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A pastor held up his Bible before the congregation. It was in tatters, full of holes. In seminary he and some classmates had gone through his Bible and underlined every passage that dealt with justice, poverty, wealth, and oppression. Then, with a pair of scissors, they cut out every verse dealing with those topics. When they finished, his Bible was in shambles. Throughout Scripture these themes are so central that there is a lot missing from the Bible when they are removed. The tattered Bible speaks powerfully and loudly about the things that God cares about.

What should this story say to us as Seventh-day Adventists? It should say a lot. Research shows that approximately 30 percent of Seventh-day Adventists are involved in meeting the needs of the community outside the church. What about the remaining 70 percent? Jesus calls His entire end-time church to proclaim and live the whole “everlasting gospel” (*Rev. 14:6*).

What is the *whole* gospel? Jesus’ mission and ministry depicted in Luke 4:16–21 portray the whole gospel as more than preaching the truth of salvation by faith, however foundational that is to all that we do. Jesus shows us that preaching the gospel also means tangible expressions of love and compassion for the poor, hungry, sick, brokenhearted, oppressed, outcast, and imprisoned. It’s about biblical justice and undoing what the devil has done, at least to whatever degree we now can as we look forward to Jesus’ ultimate triumph over evil at the end of the age.

This quarter we will explore this wholistic version of the “everlasting gospel” and will

examine the role of the church in impacting communities with this gospel. We define the “church” as a community of people who, together, do not exist for themselves but who are called out to live and to preach the everlasting gospel as expressed in the ministry of Jesus. This means not only preaching the gospel but living it in our lives through ministering to the needs of those in our local communities.

Organizationally, how does your local church serve those in need? All ministries of the church (for example, health, family, youth, Sabbath School, deacons/deaconesses, etc.) exist to work together for serving the community as well as church members. Adventist Community Services (ACS) units or centers work from the church to demonstrate the gospel and prepare the way for hearing the Word of God. In some parts of the world ACS is called Dorcas, Adventist Men, or some other name. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s humanitarian agency with a nongovernmental organization status, though it does not operate from the local church, is another important part of reaching those in need.

How do you personally express your appreciation for what God has done for you in Christ? One church member put it this way:

On the street I saw a small girl,
cold, shivering in a thin dress,
with little hope of a decent meal.
I became angry and said to God:
“Why did You permit this?
Why don’t You do something about it?”
For a while God said nothing.
Then that night He replied quite suddenly:
“I certainly did something about it.

I made you.”—In Dwight Nelson, *Pursuing the Passion of Jesus* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005), p. 78.

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Jesus shows us that preaching the gospel also means tangible expressions of love and compassion.



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The “Restoration of All Things”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Gen. 1:26, 27; Deut. 6:5; Gen. 3:8–19; James 4:4; Gal. 4:19; Mark 2:1–12; John 10:10.*

Memory Text: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (*Genesis 1:27, NIV*).

All one has to do is look around, at the world, at the neighborhood, at oneself, to see the point. And the point is? Something is terribly wrong.

It’s called the Fall. It’s called sin. It’s called rebellion, and it’s called the great controversy.

And yet, the good news is that it’s not permanent. It’s not going to last forever. Jesus came, died for the sins of the world, and promised to come again. And when He does, nothing of this world will remain. Instead, a new kingdom, His eternal kingdom, will begin. “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (*Dan. 2:44, NKJV*).

What a restoration!

But we don’t have to wait until the Second Coming for the restoration to begin. Those who are in Christ are a new creation now (*2 Cor. 5:17*), and we are predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus now (*Rom. 8:29*). Also, He calls us and empowers us, as His church, so that we can work toward the restoration of others as well.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 2.

The Image of God

The Bible says that humanity was originally created in the “image” (*Gen. 1:27*) of God. An image may be either two-dimensional, such as a mirror reflection or photograph, or three-dimensional, such as a statue or hologram. An image can also be intangible, such as a mental image, an idea that we have in our heads. What does the Bible mean?

Read Genesis 1:26, 27. How does Scripture explain what being made in God’s “image” means? See also *Gen. 1:31, Deut. 6:5, and 1 Thess. 5:23*.

With the creation of our first parents, God set a new standard for life on earth: man and woman. They alone, among all the other creatures made during that time, were in God’s image. They were not evolved apes. As human beings, they and we are radically different from all of the other life forms on earth, and any theology that lessens this difference degrades humanity.

God “called their name Adam” (*Gen. 5:2*). That is, both of them, male and female, though different and distinct beings, were still one. Together, in their fullness and completeness, they represented the image of God.

The nature of God’s image is wholistic: “When Adam came from the Creator’s hand, he bore, in his *physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker*.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 15. (Italics supplied.)

The word for “image” in Hebrew is *tselem*; the word for “likeness” is *demuth*. These words can connote the physical (*tselem*) and the inward (*demuth*), which includes the spiritual and mental aspects of humanity. Ellen G. White recognizes this when she says man was made in God’s image, “both in outward resemblance and in character.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 45.

Deuteronomy 6:5 mentions the various dimensions of the human being: soul (spiritual), heart (mind, mental), and strength (physical body). There is a similar pattern in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. A human being made in God’s image would naturally include all of these dimensions.

Though there’s much more to this idea of being made in “the image of God,” the Bible is clear: human beings are a distinct and unique creation here on earth. No other creature comes close. Why is it important for us to always keep this distinction in mind?

The Fall and Its Aftermath

The Bible does not say how long a period of time existed between the finished Creation and the Fall. Days, weeks, years, we just don't know.

What we do know, however, was that there was a Fall, and the consequences were immediate and apparent.

The first mentioned result of Adam and Eve eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was their sudden realization of their nakedness (*Gen. 3:7*). They sought to cover themselves from the presence of God. Their robes of light now disappeared. (See Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 57.) Their intimacy with God was disrupted because of their newly discovered intimacy with the self-centeredness of evil. God then sought to educate the first couple in regard to the consequences that their sin had created for them.

Read the following texts and identify the immediate consequences of Adam and Eve's sin as seen in each passage. Also, how are these same consequences manifested today?

Gen. 3:8–10 _____

Gen. 3:12 _____

Gen. 3:13 _____

Gen. 3:16 _____

Gen. 3:17–19 _____

No question, the Fall was real. The Fall was hard, and the Fall was terribly consequential for our race. The long, sad story of human history, right up to current events, reveals the tragic consequences of sin.

How thankful we can be, then, for the promise that one day the tragedy of sin is going to be over and done and never repeated.

What are ways that we, every day, live with the consequences of our own sins?

Enmity and Atonement

Read Genesis 3:14, 15. What does God mean when He says to Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers” (*Gen. 3:15, NIV*)? What hope can we find here for ourselves?

The word *enmity* in Hebrew shares its root with the Hebrew word *hate* and the word *enemy*. By eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the couple placed themselves and all humanity at enmity with God (*see Rom. 5:10, Col. 1:21, James 4:4*). God’s promise here implies that God would set in motion His plan to draw humanity back to Himself, thus shifting their enmity to Satan. Thus, by shifting the enmity from Himself to Satan, God would establish an avenue through which He could save humanity while, at the same time, not violating the principles of His divine government. This is what is known in the original sense as “atonement,” what God has done and is doing in order to ultimately restore what had been lost in the Fall.

What do the following texts reveal about atonement? *Lev. 1:3, 4; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 John 1:9.*

Theologians sometimes use the word *expiation* to talk about how this atonement works. The Latin root, *expiare*, means “to atone for,” and the idea involves reparation for a wrong deed. Someone did something wrong, he or she violated a law, and justice demands a penalty to pay for that wrong. In English, it is sometimes said that the guilty person owes a “debt to society” because of what he or she did.

In our situation we sinned, but in the plan of salvation, the atonement, Christ’s sacrificial death, relieves us from the *legal* consequences of that wrongdoing. Instead, Christ Himself paid the penalty for us. The punishment that legally (yes, God’s government has laws) should have been ours was given to Jesus instead. That way, the demands of justice were met, but they were met in Jesus instead of us. Though we are sinners, though we have done wrong, we are pardoned, forgiven, and justified in His sight. This is the crucial and foundational step in the “restoration of all things” (*Acts 3:21, NKJV*).

Restoration in Jesus

“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19, NKJV).

We were originally created as perfect and complete beings in a perfect and complete world. Unfortunately, this pre-Fall paradise was lost through sin, and the world as we know it is filled with death, violence, suffering, fear, and ignorance. The plan of salvation was created in order to bring this world back to its original perfection. Christ came in order to regain what was lost in the Fall.

“In the beginning God created man in His own likeness. He endowed him with noble qualities. His mind was well balanced, and all the powers of his being were harmonious. But the Fall and its effects have perverted these gifts. Sin has marred and well-nigh obliterated the image of God in man. It was to restore this that the plan of salvation was devised, and a life of probation was granted to man. To bring him back to the perfection in which he was first created is the great object of life—the object that underlies every other.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595. Though this restoration won’t be completed until the new heavens and the new earth, the process already has begun in us now!

Read Galatians 4:19. Whatever his immediate concerns, what important spiritual point is Paul making here?

In Hebrews 1:3 Christ Himself is presented as the image of God—“the express image of His person” (NKJV). (Compare with *John 14:9*, *2 Cor. 4:4*, *Col. 1:15*.) He desires to unite with us in order to restore God’s image in us. If we consent, Christ, who is the image of God, can be in us: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (*Col. 1:27, NKJV*).

The ultimate experience of being restored in His image will occur at Jesus’ second coming (see *1 Cor. 15:49*, *1 John 3:2*). However, when Christ is in us, and we in Christ, the process of being restored in God’s image begins on this side of heaven. When that happens, we will long to bring those in our community to the One who can restore them as well.

Though the work begins now in us, to restore us, why must we always remember that restoration won’t be totally complete until the second coming of Jesus?

The Restoring Role of the Church

As we have seen, our world, though created perfect, had fallen, with devastating results. But God had not abandoned us to what would have been our fate, eternal destruction (the fate that science says awaits us). Instead, even before the world began, the plan of salvation was formulated (*see 1 Pet. 1:2*), and at great personal cost to Himself, Jesus came to this world, suffered on the cross, and promises to return. And by the time everything is over and sin is destroyed, the world that had been lost will be fully restored.

What's amazing, though, is that God calls us, His church, even now, to have a part to play working toward this restoration.

Read in Mark 2:1–12 the story of how some friends persistently worked together to bring a paralytic to Jesus. How does this story illustrate the role of the church in healing and restoring people?

The house was crowded because Jesus was there. His love for people drew crowds. The four men made a very large hole in the roof in order to bring the spiritually, mentally, and physically sick man to Jesus. Then Jesus restored him by forgiving his sins, giving him peace of mind, and commanding him to get up and walk. Jesus demonstrated that no one is really healed unless he or she is wholistically restored.

How did the apostle John describe the reason Christ appeared on this earth? What hope can we draw from these promises? *Read John 10:10, 1 John 3:8.*

It has been said that John 10:10 is the Seventh-day Adventist message in a nutshell. It was clearly Christ's mission statement. A major role for Christ's body, His church, is to follow in His footsteps and undo the work of the devil by replacing death with abundant life (*see Acts 10:38, 1 John 2:6*). The church is called to partner with Christ in moving people toward being restored in God's image—physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Who are people in need of your help right now, help that you are especially equipped to give?

Further Thought: See other passages on restoring God’s image: Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:15, 3:9–11, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 5:17. Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” “The Temptation and Fall,” and “The Plan of Redemption,” pp. 44–70, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

As a people, we have been called by God to work for others, for the good of others, to seek to point others to the promises of hope and restoration that we have been given in Jesus. There are different ways the Lord can work through us to do this. Some churches provide physical restoration to the people in their community with health programs and services. Also, the church’s system of hospitals and clinics works toward this same goal. Mental restoration and enrichment can take place through classes that equip community members to meet their life needs. Churches also may establish or improve local schools, teach job skills, provide literacy education, tutoring, mentoring, and psychological counseling, and so on. As they continue their quest for restoration and an abundant life, many people in the community will realize that they need spiritual and moral restoration too, even though they didn’t originally think so. In fact, this is a key facet of restoration to God’s image (see *Eph. 4:22–24*). The church is uniquely positioned and equipped to meet these spiritual needs, better than any secular social or health organization.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Give examples of what your church is already doing toward the physical, mental, and spiritual restoration of the people in your community. What is your church doing in this area? Share with your class your ideas for expanding your church’s restorative ministries in your community.
- 2 How do we understand this idea of physical restoration? After all, no matter what we do to help others regain their health, unless the Lord comes back in their lifetime, most will eventually succumb to disease and the ravages of old age. Why is this more proof that full restoration can come only after Jesus returns?
- 3 Discuss the idea of what it means to start being restored into God’s image now. How does that work? How can we know whether we are making progress? Why must we have a clear picture of God in order for that restoration to happen? How can we learn not to give up in discouragement if we don’t see the progress that we think we ought to have?

Dismissed but Determined: Part 1

by ISAAH MALEK GARANG, South Sudan

The visiting Anglican archbishop barely looked at the priest kneeling before him as he dipped his finger into a bowl of ash and painted a small cross on the priest's forehead. It was Ash Wednesday, and we felt honored to have such a high church official visiting southern Sudan. But when my turn came to step forward and kneel, I did not go forward. My fellow priests urged me to kneel and receive the cross, but I refused. In all my years as a priest in Sudan, I had never found a reference to such a service in the Bible. And if it was not in the Bible, I felt I should not take part.

The archbishop reported my actions to the church, which took swift action. Within two days, another priest and I were dismissed from our positions for refusing the ashen cross. Ten years of dedicated service to the church were as dust beneath our feet. The elders of the 17 churches I had overseen were called in and questioned. Any of them deemed loyal to me were relieved of their church duties. Before the dust settled, 82 people—from church leaders to innocent members—had been dismissed from church office or membership.

I was deeply shaken. *What did I do that was such a threat to my church?* I wondered. I was forbidden even to enter the church I had so recently led. Some church members feared that if they were seen speaking to me, they too would be dismissed. But in time, I heard that others were unhappy about what had happened.

I needed to know the truth about God, the truth that had resulted in my dismissal. I spent hours a day studying the Bible, searching to know God's truth. Sometime later, Solomon, a distant cousin, came to visit my family. Conversation turned to spiritual matters, and I asked him about his beliefs. Solomon told me that he was a Seventh-day Adventist. Later, I mulled over what Solomon had said about the Sabbath.

I had heard of Sabbath keepers before, but I thought that they were like Jews and did not believe in Jesus. I remembered that while studying in the seminary I had asked the priest why the holy day had been changed from Saturday to Sunday. But he could not give me a satisfactory answer. Some said Jesus had made the change; others said that it was changed to honor Jesus, who rose from the dead on Sunday. These answers left me unsatisfied.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

Restoring Dominion



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:26–28, Ps. 8:3–8, Gen. 2:15, Rom. 8:20–22, Exod. 20:1–17, Rom. 1:25, 2 Thess. 3:10.*

Memory Text: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’ ” (*Genesis 1:26, NKJV*).

At the Fall, our first parents lost more than just their original image of God.

“Not only man but the earth also had by sin come under the control of the wicked one, and was to be restored by the plan of redemption. At his creation, Adam was placed in dominion over the earth. But by yielding to temptation, he was brought under the power of Satan, and the dominion which he held passed to his conqueror. Thus Satan became ‘the god of this world.’ He had usurped that dominion over the earth which had been originally given to Adam. But Christ, by His sacrifice paying the penalty of sin, would not only redeem man, but recover the dominion which he had forfeited. All that was lost by the first Adam will be restored by the second.”—Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, November 4, 1908.

No question, after the Fall, human beings lost very much, including the “dominion” that we originally had been given.

What was this lost dominion? Though the idea of “dominion” often has negative connotations today, it certainly didn’t back in Eden. What did it mean when humans were first given dominion over the earth? And what can the church do to help people regain some of what was lost after the tragic fall of our first parents in Eden?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 9.

Created for Dominion

Someone recently wrote the following about a friend, an avowed atheist who said that she sometimes “wakes in the middle of the night, stressing over a bunch of deep questions: ‘Is this world truly the result of an accidental cosmic big bang? How could there be no design, no grand purpose to our existence and to the universe as a whole? Can it be that every life—including my own, my husband’s, my two children’s—is totally irrelevant and meaningless? Does my life have no meaning and purpose?’ ”

After the Fall, humanity lost very much. As the story of the Fall showed, we became alienated not only from God but from each other. Even our relationship toward the earth itself changed. And as the questions asked by the woman above show, we also struggle with knowing who we are and what the purpose of our life is, problems that for many are made much worse by the prevailing idea that our existence resulted only from chance, with no foresight or purpose built in by a Creator God.

What do the following texts teach about the purposes for humanity’s creation? *Gen. 1:26–28; Ps. 8:3–8; Isa. 43:6, 7. What does “created for My glory” (Isa. 43:7, NKJV) mean? How does “My [God’s] glory” relate to dominion?*

As we can see in the verses in Genesis, whatever other reasons God had for creating Adam and Eve, they were also created in order to have dominion over the earth (*Gen. 1:26–28*). Together, reflecting God’s glory and character, the first couple were to be channels through whom He, the One with ultimate glory and dominion (*Rev. 1:5, 6*), would nurture, care for, and administer the rest of His earthly creation. Who knows how God’s glory would have been revealed through them and their dominion over the world were it not for the rise of sin?

Now, though, through faith in Jesus, through surrendering our lives to Him in faith and obedience and cooperation, we can say with David: “The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me” (*Ps. 138:8, ESV*). Knowing that God has a purpose for each of us is a cause for confidence and rejoicing, especially when we are surrendered to Him so that His will can be fulfilled in us.

If someone were to ask you, “OK, as a Christian, what do you say that the purpose of your life is?” how would you respond, and why?

The Privilege of Dominion

What is the “dominion” that humans were to have over the earth, as expressed in Genesis 1:26–28?

