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May the Lord bless you!

Spread the Word

*A Guide to Personal Witnessing
Through Conversation, Literature, Media,
and Other Seed-sowing Activities*



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Introduction

Jesus gave us a model for fulfilling the mission of the church when He used agricultural terminology to describe it. He referred to the soil, the seed, and the harvest to explain the process of making disciples. The soil of the heart must be prepared by friendship and service, the seed of God's Word must be planted in various ways, spiritual interest must be cultivated with ongoing Bible study, decisions for Christ must be harvested with loving appeals, and the harvest must be preserved with systematic discipleship.

The primary aim of *Spread the Word* is to inspire, train, and equip local churches and their members to engage actively in the second phase of the disciple-making process—planting seeds of truth. Without this vital practice, church growth is impossible. In the natural world there can be no crop to cultivate or harvest to reap without first scattering seed. In the same way, there can be no spiritual life or growth without the power of God's Word planted in the heart. We are “born again . . . through the word of God” (1 Peter 1:23; see also 1 Peter 2:2). For this reason Jesus invites every disciple to become an active sower of the seed.

This book is designed for both members and leaders of local churches. It gives deeply spiritual and highly practical instruction for individual members, while also explaining how to develop and run active seed-sowing ministries in the local church. And while it will teach you how to find those interested in studying the Bible further, it will not explain how to give Bible studies or to conduct public evangelistic meetings. These training topics will be covered in the GROW Bible study

resources dedicated to the cultivate and harvest phases of the disciple-making process (visit grow.adventist.org for more information). Additionally, while the practical instruction in this book is mostly universal, there may be occasions when it doesn't fully apply to certain cultures or contexts without some adaptation.

It is our hope and prayer that after reading this book, you and your church will be inspired and equipped to spread the Word as never before. Yet let us always remember that “neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

— The General Conference Sabbath School and
Personal Ministries Department

1

Spiritual Power for Witnessing

P rayer, Bible study, and witnessing are essential for spiritual life. They are the necessary ingredients that keep our spiritual engines running and simultaneously prepare us for our heavenly home. Three ingredients doesn't sound too complicated, does it? Yet how fast we forget them. How prone we are to neglect what we know to be spiritual necessities in the life of every believer.

Sometimes we pray and read our Bibles, but choose not to share our faith. Ellen White points out that this neglect leads to a decline in spirituality: "He who does nothing but pray will soon cease to pray, or his prayers will become a formal routine." "When men . . . cease to work earnestly for the Master, who worked earnestly for them, they lose the subject matter of prayer and have no incentive to devotion. Their prayers become personal and selfish" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 101). Even a vibrant spirituality can soon become weak if we have no evangelistic purpose in our lives. We are called to be witnesses for Jesus:

“Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 195).

However, an equal but opposite pitfall occurs when we try to witness apart from a life of personal prayer and Bible study. We can never become a fountain of life until we drink the living water ourselves. We can't give salvation to the world

Herein lies one of the greatest hindrances to witnessing—a dying spirituality.

unless we first receive it from Christ. Just as a failure to witness spoils our devotional life, a failure to commune with our Savior regularly will render our witness powerless. While the majority of this book will focus on why and how to witness, the

negative impact of trying to witness without spiritual power is so common and foundational that it deserves special attention in this opening chapter.

Jesus knew that witnessing would require a power we don't naturally have. Thus He promised the disciples a special gift: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me” (Acts 1:8). Attempting to witness without the power of the Spirit in our lives is a failing proposition. Yet as Christians, how often we fail to realize this! We read books and take classes, even studying the techniques of Jesus Himself, while personal devotion to Christ is neglected. How desperately we need the spiritual power that only earnest prayer and personal Bible study can bring. Let us now consider Scripture's repeated warnings against the dangers of a powerless Christianity, followed by an exploration of the glorious remedy that can be ours through faith in Christ.

Form Without Power

One of the greatest hindrances to our Christian witness occurs when we are too easily satisfied with a superficial religious experience. The Bible refers to this as a special characteristic of the last days: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

A “form” of godliness is an appearance of godliness. We may go to church on Sabbath and even participate in outreach, but the power that transforms the life can still be missing. Ellen White strikes at the root of the problem for many end-time believers: “The love of the world, the love of some darling sin, has weaned the heart from the love of prayer and of meditation on sacred things. A formal round of religious services is kept up; but where is the love of Jesus? Spirituality is dying” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 538). Herein lies one of the greatest hindrances to witnessing—a dying spirituality. It’s hard to be an effective witness if you’re losing your interest in heavenly things. It’s hard to be enthusiastic about your faith if you aren’t experiencing victory through the power of God in your own life.

