

Sequential Evangelism *and* Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 25:35–40, 1 Cor. 3:1–3, 1 Pet. 2:2, John 6:54–66, Luke 8:4–15.*

Memory Text: “I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it” (*1 Corinthians 3:2, NKJV*).

Key Thought: In all evangelism and witnessing, it is important that we first present the simple truth of the gospel.

Sequential evangelism is a strategy based on the understanding that people will move from one church program to another when the programs are arranged in the right sequence. This, however, has to be done correctly or else it can do more harm than good.

Our key text shows how Paul understood the fact that we can undo by overdoing. We can deliver so much complex material, and in the wrong order, that the receiver either chokes on the volume, fails to grasp the depth of meaning, or is reluctant to apply personally what is learned. Just as a baby's diet begins with milk and gradually comes to include solid food, babes in Christ must receive spiritual food so that their developing spiritual understanding can assimilate.

This week we will explore how evangelism and witnessing strategies and programs blend and how they build on, and support, each other throughout the church's sequential evangelistic year.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 5.*

Sequential Evangelism and Felt Needs

As we have already noted in earlier weeks, the discovery of individual or community felt needs will influence how we approach people and the programs and services that we make available to them. As we understand felt needs, we are better able to plan a sequence of programs that meets those basic needs, whether for an individual or a community.

Read Luke 9:11. What does this verse indicate regarding Jesus' desire to heal both physically and spiritually? In our spheres, how can we seek to do the same thing for those whom we are trying to reach?

No doubt many who came to Jesus were primarily focused on His ability to relieve physical suffering. Jesus would help them physically, of course, but He would also address a need that perhaps was not keenly felt by each person—the need for spiritual healing.

While God's people today are active in meeting people's personal or community needs, they must follow Jesus' example and somehow help to turn minds to eternal issues.

Examine Matthew 25:35–40. What is the message here? How seriously do we really take those words, or do we just see them as a metaphor? That is, if we really believed them, how differently would we act?

Ministering in any way to those whom Jesus loves and for whom He gave His life is ministering to Jesus Himself. This demonstrates just how closely related Jesus is with His creation. When any are hurting, He is concerned for them and sympathizes with them; we must do the same. Matthew 25:35–40 indicates that meeting felt needs does not always have to be a part of a fixed church strategy. When needs are discovered, they must be met, no matter where a church is in its sequential strategy. While many people will move along from program to program as their spiritual interests develop, others will need spiritual nourishment right away. A church need not abandon its planned sequence of programs and events, but it must be able to respond to any eventuality by having trained personnel and adequate resources available at all times.

Milk and Solid Food

Compare 1 Corinthians 3:1–3 and 1 Peter 2:2. What do you think Paul and Peter were specifically referring to when they spoke of milk and solid food and the need to grow? In your mind, what is theological milk as opposed to solid food?

Evidently the members of the church at Corinth had not progressed very far in their spiritual development after Paul had established the group. Consequently, when he preached to them, his message was an appeal for them to surrender themselves to God and grow in spirituality to the extent that they could grasp the deep truths of the gospel. His preaching at this time would have been evangelistic rather than edifying. Paul would not preach on the deeper themes while the people were not spiritually mature enough to understand and respond to them.

As we reach out to people today, we must be ever mindful of Paul's strategy. We must lead people to surrender to Christ before we expect them to accept the deep, life-changing truths of His Written Word.

When we speak of an evangelistic sequence, it can refer to a long strategy or a short process. When people have progressed through a sequence of programs to the place where they are open to God's call, they can be led through a full evangelistic series or begin a personal Bible study series. Whatever the program the principle is still the same: first the milk (simple gospel themes to begin a relationship) and then the solid food (deeper and more testing truths leading to firm commitment).

Read John 16:12. What important point do we find here? How can we learn to apply this principle in the ways in which we deal with others?

A new Seventh-day Adventist was so excited about the truth he had learned that he wanted to tell everyone. Often, the first thing he wanted to share with others was all about "the mark of the beast." However well-meaning, he was a prime example of how truth needs to be presented in a sequential manner.

Think about some Bible truth that you struggled with at first that you found hard to accept. Over time, how did you eventually settle into that truth? What did you learn from this experience that could help you to be more sensitive in your outreach to others?