The biblical word *dominion* comes from the Hebrew verb *radah*. This word indicates a right and responsibility to rule. It implies, in this context, a hierarchy of power and authority in which the human race is positioned above the rest of the natural world. While the verb *radah*, as used in the rest of the Old Testament, does not itself define how this dominion is to be exercised, whether benevolently or malevolently, the context of a sinless and unfallen creation shows that the intent must have been benevolent in nature.

Similar conclusions may be drawn about subduing the earth in Genesis 1:28. The verb *subdue*, from the Hebrew *kavash*, also depicts a hierarchical relationship in which humans are positioned above the earth and are granted power and control over it. Elsewhere in the Old Testament the verb *kavash* is even more forceful than *radah*, describing the actual act of subjugation, of forcing another into a subordinate position (*Num. 32:22, 29; Jer. 34:11, 16; Esther 7:8; Neh. 5:5*). In many of these cases, the abuse of power is obvious and God’s displeasure expressed. But again, taking into consideration the context within the Creation story of a sinless couple created in the image of God to administer the earth, this subduing of the earth can be characterized only as benevolent *service* to creation on behalf of the Creator. It certainly was not exploitation.

We find an additional dimension to this concept of dominion in Genesis 2:15, where God places Adam in the garden to dress (*abad*—to work, to serve, to till) and to keep (*shamar*—to hedge about, guard, protect, attend to, look narrowly, observe, preserve, regard, reserve).

Keeping this in mind, we discover that dominion is caring and loving stewardship or management. Within their relationship with God, our first parents were to have all the resources and authority that they needed to execute their dominion, which would have reflected God’s divine love of His creation.

Though the word *dominion* today can, and often does, have negative connotations, it certainly didn’t when first expressed in the Bible. What are some principles that we can take from this pre-Fall use of the term and apply to how we relate to whatever or whomever we have “dominion” over?

Boundaries

Does humanity's dominion over "all the earth" (*Gen. 1:26*) indicate that there are no boundaries to our dominion? Biblical history indicates that dominion (which can also be understood as "stewardship") must have boundaries.

For example, God told Adam that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was off-limits (*see Gen. 2:15–17*). The first sin was, then, in the context of stewardship. Adam and Eve overstepped the boundaries that God had set on their dominion. Creation is still suffering from that overstepping of boundaries (*see Rom. 8:20–22*).

Read Exodus 20:1–17. What kinds of "boundaries" are set there for us in God's law? What does the law tell us about the limits of human dominion?

Throughout human history (for example, Pharaoh in Exodus 1–14; Herod in Matthew 2) to the end of time (*see Revelation 13*), domineering people controlled by Satan are notorious for attempting to dominate that over which they have no rightful control. They imitate Satan, who seized power and made himself "the prince of this world" (*John 12:31*). Dominion gone awry becomes domination.

On the other hand, there are those who refuse to accept control over that which they need to have dominion (*see Matt. 25:14–30, Luke 19:12–27*).

Even though sin caused humanity to lose the level of dominion given at Creation, our original dominion was not entirely lost because of sin. There is plenty that is within our current boundaries of responsibility: for example, Christ-enabled self-mastery in our personal lives (*see 1 Cor. 9:25–27; Gal. 5:22, 23*), and the care of the earth and its creatures and of all that has been given to us by God (*see James 1:17, Matt. 25:14–30*). We need, as Christians, to understand what our boundaries are and then work to be faithful stewards within those boundaries.

What are some specific boundaries that you need to respect in regard to others, such as family, friends, coworkers? What principles can we use to help us know what those boundaries are (*see, for instance, Matt. 7:1, 12*)?

Care of the Earth

“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (*Gen. 2:15, NKJV*).

What principles, if any, can we take from this text that should influence how we relate to our planet in terms of taking care of it?

Before sin, Adam and Eve had been delegated stewardship over all that God had entrusted to them. They had mastery over plant and animal life. Yet, after sin, all of nature seemed to rebel against them to the same extent that they had rebelled against God. Human beings began to see themselves powerless in the face of the elements (weather, agriculture, the animal kingdom).

“Among the lower creatures Adam had stood as king, and so long as he remained loyal to God, all nature acknowledged his rule; but when he transgressed, this dominion was forfeited. The spirit of rebellion, to which he himself had given entrance, extended throughout the animal creation. Thus not only the life of man, but the nature of the beasts, the trees of the forest, the grass of the field, the very air he breathed, all told the sad lesson of the knowledge of evil.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 26, 27.

Today we are still ravaged by natural disasters and our deteriorating ecosystem, at least in some places. Thus, we make great efforts to use technology and industry to protect ourselves. However, though technology and industry may help us protect ourselves, sometimes the same technology can damage our planet. Ecology is a moral, ethical, and theological issue, especially when exploitation of the earth can lead to great hardship for others.

“Seventh-day Adventists advocate a simple, wholesome lifestyle, where people do not step on the treadmill of unbridled consumerism, goods-getting, and production of waste. We call for respect of creation, restraint in the use of the world’s resources, reevaluation of one’s needs, and reaffirmation of the dignity of created life.”—In “Official Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Environment,” 1995.

How do we strike the right balance in our attitude toward the earth: being good stewards of the home we have been given while at the same time avoiding the danger of making the earth and the environment gods whom we all but worship? What warning might Romans 1:25 have for us here?

Restoring “Dominion”

Through the Fall we as humans have lost very much, including the kind of dominion that our first parents were privileged to have in Eden. Christ came in order to restore to us what we lost.

And because of what Christ has done for us, we, too, have been called by God to reach out to others, helping them regain in Christ the salvation and dominion lost at the Fall that He has given back to us. Though this process will not be complete until the second coming of Jesus and beyond, there’s much that we can do now in reaching out to those who are needy, lost, and overwhelmed by the world. We can be used by God to help start that restoration even now, as we reach out and help those in need.

What do the following texts each say that can be applied to helping others regain some of the “dominion” lost through sin?

Deut. 15:7–12 _____

Luke 14:12–14 _____

1 Pet. 3:15 _____

James 1:27 _____

Isa. 58:7 _____

2 Thess. 3:10 _____

As a church body there’s much that we can do, that we must do, that we have been called to do, to reach out to those in need. Sometimes it’s as basic as providing food, clothes, or shelter to someone in *urgent* need. Even though giving relief is necessary, something beyond giving relief is needed to help people restore dominion in their lives.

Though we must always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us, we must, when and where we can, meet their physical needs and point them to a better way of life.

Though each situation is different and the needs are different, we have been called by God to be a light and a source of healing and hope in our communities. This is an essential part of what it means to be a witness to the world of the loving and saving God whom we serve. We must do all that we can, in the Lord’s strength, to be a beacon of light and hope to those in need. As Christians, we can’t do less. As we fulfill this role of service, we are helping them learn what God is like. And, too, by ministering to their physical needs, we are paving the way for their hearts to be reached by the Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus did, and this is what we are called to do as well.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Temperance and Dietetics,” pp. 202–206; “Discipline,” pp. 287–290, in *Education*; “Need for Self-Mastery,” pp. 73, 74, in *Counsels on Diet and Foods*; “The Principles of Stewardship,” pp. 111–113; “Sharing in the Joys of the Redeemed,” pp. 348–350, in *Counsels on Stewardship*.

It’s so hard from our perspective today, immersed as we are in a greatly fallen world, to imagine what we have lost through the Fall. This evil world is all that we know, and were it not for the Word of God and how it reveals to us our origins and the origins of sin and death and evil, we’d simply take them for granted, as just part of life itself. Yet the story of the Fall shows us that, indeed, this is not how things were to be. Genesis said that Adam and Eve were to have dominion over the world; then, right after they had sinned, suddenly their relationship to the world changed because they changed, and the physical world itself changed as well. Suddenly the dominion they had enjoyed was lost, and the consequences became enormous. “The thorn and the thistle (Gen. 3:17, 18), the aftermath of the Flood (Gen. 7:12), the desert and the wilderness, the groaning of the earth for deliverance (Rom. 8:19–22) are some of the word pictures the Bible uses to describe the effect of sin upon the world.”—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn.), vol. 12, p. 254. How thankful we should be for the plan of salvation, which will restore all that was lost and which offers us the promise of a future so much better than the past or the present.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Though the immediate context of these texts (*Exod. 23:10–12; Deut. 11:11, 12; 20:19, 20*) doesn’t have to do with ecology as understood today, what principles could one take from them that could help us understand our need to be good stewards of the environment? Also, how do we know if and when we have crossed the line from being a steward of the environment to being a worshiper of it?
- 2 Think about the natural world as we know it now. Is it a friend or a foe, and how can you justify your answer?
- 3 Discuss the question asked at the end of Sunday’s study about the meaning and purpose of human life. What answer would you give to someone who asked you that question? How should our answers differ from those who don’t believe in God or salvation?
- 4 How can we reclaim the word *dominion* in a way that helps restore its original meaning? That is, how was *dominion* at first a good thing? How can it be today as well?

Dismissed but Determined: Part 2

by ISAIAH MALEK GARANG, South Sudan

The question about the Sabbath and Sunday came up again. Was the Sabbath still valid? If so, why did most of Christianity worship on Sunday instead?

I was not allowed to enter the church I had once pastored, so on Sundays I prayed at home. Others—some who had been dismissed and some who thought the church had made a grave mistake—joined me for worship. Eight other groups began meeting in homes throughout my former district.

The Sabbath question was constantly on my mind. I knew that some people worshiped on Friday, some on Saturday, and others on Sunday. As I studied the Bible, I found many references to Sabbath, but no mention of Friday or Sunday as a day of worship. I asked our small-group members to study and pray about this issue. Eventually, we agreed that God had never changed the day of worship from Saturday to another day. We immediately began meeting on Saturday instead of Sunday. We also found the admonition to avoid eating unclean meat. Some people outside of our small groups who learned of our decisions labeled us “Jews.”

Solomon saw the changes in my life and invited me to study the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist faith. I wondered what difference there might be between what we had discovered and what the Adventists teach. I set out to find some Adventist leaders to learn more about what they believe. I found an Adventist church in a village some distance from my home. I introduced myself to the pastor and explained that I wanted to know what his denomination taught.

I stayed in that village for three months studying the Bible, the writings of Ellen G. White, and understanding the church’s fundamental beliefs. What I learned was so amazing! It became clear that I’d found what my soul was looking for. I asked to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

During the week before my baptism, I continually reconsidered my decision. My brother urged me to leave the country. I was invited to join a nondenominational church, and my former church sent a message requesting that I return to my priestly position.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

Justice *and* Mercy in the Old Testament: Part 1



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 22:21–23, 23:2–9, Amos 8:4–7, Isa. 1:13–17, 58:1–14, Acts 20:35.*

Memory Text: “He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow” (*Psalms 146:7–9, NIV*).

Years ago, on a cold day in New York City, a 10-year-old boy, barefoot and shivering, peered in the window of a shoe store. A woman came to the boy and asked why he was looking so earnestly in the window; he said that he was asking God to give him a pair of shoes. The woman took him by the hand into the store. She asked the clerk to bring six pairs of socks; she also requested a basin of water and a towel. Taking the lad to the back of the store, she removed her gloves, washed his feet, and dried them with the towel. The clerk returned with the socks. The woman placed a pair on the boy's feet and then bought him a pair of shoes. She patted his head and asked him if he felt more comfortable now. As she turned to go, the astonished lad took her hand and tearfully asked, “Are you God's wife?”—<http://www.inspirationalstories.com/1/198.html>.

That little boy spoke more truth than he realized. God's church *is* His bride, His wife. His character is expressed in the memory verse. As transformed members of His church, we must reflect that character. If we are truly His, we will passionately care about and provide for the poor and the powerless.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 16.

Mercy and Justice: Earmarks of God’s People

Even in early Israel, social justice was very much a part of God’s laws and His ideal for His people. Justice is God’s original intention for human society: a world in which basic needs are met, people flourish, and peace reigns.

Read the following texts and summarize what they say about mercy and justice. *Exod. 22:21–23, 23:2–9, Lev. 19:10, Prov. 14:31, 29:7.*

Mercy and justice also are highlighted in the Sabbath laws given to ancient Israel. God outlined three types of Sabbaths.

How is the idea of mercy and justice reflected in each of these Sabbaths? *Exod. 20:8–10; 23:10, 11; Lev. 25:8–55.*

1. Instructions in keeping the seventh-day Sabbath included providing equal opportunity for everyone to rest, including servants, animals, or foreigners.

2. Every seven years, the Sabbath year was a time for canceling debts, for showing concern for the poor, and for freeing slaves. God instructed His people to include the animals in the benefits of the Sabbath year (*see Lev. 25:6, 7*).

3. The year of jubilee came on the fiftieth year, after seven Sabbath years. Property that was sold was restored to the original owner; debts were forgiven; and prisoners and slaves were set free. Jubilee was an equalizer of society, a reboot to give everyone an opportunity to begin anew. It was a “safeguard . . . against the extremes of either wealth or want.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 185.

Here, in the very fabric of Hebrew society, we can see how justice and mercy worked together in favor of the less fortunate in society.

Universal Concerns

Read Genesis 2:1–3. What does this tell us about the universality of the Sabbath?

If we truly observe the Sabbath, we will not remain satisfied with only our own rest (*Exod. 23:12*), redemption (*Deut. 5:12–15*), and ultimate restoration in the new earth (*Isa. 66:22, 23*). Indeed, the seventh-day Sabbath tells us that God is the Creator and Rest Provider of all who live on this earth. The universality of the Sabbath rest implies a commonality among all of us, rich or poor. The common Fatherhood of God means a common equality and concern among human beings.

Also, as we saw yesterday, the concern for justice extends from weekly Sabbaths to sabbatical years and to the year of jubilee. The principles behind the three Sabbaths portrayed in Leviticus 23 and 25 extend to Christians as well. The seventh-day Sabbath will forever point back to Creation, as well as forward to the Cross and new earth. It will strengthen our relationship with our compassionate Creator and Savior, thus bringing us closer to the ones He deeply loves—people who have deep needs, who are poor or suffering.

Please note, however, that the Sabbath year and the year of jubilee illustrate eternal principles, but this doesn't mean that we are to literally observe these festivals now. We aren't. Unlike the seventh-day Sabbath, which was instituted at the Creation in a pre-Fall world, these are among the ceremonial Sabbaths that were a "shadow of things to come" (*Col. 2:16, 17*), pointing forward to the ministry and sacrifice of Jesus and then ending with His death on the cross. Instead, these ceremonial Sabbaths point to a principle in regard to how we should treat others, especially those in need. As a redeemed people, Israel had an obligation to be a light to the world, showing forth God's mercy to others with no partiality. With thanksgiving they were to represent God's character to those who didn't know Him.

Read Amos 8:4–7. What was going on here, and how can we make sure that we, in our dealings with others, aren't guilty of doing the same thing? What significance do you find, given the context, in the words, "Surely I will never forget any of their works' "?

Prophetic Voice: Part 1

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy” (*Prov. 31:8, 9, NIV*).

How do we take the principles here and apply them for today?

So far this week we have noted that God wants His people to express His characteristics of mercy and justice as part of the ideal behavior of His people. The Hebrew prophets often spoke up on behalf of the needy, calling God’s people to repentance for misrepresenting His concern for the marginalized and oppressed. In fact, God equates selfless redemptive behavior with true worship.

Read Isaiah 1:13–17. What does this pronouncement say about God’s definition of true worship? How can we take what is said here, in this immediate context, and apply it to ourselves today? That is, what should these verses say to us now?

Though, of course, many of the Old Testament prophets pointed to future events beyond their lifetimes, they also heavily focused on spiritual and moral reform and unselfish service in the present. The prophetic voice of God’s servants rang loudest when His people made extravagant efforts to worship but did not reflect God’s compassion for the suffering of those around them. One can’t imagine a worse witness than those who are too busy “worshiping” God that they don’t have time to help those in need. Might not a form of “worship” be revealed by those who are serving the Lord by ministering to the needs of others?

Prophetic Voice: Part 2

Isaiah 58 provides a special prophetic message of rebuke and hope for God's people in Isaiah's time and for us today.

After an announcement that He is upset with His people (*see Isa. 58:1*), what is God's description of those He is addressing? Read Isaiah 58:2.

Though we don't know the exact "tone of voice" expressed here, it is clear that the Lord is condemning their outward shows of piety and faith because He knows how false it all is. The NIV translates it like this: " 'For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God' " (*Isa. 58:2, NIV*).

Read Isaiah 58:3–14. What else is the Lord saying to these people about what's wrong with their religious forms (in this case fasting)? What's the bigger issue here?

Notice something crucial here: so often worship can be self-centered: *Lord, do this for me and do that for me*. And, of course, there's a time and place for seeking the Lord for our own personal needs. But what the Lord is saying here is that true worship will include reaching out to "the hungry," to "the afflicted," and to the "poor." But the amazing thing is that this ministry to others blesses not only the recipients of the help but those giving the help. Read what the texts say about what happens to those who reach out and help those who are in need. In ministering to others, in giving to others, we get blessed ourselves. Who hasn't, at some point, experienced to some degree the reality of these promises from God? Who hasn't seen what joy and satisfaction and hope come to those who help others who can't help themselves? It's hard to imagine a better way to reflect the character of Christ to the world.

Read Acts 20:35. How have you experienced the reality of these words in your own ministry to others?

A Force for Good

Having the truth, however wonderful, is not enough. In Isaiah 58, God’s people were passionate about their religious forms and practices and yet weak in applying their faith in a practical manner. God is calling His church today to be a force for good, echoing the call of the Old Testament prophets to demonstrate the truth about His character.

Read the following texts. How can we, as a local church and as a world church, seek to do what we have been called by God to do in this area?

Ps. 82:3 _____

Isa. 1:17 _____

One urban church is in a community plagued by gun violence. In 2011 the clear prophetic voice of its pastor rang out during an urban ministry congress in a large city. Here are sample thoughts found in his speech: “Christians must stop the death march!” Referring to the biblical story of when Jesus stopped the funeral train for the widow of Nain’s son (*Luke 7:11–17*), he explained how the church could not sit idly by while street violence escalated in their community. He asked his audience, “Are we simply a church that stands up to do eulogies?” Instead, we need to ask ourselves if we are a church that works to relieve suffering.

