to make a savior of our activity. We need to look constantly to Jesus, realizing that it is His power which does the work. While we are to labor earnestly for the salvation of the lost, we must also take time for meditation, for prayer, and for the study of the word of God. Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and sanctified by the

merit of Christ, will in the end prove to have been efficient for good.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 362.

III. Being Culturally Relevant (Review 1 Corinthians 9:20–22 and Hebrews 4:15, 16 with the class.)

Paul was sensitive to the needs, values, and circumstances of his various audiences. He did not needlessly offend or overwhelm them with his knowledge and experience. He learned of their interests and met them where they were, speaking in ways that they would be able to relate to, while never compromising his principles. Paul adapted his methods in order to win people to Christ. He was more concerned about the effectiveness of his proclamation than he was of his own rights and knowledge.

Jesus Himself used this method. (See *John 1:14; Heb. 4:15, 16.*) Setting aside His own rights and power, Jesus became one of us, experiencing the suffering of life as we know it. As one who can “sympathize with our weaknesses” and “who has been tempted in all things” (*Heb. 4:15, NASB*), He now serves as our heavenly High Priest.

Consider This: Read aloud 1 Corinthians 9:22, 23. Why did Paul use this method when reaching others? How effective was Paul’s method? How do we know? In what ways does the example of Jesus rebuke our pride and, at times, aloofness from unbelievers? How can we incorporate the methods of Jesus and Paul into our lives?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: The point of this activity is to help the class see the ways in which Jesus related to a wide variety of individuals. Although Jesus had many positive results, there were also those individuals who refused His witness. This should be of encouragement to the students as they relate to others.

Activity: Using a whiteboard or large sheet of paper, create a chart similar to the one on page 52 and guide the class members as they fill it out.

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: Have writing materials available so that your class can copy the following chart to use individually in this final activity. (To save time, prepare copies beforehand for distribution.) The category “What I Can Do for Them” is intended to bring intentionality to those relationships and is not

just meant to be a to-do list. Activities can be “pray for their upcoming test,” “show them support by inviting them for a meal,” and so on.

Activity: Looking at the chart “Considering the Context,” what can we learn from Jesus’ method of interacting with a wide range of people? Think of people you know and make a similar chart. For the category “What Jesus Did for Him/Her,” write in “What I Can Do for Them.” Pray for an opportunity to minister to each person and record the results in the final column.

Who	What We Know About Him/ Her	Expressed Need/Desire	Unexpressed/ Unrecognized Need	What Jesus Did for Him/ Her	The Result
John the Baptist (Luke 7:18–23)					
Woman at the well (John 4:1–30)					
Crippled man (John 5:1–15)					
Widow at son’s funeral (Luke 7:11–17)					
Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10)					
Judas Iscariot (John 13:1–5, 21–30)					
Nicodemus (John 3:1–21; 7:50–52; 19:39, 40)					
Thomas (John 11:14–16, 20:24–29)					
Pilate (John 18:33–19:1)					