David understood this all too well. After his great sins of adultery and murder (see 2 Samuel 11), he cried out for forgiveness and restoration: “Create in me a clean heart, O God. . . . Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You” (Psalm 51:10-13). The faulty but repentant king realized that until the “joy of salvation” was restored in his heart, he would never be able to “teach transgressors” the ways of God in a manner that would

lead to their conversion. To be a successful witness requires deep conviction and genuine enthusiasm about the message of salvation. But how can we persuade others of heaven's peace and joy if our own hearts are full of guilt and anxiety over sins not forsaken?

Perhaps nothing will have a greater impact on the effectiveness of a Christian's witness than to have the joy of salvation and a fervent love for Christ restored. This is why the Bible urges us to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12) and to "make your call and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). These admonitions are not suggesting that we can save ourselves, but that we should make no delay in coming to Christ for the healing and salvation that only He can give.

Truth Without Spirit

Similar to a form of religion without the power, the Bible also warns Christians to be wary of possessing the truth without the Spirit. Throughout His teachings Jesus emphasized the need for more than an accurate set of beliefs. He declared that those who worship God "must worship in *spirit* and truth" (John 4:24). Without the Spirit, the truth is powerless. Jesus sought to illustrate this in the parable of the 10 virgins in Matthew 25. The five foolish virgins in the parable failed to prepare for the coming of the bridegroom by bringing enough oil. This oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to trust and obey God.

Notice Ellen White's penetrating description of these believers: "The class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites. They have a regard for the truth, they have advocated the truth, they are attracted to those who believe the truth; but they have not yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit's working.

They have not fallen upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and permitted their old nature to be broken up. . . . The Spirit works upon man's heart, according to his desire and consent implanting in him a new nature; but the class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him; therefore they do not know how to trust, how to look and live. Their service to God degenerates into a form" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 411).

What a sad paradox. The foolish virgins "have a regard for the truth" and have even "advocated the truth," but they "have not held communion" with God. They haven't "permitted their old nature to be broken up" by the Spirit. Though they are "attracted to those who believe the truth," their failure to yield "themselves to the Holy Spirit's working" has led to the fearful conclusion that "they do not know God." In the final analysis "their service to God" has degenerated into a form. Here again it is evident that a failure to commune with God, and to yield to the working of the Holy Spirit, can lead a Christian's witness to become a lifeless form.

The Lukewarm Christian

One more warning against a powerless religious experience is found in the book of Revelation. The counsel of Christ in His letter to the church of Laodicea is that they are not cold or hot, but lukewarm. They view themselves as being in "need of nothing" (Revelation 3:17), but the True Witness sees their hearts and lives as they truly are—"wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." Here we have another example of looking good on the outside while being destitute of spiritual life on the inside.

So what does Jesus advise them to do? “I counsel you to buy from Me” (verse 18) gold, white garments, and eye salve. The key is not so much what they are told to buy, but where they must go to get it. They won’t find what they need by attending religious events, or by serving the poor, or by any other attempts at good behavior or righteous causes. “Buy from Me,” He says. The only remedy is to go to Jesus.

In the last part of His letter to the Laodicean church, Jesus represents Himself as standing outside looking for entrance: “I stand at the door and knock” (verse 20). He loves us still, and if we will open the door, He promises to come in and “dine” with us (see verses 19, 20). But what is meant by the promise of dining with Jesus? Ellen White explains using a vivid description of communion with God:

*In His mercy,
Jesus offers us
a remedy.*

“The Lord draws out the soul in prayer, and gives us to feel His precious love. We have a nearness to Him, and can hold sweet communion with Him. We obtain distinct views of His tenderness and compassion, and our hearts are broken and melted with contemplation of the love that is given to us. We feel indeed an abiding Christ in the soul. We abide in Him, and feel at home with Jesus. The promises flow into the soul. Our peace is like a river, wave after wave of glory rolls into the heart, and indeed we sup with Jesus and He with us” (*Prayer*, p. 11).