This church also is very active in community development. For seven years, the church choir went to the streets of their community. They sang, passed out fliers, and offered the services of the church to those who had needs. From this contact with their community, the church helped their neighborhood in numerous ways that greatly benefited those in need. Through various and numerous programs, the church made a big difference in the community.

This church is just one example of the many ways that we as a church body can be a ministering and healing force in our communities.

What can your church do to help the needy in your community?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Law Given to Israel,” pp. 307–314; “God’s Care for the Poor,” pp. 530–536, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

The concepts of justice and mercy are seen all through the Old Testament. Look at, for instance, Deuteronomy 24:10–22. Look at the specific instructions given in these cases. We can see so clearly the Lord’s concern for the poor, for the workers, for those in debt. This concern is expressed not merely in abstract and lofty language about care for the less fortunate; instead, at least here, it also is expressed in concrete and practical instructions on what to do and what not to do in specific instances, such as with someone in debt or with a poor worker. These concepts were too important to be left totally to one’s own personal notions of what justice and benevolence were. Notice, too, how the Lord referred them back to where they had once been, to when they certainly were among the less fortunate. “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this” (*Deut. 24:22, NIV*). As Christians, regardless of our financial situation, we must always remember the grace and unmerited favor God has bestowed upon us. Thus, out of the richness and fullness of what we have in Christ (*Eph. 3:19, Col. 2:10*), we need to be ready to serve and help those who need our service and help.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How does the fourth commandment’s saying that servants should rest on the Sabbath help reveal the idea of the equality of all humanity before the Lord? How, too, should that help us to understand in general how we should justly treat those who work for us or those who are under our control to some degree? Also, how does the universality of what Christ did on the cross reveal even more greatly the equality of all human beings before God?
- ② “When the mind of Christ becomes our mind, and His works our works, we shall be able to keep the fast described by the prophet Isaiah: ‘Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens?’ [Isa. 58:6]. Find out what the poor and suffering are in need of, and then, in love and tenderness, help them to courage and hope and confidence by sharing with them the good things that God has given you.” —Ellen G. White, in *Pacific Union Recorder*, July 21, 1904. How do we do this. That is, how do we share what we have been given in Christ but do so in tangible ways that can truly help those in need?

Dismissed but Determined: Part 3

by ISAIAH MALEK GARANG, South Sudan

The night before my baptism, I had a dream. I saw myself standing on an earth that was clean and bright. I looked up and saw a ladder reaching from the ground to the sky. People were running from all directions and climbing the ladder. They were singing, “We can never stop following Jesus, for we are marching to heaven.” The ladder was full of people singing this song. Then I watched myself climb the ladder. I awoke suddenly and sat up, wondering if I was still alive. Then I knelt to thank God for the wonderful lesson and courage He had given me.

I was baptized in a river near the pastor’s home. Shortly afterward, I was invited to work as a volunteer with Global Mission. I enjoyed this work for three months, but I realized that I needed to return to my wife and the small congregations I had left behind. I told my team leader of my decision and expressed my hope that God would bring these new believers into the church as He had me.

I returned home and visited the eight groups that were meeting in my former pastoral district. They had continued worshiping on Sabbath and were eager to hear what I’d learned during my absence. Most of them accepted the Adventist message and were baptized. My wife was one of the first to be baptized. How thrilled I am to have her stand by me in this new ministry. Even the priest who was dismissed with me so many months earlier took his stand and asked to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

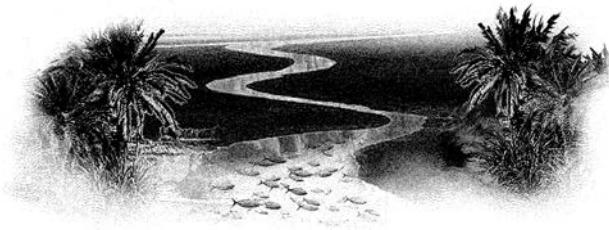
As a result of my being dismissed from my former church, today we have about 355 members in 13 Adventist churches, companies, and groups in my region of South Sudan. I minister to the very people I had ministered to as a priest in my former church.

Our work is not easy. Some of our churches have been torn down during the night, with only piles of materials left in their place. But even these setbacks have been a blessing, as we simply rebuild and invite the destroyers to join us for worship. It is difficult to make inroads in new areas, but we work hard, and God is blessing.

Thank you for partnering with us in southern Sudan to finish the work God has for us here.

ISAIAH MALEK GARANG *now serves in the Greater Equatoria Field as an associate secretary of the Ministerial Association, and as associate director in the Family Ministries and Sabbath School and Personal Ministries departments.*

Justice *and* Mercy in the Old Testament: Part 2



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ezek. 37:1–14; Eph. 2:10; Ezek. 47:1–8; Matt. 5:16; Rev. 22:1, 2; Isa. 61:1–11.*

Memory Text: “Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live” (*Ezekiel 47:9, NIV*).

A neighborhood that had flourished in the 1950s and early 1960s had become like a war zone in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The majority of the families moved away, leaving behind a trail of abandoned, run-down, and burned-out tenements. Businesses moved out and drugs and crime moved in, further making the neighborhood very undesirable.

In 1986 a Christian family left their comfortable home in suburbia and moved into this depressed urban community. A pastor from another city joined them. They rebuilt two burned-out buildings and made them their homes. The two families spent time in the streets, meeting with community groups and mingling with those who remained in the area. These two families were the catalyst that God used to begin a church that brought healing and transformation to this dead community. Their work and impact continues today, having made a big difference in many lives there.

God has something to say about the role of His church in “hopeless” situations such as this. This week’s lesson continues “listening” to the chorus of Old Testament voices that call upon God’s people to reveal His character of benevolence to the world.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 23.

Alive in Christ

The grace of God that brings revival to those who are dead in transgression and sin is graphically revealed in Ezekiel 37. In vision, the prophet Ezekiel is transported by the Spirit to a valley full of dead, dry, and scattered bones. These bones represent the whole house of Israel. God asks, “Son of man, can these bones live?” (*Ezek. 37:3*).

The answer to this question unfolds as the prophet prophesies to the bones.

Read Ezekiel 37:1–14. What was God going to do for His people?

The results of the message delivered to the dry bones are that (1) they “came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army” (*Ezek. 37:10, NIV*); (2) God will settle His people in their own land (*Ezek. 37:14*); (3) and they will know that it was God who did it (*Ezek. 37:14*).

But being revived is not enough. God’s people are revived for a mission, for a purpose. Israel was to be a light to the nations.

Read Ephesians 2:10. Why are we made alive—spiritually re-created—in Christ?

“Our acceptance with God is sure only through His beloved Son, and good works are but the result of the working of His sin-pardoning love. They are no credit to us, and we have nothing accorded to us for our good works by which we may claim a part in the salvation of our souls. Salvation is God’s free gift to the believer, given to him for Christ’s sake alone. The troubled soul may find peace through faith in Christ, and his peace will be in proportion to his faith and trust. He cannot present his good works as a plea for the salvation of his soul.

“But are good works of no real value? Is the sinner who commits sin every day with impunity, regarded of God with the same favor as the one who through faith in Christ tries to work in his integrity? The Scripture answers, ‘We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.’

“In His divine arrangement, through His unmerited favor, the Lord has ordained that good works shall be rewarded. We are accepted through Christ’s merit alone; and the acts of mercy, the deeds of charity, which we perform, are the fruits of faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, pp. 199, 200.

A Flowing River

Read Ezekiel 47:1–8. What’s going on with the temple that Ezekiel saw in vision?

The temple appears to have sprung a leak. You may wonder, did a pipe break, or what? In this case, the leak was a good thing.

This water leaking out of the temple was going “toward the east.” East of Jerusalem is the Salt Sea (also known as the Dead Sea), the lowest body of water on earth. Between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea is approximately 21 miles (about 34 kilometers) of largely desert country, which includes the Arabah, also known as the depression of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. That sea itself is so salty that nothing can live there.

However, when the water from the temple reaches it, the dead waters of the sea are “healed.” This can be understood symbolically as God’s church, the temple (*1 Pet. 2:4, 5*), reaching out and being a source of health and healing to those dead in trespasses and in sin.

Read Matthew 5:16. What is Jesus saying to us here in regard to how we are to represent Him to the world?

The Zambezi River in Zambia, Africa, starts as a shallow brook that comes from under a tree. As it flows toward Victoria Falls it grows from a brook (ankle-deep) to knee-deep, to waist-deep, and then to a river that is deep enough to swim in. Likewise, though small at the beginning, the river from the temple increased in momentum and impact and became a river “deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross” (*Ezek. 47:5, NIV*).

Your church’s healing influence may start small, but it can grow until it transforms your community! “Our work has been presented to me as, in its beginning, a small, very small, rivulet.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 171.

Light, water—both of these are images used to talk about what God can do through us to help others. How can we become better conduits for ministering to those in need?

The Church: A Source of Life

“Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish . . . ; where the river flows everything will live” (Ezek. 47:9, NIV).

Ezekiel’s prophecy illustrates that where the river that comes from God’s church flows, there is life. Ezekiel 47:10 adds to the amazement of it all. What a strange sight that would be: the banks of a body of water known as being without fish because nothing can live there suddenly become a place where fishermen are casting their nets because many fish are caught there.

The whole point is that through the power of God working in His people, life can exist where before there was none.

“Where God is at work there is no hopeless situation, no group of people who are beyond redemption, no heritage from an unhappy past which need condemn us to a future delivered over to despair.”—*The Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), vol. 6, p. 328.

God’s amazing grace does amazing things—for anyone who will accept it. Here again, we have the message of the gospel. God, through us, can give hope to those who are discouraged, despondent, dry, and dying, both spiritually and physically.

Compare Ezekiel 47:12 with Revelation 22:1, 2. What do these two passages tell you about the ultimate destiny of those who are healed and made alive by Jesus through His church?

Someday God’s people—including community members God has healed and made alive through the selflessness of church members—will be in the new earth, where there is another river, one flowing from the throne of God. There will be no deserts, dryness, or death there.

In the meantime—while we wait for that blessed reality—God wants His churches to be places from which flow healing and abundant life to the community. He wants to work through us to revitalize and transform the deserts, depressions, and Dead Seas in our territory, bringing them abundant life in Jesus (*John 10:10*), which is the wholistic Seventh-day Adventist message in a nutshell.

The prophet Amos presents a similar picture to Ezekiel 47. Read Amos 5:24. How does this picture compare with the role of your church in your community? In what tangible ways is your church a healing river there?

Jubilee Promises

The Old Testament is filled with the idea that those who have been blessed materially and spiritually will reach out to those who have not been.

Read Isaiah 61:1–11. What is God saying to His people here, and how can we apply what’s said here to ourselves and to our calling before the Lord? See also Luke 4:18.

Isaiah 61 begins with a declaration that the Spirit of the Lord works through the Anointed One to preach good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for the captives, and release the prisoners from darkness and despair (*Isa. 61:1*). All of the elements of this promise have their fulfillment in the “year of the LORD’s favor.” The “year of the LORD’s favor” is a reference to the year of jubilee, which we already saw was filled with implications for the necessity of ministering to the needs of the poor.

Thus, the mourners who are comforted, the grieving ones in Zion who are provided for, those who receive “beauty instead of ashes” and “the oil of joy instead of mourning,” and those who wear “a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (*Isa. 61:3, NIV*) are the very ones who will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated. Those blessed by the Messianic jubilee become transformers of society, renewing the ruined cities (*Isa. 61:4*). God’s servants are called priests and ministers and are supported by the wealth of the surrounding nations (*Isa. 61:5, 6*).

The images that we find in Isaiah 61 of God’s Anointed One transforming the surrounding peoples through the prosperity of those who are in covenant with Him (*Isa. 61:8, 9*) apply to those who, in the present day, have been called to be ministers and missionaries in communities around the world. Shouldn’t the same transforming influence of this prophecy be felt when we delight greatly in the Lord, rejoice in our God, and stand clothed in garments of salvation and righteousness in the midst of our community (*Isa. 61:10, 11*)?

Read Isaiah 61:9. What a powerful testimony to what God could do in His people. Could the same thing be said about us today? Why, or why not?

The Church—A Change Agent

Read Micah 6. What is the Lord speaking out against here?

Micah joins the other Old Testament prophets who emphasize that external forms of religion that lack a humble and intentional manifestation of justice and mercy are never acceptable to a just and merciful God.

What is the crucial message of Micah 6:8?

“True religion is practical. To be sure, it includes the rites and ceremonies of the church, but . . . it is not so much a matter of abstaining from food as it is of sharing food with the hungry. Practical godliness is the only kind of religion recognized at the judgment bar of God (Matt. 25:34–46).”
The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 306.

Today God continues to reject the apostasy of an external religion that excludes the practical godliness expressed in Micah 6:8. Our religious forms are not an end in and of themselves; they are a means to an end, and that end is Christ, who is to be revealed in us.

In the introduction to this week’s lesson we met two families who moved into a “hopeless” community in order to minister to their needs. The two families formed a small group in one of their living rooms with new friends from the neighborhood. The members of this growing small group earnestly prayed that God would show them how to revive their community. They partnered with a Christian development agency and began recruiting volunteers to join them in rebuilding the run-down tenements around them.

If you visited this community today, you would see a thriving new community doing so much better than before. This became a reality because a small church was intent on demonstrating Jesus’ love in a practical way, which transformed their community. What this work reveals is one very practical and powerful way in which Christ was able to work through His people to reach out and minister to others.

Though God was speaking to His people as a whole, in verse 8 the “you” was in the singular. God was talking to each one personally. How well do you, personally, reveal what the Lord says here “is good”?

Further Thought: Read Jeremiah 22:1–16; Ezekiel 16:49; Zechariah 7:9, 10. Read Ellen G. White Comments, pp. 1165, 1166, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4; “God’s Design in Our Sanitariums,” pp. 227, 228, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6.

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (*Mic. 6:8, NIV*). How much clearer could the Lord be in regard to what He asks of His people? God has shown us what is “good,” and this “good” is the same word used again and again in Genesis 1, referring to the pre-Fall Creation. Thus, implicitly we are pointed back to the ideal, to what God originally had for us and, ultimately, what He will restore to us after Jesus returns. The phrase translated “require of you” could also be (and perhaps more accurately) translated as “seek from you.” That is, what does God “seek from” us, His redeemed people covered by the grace of Christ? The answer is shown in how we are to relate to others and to God. First, we are *to act justly*. This is so appropriate given the topic of this quarter, which is on how we can help those who are often helpless victims of injustice. Second, we are *to love mercy*. We live in a world that, at times, can be so unmerciful. What a powerful witness we could be were we to love mercy and show that love by revealing mercy in our lives toward others. Third, we are *to walk humbly before God*. If the Lord in Micah 6:4 referred them back to their deliverance from Egypt as a reason for them to be humble and faithful before Him, how much more so should that apply to us, we who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus? The reality of the Cross, and what it cost to redeem us, should always keep us humble before our God.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What other Old Testament texts can you find that talk about our obligation to the needy?
- ❷ In Amos 5, especially verses 21–24, we find strong words about the religious people in the time of Amos, about God’s showing more interest in how others are treated than in the religious rituals that He Himself instituted. What should this be saying to us about where we should have our emphasis?
- ❸ How can we guard against the danger of getting so caught up in reaching out to people’s material needs that we neglect their spiritual ones? How can we strike the right balance between the two in our desire to minister to the less fortunate and needy among us?

Baxter's Bible Studies

Due to the civil war in Sudan, Baxter had to leave his home for a long time. While away, he met some Seventh-day Adventists and studied the Bible with them. He joined the Adventist Church and was eager to share his new faith with his family. When he was finally able to return home, he learned to his dismay that his family wasn't interested in hearing anything about Seventh-day Adventists.

"What's wrong with the church we already go to?" Baxter's brother asked. "Why do you have to stir everything up?"

Then Baxter's nephew died. At the funeral, Baxter shared his hope that they would all see his nephew again when Jesus comes. After the funeral, the local priest confronted him.

"Who gave you permission to preach here?" the priest demanded.

Baxter responded, "My permission comes from Jesus Christ, who said to go into all the world and preach the gospel."

The priest became angrier and threatened to hit Baxter, but another man stepped between the two. "We can't fight at a funeral," the man said. "Let's sit down and discuss this matter carefully."

After the funeral, Baxter and the priest sat under a mango tree to talk while about 200 people gathered to listen. The two men talked for several hours. The priest would state a traditional belief, and Baxter would show him what the Bible said on the subject. Little by little, the people gathered around began to understand the differences between what they had been taught all their lives and what the Bible taught.

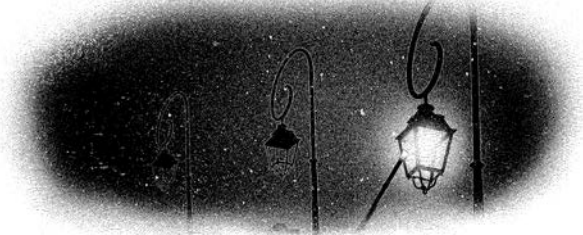
Some were unhappy that Baxter would discredit their church, but others wanted to know more about this new faith.

Baxter began visiting every home in the village. The people's culture considered it rude not to sit and listen to a visitor who comes to their homes, so again and again Baxter was invited to share his faith with the villagers. Even those who didn't want to hear what he had to say would listen to him just to be polite. One family, afraid to offend their visitor, invited him to sit down. Then they left their own home so they wouldn't have to listen to him!

But Baxter didn't give up. He kept returning until some members of the family would listen to him. After five months of study, this family was among the first to take their stand for the Bible and join the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Baxter taught the new believers to give Bible studies, and soon the little group doubled to 32 members. They built a small church and school of local materials, and the congregation continues to grow.

Jesus on Community Outreach



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 4:16–19, 10:25–37, Matt. 5:13, Isa. 2:8, John 4:35–38, Matt. 13:3–9.*

Memory Text: “Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (*Matthew 4:23, NKJV*).