Testing Truths

A testing truth is a biblical teaching that, once understood, challenges the individual to make significant changes in his or her personal beliefs or lifestyle. Some testing truths, such as seventh-day Sabbath observance and the avoidance of unclean foods, impact both belief and lifestyle. This underscores once again the necessity of leading people to accept Christ before urging them to do things for Him.

John 6:54–66 shows that some people turned away from Jesus when they faced a testing truth. Why did some who had followed Jesus eventually turn away? What lesson is here for us personally? What “testing truths” still, perhaps, challenge your commitment to Jesus?

Many who had witnessed, and benefited from, the feast on the mountainside the previous day followed Jesus in order to be fed again. As Jesus attempted to turn their minds to spiritual things by using the illustration of His body and blood, many turned away. It wasn’t that they could not grasp the truth of salvation through Christ alone; it was that they refused to accept it. It was a testing time, and when their personal wants were not met, they chose to walk away.

Read John 14:15. In what ways do these words present a “testing truth”?

Here is a challenge for those who claim to love Jesus to consider seriously their commitment to Him. Sooner or later the time will come when a professed belief will be tested by the call to action. The reality is that sometimes, at any stage in the evangelism process, people turn aside when faced with testing truths. Experience has shown, however, that people respond more easily and positively to a testing truth when a love relationship with the Savior has been cultivated. In other words, it is still true that the right sequence brings the best results.

Jesus had many things that He wanted to tell the disciples, but He knew that they would not understand them yet (*see John 16:12*). His promise that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth (*John 16:13*) is a promise that extends to our time, to us, and to those we seek to lead to Christ.

However free the gift of grace is, the *commitment* that results from accepting that gift can, at times, be very costly. How can you help someone struggling with this cost, whatever the specifics? What have you learned about the cost of commitment that you could share with someone who is facing the same challenge?

Measuring Spiritual Growth

Just because we deliver biblical information through a public lecture, seminar, or Bible study, there is no guarantee that we have influenced those present in a spiritual way. Many people have attended an evangelistic series, a Revelation seminar, a Bible study, or maybe all of the above. Though they might have gained an intellectual understanding of Bible truth, this doesn't mean that they have integrated these truths into their lives.

How, then, can we better determine that people who hear what we have to say are being impacted by truth in a life-changing way?

One important way in which we can measure people's spiritual growth is by asking questions. Asking questions is a good way to gauge a person's spiritual understanding and growth. It is best to ask open-ended questions. These are questions that encourage an informative answer and that cannot be answered simply by yes or no.

Some typical questions might be, What do you think these verses are saying to us today? How would you share this Bible truth with a friend? How do you feel about God's promise to you? What changes do you think you need to make in your life, in your attitude toward others, and in how you live in general, because of what you have been studying? How do these truths help you to love Jesus more? Of all the things you have been learning, what impresses you the most? What gives you the most hope? The most fear?

Bible studies, as well as other evangelistic presentations, should be arranged in a logical and orderly sequence. That is, the more simple and easy-to-understand studies are presented first, while more complex studies are presented later in the series when the Bible student's understanding has grown. It is important that searching questions be asked throughout each study to gauge spiritual understanding and growth.

Look up the following verses and consider why a God who knows everything would ask such questions: *Gen. 3:9, 13; Matt. 16:13–15; 22:41–46; Mark 9:33; Luke 2:46.* What does this tell us about how questions can be a powerful tool for helping people grow in God's grace?

Preparing a Harvest

Leading a person along in his or her spiritual journey is like preparing for a harvest. Anyone who has worked a vegetable garden knows that there is a definite time frame and sequence of steps to follow if the desired harvest is to be realized. We must dig in the soil, remove the weeds, plant the seeds, and water the garden. It is also necessary to create the right environment for the plants; some may require full sunlight, while others may need some shade. Furthermore, it is necessary to protect the plants from birds and other garden pests. In other words, plants in a garden must be nurtured from seeds to fruitful and mature plants. For people on the spiritual journey, a similar process begins before they are baptized, and it must continue afterward, as well. Ideally a person is nurtured along until he or she is able to start nurturing others. This truth again underscores the vital nature of a planned sequence that provides the right time frames, takes the right steps, and creates the best nurturing and protective environment.

Read the parable of the sower and Jesus' explanation in Luke 8:4–15. What challenges does this parable bring to us in regard to nurturing to maturity the seed that falls on good ground? See also John 16:7, 8, 13.