That last phrase, “indeed we sup with Jesus and He with us,” equates this precious experience with the promise of Jesus to *dine* with those who hold communion with Him. It can be so easy to have the form but lack the power, to have the truth but lack the Spirit, to bear the Christian name but fail to abide

in Christ. The Bible consistently warns of this condition, which stands as a formidable barrier to the effective witness of God's people. *Especially* is this true for those of us living in the last days. Notice that Paul's counsel against a form of godliness without power, Jesus' parable of the 10 virgins, and the message of Christ to the Laodiceans have special application to the end of time. Yet in His mercy Jesus offers us a remedy. He invites us to draw near, commune with Him in prayer and in His Word, and experience His transforming power in our lives.

The Source of Life and Power

Jesus declared, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The Bible further testifies that "in Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Jesus is the source of spiritual life, and as we draw life from Him, we are guaranteed to bear "much fruit." This is a wonderful promise. Of course, the opposite is also true. Christ's power and virtue is so essential for effective witnessing that believers can never expect positive returns if they fail to abide in Him—"for without Me you can do nothing."

For the disciple the primary way to abide in Christ is through regular prayer and time in His Word. This is the Christian's source of spiritual life and power and the meaning behind Jesus' mysterious words "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Just as we would soon die without eating and drinking, so our spiritual life decays and soon dies without regular communion with God. For this reason Ellen White offers pointed counsel to Christians, emphasizing the danger of neglecting time alone with God:

“Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. No other means of grace can be substituted and the health of the soul be preserved. . . . Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient, and you lose your hold on God” (*Prayer*, p. 12). “Satan well knows that all whom he can lead to neglect prayer and the searching of the Scriptures will be overcome by his attacks. Therefore he invents every possible device to engross the mind” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 519).

God gives these warnings to help us in our weakness. If we fail to commune with Him, He knows that we will be powerless to resist sin and selfishness. But if we *do* prioritize time alone with Christ, it will bear fruit in our lives and in our labors for others: “Nothing is more needed in our work than the practical results of communion with God. . . . This will impart to the worker a power that nothing else can give. Of this power he must not allow himself to be deprived” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 512). Communion with God not only provides for our own spiritual growth, but brings “practical results” in our witness to others!

This communion includes not only prayer, but reading and meditating on the Bible. Through its pages God communes with us directly and personally. But often we fail to recognize this. Consider the experience of Kristin, who was a new Christian when she heard that Jesus’ followers are those who “know his voice” (John 10:4). She noticed how some Christians would say “God told me” this or “God told me” that. So when she prayed, she listened hard for His “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12), but never seemed to hear it. She loved Jesus and in her heart felt impressed by the truths she had learned, but her fear of not knowing God’s voice made her worry that she wasn’t a true Christian. Perhaps you or someone you know has shared these fears.

You can imagine how happy Kristin was to learn that even if believers never hear Jesus speak to them audibly, they can still be familiar with His voice through His written Word! Consider this encouraging counsel: “The Bible is God’s voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe would we open God’s Word, and with what earnestness would we search its precepts! The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 393). “Only he who receives the Scriptures as the voice of God speaking to himself is a true learner. He trembles at the Word; for to him it is a living reality” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 59).

Through prayer and the Bible, Jesus communes with His people and impresses their hearts. The Holy Spirit speaks spiritual life into their souls and illuminates their minds with glimpses of the glory of God. Thus every Christian may come to know Jesus as a personal Savior. Motivation and power for witnessing is fueled by this time spent in communion with Christ.

Making Peace With God

Now let us consider the importance of abiding with Christ through the testimony of a believer named Rob. There is no question that Rob had experienced a true conversion. The love of Christ and the truth of eternal realities had been clearly revealed to him through the Scriptures. But after a period of time his devotional life began to slip. When he neglected time with God, he would feel guilty and recommit himself the next time he prayed. But gradually the neglect became more frequent. Worldly attractions became stronger, and his character weaknesses became more prominent.

When Rob confessed to God, he experienced a sense of peace, but his frequent failures caused him to wonder if he could ever truly overcome his many faults. He began to feel insincere asking for forgiveness when he didn't seem able or willing to change. He was still going to Sabbath School and church, return-

“A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs.”

ing tithes, and even participating in outreach activities and performing church duties—but joy and love were dying, and everything felt like an obligation. His effectiveness in witnessing had been declining for some time, but now he was losing any motivation to share his faith.

Rob's life had become a form of godliness without the power. His mind was preoccupied with earthly interests. He was losing his hold on God.