Robert Louis Stevenson, best known for his adventure story *Treasure Island*, had been a sickly boy who couldn't go to school regularly. Finally, his parents hired a teacher to educate him and a nanny to help with his personal needs. One night when his nanny came to check on him before he went to bed, he was out of bed, and his hands and nose were pressed against the window. His nanny firmly told him to get back in bed before he got a chill.

Robert asked her to come to the window and see what he was seeing.

The nanny came to see. Down below on the street, there was a lamp-lighter lighting the streetlights. “‘Look there,’” Robert said, “‘there's a man poking holes in the darkness.’” —Margaret Davis, *Fear Not! Is There Anything Too Hard for God?* (Aspect Books, 2011), p. 332.

We've seen a bit of what the Old Testament said about helping those in need. We are now going to look at what the New Testament says, and what better place to start than with Jesus? And one of Jesus' well-known teachings is that we are to be “the light of the world” (*Matt. 5:14*). In so doing, we reflect Jesus, the True Light of the world (*John 8:12*). Jesus' teachings, which He modeled in His own earthly ministry, provide powerful instructions concerning how we, through Him, can poke holes in the darkness.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 30.

Jesus' Mission Statement

Jesus, the young rabbi from Nazareth, had become very popular in the region of Galilee (*Luke 4:15*). When He spoke, “the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (*Matt. 7:28, 29, NKJV*). One Sabbath, when handed the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus read the first two verses of Isaiah 61, stopping in midsentence just before the phrase “and the day of vengeance of our God” (*Isa. 61:2, NIV*).

Read *Luke 4:16–19*. Where have we heard these words before? (*See Isa. 61:1, 2*.) What was Jesus proclaiming by reading those texts?

As we already saw, the phrase “the year of the LORD’s favor” is identified as the year of jubilee (*see Leviticus 25*). In this visit to Nazareth, Jesus quotes a Messianic passage from Scripture and assures His hearers that “today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (*Luke 4:21, NIV*). In this sermon, He reveals Himself as the Anointed One who preaches good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, sight for the blind, release for the oppressed, and jubilee restoration. This list well describes His earthly ministry, which was focused on teaching, healing, and ministering, especially to those in need.

Why would Jesus stop short of completing the sentence in Isaiah 61:2?

Perhaps Jesus stopped short of the phrase “the day of vengeance of our God” because Jesus did not want His ministry to be associated with the prevailing concept that the Messiah would come to lead armies to vanquish the oppressors of Israel and bring them under Israel’s power. That was a false conception that would, unfortunately, keep many of His fellow countrymen from seeing Him and His ministry for what it really was. Instead, He focused on what He would do for those who needed what He had to offer right then and there, regardless of the political situation of the time.

What should it say to us that Jesus announces His ministry in this way; that is, what should we take away for ourselves by His emphasizing here the practical work that we would be doing?

Loving Your Neighbor

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself” (*Luke 10:27*).

Read Luke 10:25–37. What message is given here to us in regard to the whole question of helping those in need?

The expert in the law understood that all the commandments revolve around loving God with all you have and loving your neighbor as yourself. The question that remained to be answered was “Who is my neighbor?”

Given that the prevailing thought among the people of Israel in Christ’s time was to favor their own kind as neighbors and relegate all others as outsiders, this expert in the law sought to have Jesus clarify the issue. The parable that Jesus tells reveals a totally different perspective. Our neighbor is *anyone* we encounter who is in need. Being a neighbor is meeting the needs of a neighbor. The priest and the Levite were more concerned about defiling themselves and protecting their godly duties from contamination. What a convenient way to use their religion as an excuse not to have to die to self in order to help someone who, most likely, could never pay them back.

In contrast, the Samaritan saw this wounded “outsider” and “enemy” as his neighbor, mercifully meeting his needs rather than his own. The point is that instead of asking “Who is my neighbor?” we need to be asking, “Who will be a neighbor to the downtrodden and oppressed?” It doesn’t matter who a person is: the one in need is the one whom we should help—period.

“No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 386.

What prejudices might be hindering you from being the neighbor you must be?

The Whole Recipe

“‘You are the salt of the earth’” (*Matt. 5:13, NIV*).

In this passage, Jesus is calling His followers to be “salt,” which is a transforming agent. The church is a “saltshaker,” which contains the “salt of the earth.” With what or whom should we, this “salt,” mix? Only with ourselves, or with ingredients different from ourselves?

You can better understand the answer to this question if you fill one loaf pan with only salt and another loaf pan with bread that has salt as one of its ingredients. In the first pan, salt is the whole recipe; it hardly would be tasty, much less edible. In the second pan, salt is part of the recipe and is mixed with ingredients different from itself. And, as such, it transforms a loaf of bread from bland to delicious. Salt does more good when it mixes with elements unlike itself. The same is true of Christians. This won’t happen if we stay comfortably in the church “saltshaker.”

Thus, there’s a point here we shouldn’t miss. We can, in every which way, be moral in that we don’t smoke or drink or carouse or gamble or engage in crime. All that is important. But the question isn’t just What don’t we do? Rather, it is *What do we do?* That is, what do we do to help our community and those who are in need?

Read Matthew 5:13 again, concentrating on the rest of the verse. How can the salt lose its savor?

“But if the salt has lost its savor; if there is only a profession of godliness, without the love of Christ, there is no power for good. The life can exert no saving influence upon the world.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 439.

Go back to the recipe symbol. As we saw, if all we have is salt, it is no good. In fact, too much salt in the diet can be toxic. Salt has to be mixed with what is different from it. Thus, if we are too much like the world, we won’t make a difference in it. We will have nothing to offer. The salt becomes good for nothing. And what does Jesus say happens to it then?

However, permeated with the savor of the love of Christ, we will desire to become “insiders” with the “outsiders,” mixing with others in order to be a transforming agent, to be something that will make a positive difference in their lives and, by extension, leading others to what really matters in life: salvation in Jesus.

Read Deuteronomy 12:30, 31:20, and Isaiah 2:8. What danger do these texts warn about, and how can we be careful not to fall into this trap?

On Being a Farmer

Read John 4:35–38. What is Jesus telling us here about the different steps needed in reaching souls?

The work of a farmer is multifaceted. Other types of farming work must be done *before* a harvest can be plentiful (*Matt. 9:35–38*). Not only reapers are needed in the Lord’s harvest field. Can you imagine a farmer at harvesttime saying to his farmhands, “Harvesttime is here, so we must start planting seeds”? Reaping is best done after you have been farming all along.

Farming includes preparing the soil, for not all ground is good ground at first. (*Read Matt. 13:3–9.*)

What can your church do in your community to soften “hard ground” and remove “rocks” and “thorns”?

Workers have done the hard farming work before the harvest, and other workers reap the benefits of their labor. Sometimes evangelistic outreach strategies have emphasized reaping more than they do the preparatory farming. This is not how it should be done. The soil should be prepared long before the evangelist just shows up and starts preaching in hopes of reaping a harvest.

We should look at working in the harvest field as a *process*: testing the soil, preparing/cultivating the soil, planting, watering, fertilizing, fighting pests, waiting, reaping, and preserving the harvest.

Reaping the harvest is only one part of the process. In the church, the “farming” process could include soil-testing activities, such as community needs assessment surveys, demographics, and interviews with community leaders. There can be soil preparing/cultivating activities, such as meeting needs in the community, which are revealed by the community assessment; seed-planting activities, such as seminars, Bible studies, and small groups; and praying for the rain—the Holy Spirit. Few people are won to Christ with only one exposure. We need to nurture them with a process of multiple exposures, increasing the likelihood that they will be ready for harvesting. If we rely only on scattered events, it is unlikely that the new plants will survive until the harvest.

What role should you be playing in the whole process of winning souls, as opposed to the role, if any, that you are now playing?

Church Planting

Read Matthew 10:5–10. Why would Jesus send His disciples out into the surrounding towns and villages without any resources?

It seems strange that Jesus' disciples would have direct orders to enter their ministry territory with little to sustain themselves. Apparently, Jesus placed His disciples in this situation to teach them dependence on God and also the importance of creating friendships through service to the local residents. These local residents would then value their service enough to provide support for the ministry.

Pastor Frank's local conference asked him to plant a church in a section of a large city that had virtually no Adventist presence. Initially, he had no budget to do so. He consulted a map and determined the boundaries of that section of the city and studied the demographics of the people there. Then he parked his car in the busiest part of the neighborhood and began going from business to business asking questions about life in that area. He visited with political, business, and social agency leaders, asking questions about the greatest needs in that community. He made friends with some of the local residents, who invited him to join a local civic club. In that setting, he discovered other leaders who opened the way to rent the annex of a local Presbyterian church. The civic club members provided seed money to buy paint and cleaning supplies to refurbish the annex to use for community services. Interviews with community leaders indicated that health care was an important need in the community. Therefore, Pastor Frank brought together a team of volunteers who ran various health-screening programs and follow-up meetings in the annex for community residents. Those who benefited from the screenings and programs paid a modest fee, which helped pay the expenses. Soon a branch Sabbath School was started, and some of the residents began to attend.

Pastor Frank soon learned that *one of the best ways to plant a church is to first plant a ministry* that meets the needs of the community—and then grow a church through that ministry. This community-based ministry spawned a Seventh-day Adventist church of more than 140 members.

Pastor Frank's story illustrates what can happen when we follow Jesus' teachings about reaching our community. How did Jesus live out His own teachings about ministry? Next week we will begin exploring Christ's ministry method, which "will give true success in reaching the people."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Further Thought: Read other teachings of Jesus that inform you and your church's role in the community: Matthew 7:12, 23:23, 25:31–46, Mark 4:1–34, 6:1–13, Luke 6:36, 11:42, 12:13–21, 14:16–24, 16:13, 18:18–27, 19:1–10, John 10:10, 12:8, 17:13–18. Read Ellen G. White, “‘The Least of These My Brethren,’” pp. 637–641, in *The Desire of Ages*; “‘The Missionary’s Pattern,’” in *Signs of the Times*, March 19, 1894.

“Unless the church is the light of the world, it is darkness.”—Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, September 11, 1893. That’s a powerful thought. It reminds us of Jesus’ words, “‘He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad’” (*Matt. 12:30, NKJV*). Jesus is making it plain: there is no neutral territory in the great controversy. We are on Christ’s side or the devil’s. To have been given great light and to do nothing with it, really, is to be working against it. We have been called to be lights in the world; if we aren’t light, then we are darkness. Though the immediate context is different, the principle is the same: “‘If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!’” (*Matt. 6:23, NIV*). Perhaps all this could be summed up with the words: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (*Luke 12:48*).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss how we are to mingle with the world in order to reach out to others. How do we strike the right balance here; that is, how do we mingle with the world in a way that we can do others some good, while at the same time not getting so caught up in it that we become part of the problem, not the solution?
- 2 So often, if we are involved in our community, the question of politics arises. After all, many of the issues that we want to help with—poverty, education, health care, and so on—are part of the political debate. How can we be careful that we don’t allow the inevitable polarization of politics to contaminate what we want to do? Some political involvement seems unavoidable, so how can we position ourselves in a way to keep out of the political fray as much as possible?
- 3 Or, on the other hand, are there situations in which we need to be in the political arena in order to best minister to the community? If so, what are they, and how can we operate in ways so that we don’t compromise our gospel commission?

The Unseen Companion

Global Mission Pioneers have been called by God to live in areas where there are no organized churches. They make friends, lead people to Christ, strengthen and nurture believers, and provide leadership to the churches. These pioneers remain in their assigned region as long as they are needed, establishing a central congregation and then satellite congregations in neighboring villages.

In South Sudan, they labor under difficult circumstances—without electricity, decent roads, running water, or many of the other conveniences most of us take for granted. Here is an amazing story that took place in southern Sudan some years ago.

William and Charles had built a church in one village and asked two more Global Mission Pioneers to join them in holding evangelistic meetings in a nearby unentered village. They invited everyone to the meetings, and many came. Night after night, the people listened to the gospel message, but not one person took a stand for the truth.

William and his fellow mission pioneers were puzzled. The people had been kind, had offered them a place to stay and food to eat. Night after night they had listened to the messages. Why was there no response?

The pioneers went from home to home asking the people to accept Jesus, but nobody wanted to join the church. The four were saddened by the lack of results, but they encouraged each other that they had sown seeds of faith.

It was time for two of the Global Mission Pioneers to return to their own area. Before they left, Charles wanted to take a picture of the group. The four climbed a hill where they had often prayed. The three stood together as Charles snapped the picture.

When Charles developed the film, he found not three, but four men standing on the hillside. The man standing beside William was dressed in white and held a Bible in his hand. The faithful pioneers knew that God had sent an angel to encourage them in their work.

“We knew from that picture that the gospel work is God’s work,” William said. “He sent his angels to help us and to confirm our beliefs. We knew God was pleased with our work, even though we hadn’t seen results. It’s sure to bear fruit in the end.”

Part of this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help build a children’s discipleship center at the Juba Adventist Central Church in the capital city of South Sudan. The children, who make up approximately 45 percent of the church membership, currently meet under a tree for Sabbath School and other children’s meetings. Thank you for your generous support.

Jesus Mingled With People



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 1:22, 23; John 1:14; Luke 15:3–24; Matt. 9:10–13; Ps. 51:17; 1 John 2:16; Phil. 2:13–15.*

Memory Text: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’ ” (*Luke 15:1, 2, NIV*).

A deacon in a local church drove a van that took the youth to an old-age home to hold a worship service every month. In the first week, while the youth were leading out, an old man in a wheelchair grabbed the deacon's hand and held it during the service. This happened month after month. One time, when the youth group came, the man in the wheelchair was not there. The staff said that he would not likely live through the night. The deacon went to his room, and he was lying there, obviously unconscious. Taking the old man's hand, the deacon prayed that the Lord would grant him eternal life. The seemingly unconscious man squeezed the deacon's hand tightly, and the deacon knew that his prayer had been heard. With tears in his eyes, he stumbled out of the room, bumping into a woman who said, “I'm his daughter. He's been waiting for you. My father said, ‘Once a month Jesus comes and holds my hand. And I don't want to die until I have a chance to hold the hand of Jesus one more time.’” —Adapted from *The Least of These*, a video produced by Old Fashioned Pictures (2004). Used by permission.

Christianity is about becoming “Jesus” for somebody. The next several lessons will focus on aspects of Jesus' ministry method and how His church can live out His ministry.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 6.

Christ’s Method Alone

Ellen G. White, in an often-quoted paragraph, summarizes what Jesus did in order to reach out and bring the people to salvation. (*See also Matt. 9:35, 36.*)

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Let’s analyze this a bit.

1. Jesus mingled with people as One who desired their good. (He opened networks.)
2. Jesus sympathized with people. (He formed attachments.)
3. Jesus ministered to their needs. (This also formed attachments.)
4. When He combined the first, second, and third elements, He won people’s confidence.
5. “Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’ ” (to become disciples).

What we see here is a wholistic model of the gospel. This ministry method will guide us in proclaiming the gospel more fully. Jesus did not separate the social aspects (numbers 1–4) from giving the invitation to follow Him (number 5), and neither should we. All of the steps working together will give “*true success.*” This lesson will focus on the first step of Jesus’ method. Lessons 7–11 will focus on the others.

What do the following verses say about God the Son mingling with us?

Matt. 1:22, 23; John 1:14.

We are all deeply hurt and damaged by sin. But everything that has gone wrong in the world because of sin is addressed by God’s reconciliation with humanity through Jesus’ wholistic incarnational ministry. He mingled with and desired the good of the whole person and the whole human race, even ministering to those who in that culture were deemed “the worst.”

Dwell on this amazing truth that the One who made all created things (see John 1:3), Jesus, took upon Himself human flesh and in the flesh mingled with and ministered to fallen humanity as He did. How should this amazing truth, so full of hope, impact how we mingle with and minister to others?

Lost and Found

Jesus tells three parables in Luke 15, in direct response to the accusation of the Pharisees and teachers of the law that Jesus “welcomes sinners and eats with them” (*Luke 15:2, NIV*).

Read the following passages and note the essence of Jesus’ answer to these accusations.

Luke 15:3–7 _____

Luke 15:8–10 _____

Luke 15:11–24 _____

Each parable begins with something lost and ends with a celebration, an expression of God’s love for us and His profound interest in our salvation.

A pastor was following up a Voice of Prophecy interest and discovered that the whole family was interested in Bible studies, except one. The mother, father, and younger daughter had accepted Christ and were eager to receive the pastor in their home on a regular basis. The older son had rebelled against Christianity and wanted nothing to do with it. Every evening that the pastor visited, the young man left the room and would not participate in the lesson studies. After six weeks of cordial and productive Bible study, the young pastor began to challenge the three who were studying with him to consider baptism. Each had his or her own reason why he or she should wait a few months before deciding. Unexpectedly, the young man entered the dining room where the study was in session and announced that he wanted to be baptized as soon as the pastor felt he was ready. He had been sitting in his room following along in a Bible he had purchased at a used bookstore after the first lesson, and all along was growing in conviction that he needed to make a public confession of his faith. Two weeks later the young man was baptized, and one month after that, the rest of the family took their stand as well. Considering what we just read in the parables, we can imagine that there was joy in heaven over these decisions.

Jesus purposely placed Himself in contact with such people as the Samaritan woman at the well, a Roman centurion, a “sinful” woman who poured a year’s salary’s worth of nard on His feet, and countless unrecorded individuals “unworthy” of those who considered themselves too holy to be in their presence.

Have you ever avoided witnessing to a person who would likely not fit well in your church? What would it take for you and your church to find sufficient grace to embrace those “sinners”?

Eating With Sinners

Read Matthew 9:10–13. What crucial message should we as individuals take away from Jesus’ response to His critics? *Read Hos. 6:6.*

Jesus is reclining at the dinner table, where He is fellowshiping and eating with what this society would deem “undesirables.”

What kind of people does your culture deem “undesirables”?

Interrupted by the Pharisees’ question of the appropriateness of Jesus’ mingling with such despicable people, Jesus challenges them to learn the meaning of mercy in contrast to sacrifice. “ ‘But go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance’ ” (*Matt. 9:13, NKJV*). How sad that Jesus has to tell religious leaders to learn one of the most crucial truths of their own faith.