Jesus' explanation of the parable reveals some interesting facts. Verse 12 suggests that some people began to believe but were sidetracked by the devil before their belief was firmly established. Verse 13 describes some who received the word with joy. They believed for a while, but, when tempted, they chose another direction. Verse 14 mentions another group who heard but did not go on to Christian maturity. Most of the people started on the journey toward Christ and His kingdom, but things happened at various stages along the way that prevented their growth progress.

Simply sowing the seed is rarely enough to bring about a good harvest. Our challenge as a church, and as individuals, is to sow the gospel seed and then sequentially nurture to maturity all those who begin the journey.

What part of the parable best describes your own spiritual experience? What choices can you make that can improve your situation?

Further Study: Finding a Target Audience

By now you will have discovered that the evangelism strategy we are following week to week will take longer than one quarter to achieve. For instance, we would not expect that the local evangelistic training opportunities mentioned in Lesson 3 will be discovered, planned, and attended in just one week. However, while you are considering training and where your ministry will fit into your church's overall plans, it is important that you consider your target audience.

The following points are worth considering:

1. In consultation with your pastor, elders, and evangelism leaders, decide upon your witnessing and evangelism programs and target audiences. Considering your target audience will help you to focus on all aspects of the process. For instance, with a children's program, it will be better to advertise in schools and in neighborhoods that contain young families. Other target audiences may be the retired, the unemployed, students, and so on.
2. Focusing on a target audience will help you to choose the best personnel, location, time, and follow-up strategies. It will also help in effective evaluation at the conclusion of your program, as well as providing you with a specific prayer focus.
3. You may not have to look further than your church to select a target group. Consider people who attend church but are not baptized, or the church's unbaptized young people, or people who regularly attend special church or church-school programs.

Discussion Questions:

❶ “One truth received into the heart will make room for still another truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 449. In what sequence should the truths we hold be presented in order to increase the effectiveness in our outreach? Why should Christ's substitutionary death always be at the forefront of all that we teach?

❷ “Christ drew the hearts of His hearers to Him by the manifestation of His love, and then, little by little, as they were able to bear it, He unfolded to them the great truths of the kingdom. We also must learn to adapt our labors to the condition of the people—to meet men where they are.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 57. How should love for those to whom we are speaking to about God's Word temper the way we present Bible truth, especially points of doctrine that might challenge a person's existing beliefs, or do we need to?

No Longer Alone

“Sometimes, I wonder if my mother has seen me but didn’t recognize me,” 16-year-old Ginny said.

Born in the Haitian countryside, Ginny was given up at birth. She lived in several different homes and even lived on the streets. When Ginny was 4, a woman took her home to live with her. “I got to go to school!” Ginny said. “But when Ginny was 10, the woman invited a man to live in the house. He beat Ginny and tried to rape her. “I screamed, but no one came to help me,” she said stoically. “I was so scared; I couldn’t sleep.”

Ginny left the woman’s home and lived with a neighbor, where she cleaned house in exchange for food. Ginny was mistreated in this home, too.

“I’ve suffered a lot,” Ginny said. “I just wanted to have a home and a mother.”

One day someone told Ginny that her mother was in Port-au-Prince. They gave her a telephone number. Ginny called the number and heard her mother’s voice. She learned that she had five sisters. When Ginny asked if she could visit, her mother agreed.

Excited that at last she’d have a home and a family, Ginny made plans to visit her mother.

But the January 12 earthquake shattered Ginny’s plans. Ginny survived the earthquake, but she lost everything else. She searched for her mother’s home to find it was now only a pile of rubble. “Day and night, I wonder if my mother and sisters are still alive somewhere,” she said. “I came so close to meeting her, and then the earthquake took everything away.”

Ginny made her way to a displaced-persons camp, where ADRA provides shelter, food, and understanding adults who can help her to deal with the traumas she’s experienced. ADRA is working with other agencies to keep these children safe and unite them with their families. They have given Ginny hope.

Ginny met another girl who also was separated from her family. “We look out for each other,” she said. “For the first time in my life, I have a sister. We are no longer alone.”

Our church has more than 330,000 members in Haiti. ADRA has been working to help the Haitian people for some thirty years. Your mission offerings and a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is helping to rebuild the work in Haiti so that more people can experience God’s love.

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