Feeling empty and increasingly uncertain about his salvation, Rob began to think about the zeal, joy, and peace he had once had with God. How had he gotten to this point? He turned to the Scriptures for encouragement and read Isaiah 27:5: “Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me.” He longed for that peace. He remembered the story of Jacob, who wrestled with God until he was assured of His blessing (see Genesis 32:24-28). He decided to get serious about seeking God (see Jeremiah 29:13). He started going to bed earlier so that he could get up in time to spend a thoughtful hour in prayer and devotion every day. He made his time with God the number-one priority in his life.

Even though he still had many shortcomings, Rob felt the smile of God upon him when he prioritized his time with Jesus. Each morning he made God his refuge, and poured out

his heart before Him (see Psalm 62:8). He openly confessed his faults and failures, and pleaded with God for a new heart (see Psalm 51:10). He soon felt impressed to set aside the worthless distractions that had been preoccupying his time. He became more careful in what he chose to read and watch. As he meditated on the Bible each morning, he became excited about the truth again. He started looking forward to Sabbath School and church. Throughout the day he felt stronger to resist temptation, and he experienced victory where before he had felt helpless. Through the power of communion with God, the joy and peace of salvation was being restored. Rob couldn't keep the truth to himself anymore. He was on fire for God, and his passion for witnessing had been rekindled.

The revival that Rob experienced is the greatest need in the church today: "A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow His blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it. Our heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing. A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer" (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 121).

Come to Jesus

So what should you do if you fear that your Christian life and witness is more form than power? First, understand that the answer is not to put a halt to your witnessing efforts. If you wait

until you're perfect to witness for Christ, you'll never feel ready. Remember that there are three key components needed for your spiritual life to prosper—prayer, Bible study, *and* witnessing. Strengthening the first two while neglecting the third will cause a different set of problems. It's not witnessing that needs to stop, but rather any habits or practices that may be separating you from God. And for this we desperately need Jesus.

A revival of spiritual power can be ours only when we seek it in Christ and His Word. The True Witness to the Laodiceans (see Revelation 3:14) points out our pitiful condition for this very reason—so that we'll see our desperate need of Him! He highlights our flaws, not to condemn us, but to save us (see John 3:17). He tells us our failures, not to discourage us, but because He so deeply loves us (see Revelation 3:19). He longs for us to lay our feelings of guilt and shame down at His feet: “We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 64).

No matter what condition you find yourself in, the promises of God are for you. Jesus invites you with outstretched hand, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He promises never to turn you away: “Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. You may say, I am sinful, very sinful. You may be; but the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. He turns no weeping, contrite one away” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 568; see also John 6:37).

Many Christians lack spiritual power in their lives because they don't truly believe that communion with Christ is transformational or necessary. These believers fail to believe fully in

His promises of forgiveness, cleansing, and peace (see Jeremiah 29:13; Isaiah 27:5; 1 John 1:9). They believe more in their weakness than in His strength. Enslaved by sinful thoughts, feelings, and habits, they question whether time alone with God will do any real good. But this is exactly the lie the devil wants them to believe. He wants to rob us of the power of Christ. The truth is that Jesus is “able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him” (Hebrews 7:25). Yes, “we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

Whether you’ve wandered far from God or simply desire more spiritual power in your life and witness, the recipe is the same. Come to Christ, just as you are, every morning. Kneel and pray and linger in His presence. Pour out your heart before Him. Confess your sins, put them away, and pray for purity of soul. Read and meditate on His Word and claim His promises. If you don’t feel in the mood, come by faith. If you miss a morning, come in the evening. If you don’t sense an immediate change, keep coming anyway. You don’t get into shape the first time you step on a treadmill. Be consistent. Don’t doubt His power just because you don’t understand how it works. Trust God and His Word. Let nothing prevent you from pressing close to His side.

The hope you have in God will not disappoint (see Romans 5:5). Day by day, your heart will change. Your thoughts and habits will change. You will be infused with spiritual power. The love of Christ will thrill your soul and compel you to live for Him. You will be filled with love for God and your neighbor. You will rejoice over sins forgiven, victories gained, and “the love of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:10). The joy of salvation will be restored to you, the power of the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will be His witness.

4

Sowing Bountifully

In explaining the parable of the sower (see Matthew 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8), Jesus told us plainly that the seed represents “the word of God” (Luke 8:11). Perhaps nothing could better describe the mysterious power of God’s Word than the abundant life contained in a seed. It’s almost impossible not to wonder at the incredible miracle of a tiny seed’s becoming a flowering plant or a mighty tree.