Here again, we are seeing the same problem that we saw occurring in Old Testament times, that of religious forms and ceremonies becoming more important in the minds of people than the question of how they treated others. How interesting that He quoted the Old Testament here (*Hos. 6:6*) to make His point.

“Thousands are making the same mistake as did the Pharisees whom Christ reproved at Matthew’s feast. Rather than give up some cherished idea, or discard some idol of opinion, many refuse the truth which comes down from the Father of light. They trust in self, and depend upon their own wisdom, and do not realize their spiritual poverty. . . .

“ . . . Fasting or prayer that is actuated by a self-justifying spirit is an abomination in the sight of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 280.

It is easy to judge the actions of others by using our own preferences as the standard. We must learn to humbly put self aside and allow the Holy Spirit to translate mercy into conviction.

What does Psalm 51:17 say to us all? How should the knowledge of our own sinfulness help us to understand better the meaning of this text?

Mingling Wisely

A speaker asked a group to tell how many “non-Adventist friends” they had. One man in the back of the room stood up and triumphantly proclaimed, “I’m proud to say none!” That man might have meant well, but his words said a lot about what kind of light to the world he was.

As we saw already, Matthew 5:13 says we are the salt of the earth, but this salt can lose its savor. A merchant in Sidon had stored much salt in sheds with a bare earth floor. Because the salt was in direct contact with the earth, it lost its savor. This salt was thrown out and used to pave roads. In the same way, we need to be careful as we mingle with the world: Are we letting the world rob us of our unique savor? Are our values the same as the world’s?

What can we learn from these stories about how not to mingle with the world? *Gen. 13:5–13, 19:12–26, Num. 25:1–3; see also 1 John 2:16.*

These biblical examples illustrate the need for caution in mingling with people who live by the worldly values listed in 1 John 2:16. We fool ourselves if we think that we must not use caution or that there’s no danger of getting caught up in the fallen principles of the world. At the same time, what good are we going to be to others if we hide ourselves from others in order not to be negatively impacted by their ways?

Note this wise and balanced counsel: “Now, shall professed Christians refuse to associate with the unconverted, and seek to have no communication with them? No, they are to be with them, in the world and not of the world, but not to partake of their ways, not to be impressed by them, not to have a heart open to their customs and practices. Their associations are to be for the purpose of drawing others to Christ.”
—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 231.

How many non-Adventist friends do you have? What is the nature of your relationship? Who is influencing whom more, you them or they you?

In the Midst of a Crooked Generation

No question, the world needs what we have been given in Christ. It's nothing in us, ourselves, that makes what we have so important. Rather, it is only by virtue of what we have received from Christ that gives us our imperative to reach others. And it's precisely because we have been given so much that we are called to reach out to those who don't have it. " 'Freely you have received, freely give' " (*Matt. 10:8, NKJV*).

Read Philippians 2:13–15. What are we being told here, and how does it fit in with our calling to reach out to others without falling away ourselves?

We have to be careful about so seeking to protect ourselves from the world that we never come in contact with the souls in it. It's very easy to stay in our own spiritual and theological comfort zone and to become spiritual introverts. Such introversion can turn into self-centered religion. How often do local churches, for instance, spend more energy battling over worship styles or doctrine than they spend in outreach to a dying world?

Robert Linthicum, in his book *Empowering the Poor* (pp. 21–30), describes three kinds of churches.

First, the church *in* the city (community) has virtually no contact with the community. The bulk of the church's emphasis is serving its members' needs.

Then, there is the church *to* the city (community). This church knows that it must get involved in ministry to the community. It guesses what the community needs without consulting the community it serves. Then it presents programs *to* the community. Its ministry risks being irrelevant, with no community ownership.

Last, Linthicum speaks of the church *with* the city (community). This church does a demographic analysis to understand those whom it serves. Members mingle *with* leaders and residents of the community, asking them what their real needs are. Their service to the community is more likely to be relevant and well-received because the community has already given input and trusts the process. This church joins the community in their struggle to decide what kind of community they want and is a partner with the community toward realizing that goal. Such a church gets involved with community organizations and may help the community to add lacking services, if needed. There is a mutual ownership and buy-in of this partnership to meet real needs.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Our Example,” pp. 17–28, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Levi-Matthew,” pp. 272–280, in *The Desire of Ages*.

The church’s mission is to the world, not only unto itself. It was organized for service to others. A church of another faith community has a sign at the end of the driveway, just before the driveway enters the road into the community in front of the church. The sign says: “Servant’s Entrance.” That says it all, doesn’t it?

Jesus was a great mingler, and Ellen White indicates that God’s church must be today. The members are salt and must permeate the community.

“There is no call here to hibernate in the wilderness evangelizing jack rabbits. Here is an awesome invitation given by the prophet of the Lord to mingle, like Jesus, with the unlovely, the poor, and the lost. Jesus was friends with sinners. He attended their parties—met them where they were. Jesus never compromised His faith, but He loved to go where there were sinners. The people most comfortable around Jesus were sinners, while the ones most uncomfortable were the so-called saints. But Jesus didn’t pay attention to that, because He had His priorities straight. He came to save sinners. That was His mission, and it should be our mission, even if we make some saints upset. . . .

“For too long Adventists have isolated themselves in safe havens and ghettos, as if the rest of the world did not exist. That time has ended. We cannot, we dare not, live in apostasy any longer. It is time to enter the community as individuals and as a church.”—Russell Burrill, *How to Grow an Adventist Church* (Fallbrook, Calif.: Hart Books, 2009), p. 50.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the idea expressed above that by isolating ourselves we are “in apostasy.” Do you think that’s too strong, or is the point valid? If so, what biblical justification can you find to back up your answer?
- 2 Though we need to mingle in order to minister, why is the support from, and accountability to, the church family an important factor that we mustn’t neglect? How can we as a church body help one another as we seek to minister to the world but not get pulled into it?
- 3 Discuss this idea of churches spending more energy bickering over internal issues than they spend on outreach. How can we avoid this deadly trap?

Lost and Found: Part 1

“Denise!” her mother called. “Come!” Her mother grabbed the little girl’s hand.

“What’s wrong?” the four-year-old asked as she ran to keep pace with her mother.

“Soldiers! They’re coming! We must hide!” Denise didn’t understand her mother’s words, but she felt her mother’s fear. As they approached their little home in Rwanda, Denise saw her father tying a bundle.

Together the little family ran down the dusty trail that headed east. Other people joined them, and soon the path became crowded with people running and crying. It was 1994, and millions were fleeing for their lives.

They walked for hours, hiding in the tall grass or the small forests when someone thought soldiers were nearby. At last, the family reached the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where they could rest.

The family settled into a refugee camp made of lean-tos and plastic tarps that offered a little shelter from the hot sun and the pounding rain. But at least they were safe—they thought.

Then men with knives and guns entered the camp, and people screamed and fled. Denise ran too. But where were Mama and Papa? Denise followed the crowd, calling for her parents. But no one answered.

Wearily, Denise sat down to rest. A man offered to carry her on his shoulders. She felt safe. But then he became tired and put her down. Suddenly, the sound of gunfire and screams tore the air. Denise scampered off the road and hid until the shooting stopped. Then she joined others seeking safety. She saw people lying on the road. Then she saw the man who had carried her. He was lying so still. Somehow Denise understood that he was dead.

Denise walked on, blindly following the other people. Sometimes she called out, “Mama, Papa,” but she never heard an answer. Denise found a family who allowed her to stay with them in exchange for work. She suffered their abuse. She fled the home and found an orphanage where she could stay.

When Denise heard that the fighting was over, she wanted to go home and find her parents. But where was home?

Denise remained in the orphanage until she was old enough to leave. Then she began the long walk back to Rwanda. She slept in the bush at night. As she walked, she often asked God why she had to suffer so much. She didn’t hear God answer, but when she grew discouraged and hungry, people shared their food with her and gave her hope to keep walking.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.



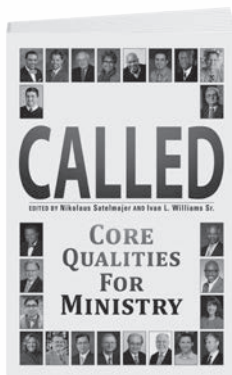
CALLED



Nikolaus Satelmajer, DMin, STM • Ivan L. Williams Sr., DMin

Called examines the seven core qualities that the Ministerial Department of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists has identified as benchmarks. These benchmarks are critical for an effective ministry.

Ministers are constantly challenged to meet the needs of the community and the congregation. *Called* was written to help ministers find and experience fulfillment in ministry while meeting the challenges of the ever-changing world.



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HEALING AND HELPING



The Adventist University of Central Africa's new School of Medicine in Rwanda trains medical professionals to continue the healing, wholistic ministry of Jesus in a region where the doctor to patient ratio is 1:16,000. But they need dormitories and a cafeteria.

In South Sudan, the Adventist church opened its field office in the capital city of Juba in 2011. Members in Juba worship in a small church, and the

children meet under a tree for Sabbath School. You can help them have their own "lamb shelter."

Thank you for giving generously to the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on September 24, 2016, or anytime on our secure website.

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Jesus Desired Their Good



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Jon. 3:4–4:6, Luke 19:38–42, Matt. 5:43–47, 1 Corinthians 13, Mark 8:22–25, Phil. 2:3–5, James 2:14–17.*

Memory Text: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (*Matthew 23:37*).

On Sabbath morning, during Sabbath School and worship service, skateboarders can often be seen rolling past the main doors of a local Seventh-day Adventist church.

Why? Because this church meets in a community youth center facility right next to a skateboard park. And if you thought these skateboarders were an unexpected annoyance, think again.

Instead, in an effort to curb the rising youth crime rate, the government in their city built the park to provide a place for its youth to engage in wholesome recreation. When the youth center and skateboard park were finished, the government wanted a church congregation to hold its worship services in the community youth center facility. The community leaders felt that the presence of a church would have a positive moral influence on the youth who used the park. They invited several churches of various Christian denominations, but only one accepted, the church that had Sabbath School and worship on Saturday morning.

These Adventist church members were excited about moving into the center, for the skateboarders were part of the group they wanted to reach.

The local church's definition of “church” is a community that does not exist for itself. This should be the definition for all our churches as well.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 13.

Jonah in Nineveh

Read Jonah 3:4–4:6. What serious attitude problem does this prophet have?

In Jonah 4, the prophet Jonah sits down east of the great city of Nineveh. He has delivered the message of doom that God has entrusted to him. He reflects on his journey, his reluctance to come to Nineveh, his runaway tactics, God's insistence in getting Jonah back on mission, the three-day episode in the fish, and the long journey inland from the coast. And for what? *For God to turn around and show His grace on these despicable people?* The people repented, but Jonah now feels betrayed. He feels dishonored and used. His hope had been that the destruction of this heathen city of 120,000 inhabitants would show God's preference for His chosen people and vindicate Jonah's hatred for the Ninevites.

Read Luke 19:38–42. What is happening here, and what is Jesus' attitude toward the city of Jerusalem?

Eight hundred years after Jonah, Jesus rides on a donkey over the crest of a hill overlooking Jerusalem. Shouts of praise to the "King who comes in the name of the Lord" are heard, along with echoes of hope declaring " 'peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' " (*Luke 19:38, NIV*). In the midst of this triumphal entry, as Jesus approaches the city, He stops and weeps, saying, " 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace' " (*Luke 19:42, NIV*).

Note the contrast. Jonah reluctantly obeyed the command of God, caring little for the good of the inhabitants of Nineveh. Jesus approaches Jerusalem with one burden on His heart: that they might have the salvation He offers, and at such a high cost.

Two cities: Nineveh and Jerusalem. Two messengers: Jonah and Jesus. The difference is obvious. Jesus exemplifies the selfless, caring attitude that desires the good of the people. May we, through God's grace, reveal that same attitude as Jesus did toward the lost.

How might selfishness play into the attitude that leaves someone unconcerned about the salvation of others?

The “Anyway” Principle

A leper approaches Jesus and begs for healing. Conventional wisdom says that this man should be isolated. Jesus, the clean One, touches him and heals him *anyway* (*Matt. 8:1–4*). Peter denies Jesus three times during His trial (*John 18*). After the Resurrection, having searched Peter’s heart, Jesus reinstates him into His service *anyway* (*John 21*). God’s church in Corinth is unappreciative of Paul’s authority and influence. Paul serves them *anyway* (*2 Cor. 12:14, 15*).

This principle of “anyway” or “in spite of” is essential for revealing the character of the One who desires their good.

“Millions upon millions of human souls ready to perish, bound in chains of ignorance and sin, have never so much as heard of Christ’s love for them. Were our condition and theirs to be reversed, what would we desire them to do for us? All this, so far as lies in our power, we are under the most solemn obligation to do for them. Christ’s rule of life, by which every one of us must stand or fall in the judgment, is, ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.’ Matthew 7:12.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 640.

This “golden rule” is foundational to a mind-set of ministry that thinks first of what is good for the ones we are serving instead of what benefits us.

Read Matthew 5:43–47; Luke 6:27, 35; 23:34. What crucial point here has Jesus revealed to us in regard to our attitude toward a certain class of people?

Jesus is calling us to show love and be kind to people “in spite of” the fact that they hate you or are your enemies. Notice, too, that Jesus links these acts and attitude with the character of God Himself. “ ‘But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked’ ” (*Luke 6:35, NIV*).

How do we understand the idea that God is “kind to the ungrateful and wicked”? (How does this answer, for example, the question “Why do the wicked sometimes prosper?”) How does Romans 2:4 play into the picture as well?

Love Never Fails

According to Jesus, the two greatest commandments are love to God and love to neighbor (*Luke 10:27, 28*). He also showed us who our neighbors are (*Luke 10:29–37*). No question, too, that Jesus' life from beginning to end was an expression of the pure love of God, who Himself is love (*1 John 4:16*). Thus, if we are to reflect the character of God, if we are to help reveal to others the reality of God and what He is like, we are to love.

Think about it another way. One of the greatest “excuses” that people have used to reject Jesus and Christianity as a whole has been professed Christians themselves.

What are some examples you can find in history, or even today, of how “Christians,” or at least people bearing the name “Christian,” have done some terrible deeds, sometimes even in the name of Jesus? Does not even the book of Daniel (*see Dan. 7:24, 25 or Rom. 2:24*) warn about this?

It's no wonder that many people through the ages, and even today, have been turned off by Christianity as a whole. Thus the imperative to reveal Christ to others through our own lives should be stronger than ever. And nothing can do this more powerfully than the kind of love expressed by Jesus Himself being expressed in our own lives as well.

Read 1 Corinthians 13. What does Paul say love is? What does he say love isn't? What does he say love does? What does he say love doesn't do? In short, how is love to be expressed in our lives as Christians, and how does love fit in with how we are to be witnesses to our community? More important, what changes do you need to make in order to reveal this kind of love?

The Second Touch

Read Mark 8:22–25. What spiritual lesson can we learn from the fact that Jesus’ first healing touch didn’t fully heal the blind man?

After Jesus “spat” on the man’s eyes, He touched him and asked, “ ‘Do you see anything?’ ” (*Mark 8:23, NIV*). Why did Jesus “spit” on his eyes? Ancient literature indicates examples of the use of saliva by physicians. This miracle resembles somewhat the healing of the deaf and mute man in Decapolis not long before that. (*Read Mark 7:31–37.*) However, unlike all His other recorded healing miracles, the cure for the blind man was performed in two stages.

Reread Mark 8:23, 24. How do you understand the man’s answer to the question “ ‘Do you see anything?’ ”?

“ ‘I see people; they look like trees walking around’ ” (*Mark 8:24, NIV*). That is, he could distinguish them from trees only by their motion. In a spiritual sense, how could we apply this incident to our own lives? It might be that after Jesus gives us spiritual sight, we are not totally restored. We might see people as “trees,” as objects. This could mean that we still are blind to them as real people with real needs. They are items, numbers, objects that we want to join the church, maybe to boost our baptism count, or to make us look good. With such a self-serving attitude around them, many people are likely not to stay in such a church.

Reread Mark 8:25. In this case, why might Jesus have deliberately healed the man in two stages?

The context of this story is that just before this healing miracle Jesus was dealing with another kind of blindness: His disciples didn’t understand the meaning of His statement to “ ‘watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod’ ” (*Mark 8:15, NIV*). They thought it was because they didn’t have enough bread for their boat ride. Jesus called them blind: “ ‘Do you have eyes but fail to see?’ ” (*Mark 8:18, NIV*).

Not only people outside the church need Jesus’ healing touch. Inside the church there is blindness. Partially sighted church members who see people as statistics and objects will not care or notice that many new babes in Christ slip out the back door of the church. They need Jesus’ second touch so they will see everything more clearly and will come to love others as Jesus did.

The Other-Centered Church

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 2:3–5, NIV*).

In what ways should the principles expressed here rule our lives and impact how we relate, not just to church members, but to our community?

When He was on earth, Jesus wasn't thinking about Himself. His agenda was about desiring the good of others. Much of His ministry consisted of responding to interruptions, such as when Jairus interrupted Him with a request to rush to his house to heal his dying daughter. This interruption then was interrupted by a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. (*Read Mark 5:21–43.*)

Christ's church is His heart and hands on earth. Jesus loved people more than anything else, and a church that is truly His will do the same.

Churches have agendas and goals, and that's good. An unconditional love for human beings will sometimes lead us to get out of our preconceived agendas, especially if those agendas distract from expressing God's love to others. For many churches, baptisms are high on the agenda. Baptisms are wonderful. Baptisms fulfill Matthew 28:19. But what is your church's motivation for baptisms? Is it self-serving? Is it to make the church look good and bring accolades to its pastor? Or is it because your church genuinely wants people in your community to enjoy the abundant life found by accepting Christ (*John 10:10*) and to accept *everything* that He offers because you wish the best for them?

