ROOTED TO SPREAD

After preparing the soil with friendship and service, the next phase in the disciple-making process is to plant seeds of spiritual truth. This is accomplished by introducing spiritual elements into our conversations, offering personal testimonies, or sharing truth-filled literature or media. Planting the seed of God’s Word may nurture spiritual interest if the soil of the heart is fertile. This stage is a natural extension of the preparation stage. Planting these seeds is absolutely essential if we are ever to eventually reap a spiritual harvest.

This week’s lesson looks at a couple of the primary ways that spiritual planting takes place. As the narrative of John 4—the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well—evidences, a spiritual conversation can take place where seeds can be planted through a testimony or an invitation. The chapter is an example of a conversation going from the mundane into the spiritual.

The second manner of planting is through the sharing of literature and media. Various manifestations of the seed exist solely to implant truth and spiritual material into the soil. Regardless of technique, the mindset of planting seeds should be “well rooted” in the mindset of the Christian disciple.
Write out John 4:7–26 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out John 4:19–26. You may also re-write the passage in your own words, outline, or mind-map the chapter.
AS THE LEAVES OF AUTUMN

At a certain point in all of our soil preparation, we will have an opportunity to cross the line into the planting. Sometimes the opportunity is obvious, while at other times it’s implicit. Some say that Christian outreach should be limited to community service and acts of kindness, but the ministry, teachings, and example of Christ, as evidenced by John 4, indicate the contrary. Christ continually sought opportunities to interrupt people’s lives with the spiritual realities of the kingdom of God. Christ’s approach will be revisited in the inVite section.

When one-to-one opportunities are not available, the usage of tracts is quite effective. As the preacher Charles Spurgeon said, “When preaching and private talk are not available, you have a tract ready. . . . Get good striking tracts, or none at all. But a telling, touching gospel tract may often be the seed of eternal life; therefore, do not go out without your tracts” (The Soul Winner, 141).

Tracts and spiritual literature should contain the clear gospel message, the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16). In the parable of the sower, the seed is the Word of God; therefore, good tracts should contain Scripture. These messengers can go where we cannot go; they can be read at different times when we cannot speak. God has used the form of gospel literature on countless occasions to bring the most random of people to a genuine relationship with Christ.

In many ways, it is also the perfect instrument for the introvert. While extroverts might enjoy the verbal interaction of sharing their testimony, introverts can find creative and sensible ways to distribute tracts. Sadly, many Christians today mock this method and its efficiency. While discussions to increase the effectiveness of the method should be welcomed, mockers ought to evaluate where their criticism comes from. After all, aren’t they mocking just another form of the expansion of the gospel, the kingdom of God, the three angels’ messages, the good news, salvation for humanity, the message of Jesus?

Numerous accounts have been gathered of individuals being turned heavenward after reading a tract. Some threw away the tract only for it to be picked up by disposal services personnel who read it and began their journey to conversion. Others walked far enough away from those distributing the tract to read it privately later. There are also those who fill balloons full of tracts and launch them across international borders to reach “closed” countries in the world. Missionaries drop these seeds from planes across the hills and valleys of some countries to win those native to those lands or even guerrilla fighters in hiding! Others stand in the central nexuses of urban concrete jungles to distribute tracts in highly populated areas. Who can tell the effects of these seeds until the very end of time?
ACTIVE LITERATURE AND MEDIA MINISTRY

To ensure that spiritual seeds are being planted, local churches should conduct active literature and media ministries. Active means more than an occasional emphasis on distribution of a sharing book. It means a prominent and robust free literature and media display from which church members are trained to take literature to distribute every week. Here are some practical ways to get this started:

1. ELECT a local church publishing director, or assign a personal ministries assistant to oversee the literature and media ministry.
2. CREATE and MAINTAIN a prominent display of truth-sharing literature and media.
3. INCLUDE an offer for Bible studies with every piece of literature or media.
4. ENCOURAGE every member to daily share literature and media from the church’s display and digital media over the internet and social networks.
5. CONDUCT church-wide literature and media distribution projects in your territory with established goals for individuals, departments, Sabbath School classes, and the church.
6. PROVIDE leadership support—promotion, financial support, and participation.
7. PRAY for laborers and for the salvation of souls through the literature and media ministry.

For more information on the planting stage and the Grow cycle, visit https://grow.adventist.org/plant/.

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?

What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

Outside of literature distribution and the sharing of our testimonies, what are other forms of “planting” in the discipleship process?

For more information on the planting stage and the Grow cycle, visit https://grow.adventist.org/plant/.
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Isaiah 32:20
Ecclesiastes 11:4–6
2 Corinthians 9:6

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with discipleship and planting?

TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION

Of all the conversations that Christ had with individuals, one sticks out more than the others. Whereas other accounts include a healing or a parable, John 4 records a verbal-spiritual-strategic conversation between two interesting characters: the unrecognized Messiah, and one who does not want to be recognized. Social convention would not allow them to speak, as it was not proper for men and women to converse alone. Additionally, this woman sought water in the hottest part of the day. In that culture, the women collected water in the early mornings and evenings when the temperature was cool, but here was a woman seeking to avoid the crowds. Jesus also transgressed another cultural line when He, as a Jew, spoke to a Samaritan.

