

FARMER JESUS

Jesus understood His mission was to fulfill Isaiah 61.

- **Luke 4:17-21** And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Though we’re likely very familiar with the opening lines of Isaiah’s prophecy, for our purposes today we will take particular note of its closing lines.

- **Isaiah 61:11** As the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

It is little wonder Christ repeatedly compared soul-winning to agriculture... it was in His mission statement!

THE CYCLE OF EVANGELISM

Like Isaiah 61:11, Christ’s use of the agricultural metaphor repeatedly emphasized the sequential nature of the work. Akin to agricultural production, evangelism is a process, not merely an event.

- **John 4:34-38** Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’
- **Luke 8:4-8** And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Just as the agricultural cycle includes preparing the soil, planting seed, cultivating, harvesting, and preserving the crop, the “Cycle of Evangelism” requires corresponding phases that are essential for true success.

SOIL PREPARATION

- **Luke 8:11-15** “The parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.

- **Adventist Home, p. 145** As the garden must be prepared for the natural seed, so the heart must be prepared for the seed of truth... No one settles upon a raw piece of land with the expectation that it will at once yield a harvest. Diligent, persevering labor must be put forth in the preparation of the soil, the sowing of the seed, and the culture of the crop. So it must be in the spiritual sowing.
- **Christ's Object Lessons, p. 57** The sowers of the seed have a work to do in preparing hearts to receive the gospel. In the ministry of the word there is too much sermonizing, and too little of real heart-to-heart work. There is need of personal labor for the souls of the lost. In Christlike sympathy we should come close to men individually, and seek to awaken their interest in the great things of eternal life. Their hearts may be as hard as the beaten highway, and apparently it may be a useless effort to present the Saviour to them; but while logic may fail to move, and argument be powerless to convince, the love of Christ, revealed in personal ministry, may soften the stony heart, so that the seed of truth can take root.

SEED SOWING

The purpose of soil preparation is to sow seed. In Christ's parable, the seed is the Word of God. At some point, you have to sow some seed!

Too many people make the mistake of not sowing the seed of truth because they're afraid they might do it poorly. While we never want to approach someone with Bible truth in a careless, prayer-less manner, we far too often go to the opposite extreme of being so cautious that we never actually sow the seed. It is better to *risk* failure because of a poor approach than to *guarantee* failure for making no approach at all!

- **Ecclesiastes 11:4-6** He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything. 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.
- **2 Corinthians 9:6** He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.
- **Isaiah 32:20** Blessed are you who sow beside all waters, who send out freely the feet of the ox and the donkey.
- **The Publishing Ministry, p. 395** From the light which God has given me, He desires that His people shall improve every opportunity for disseminating light. They are to sow beside all waters. A couple leave the boat at Samoa. The lady, Mrs. Goward, caught sight of *Desire of Ages* and she expressed her admiration of the book. I made her a present of it, and gave her the little book *Christian Education*. She said when she took it up she could not lay it down. She said she never saw things in print so enlightening and so beneficial. Her husband has been reading *Desire of Ages*. He says it is a wonderful book. Both seem very thankful for these books. Now they leave Samoa for another island... Well, we mean to sow beside all waters. Some fruit may come of the seed sown. I prayed the Lord to open the way that I might find someone interested in the *Desire of Ages*, and then came this chance.
- **Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 7, p. 35** In the parable of the sower, Christ gave an illustration of His own work and that of His servants. The seed fell upon all kinds of soil. Some seed fell upon poor soil, yet the sower did not therefore cease his work. You are to sow the seeds of truth in every place. Wherever you can gain access, hold forth the word of God. Sow beside all waters. You may not at once see the result of your labors, but be not discouraged. Speak the words that Christ gives you. Work in His lines. Go forth everywhere as He did during His ministry on the earth. The world's Redeemer had many hearers, but few followers.

Once the seed has taken root, the new plant must be cultivated. This nurturing work is by far the most time-consuming and labor-intensive phase of the growing cycle. Where soil preparation and seed sowing may take a day or two, cultivation requires continued effort over weeks or months.