One church was running a much-needed soup kitchen in a depressed area of town. The pastor was heard saying, “We must close this soup kitchen, because no baptisms are coming from it.” Another congregation had just built a new church building. They were very proud of it. When the pastor suggested inviting the community to come inside the church for such events as Vacation Bible School or health screenings, to expose people to the environment of the church, the *first* consideration was fear that the new carpet would get dirty and worn. And the new bathrooms might get defaced. Contrast these two churches with the church that was meeting in the skateboard park.

Read over the verses for today. How well do they reflect your own attitude toward others? How can we learn to experience the death to self that is needed to reveal these characteristics in our lives?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Our Example,” pp. 17–28, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “‘One Thing Thou Lackest,’” pp. 518–523, in *The Desire of Ages*; “A Social Life,” pp. 186–188, 190–192, 194–196, in *My Life Today*.

“In order to reach all classes, we must meet them where they are; for they will seldom seek us of their own accord. Not alone from the pulpit are the hearts of men and women touched by divine truth. Christ awakened their interest by going among them as one who desired their good. He sought them at their daily avocations and manifested an unfeigned interest in their temporal affairs.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 186. How true that many people today, for various reasons, will “seldom seek us of their own accord.” Just as Jesus came down and reached us where we are, we need to do the same for others. On one level, this shouldn’t be so hard. There are so many people out there with so many needs. The world is a hurt and broken place with hurt and broken people who, in some cases, simply crave someone to listen to them, someone to talk to, someone who cares. And of course, as a church body, we should be able to give them to some degree the physical help that they need. We need to be careful not to be guilty of what James warned about: having faith but not the deeds to reveal it. How interesting, too, that he expressed that warning, not in the context of diet or dress or personal behavior, but in the context of helping the needy. (See *James 2:14–17*.) Anyone can say that they have faith. How we respond to our “neighbor” is the true measure of that faith.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read James 2:14–17. How can you help your church make sure that it is not guilty of doing what James warns about here?
- 2 Think about some people in the Bible who demonstrated unselfish and caring service. For example: “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor” (*Acts 9:36, NIV*). What is your church doing to help others in modern “Joppa”?
- 3 It’s easy to do good things when you are lauded and praised and held up as an example of “good works” or the like. But what about doing things for others that no one knows about, that no one hears about, and that no one (other than perhaps the persons helped) even cares about?
- 4 Someone asked a Christian, “What is the purpose of your life?” He responded, “To give, and ask nothing in return.” How well does this answer encapsulate what our attitude as Christians should be?

Lost and Found: Part 2

At last Denise arrived in northwestern Rwanda. There she met a kind man and his wife who befriended her. When she told them her story, they urged her to stop wandering and stay with them. They invited her into their home and shared their food. They treated her well and spoke to her with love. They told her about Jesus and how much He loves her. She learned that they were Seventh-day Adventists.

Denise loved these people who wanted to help find her family. But when they found no living relative, they asked Denise's permission to adopt her. She agreed. Finally, she had a home again and someone to care for her.

The couple often talked to Denise about God. They introduced her to Jesus, and soon she accepted Him as her Savior.

But often at night Denise wondered about her birth family. Her adoptive father took Denise to Kigali, the capital city. He introduced her to the manager of the Adventist radio station, the Voice of Hope Radio, and there she told her story. The announcer invited anyone who knew anything about Denise's family to call in.

Denise learned that her father had died in a refugee camp. But she never learned what had happened to her mother. She found out that she has other relatives in Rwanda, and one day she would like to meet them. But she is torn. She loves her adoptive parents and the God they taught her to love. "They have given me spiritual roots and a hope for the future," she says.

Although her earthly father is dead, Denise knows that her heavenly Father loves her unconditionally. It is He who kept her alive as she wandered across several countries in search of a home and a family. "So many people perished during the genocide, and yet God preserved me," she says. "He saved me when I didn't even know Him, and He brought me from death to new life in Jesus."

The country of Rwanda has recovered significantly since the genocide. A new School of Medicine at the Adventist University of Central Africa, located in Kigali, will train qualified health professionals to serve in a comprehensive health ministry in a region of the world where the doctor-to-patient ratio fluctuates between 1 to 16,000 to 1 to 24,200. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help to build dormitories and a cafeteria for the medical students. Thank you for giving.

Jesus Showed Sympathy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Kings 13:23; Exod. 2:23–25; Luke 7:11–16; 1 John 3:17; John 11:35; Rom. 12:15; 2 Cor. 1:3, 4.*

Memory Text: *And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick” (Matthew 14:14, NKJV).*

How much more tragic could it be? A 17-year-old girl, struggling with what most 17-year-old girls struggle with, except with so much more, took her own life. Who could imagine the parents' devastation?

Their pastor came over to the house. He sat down in the living room next to them and for a long time said nothing. He just immersed himself in their grief. Then he, the pastor, started sobbing. He sobbed until his tears ran dry. Then, without saying a word, he got up and left.

Sometime later, the father told him how much he appreciated what the pastor had done. He and his wife, at that time, didn't need words, didn't need promises, didn't need counseling. All they needed, right then and there, was raw sympathy.

"I can't tell you," he said to the minister, "how much your sympathy meant to us."

Sympathy means "with pathos," and "pathos" is related to pity, tenderness, or sorrow. It means being "with" someone but in a profound way. Showing sympathy toward the sorrows of others takes the question of "mingling" with others to a whole new level.

Showing sympathy was also a crucial way that Jesus reached people.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 20.

Hearing the Groans

The universe can seem like a very scary place: vast, cold, and so big we sense our own insignificance and meaninglessness amid it. This fear has become even more prevalent with the advent of modern science, whose giant telescopes have revealed a cosmos much larger and vaster than our imaginations can readily grasp. Add to that the extravagant claims of Darwinism, which in most popular versions dismisses the idea of a Creator, and people can, understandably, struggle with a sense of hopelessness amid a vast creation that seems to care nothing about us.

Of course, the Bible gives us a different view of our place in the creation.

What do the following texts teach about God’s compassion toward His fallen and broken creation here on earth?

Judg. 2:16–18 _____

2 Kings 13:23 _____

Isa. 54:7, 8, 10 _____

Contrary to the popular notion of the God of the Old Testament as stern, mean, unforgiving, and uncompassionate, especially in contrast to Jesus and how He is represented in the New Testament, these texts are just a few of many in the Old Testament that reveal God’s compassion for humanity.

What does Exodus 2:23–25 teach us about how God deals with suffering?

God deeply cares about people (*see James 5:11*). This is a theme that is seen all through the Bible.

“His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterances of them. . . . Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. . . . No calamity can befall the least of His children . . . of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 100.

What kind of collective groans are going up toward heaven in your community, and how can God use you to sympathize with and to help those who are suffering?

Our Sympathetic Savior

As Jesus mingled with people during His earthly ministry, He encountered situations that revealed His sympathy and compassion for them. “He came forth, and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick” (*Matt. 14:14, ASV*).

Read Matthew 9:35, 36 and Luke 7:11–16. What do they teach us about how true sympathy and compassion are made manifest?

The word *sympathy* also brings to mind other related words, such as *empathy* and *pity*. According to various dictionaries, *compassion* is pity, sympathy, empathy. *Pity* is sympathetic sorrow for one’s suffering. *Empathy* is the ability to understand or share the feelings of others.

Compassion and sympathy show that we not only understand what others are suffering but want to help alleviate and remedy the suffering.

When you hear about the sad things that have happened to people in your community, such as their house burning down or a death in the family, what is your reaction? Do you just mutter, “That’s so sad,” and then move on, which is so easy to do? Or are your sympathies aroused, *moving* you with compassion for them? True compassion will lead you toward comforting and actively helping friends as well as strangers in practical ways. Whether it is sending a sympathy card or showing even deeper sympathy by visiting and assisting with immediate needs, loving action is the clear result of true sympathy.

Fortunately, people and aid organizations tend to compassionately respond to big disasters. However, sometimes we may not pay as much attention to the “smaller” misfortunes and disasters that deeply affect someone.

Jesus didn’t just show sympathy but took that sympathy to the next level: compassionate action. We, of course, are called to do the same. Anyone can feel sorrow or sympathy for someone’s misfortune. The question is, What action does that sympathy lead us to perform?

While eating breakfast, a man was listening to his wife read from the news about a tragedy in another country that had left thousands dead. After talking for a few moments about how terrible it was, he then changed the subject and asked whether the local soccer team had won the match the night before. In what ways are we all somewhat guilty of the same thing, and what, if anything, can we do about it?

Walking in Their Shoes

Read Colossians 3:12, 1 Peter 3:8, and 1 John 3:17. What are these texts saying to us, and how can we reveal this compassion in our lives?

Compassion comes from the Latin word *compati*, which means “to suffer with.” As we ourselves have suffered, we also can understand the sufferings of others; and, no doubt, just as we often crave compassion and sympathy in our suffering, we should be willing to do the same for others in their need as well.

We saw in an earlier lesson the story of the good Samaritan. As He highlights the example of the Samaritan, Jesus says, “But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him” (*Luke 10:33, NIV*). This pity, or compassion, drove the Samaritan traveler to act on behalf of the injured victim. The priest and the Levite likely asked themselves, “If I help this man, what will happen to me?” The Samaritan might have asked himself, “If I don’t help this man, what will happen to him?” In this story the Samaritan unselfishly takes the perspective of the victim and takes action. He risks his safety and his wealth for a stranger. In other words, sometimes being a Christian involves risks and can be, potentially, very costly.

Look at the story of the prodigal son from this perspective as well (*Luke 15:20–32*). What does the prodigal’s father do that makes him vulnerable to criticism and family strife? The compassionate embrace, the robe of belonging, the ring of trust, the sandals of freedom, and the call for celebration reflect the selfless joy of a father who is willing to sacrifice all for the sake of his prodigal son’s restoration. *Prodigal* means wasteful, reckless, extravagant, and uncontrolled. This kind of behavior certainly describes the path of the son in this story. But stop for a moment and consider that, in response to the return of the prodigal, one could justly claim that the father in this story puts all dignity aside and recklessly bestows everything he has on his disheveled son. In the eyes of the older sibling, the father is wasteful, extravagant, and uncontrolled. The father becomes prodigal at the sight of his repentant son, and his heart of compassion triggers the emptying of all resources necessary to restore him.

This level of sympathy and compassion involves setting self aside, and it can make us vulnerable to whatever comes as we suffer with someone and endeavor to move him or her toward restoration. In short, true compassion and sympathy might come with a cost.

Jesus Wept

“Jesus wept” (*John 11:35, NIV*).

What does this verse tell us, not just about the humanity of Jesus, but how in that humanity He related to the suffering of others? *See also Rom. 12:15.*

In John 11:35 Jesus demonstrated sympathy, empathy, and pity from His core. Even though He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, the grief of a family with whom He was very close affected Him physically and emotionally.

However, Jesus was weeping not only over the death of a dear friend. He was looking at a much bigger picture, that of the suffering of all humanity because of the ravages of sin.

“The weight of the grief of ages was upon Him. He saw the terrible effects of the transgression of God’s law. He saw that in the history of the world, beginning with the death of Abel, the conflict between good and evil had been unceasing. Looking down the years to come, He saw the suffering and sorrow, tears and death, that were to be the lot of men. His heart was pierced with the pain of the human family of all ages and in all lands. The woes of the sinful race were heavy upon His soul, and the fountain of His tears was broken up as He longed to relieve all their distress.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 534.

Think about her words: Jesus, in ways that none of us ever could, saw the “pain of the human family in all ages and in all lands.”

We ourselves barely can stand to think about the pain of those whom we know or with whom we are close. Then add to that the pain of others that we read about in the news. And yet, we have here the Lord, who knows things in ways that we don’t, weeping over the collective grief of humanity. God alone knows the full extent of human woe and sorrow. How thankful we should be that we get only faint glimpses of that sorrow, and sometimes even that seems too much for us. Try to imagine what must have been stirring the heart of Jesus at that time.

General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, said, “If you can’t cry over the city, we can’t use you.”—Roger S. Greenway and Timothy M. Monsma, *Cities: Missions’ New Frontier* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Pub. Group, 2000), p. 246. **What should those words say to each of us?**

Another Kind of Comforter

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor. 1:3, 4, NKJV).

What is Paul telling us here about how our own suffering can help us be more effective in showing sympathy and comfort to those around us? How have you experienced (if you have) the reality of these words in your own life?

The word *comfort* comes from the Latin *com* (together, with) plus *fortis* (strong). As Christ strengthens us in our suffering, we can pass this strength to others. As we have learned from our own sorrows, we can more effectively minister to others in theirs.

Churches generally have members who suffer and members who comfort. This combination can transform your church into a “safe house”—a “city of refuge” (see *Numbers 35*) as well as a river of healing (see *Ezek. 47:1–12*) that flows to the community.

Showing sympathy and comfort is an art. Here are some suggestions:

- Be authentic. Listen more than you speak. Be sure your body language reinforces your attempt to sympathize and comfort.
- Show sympathy out of your individual personality. Some people give sympathy by quietly crying with the troubled person. Others don’t cry but show sympathy by organizing something that is a comfort to the bereaved.
 - *Being* a presence is often more important than speaking or doing.
 - Allow people to grieve in their own way.
 - Become acquainted with the stages of processing grief that people often go through.
 - Be careful about saying “I know how you feel.” Chances are that you don’t.
 - There is a place for professional counseling.
 - Don’t say “I’ll pray for you” unless you really intend to do so. When possible, pray with, unhurriedly visit with, and share encouraging Bible promises with suffering ones.
 - Organize support groups (if available) at your church or in your community.

Further Thought: Read Deuteronomy 24:10–22, Jonah 3, Malachi 3:17, Matthew 15:32–38, Mark 6:34–44, Galatians 6:2, Hebrews 10:32–34; Read Ellen G. White, “Be Sympathetic to All Men,” p. 189, and “Thoughtful of Others,” p. 193, in *My Life Today*; “The Privilege of Prayer,” p. 100, in *Steps to Christ*; “This Is Pure Religion” and “The Parable of the Good Samaritan,” chapters 4 and 5, in *Welfare Ministry*.

A few families with their small children got together during a holiday and made packages of food and toiletries to give out to the many homeless in their city. After working for a few hours, they got into their cars, went to the city center, and, in about a half hour, distributed the goods. They then went off to a museum and, afterward, out to dinner. As they were walking back to the cars, one of them said, “I’m glad we did this. But do you realize that by now most of those whom we fed are probably hungry again?”

No question, there are so many people out there who need comfort, sympathy, and help that it can seem overwhelming, almost to the point where one could think: *What’s the sense of doing anything? We can barely make a dent!* Numerous problems exist with that line of thinking, however. First, if everyone thought that way, no one would help anyone, and the needs, as terrible as they are, would be even worse. On the other hand, if everyone who could help others would, then the needs, as terrible as they are, wouldn’t be as bad. Second, we have never been told in the Bible that human pain, suffering, and evil would be eliminated this side of heaven. In fact, we have been told the opposite. Even Jesus, when here, didn’t end all human suffering. He did what He could. We are to do the same: bring comfort, sympathy, and help to those whom we can.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How can your church be made into a safe, healing place for the brokenhearted?
- ② Discuss in class the following quote: “Many wonder why God doesn’t act. God wonders why so many of His people don’t care.” —Dwight Nelson, *Pursuing the Passion of Jesus* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2005). Do you even agree with the premise of the challenge? If so, what can we do to change?
- ③ Look at this quote from Ellen G. White: “Kindly words simply spoken, little attentions simply bestowed, will sweep away the clouds of temptation and doubt that gather over the soul. The true heart expression of Christlike sympathy, given in simplicity, has power to open the door of hearts that need the simple, delicate touch of the Spirit of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 30. What should this tell us about the incredible power for good that kindness and sympathy can have as we reach out to help the grieving?

“Remember Your Faith”: Part 1

Pierre stumbled down the red-dirt road, following others who walked in front of him. He didn't know where he was going, but he knew that he had to get away from the death that pursued him.

Pierre was nine years old when the Rwandan genocide took the lives of 800,000 Rwandans and destroyed the life he had known. Pierre's father, a pastor, had gathered his nine children together and told them solemnly, “I don't know what will happen. If you live, you must remain faithful to God. Remember the Sabbath. Remember your faith.”

When soldiers came, the family fled to the church for refuge. But the soldiers set fire to the church. Pierre could still smell the smoke, and could still hear the screams of those dying around him. Somehow he had managed to escape the building and flee without being shot. But what had happened to his family? He didn't know.

Pierre followed others who fled to neighboring Burundi. He survived in a refugee camp until he was told that it was safe to return to Rwanda. Once again, he walked the dusty road, this time toward his home.

He found his town. He found a pile of ashes where his church had been. He found bones. Somehow he knew that only he had survived. He was alone. His father's words rang in his heart. “Stay faithful to God, no matter what.”

Pierre's aunt, who lived in neighboring Uganda, came searching for his family. She took Pierre home to live with her. Together they built a new life. Over time, the sharp pain of his loss became a dull ache. His faith in God grew stronger. Then, without warning, his aunt died in an accident. Once more, Pierre was alone. He was 14 and didn't know what to do or where to turn. All he had was his faith.

The Rwandan government provided free education to genocide survivors, and someone helped Pierre enroll in high school. He shared a room with two other boys, Esdras and Deo, who had lost their families in the genocide too. The three boys became as brothers, bound together by loss and tragedy.

Pierre finished high school and was awarded a full scholarship to study at a national university in Rwanda. But he turned down the offer. He wanted to study at the Seventh-day Adventist university in Kigali, even though his genocide survivor benefits wouldn't pay all his costs. “You're crazy!” his friends told him. “Take the scholarship!”

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.

Jesus Ministered *to* Their Needs



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 5:22–43, 10:46–52, John 5:1–9, Ps. 139:1–13, Mark 2:1–12, Acts 9:36–42.*

Memory Text: “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness” (*Matthew 9:35, NIV*).

