

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 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:

- ① **When and how do you cross the line between evaluation and the kind of judgment that we are warned against in Scripture?**
- ② **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?**
- ③ **Consider a current ministry in your church and suggest a good evaluation process of the program, the process, and the personnel.**

Learning Lessons of Love

I had been assigned to a congregation in Cameroon that was facing a huge crisis.

A man had given to the church land on which the congregation built a simple church. But the land transfer had not been completed when the man died, and his widow wanted the land back. She took the church to court, and the judge ruled that the church must buy the land for a huge sum of money or vacate the land within two weeks.

I called the members together to pray. But some were angry, and others felt the situation was hopeless. Those who were willing prayed day and night that God would intervene.

On the Sabbath before we had to vacate the property, I preached on Joshua and his “impossible” situation at Jericho. I challenged the members to believe that God would deliver us just as He had delivered the children of Israel at Jericho.

After the service I invited those who were willing to go with me to visit the woman, who was not a Seventh-day Adventist. Several members refused, saying it would do no good. I sensed that it was these members’ lack of love that had driven this woman to take back the church land.

Those who remained prayed with me that God would cleanse our hearts from animosity and prepare the way. Then we walked to the woman’s home. We arrived at her home singing, and the woman sat listening quietly. I told her that we had come to apologize to her and to ask her forgiveness for treating her unkindly. I recounted her husband’s reason for giving the land to the church, and then I prayed that God would bless her.

Silence fell on the group. Then the woman said, “Last week I dreamed that you would come today. Now go; you’ll hear from me later.” The church members greeted her warmly before we left.

The next day I was called to visit the woman’s home. “I have decided to give the church half the land my husband originally gave you,” she said. “But you must build the school you have planned on the land I am giving you.”

That afternoon we had a prayer and praise meeting in the church. Many confessed their unbelief and the unkindness they had felt toward the woman, and everyone praised God for saving the church. The members’ attitudes have changed, and they often visit this woman and invite her family to the church.

Today an Adventist school serves the community, and the members have learned critical lessons in love, forgiveness, and faith.

YVES MBENDE is chaplain of Adventist University of Cosendai in Cameroon, West Africa.