While each of these elements can be further elaborated upon, it is the interesting twists and turns the conversation takes that we shall focus on. It is, in fact, a disjointed conversation. It starts with water, then goes into race politics, and then into history, marriage, prophecy, worship, and the Messiah! A coherent argument doesn’t appear through the narrative; rather, you see the Lord Jesus pursuing the woman’s heart through the art of conversation. The woman seems to get caught up in the conversation and opens up to deeper conversation, but then disengages. Jesus is unrelenting and manages to bring the exchange back to a conversion conversation at the end. This is a tit-for-tat tête-à-tête par excellence!

Throughout the conversation, Jesus hints at different elements of His Messiahship—from the potential eternal satisfaction of the heart, the human insufficiency of spiritual satisfaction, and the promise of the Chosen One to heal the human condition. But only at the end does He reveal Himself: “I who speak to you am He” (John 4:26).

Of the myriad things this conversation can teach and model for us, one important thing is that we are called to enter conversations that direct people to spiritual thoughts. While the core value in the preparation stage is trust, the core value in the plant stage is “consider.” Once a good trusting relationship is established, we are to share and introduce spiritual matters for people to consider.

Though the topic was real water, Jesus shifted the conversation for the woman to consider spiritual water. Though another topic was husbands, Jesus shifted the conversation for the woman to consider her spiritual condition regarding her husbands. Though the topic was race politics, Jesus shifted the conversation for the woman to consider the real spiritual promises of each side.

One of the most wonderful verses of this narrative is verse 28, where John records that “the woman then left her waterpot, [and] went her way into the city.” She completely forgot about the task that she originally came to accomplish. The Samaritan woman then becomes one of the first missionaries for Christ. While some may take three years (as in the previous account in John 3 with Nicodemus) to believe, others will believe through one encounter, one conversation, one tract, or one form of seed that causes them to consider spiritual things.
THE TRUTH IS TO BE SCATTERED

“If there is one work more important than another, it is that of getting our publications before the public, thus leading them to search the Scriptures. Missionary work—introducing our publications into families, conversing, and praying with and for them—is a good work” (Colporteur Evangelist, 80).

“Let every Seventh-day Adventist ask himself, ‘What can I do to proclaim the third angel’s message?’ Christ came to this world to give this message to His servant to give to the churches. It is to be proclaimed to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. How are we to give it? The distribution of our literature is one means by which the message is to be proclaimed. Let every believer scatter broadcast tracts and leaflets and books containing the message for this time. Colporteurs are needed who will go forth to circulate our publications everywhere” (Southern Watchman, Jan. 5, 1904).

“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, 68).

“The truth must not be muffled now. Plain statements must be made. Unvarnished truth must be spoken, in leaflets and pamphlets, and these must be scattered like the leaves of autumn” (Testimonies for the Church, 9:231).

“The canvassing work, properly conducted, is missionary work of the highest order, and it is as good and successful a method as can be employed for placing before the people the important truths for this time. The importance of the work of the ministry is unmistakable; but many who are hungry for the bread of life have not the privilege of hearing the word from God’s delegated preachers. For this reason it is essential that our publications be widely circulated. Thus the message will go where the living preacher cannot go, and the attention of many will be called to the important events connected with the closing scenes of this world’s history” (Testimonies for the Church, 6:313).

“When church members realize the importance of the circulation of our literature, they will devote more time to this work. Papers, tracts, and books will be placed in the homes of the people, to preach the gospel in their several lines. . . . The church must give her attention to the canvassing work. This is one way in which she is to shine in the world” (Manuscript 113, 1901).

“God will soon do great things for us if we lie humble and believing at His feet. . . . More than one thousand will soon be converted in one day, most of whom will trace their first convictions to the reading of our publications” (Review and Herald, Nov. 10, 1885).

“Papers and books are the Lord’s means of keeping the message for this time continually before the people. In enlightening and confirming souls in the truth, the publications will do a far greater work than can be accomplished by the ministry of the word alone. The silent messengers that are placed in the homes of the people through the work of the canvasser, will strengthen the gospel ministry in every way; for the Holy Spirit will impress minds as they read the books, just as He impresses the minds of those who listen to the preaching of the word. The same ministry of angels attends the books that contain the truth as attends the work of the minister” (Testimonies to the Church, 6:315, 316).
inQuire

Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How is planting different from preparation?

Why do some mock the form of distributing Christian literature and tracts? How can this form be improved?

Besides literature, what are other forms for planting?

What is preventing you and your church from being more active seed planters?

What are ways to engage media ministry more in the discipleship process?

How can we be more like Christ in the art of conversation and listening?

How can we maintain sincerity, authenticity, and realness in our Christian discipleship?

When and where will you plant next?

The Process of Discipleship: Plant