A retired Seventh-day Adventist woman in an African country did not wish to stop ministering in retirement. Her community needed healing because of the ravages of HIV/AIDS. The most urgent need was that AIDS orphans didn't have adequate nutrition. In 2002, she and her church started feeding the children in the community a solid meal six days a week. They started with 50 children and, as of 2012, were serving 300 children per day. That led them to start a preschool, and now 45 of those children are attending. Other services include distributing clothing from ADRA, sharing vegetables and maize from a garden that they maintain, and taking care of the sick. They started a skills-development program for women, who teach one another skills that helped them earn a living. This demonstration of the love of Jesus spawned a new church. There were five members in the beginning, and, as of 2012, 160 were attending. God provided means for building an orphanage and a new church building in 2012.

What a powerful and practical example of how meeting the needs of the community is so important for Christians.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 27.*

Interruption for Ministry

Jesus steps off the boat on the shore near Capernaum. (*See Mark 5.*) His disciples are still reeling from the harrowing encounter with the demon-possessed man in Decapolis. As usual, a crowd is there to meet Him. Eager to get His attention, individuals in the throng jostle to be near Jesus. Immediately He is asked for help, this time by a ruler of a synagogue.

Read Mark 5:22–43. While Jesus was on His way to minister to the needs of this ruler of a synagogue, what interrupted Him, and how did He respond to the interruption? More important, what lessons should we take from the story for ourselves about how we react when interrupted for ministry?

Let's face it, none of us likes interruptions, do we? We are busy. We have things to do, places to go, and jobs to get done. We set goals for ourselves and want to meet those goals, sometimes within a certain time frame, as well. Interruptions can get in the way.

That's why, if someone comes with a need or with a request for help, it can be annoying if the time isn't convenient. Sometimes you just can't drop whatever you are doing. At the same time, how often could we drop what we are doing and help but don't because we simply don't want to?

Yet, often the greatest opportunities to minister to people's needs come through interruptions. Most of us try to avoid interruptions and get upset when our plans are derailed. As we look at the ministry of Jesus, we notice that some of the needs that He cared for came as interruptions, to which He lovingly responded. If we think about it, many opportunities we get for ministry come in the form of interruptions. We have already looked at the story of the good Samaritan. Who knows where he was going and what he was going to do when he got there? But he stopped anyway to minister.

Talk about an interruption!

When was the last time someone interrupted you with a need and a request for help? How did you respond?

How Can I Help You?

Read Mark 10:46–52 and John 5:1–9. In both cases, Jesus asked questions. Why would He do that?

Notice, in both cases, that Jesus asked what they wanted, even though it was obvious what they wanted. And even if it weren't, Jesus would have known what those needs were anyway.

However, by asking these questions, Jesus showed the men respect. He showed that He was listening to them and, by listening, that He cared about what they were struggling with. In how many cases do people, perhaps more than anything else, simply want someone just to talk to, someone who will listen to them? Sometimes just being able to talk about one's struggles can help a person feel better.

Consider for a moment how you would feel if you entered a doctor's office and the doctor took one glance at you, wrote out a prescription, and sent you on your way. Surely you would doubt whether this person really knew what you needed. You might say, "The doctor didn't ask me how I feel or listen to my heart or check my blood pressure or . . ." One of the cardinal rules of medical practice is "Diagnose before you treat."

The same concept applies to medical missionary work, which is focused on the well-being of people and meeting their wholistic needs. Too many churches think they already know, or they guess at what needs to be done to serve others in their community. When we put forth the effort of talking to people about their needs or the needs of the community, it lets them know we care, and it informs us how we can serve in ways that will be appreciated. Also, we will make new friends.

“ ‘Remember that you can break down the severest opposition by taking a personal interest in the people whom you meet. Christ took a personal interest in men and women while He lived on this earth. Wherever He went He was a medical missionary. We are to go about doing good, even as He did. We are instructed to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the sorrowing.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 162.

Most of us have no problem expressing our opinions. How can we learn to be better listeners?

The Deeper Needs

Jesus, as the Lord, knew more about the people than they knew about themselves. There are many accounts in the Gospels where Jesus showed that He not only knew what people were thinking at the present (see *Mark 2:8*)—He knew their histories as well (*John 4:18*).

Read Psalm 139:1–13. What is the Word of God telling us here?

As we saw yesterday, Jesus knew the needs of the people, and it was to those needs that He ministered. In fact, He knew even needs that went below the surface. This reality is seen in the story of the paralytic. Though it was obvious on the surface that he needed physical healing, there was something deeper there, which is why, even before telling him to take up his bed and walk, Jesus said, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (*Mark 2:5*).

Read Mark 2:1–12. What was going on below the surface in regard to this man? In what ways might this deeper need be a problem for all whom we seek to minister to?

Jesus knew the issue here was more than physical. “Yet it was not physical restoration he [the paralytic] desired so much as relief from the burden of sin. If he could see Jesus, and receive the assurance of forgiveness and peace with Heaven, he would be content to live or die, according to God’s will.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 267.

Of course we are not going to be able to get below the surface as Jesus did. Yet, we can be sure that whomever we are ministering to, they are sin-damaged creatures. That is, whatever the other surface needs, they are also in need of grace, of assurance, of the knowledge that there is a God who loves them, who died for them, and who wants only the best for them.

Think about how much you crave the assurance of salvation and of the knowledge that God loves you. How can you help others experience that same assurance and love?

Dorcas in Joppa

Read Acts 9:36–42. What did Dorcas do in Joppa when she discovered the needs around her? In Acts 9:41, what does the phrase “the believers, especially the widows” (*NIV*) imply?

Dorcas was a disciple of action. “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha” (*Acts 9:36, NIV*). Can it be said, “In [the name of your city] there are disciples named [name of your congregation]” who are “full of good works and charitable deeds” (*Acts 9:36, NKJV*)?

The “believers” are Christian church members; “the widows” may include church members as well as those who were not members. Dorcas likely served both. Your “Joppa” should be outside *and* inside your church. Consistent caring for those inside your church is also a powerful evangelistic strategy (*see Acts 2:42–47*). People outside can then say, “See how those Seventh-day Adventists love and care for one another!”

Read John 13:34, 35 and John 15:12. What is the same message in all three texts, and why is that so important for us as a church to follow? Why, though, can it sometimes be so hard to follow?

When planning to serve people outside your church, you should consider what style, or approach, you will use.

Amy Sherman describes three styles a church can use in serving its community.

1. *Settler* style focuses on meeting the needs of the community around your church. The woman with the HIV/AIDS ministry chose her nearby community as her “Joppa.”

2. The *gardener* style means developing ministry ties with neighborhoods outside your church’s immediate area, as gardeners view their gardens as an extension of their homes. Sometimes several churches partner to operate a community service center outside of each of their communities. In one city, several churches ran a health food store—out of which a new church started.

3. The *shepherd* style is serving one targeted population rather than a specific geographic neighborhood.—Adapted from Ronald J. Sider et al., *Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002), p. 146.

The Church at Work

“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans” (*Prov. 16:3, NIV*).

Once your church has a clear vision of how it can minister to the community, it is important to develop a plan whereby all church departments can work together in order to make this vision a reality. Even though you may not consider yourself a “leader” in your church, you can contribute. Also, it is good for all church members to understand this process, for this is about your church’s mission to your community.

Ideally, a church strategic plan should be based on input from at least three sources: (1) input from biblical and Spirit of Prophecy principles; (2) knowledge of community needs; and (3) input from the congregation. Some churches have collected input from the congregation by holding brainstorming sessions during which all church members are invited to share their ideas and dreams for outreach and for improving their church within.

Read Luke 14:25–35. What does this passage have to do with commitment and the planning it takes to fulfill your church’s mission?

As you think about the process required to meet your community’s needs effectively, you might think: *this takes too much commitment and time*. We’d prefer to take shortcuts. The two parables warn us against taking the responsibilities of mission and discipleship lightly. They remind us that analysis and planning for our mission are essential. It’s a matter of good stewardship. The flavor of the salt in Luke 14:34 represents devotion. Without this, our service, our discipleship, is useless and meaningless. We need fervent and faithful devotion to our Lord, and if we have that, fervent and faithful devotion to ministry will follow.

What are ways that you can do more to work with your church in organizing and planning beforehand how you can reach out to your community?

Further Thought: Read Deuteronomy 15:11, Job 29:11–17, Proverbs 14:31, 19:17, Acts 3:6, James 1:27–2:5. Read Ellen G. White, “Pioneering in Australia,” pp. 327–338, in *Welfare Ministry*.

Paul, like Jesus, was involved in meeting the expressed needs of people. We can see this, for example, in the famous story of Paul at Mars Hill in Athens. In Acts 17:23, Paul, provoked by the idolatry that he saw in the city, engaged in lively discussions with the local intelligentsia and anyone in the marketplace who would talk with him. He became aware of their needs and issues. He discovered that they had an unknown God-shaped hole in their lives and that they needed to know the true God and to stop worshiping useless idols. He then began to preach in the synagogue, where both Jews and “Gentile worshippers” (*Acts 17:17, NKJV*) were. In other words, he took advantage of the opportunity he had and reached out with the gospel. Paul sought to meet them where they were, as we can see by how he talked to the people when at the synagogue and in the marketplace. The masses believed in some kind of deity, because they had built an altar to “the unknown God” (*Acts 17:23*). Working from that premise, Paul sought to point them to the God “ ‘whom you worship without knowing’ ” (*Acts 17:23, NKJV*). He even later quoted one of their own poets, who happened to have written something true: “ ‘We are also His offspring’ ” (*Acts 17:28, NKJV*). Starting from where the people were, he wanted to lead them away from their idols to the living God and Jesus, raised from the dead. In short, assessing the needs of those whom he wanted to reach, Paul then tried to help fulfill those needs.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 “He who taught the people the way to secure peace and happiness was just as thoughtful of their temporal necessities as of their spiritual need.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 365. What important message is given to us here in regard to why we should minister to the needs of others?
- 2 Why do we, when thinking about outreach, have to be careful not to forget what our ultimate goal is? What is that ultimate goal? Give reasons for your answer.
- 3 How can we learn to view some interruptions not as annoyances but as sacred opportunities for ministry? How does Galatians 2:20 help us in this area?

“Remember Your Faith”: Part 2

Pierre refused to be swayed by his friends urging him to study at the national university. He wanted to study at the Adventist university instead, even if it meant losing a full scholarship. “God will provide,” he told them. When Esdras and Deo realized how determined Pierre was to enroll in the Adventist university, they applied to study there, as well. They were, after all, brothers.

The boys were accepted at the Adventist university. They shared a small room in a house near the university. They pooled their money, but often didn’t have enough for proper food. Even so, sometimes they shared their meager food with others who had even less.

Esdras and Deo noticed differences between their former teachers and the staff and students at the Adventist university. The teachers at the university were personally interested in the students’ needs and shared their concerns. They counseled them and prayed with them. Prayer was not just a formality; it was the lifeblood of the school.

Pierre invited Esdras and Deo to join him at worship services on Sabbath and during the week. Larger worship services were held in an open stadium on the campus. There was no church building in which to worship, but they still went. Before long the boys began to understand why God was so important in Pierre’s life.

During a Week of Prayer at the school, Esdras and Deo gave their lives to God and were baptized. Pierre rejoices that the brothers once bound by tragedy are now brothers bound by a faith in God that is stronger than death.

Like Pierre and his friends and thousands of others who survived the genocide in Rwanda, the Adventist University of Central Africa (AUCA) has risen from the destruction as well. The government took over the original university campus, which was located in a still unstable region of Rwanda. They gave the church land on a hilltop in Kigali, the capital city, and funds to help rebuild the campus. Today, 2,200 students are studying at the university. More than half of these students are not Adventists.

The campus of AUCA continues to grow. In 2010, the first quarter Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped to complete a church-multipurpose building on the campus. This quarter, we have the opportunity to provide funding to build a dormitory for students attending the new AUCA medical school, and an on-campus cafeteria. Thank you for your generous support of mission!

Jesus Won Their Confidence



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 15:6, Num. 14:11, 1 Cor. 3:1–9, Dan. 6:1–3, Neh. 2:1–9, Deut. 4:1–9, Acts 2:42–47.*

Memory Text: “But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities” (*Luke 5:15, ESV*).

For several years, a Seventh-day Adventist church has provided breakfast five days a week for a local public elementary school. Though the nation itself was very secular, it just had passed a law providing enough money for each public school to have a chaplain, and the school and community wanted the Seventh-day Adventist church to provide one (it is rare to ask only one church to do that). The chaplain's role is to help look after the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the students and even the wider school community. The opportunities are amazing.

“I enjoy the unique and special relationship we have with your church,” the school principal had said to the church pastor, who was visiting the school, “and just wish other churches could be involved the way you are.” When the pastor was leaving the grounds, the school's community liaison officer thanked him for what the church was doing and asked if she could attend one Sabbath.

This week, we will explore the issue of winning the confidence of people whom we aim to serve and win for Christ.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 3.

Winning Confidence

After desiring their good, showing sympathy, and ministering to their needs, Jesus “won their confidence.” *Confidence* in Latin is composed of the words *con*, meaning “with,” and *fides*, meaning “faith.” Throughout the Bible several words are employed to get across the meaning of the word *faith*.

In Hebrew the main root for “faith” is *amn*, from which we get the word *amen*. The basic idea is that of constancy, continuity, and reliability. It gives the idea of something solid, firm, in which one can trust and believe. It is often translated as “believe” in the context of a saving faith in God, and in another form it means “truth.” In the context of Christ’s example of winning people’s confidence, the implication would be that of evoking the kind of trust that comes from seeing unwavering and solid commitment, which in the case of Jesus came through mingling with, sympathizing with, and serving the people.

Read the following texts, all of which have a word based on the root *amn* (*Gen. 15:6, Num. 14:11, Isa. 7:9, Hab. 2:4*). **How is it used in the text, and how does it convey the idea of confidence and trust?**

In the Greek of the New Testament, the root word used to convey the Hebrew *amn* (faith, belief) is “*pistis*.” This Greek word for faith implies belief, trust, absolute certainty, reliability, and assurance. In the context of Christ’s example of winning people’s confidence, the implication would be that of evoking absolute certainty, assurance, trust, and belief in response to His unselfish commitment to mingling, sympathizing, and serving.

It is important to note that in Scripture, whenever this concept of confidence is attributed to humans—as in self-confidence or confidence in a person—it can often have a negative connotation (see *Mic. 7:5 and Ps. 118:9*). It is positive when this confidence is attributed to God. This calls for a word of caution. As followers of Jesus, we are called to live out His pattern of mingling, sympathizing, and ministering to people’s needs. Yet, when those we serve show confidence in us, we must point them to Jesus and what He has done for them.

If someone were to ask you, “What does true faith in God look like?” how would you answer, and why? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

A Careful Balance

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in an African country is growing rapidly. What is the secret? Church leaders have stated that there is a strong connection between this growth and the unselfish and unconditional service of the church members to people in communities throughout the country. The widespread confidence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church came to the attention of the country's president. He attended a large Adventist Community Services rally and thanked Seventh-day Adventist Church members personally for their service.

At the same time, as representatives of Christ we need to walk a fine line. We need to, as Jesus did, win the trust and the confidence of the people. But their confidence and trust in us needs to be directed toward Jesus. We are mere conduits. They see something of Christ in us—be it selflessness, love, caring, self-denial for the good of others—and they are drawn to us. As always, though, if they look at us too carefully, because we are all sinners, they might not like all that they see. Hence, we must always point them to Jesus, in whom they alone can put their full confidence. The rest of us are, sooner or later, bound to disappoint.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1–9, 5:1. What is Paul dealing with in the church? What kind of witness would result if these people were inviting others to their church and the visitors saw what Paul was talking about?

Of course, we don't have to be perfect or have a perfect church before we can seek to minister to the needs of others. At the same time, we must seek to be the kind of people whom, to some degree, others can learn to count on and trust. And we can do that only to the degree that we faithfully and diligently care for people as Jesus did. Indeed, there's no question that many of the quarrels and struggles within a church would quickly dissipate were the members focused solely on ministering to the needs of the community and revealing to them the love of Christ.

If some visitors started attending your church regularly, what would they see, and what kind of witness would it present to them?

Social Capital

“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold” (*Prov. 22:1, NIV*).

How does the concept expressed here relate to our community witness and outreach?

What is “social capital”? When you make investments in a bank account, its value grows. Social capital consists of positive, productive relationships that are just as valuable as money in the bank. When you nurture rapport with community leaders, asking them what are the community’s needs, seeking their advice on meeting these needs, and then following up with action, you are building relationships with them. This is social capital. Each positive experience with them is like an investment in your relationship. Your social capital continues to grow, and you increase in value in their eyes.

The *Church Manual* reminds us that Seventh-day Adventists “should be recognized as outstanding citizens . . . in working for the common good.” We “should support by our service and our means, as far as possible and consistent with our beliefs, efforts for social order and betterment,” maintaining “an uncompromising stand for justice and right in civic affairs.”—“Standards of Christian Living,” in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2010) pp. 137, 138.

In addition to Jesus’ earthly ministry, Scripture gives other examples of what can happen when God’s people have acquired “social capital.” Read the following passages and describe the positive relationships these Bible characters experienced with “outsiders” and what happened as a result:

Acts 7:9, 10; Gen. 41:38–45 _____

Dan. 2:46–49, 6:1–3 _____

Of course, we might not have the kind of dramatic rescues and stories that are seen here. But that’s not the crucial point. These men displayed strength of character that impressed those around them. Ellen G. White states in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (pp. 217, 218, 221) and in *Prophets and Kings* (p. 628) that the following qualities among these godly men won the confidence and favor of the “heathens” around them: gentleness, fidelity, wisdom, sound judgment, abilities, noble dignity, and unswerving integrity.

The Value of Social Capital

Churches are largely volunteer groups, which operate on limited budgets. Social capital helps improve the chance that your church can reach its significant goals. The old tradition in some countries of farmers helping other farmers bring in their harvest is an example of social capital. That is, though we need to look at each situation on its own, when it is feasible and practical we can cooperate with others in order to reach our goals.

Read Nehemiah 2:1–9. What was the result of the heaven-sent confidence that King Artaxerxes had in Nehemiah?