The primary way to nurture the growth of the Word in someone's heart is by giving regular Bible studies.

- **1 Peter 2:2** As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.
- **Matthew 28:18-20** And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.
- **Acts 8:30-35** So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"...Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.
- **Evangelism, p. 338** It is not preaching alone that must be done. Far less preaching is needed. More time should be devoted to patiently educating others, giving the hearers opportunity to express themselves. It is instruction that many need, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little.
- **Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 9, p. 196** In visions of the night, representations passed before me of a great reformatory movement among God's people. Many were praising God. The sick were healed, and other miracles were wrought. A spirit of intercession was seen, even as was manifested before the great Day of Pentecost. Hundreds and thousands were seen visiting families and opening before them the word of God.

Crops never harvest themselves.

- **Psalms 126:5, 6** 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.
- **Matthew 9:35-38** But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."
- **Welfare Ministry, p. 93** Personal, individual effort and interest for your friends and neighbors will accomplish more than can be estimated. It is for the want of this kind of labor that souls for whom Christ died are perishing... Your work may accomplish more real good than the more extensive meetings, if they lack in personal effort. When both are combined, with the blessing of God, a more perfect and thorough work may be wrought; but if we can have but one part done, let it be the individual labor of opening the Scriptures in households, making personal appeals, and talking familiarly with the members of the family, not about things of little importance, but of the great themes of redemption.
- **Review and Herald, April 24, 1883** The salvation of sinners requires earnest, personal labor. We are to bear to them the word of life, not to wait for them to come to us. With personal piety and a consistent course of life our earnest heart-felt appeals will be, through God, as sharp arrows of the Almighty to pierce the sin-hardened heart, as sharp sickles to reap a precious harvest for the heavenly garner. If we are co-laborers with Christ, we shall all have sheaves to bring to the Master,--souls saved through our instrumentality.

Once the crop has been harvested, the grain must be preserved as a blessing to the church and a worker for the salvation of other souls. When the evangelism cycle comes full circle, it accomplishes its purpose of making disciples who make other disciples.

- **Nehemiah 8:5-8** And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground... and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.
- **Isaiah 55:10, 11** "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 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.

We must not be satisfied with mere retention of new members. Replication is the ultimate goal, to make another disciple-making disciple. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has plenty of members; we need missionaries!

- **John 4:14** "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."
- **Christian Service, p. 9** 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 receiver becomes a giver.
- **Review and Herald, December 3, 1908** It is an eternal law of Jehovah that he who accepts the truth is to make it his first work to proclaim the truth. But who is it that makes the burden of perishing sinners his own? Among God's people today there is a fearful lack of the sympathy that should be felt for souls unsaved. We talk of Christian missions, the sound of our voice is heard; but do we feel Christ's tender heart-longing for those outside the fold?

It is not uncommon for Christians to express disappointment at meager results from their efforts to win souls. Often times, however, the problem lies in not realizing that the growing cycle is a process involving multiple steps, each of which demands careful planning and hard work.

There are no shortcuts when it comes to winning souls for Christ. If even one step in the evangelism cycle is overlooked, results will suffer. We must prepare the soil of the heart, plant the seed of God's Word, cultivate spiritual interest with ongoing Bible studies, harvest decisions to follow Christ, and preserve those decisions through systematic discipleship. Yet even our best efforts will fail without the power only God can provide.

- **1 Corinthians 3:5-7** Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.
- **In Heavenly Places, p. 331** We are individually to work as though a great responsibility rested upon us. We are to manifest untiring energy and tact and zeal in this work and take the burden, feeling the peril in which our neighbors and friends are placed. We are to work as Christ worked. We are to present the truth as it is in Jesus, that the blood of souls shall not be upon our garments. At the same time we are to feel entire dependence and trust in God, for we know we cannot do anything without His grace and power to help. A Paul may plant, and an Apollos water, but God alone can give the increase. Then we are indeed to go forward to the work, weeping, sowing the precious seeds of truth and trusting in God to give the increase.