As with natural seed, the spiritual seed of God’s Word is a miracle waiting to happen. The Lord declares through Isaiah: “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). What an incredible promise! Just as we have confidence that a seed planted in proper soil will result in a fruitful plant, so we can have faith that when we share the Word of God, it will not return empty. There is supernatural power in the Word to convert souls to Christ and to cause them to grow spiritually (see 1 Peter 1:23; 2:2).

There is supernatural power in the Word.

The apostle Paul declares: “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6). We can have confidence that God’s Word will accomplish its purpose. It will awaken those living only for this world to a love for Christ and a deeper longing for eternal truth. “Sanctify them [set them apart] by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). The more seeds of truth we plant, the greater will be the harvest of souls.

Every Member Is Needed

In light of this powerful formula, that the more we plant the more we reap, should we not plant the gospel seed wherever we go? God is calling on the members of His church to do just that. Regardless of age, background, talents, or gifts, every member of the church can spread the Word. This is exactly what we find the early believers doing in the book of Acts.

Just after the martyrdom of the deacon Stephen, “a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1). While the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, the lay members of the church were scattered abroad. And what does the Bible tell us about these believers? “Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (verse 4). To “preach” doesn’t refer only to proclaiming God’s Word publicly, but includes sharing the “word of truth” (James 1:18) in personal settings as well. The witness of these laypeople was so powerful that a new church was established in Antioch as a result of their truth-sharing labors (see Acts 11:19-26).

The church has been commissioned to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). As disciples of Christ, sharing

the truth is an indispensable part of our calling as “fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). Consider the emphasis Ellen White places on the vital role of every member in sharing the truth of God’s Word with others:

“The dissemination of the truth of God is not confined to a few ordained ministers. *The truth is to be scattered* by all who claim to be disciples of Christ” (*Christian Service*, p. 68; emphasis supplied).

“Satan is now seeking to hold God’s people in a state of inactivity, to keep them from acting their part in *spreading the truth*, that they may at last be weighed in the balance and found wanting” (*ibid.*, p. 37; emphasis supplied).

“Unbelief, like the pall of death, is surrounding our churches, because they do not exercise the talents God has given them, by imparting the light to those who know not the precious truth. The Lord calls for the pardoned souls, those who rejoice in the light, to *make known the truth* to others” (*ibid.*; emphasis supplied).

“Let ministers teach church members that in order to grow in spirituality, they must carry the burden that the Lord has laid upon them—the burden of *leading souls into the truth*” (*ibid.*, p. 69; emphasis supplied).

The Lord has given every Christian the privilege and responsibility of scattering, spreading, imparting, and making known the truth to others. This “burden” should not be viewed in the sense of an unwanted or arbitrarily assigned chore. Rather, it reflects the natural love and concern for others that is felt by every person who has received the free gift of salvation. We cannot help feeling, even if only to a limited degree, the burden

of Christ for those who do not yet know Him as their personal Savior. As Seventh-day Adventists we also carry a special burden for those who do not understand the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14. The good news of the gospel, the love of our Savior, and the powerful conviction of the Holy Spirit compel us to share our message with the world!

Consider the story of Debbie, a faithful Seventh-day Adventist. She loved God and felt a burden to share the message of salvation with others, but she was extremely timid and shy. As Debbie considered what she could do, she felt impressed to distribute tracts. With great trepidation she went from house to house for two blocks, leaving a gospel tract at every door. She then went home and prayed for the blessing of God to rest on every home she had visited. She claimed the promise in Isaiah 55:11 that God's Word would not return empty but would accomplish His purpose.

A woman in one of the houses read the tract left by Debbie. The Lord spoke to her heart. The more she read, the more the Holy Spirit impressed her with the truth. She had to get more literature, but where? She looked on the back of the tract and found a church address. Soon this woman was attending Sabbath School and church. She came for several months until a visiting minister made an appeal one day at the end of his sermon. The woman sprung from her seat and came forward to commit her life to Jesus. Imagine the joy that filled Debbie's heart that day! Even if you are as fearful as Debbie, God can use *you* to spread the Word. (Story adapted from Home Missionary Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Lift Him Up*, p. 39.)

Beside All Waters

The prophet Isaiah emphasizes the importance of a wide distribution of the gospel seed: “Blessed are you who sow beside all waters” (Isaiah 32:20). When doing this, we should utilize multiple methods in order to meet the needs of various circumstances. In the remaining chapters of this book, we will explore the following ways to sow the gospel seed:

- Conversations, testimonies, and invitations
- Literature distribution
- Media sharing
- House-to-house visitation

The above topics relate to planting seeds of truth by introducing people to spiritual things. For training on how to give ongoing Bible studies or to conduct evangelistic meetings, see the resources dedicated to the *cultivate* and *harvest* phases of the GROW model at grow.adventist.org.

When it comes to planting the seed of God’s Word, different methods are needed to reach different people. While we sometimes dismiss a method because it influences a smaller number of people, we should remember that those same individuals may be difficult to reach in any other way. Therefore we should not limit ourselves to only one or two methods of spreading the truth. To employ a fishing analogy, we should “cast the net” in as many ways as possible.

Spiritual Interests

Growing churches have a specific trait that sets them apart from stagnant or declining churches. They spend a significant amount of time, energy, and resources searching for people who are open to or interested in eternal things. In evangelistic

terms we refer to these individuals as “interests” or “spiritual interests.” All around us there are people with a hunger and thirst for something more than this world has to offer. Mission-driven churches never stop looking for these individuals. Take a moment to consider the following questions:

- Do you seek out spiritual interests?
- Do you pray for spiritual interests?
- Do you put forth efforts to lead spiritual interests into the truth?
- Does your church create and oversee plans to find, pray for, and develop spiritual interests?

Healthy, growing churches have an interest coordinator that oversees an active interest list. They regularly search for new interests and make plans to generate new ones. Then they pray, plan, and work for these interests to nurture and guide them into the truth and to eventually integrate them into the life and mission of the church.

So how do we find spiritual interests? The best way to identify those who are open to the truth is to plant spiritual seeds! When we spread invitations to Bible-based studies and

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events, for instance, we find those we may not have otherwise known to be interested. Similarly, when we share a testimony, an inspiring piece of literature, or a powerful sermon video, it can help us to identify people who are open to truth. In

essence, the more seeds we plant, the more spiritually interested people we will find, and the more disciples we will be able to make!

Through acts of providence and the influence of His Spirit, God is generating a spiritual interest in many people in our communities: “All over the world men and women are looking wistfully to heaven. . . . Many are on the verge of the kingdom, waiting only to be gathered in” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109). The only way to identify and gather into the body of Christ those who are open to salvation is to keep planting seeds of spiritual truth—through conversations, invitations, literature, and media.

Morning and Evening

We should ask God each day to use us as His witnesses. This we can do by praying for doors of opportunity to be opened to plant spiritual seeds: “Continue earnestly in prayer . . . that God would open to us a door for the word” (Colossians 4:2, 3). If clear opportunities don’t present themselves, we may have to take the first steps in building relationships and creating witnessing opportunities. Remember, we’re called to mingle with people, seek the lost, and fish for souls.

The Bible tells us that “he who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap” (Ecclesiastes 11:4). If we put off sharing spiritual truth until what we perceive to be the perfect time or conditions, we may never do it. The passage goes on to say, “In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good” (verses 5, 6). We can’t know the perfect time to offer a Bible study, or to open a spiritual conversation, or to share a tract. Therefore the Bible urges us to sow seed “in the morning” *and* “in the evening.” Perhaps both will prosper!

Successful soul winners don't sow sporadically, but continually: "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who *continually* goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:5, 6). Many people who seem to be open to Bible truth never fully accept it. The key to significant growth, then, is to be continually planting seeds and thus finding more spiritual interests. When this is done, there will always be a harvest of "sheaves" giving us reason to rejoice. Growing churches reap bountiful harvests because they sow bountiful seeds of truth!



GROW Your Church is an initiative of the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It highlights five essential phases of making disciples:

PREPARE the soil of the heart with friendship and service.

PLANT the Word with spiritual conversations or literature/media.

CULTIVATE spiritual interest with ongoing Bible studies.

HARVEST decisions with appeals to follow Christ and be baptized.

PRESERVE the harvest with ongoing discipleship training.



*Spread the Word** especially aids churches in the **Plant** phase of disciple-making—a phase in which the truth of God's Word is shared through conversations, testimonies, invitations, literature, and digital media.

To learn about the five GROW goals for every local church, and for training videos, customized logos, and additional resources, visit:

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