“The means that he [Nehemiah] lacked he solicited from those who were able to bestow. And the Lord is still willing to move upon the hearts of those in possession of His goods, in behalf of the cause of truth. Those who labor for Him are to avail themselves of the help that He prompts men to give. . . . The donors may have no faith in Christ, no acquaintance with His word; but their gifts are not on this account to be refused.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 634.

How fascinating that, in this case, God moved upon the hearts of pagans to help with the advancement of His own work. This should teach us an important lesson. To whatever degree we can, we should be willing to work with others, even those not of our faith, or even of any faith, if it will advance the cause of Christ. Though, of course, we always have to be careful about any kind of alliance we engage in with others, we can carefully and prayerfully work with others whose input can greatly aid in what we want to do for the good of the community as a whole. Oftentimes governments or even private businesses or individuals, impressed by our humanitarian work, will offer their support. This support shouldn't be automatically accepted or automatically rejected. Instead, it should be prayerfully looked at on a case-by-case basis, with input and counsel, before a decision is made.

What are some ways you can build some “social capital” in your community that could later result in positive benefits, *not for yourself* but for others?

Favor With All People

There's no question that we, as a people, have been blessed with much light from the Lord. This light isn't just in theology, such as understanding the Cross, the sanctuary, the state of the dead, the Sabbath, and the great controversy, which are great blessings in and of themselves. When we think about the light given us in regard to health and healing as well, we surely have much to offer those around us.

In fact, the health message can be a powerful point of contact to help us reach out to our communities. After all, even those who might not (at least at first) have any interest in our beliefs care about having good health. What an opportunity for us to share what we have been given. As we have already seen, Jesus said: " 'For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more' " (*Luke 12:48, NKJV*). And there's no question: to us much has been given.

Read Deuteronomy 4:1–9. What is the Lord saying to His people at that time, and in what ways does the principle expressed here apply to us, including the Lord telling them that they must be sure to obey all that He has commanded them?

A few years ago, a Seventh-day Adventist congregation was thinking about this question: Would our community miss us if somehow our congregation disappeared overnight? The answer was simple. No, they wouldn't be missed. Their community had no confidence in them.

Not liking the answer, they decided to move from building walls to building bridges. Careful not to compromise what they knew to be truth, they worked in partnership with organizations that are already doing the work of God. They became engaged with these organizations on an ongoing basis, not simply doing one-time projects but maintaining an ongoing program that greatly benefited their communities. No question: attitudes toward the church soon changed.

Read Acts 2:42–47. What connection was there in the early church between “enjoying the favor of all the people” (*Acts 2:47, NIV*) and church growth? Compare the values mentioned in this passage with your church's values.

Further Thought: Read Mark 5:18–20; Luke 8:38, 39; Acts 5:12–16. Read Ellen G. White, “Our Example,” pp. 17–28, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Grace of Courtesy,” pp. 236–240, in *Selected Messages*, book 3 (especially pp. 238, 239); “Blessing the Children,” pp. 511–517, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Relieve the Oppressed,” p. 242, in *My Life Today*.

There are, no doubt, numerous ways in which you and your church can cooperate with other churches and organizations for the good of the community. It’s crucial for your local church to know what the community needs are and then, to whatever degree possible, work in harmony with others to meet those needs. What better way to build confidence among the community and even with other churches? When mutual confidence and trust are established between your church and its target community, groundwork is laid for them to move toward following Jesus, for “this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 144. God alone knows how many people have been, or will be, won through the simple act of reaching out and seeking to do good to others who are in need.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How do we reconcile this idea of building good ties and getting a good name in the community with Jesus’ warning in Matthew 10:22: “ ‘And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved’ ” (NKJV)? How do we work through what appears to be a strong contradiction?
- 2 In class, discuss your answer to the question: What does true faith look like? That is, if we truly have a saving faith in Jesus, what will be different about us from those who don’t?
- 3 The question of gifts from others not of our faith is one that we need to think about carefully. As we saw in Wednesday’s study, Ellen G. White talked favorably about receiving gifts from those who weren’t even believers in Jesus. In *The Ministry of Healing* (p. 340), however, she spoke very sharply against churches that took money from those in the liquor business (even its own members “in good and regular standing”). She said that money from these people “is stained with blood. A curse is on it.” How can we know right from wrong in regard to whom we take gifts from or cooperate with in general, even for a good cause?

Meeting People's Needs

Zephyrin, 29, is a Global Mission Pioneer in the hills of northern Rwanda. When he came to this district two years earlier, he found just three Seventh-day Adventists.

Most people worshiped traditional gods.

Zephyrin studied the people's needs, searching for a way to make friends for Jesus. He asked the chief for permission to teach adults to read and write. The chief agreed and gave him three rooms to use.

Zephyrin was surprised when 126 people showed up for class. He had received some training in adult literacy, but he had no books. So armed with only a blackboard and chalk, he began teaching. Eight months later, most could read and write at least a little. He formed new groups to study advanced reading and writing. When these groups graduated, they could read the Bible in their own language.

Zephyrin started and ended class with prayer, and bit by bit he told his students about God and explained Bible truths to them. As interest increased, Zephyrin arranged to hold evangelistic meetings.

About 500 people came to the meetings. Zephyrin taught them for two weeks, and then followed up with visits for a month. He held another two-week series of meetings and a one-month follow-up. He repeated this six times, all the while continuing to teach literacy classes. With each series of meetings, the attendance grew.

Almost 200 were baptized in the first baptism. One man was a fortune-teller who earned a living consulting the traditional gods. Another man was a religious teacher in another church. Most of the members of his former church followed him.

Rosette, the wife of the local school headmaster, was baptized. Zephyrin was concerned that her baptism would make her husband angry. But the headmaster attended the baptism and said, "Who knows? Maybe I'll be baptized too." He was baptized during the next series of meetings and hopes to start a new group of believers near his school.

Zephyrin continued teaching literacy classes, holding evangelistic meetings, visiting families, and conducting early morning worship and Sabbath services. And God continued to bless. Within a year, the number of believers grew from three to 300!

The church's mission office purchased land and provided cement for the foundation and metal sheets for the roof of a church to seat 500. The believers bought bricks to build the walls.

Today the church has more than 400 members plus many children and visitors. Several smaller groups have formed in neighboring locations, resulting in more baptisms. Your regular mission offerings help support Global Mission and other church-planting efforts. Thank you for giving.

Jesus Bade Them, “Follow Me”



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *John 10:1–5, 16; Luke 9:2; Rev. 14:6, 7; Luke 19:1–10; Acts 26:11–27; Rev. 3:20.*

Memory Text: “But they [the sheep] will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice” (*John 10:5, NIV*).

In A.D. 362, Roman emperor Julian launched a campaign to revive paganism. Christianity was taking over the Roman Empire, and he and the pagan leaders were worried. Julian’s advice to a prominent pagan priest expresses his concern and gives a clue as to why Christianity was growing so rapidly: “I think that when the poor happened to be neglected and overlooked by the [pagan] priests, the impious Galileans [Christians] observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence. . . . [They] support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us.”—Quoted in Rodney Stark, *Cities of God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), p. 31.

The Romans had counted on Christianity’s fading away when their leader, Jesus Christ, died. Instead, record numbers of Roman citizens were following Jesus. How did *they* explain this “problem”? Jesus’ followers were demonstrating His love through meeting the basic needs of those around them. That’s what Jesus did when He was here, and that’s what His followers are to do as well.

No wonder, then, that when given the offer to follow Jesus, so many did.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 10.

They Know His Voice

Read John 10:1–5, 16. How do these texts illustrate the importance of why we, as Jesus’ representatives, must form positive and loving relationships with people in our communities as we seek to lead them to Jesus? How can we help them learn to hear His voice?

The whisper of a friend is more powerful in drawing people to Jesus than is the shout of a stranger. When we make friends who learn to trust us, the Good Shepherd (*John 10:11, 14*) can work through us to help these people hear, know, and follow His voice.

It is, of course, important that we know Jesus’ voice ourselves before we can help others know it as well. We need divinely given discernment to distinguish between the cunning voice of Satan and Jesus’ voice. Indeed, we must never forget the reality of the great controversy and that we have an enemy who works with great stealth to keep people from coming to a saving relationship with Jesus.

Nevertheless, we can be powerful conduits who help people know the voice of Jesus. He speaks through nature (even despite the ravages of the Fall), providential circumstantial workings, the influence of the Holy Spirit, godly people, and His Word. (See Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 85–91.) As we ourselves come to know and obey that voice, we can be guides to others, as well. The last thing we want to be is, as Jesus once warned, the blind leading the blind (*see Matt. 15:14*).

Why did Jesus have such compelling power to draw people to Him? It is because His example of unselfish giving of Himself is hard to resist. When we, His body, set selfishness aside and take on the nature of a servant, letting Him live out His life within us, others will be drawn to the call of the Christ in us.

As the Good Shepherd’s representatives, we must reflect the characteristics of His ministry when we bid people to follow Him. Authenticity in word as well as genuine service that reflects Jesus’ sacrificial love opens the ears of those whom we serve and breaks down barriers between the community and the church.

What are concrete ways that you can help others hear the voice of the Shepherd?

We Are to Seek

Read Luke 19:10, Mark 1:17, Luke 9:2, and Revelation 14:6, 7. What is one key point that all these texts have in common? That is, what are they telling us to do?

For years a Seventh-day Adventist congregation prayed, “Lord, please draw the people in our community to our church and to You”—as if our church is a giant magnet that will magically draw people in. Yes, sometimes people do walk into our churches, searching for God, all with no apparent effort on our part.

But what is your church to do when years go by and no one from the community walks through your doors? If you merely focus on praying for people to come, you are not following Jesus’ method for winning souls. He mingled, socialized, and sought out people to save. “We are not to wait for souls to come to us; we must seek them out where they are. . . . There are multitudes who will never be reached by the gospel unless it is carried to them.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 229.

Various metaphors illustrate this idea of seeking:

1. The shepherd leaves the 99 sheep that are in the fold to seek for the one who has wandered away (*see Matt. 18:10–14*). Jesus is telling this story in the context of His admonition to nurture and protect “little ones” from sinning. The “little ones” could be literal children or immature Christians. If they wander back into the world, we, like Jesus, are to seek for them and lovingly bring them back to Him.

The point here, as in the texts above, is similar: we are to be proactive in seeking the lost. We need to make an effort to reach out to them. Though, on occasion, it happens that someone walks in off the street and says, “Teach me about God, about salvation, about truth,” that’s generally not the norm, is it?

2. “Christ’s method” of reaching the lost “will not, cannot, be without fruit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 144. Are we, however, focusing only on the “low-hanging fruit”—people who already share our Christian worldview, such as Christians of other denominations? What are we doing about reaching the “hard-to-reach fruit”—secular people, atheists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, et cetera? Historically, people with Christian worldviews find Adventism relevant, but we must do a much better job of sharing Jesus with faith groups that have other worldviews.

The Bridge

Sometimes a church will have community service outreach programs in areas of health, family, personal finance, conflict management, et cetera, and might ask: What is the bridge to bring them to the “Follow Me” stage? We rather should ask, *Who* is the bridge? Answer: You are! “The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470. Churches that are successful in keeping inquiring visitors engaged from event to event and program to program are blessed with members who genuinely love God and are eager to nurture lasting friendships.

On the flip side, church members who are careless in their approach to visitors, or even lethargic toward them, can have a very negative impact on your church’s outreach. “The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 371.

Read Luke 19:1–10. Why did Zacchaeus find it necessary to climb a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus? What spiritual lessons should we take from this story?

Imagine what might have happened if those who were blocking access to Jesus there in Jericho had paid attention to Zacchaeus’s keen interest in coming close to Jesus and had lovingly invited this “sinner” to the feet of the Savior.

Those of us who are part of the “crowd” around Jesus must be so “infected” with His love for struggling, sinful humanity that we become “contagious” Christians. If we are deeply aware of God’s love and grace for sinners like us, we will passionately seek those outside of the crowd who are short in spiritual stature and caringly usher them to Christ.

How do you act toward new faces in your church? Do you make an intentional effort to talk to them? Or do you ignore these people, thinking that someone else can minister to them? What does your answer say about yourself and what might need to be changed?

The Bidding

Jesus and His disciples healed people *and* then turned their minds to eternal issues. (See Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 20.) Evangelist Mark Finley reminds us that not to introduce God to people is spiritual malpractice. Jesus' method of evangelism was to touch people at their points of greatest need. This is medical missionary work. Christ was not content only to heal them physically and do nothing else. The goal is eternal life in Jesus. Medical missionary work may not start with bidding those whom we know to follow Jesus, but it should get there eventually. Out of our love for people, we will long to offer them *everything* that Jesus offers.

But you may say, "I will take care of the first part of Jesus' method, but I don't do the bidding 'follow Me' part. That's not my gift." If you do the first part, you may surprise yourself by automatically sharing Jesus—and it will be so natural, so much easier, because you did the "groundwork" in the soil of their hearts.

As you become better acquainted with the people you serve, be alert for opportunities to talk about faith and about what the Lord means to you. Seek for opportunities to bring up spiritual topics. Ask your new friends about their family, their occupation, and their religion, which opens the way to share your personal testimony.

In fact, personal testimonies can be the most powerful way to witness, because they can also be the least threatening. You aren't overtly preaching; you are simply telling a story, and we all should have our own personal story about what Jesus has done in our lives.

Read Acts 26:11–27, the apostle Paul's telling of his personal testimony to King Agrippa. What can we learn from this for ourselves in seeking to witness to others about Jesus?

Notice the various stages. Paul told about what he was like before he knew the Lord. He then told about his actual conversion experience. And Paul then told about what God had done in his life since then. Then he made an appeal.

Though our stories might not be as dramatic as Paul's, what is your own story with Jesus, and how can you learn to share it with others when the time is right?

Seek and You Shall Find

Read Revelation 3:20, Matthew 7:7, 8, and John 1:12. In what ways are these three passages related, and what are they saying to us about what it means to seek and to find the Lord?

These texts together show that people must ask and seek and be open to receive Jesus. At the same time, Revelation 3:20 depicts Jesus as standing at the door and knocking so that a person will open the door and let Him in.

These ideas are not contradictory. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord is working on the hearts of people, drawing them to Him, even if people aren't necessarily aware that this is what is happening. They are often seeking for something that life itself doesn't offer them. What a privilege to be there to point them in the right direction and to help them better understand just what it is that they are looking for.

The fact is that, through you, Jesus can knock at the "door" of the lives of the people in your community, and anyone who willingly "opens the door" and receives Him will receive the blessings that come with Him (*Rev. 3:20, John 1:12*). Also, He invites His followers to ask, seek, and knock at His door and receive the "good gifts" of His kingdom (*Matt. 7:7, 8, 11*).

When the Holy Spirit impresses you that someone is ready to "open the door" to Christ, ask, "Would you like to pray with me to receive Jesus Christ and become a member of His family?" The following is a sample prayer that he or she can pray:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name, amen."

We need spiritual discernment to know when the right time is to make an appeal. While there's always the danger of being too aggressive, there's always the danger, perhaps worse, of not being aggressive enough. Sometimes people need a firm and loving push to make a choice for the Lord. Who knows who might be teetering on the edge between two choices: eternal life in Christ or eternal loss?

We do, for sure, have a sacred responsibility.

Further Thought: Read Psalm 77:20, Hosea 11:4, 2 Corinthians 5:11–21. Read Ellen G. White, “Teaching and Healing,” pp. 139–146, and “Help in Daily Living,” pp. 469, 470, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “ ‘This Man Receiveth Sinners,’ ” pp. 185–197, and “ ‘Go Into the Highways and Hedges,’ ” pp. 228–237, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*.

There was a young man who loved the Lord and who wanted to tell others about Jesus. Articulate, charismatic, he was a powerful witness. People loved to hear him speak. Yet, there was a constant problem: he was always afraid to ask people to make a commitment to Jesus. This surprised other church members, because in every other way he seemed so bold for the Lord, so willing to speak openly about his faith. Eventually, when asked about it, he gave the argument that we saw in Wednesday’s study that this was not his gift. He liked to sow seeds; he would leave it to others to reap the harvest. After a while, though, he confessed that, more than anything else, he was afraid of being rejected. He always felt a bit inadequate as a witness for the Lord (which is a good thing), and thus he was afraid that people would not make commitments to Jesus after he had asked them to do so. Others in the church explained to him that witnessing isn’t about us but about Jesus. We are always going to be imperfect witnesses. Though we can prayerfully and lovingly point them to Jesus, we cannot play the role of the Holy Spirit, who alone can bring conviction and conversion. We, though, are to be the human conduits of the love of Christ to others.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What would you say to someone who said that he or she was afraid to ask others to make a commitment to Jesus?
- 2 John 1:9 reads: “That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (*NKJV*). How does this verse help us to understand that the Lord is seeking to reach every person with salvation?
- 3 How friendly is your church to visitors? What could you do better in regard to how you deal with strangers who walk in the door?
- 4 When was the last time someone off the street simply walked into your church? How did the church respond?
- 5 In class, talk about your own conversion stories. How have you used them, or how could you use them to be a witness to others?

A Changed Heart: Part 1

by AGNES MUKARWEGO and ALITA BYRD, Rwanda

“Why are you all dressed up?” the fish seller in the marketplace asked me.

I looked at my good clothes—not what one normally wore to the market—and wondered what to tell this man, who was a friend of my husband. If my husband knew that I had gone to church, he would be angry. But I could not lie. Finally I told the man, “I came from church to buy my husband’s favorite fish for dinner.”

My home was not a happy one. My husband drank heavily and paid little attention to the children or me. We were poor because he did not work regularly. These problems left me discouraged and searching for anything that would bring me hope. So when I met my neighbor and her friends on the road one day and they began to tell me that God is the answer to all my problems, big and small, I was eager to hear more. But when they invited me to their church on Saturday, I told them I could not go. Saturday was market day, the busiest day of the week.

Before my neighbor and her friends parted, they gave me a Bible. I opened it and began reading as I walked home. I continued reading the Bible at home, and soon I found some precious verses that seemed to speak just to me. I read them again and again.

“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (*Matt. 6:25–27, NIV*).

God knows about my worries! I thought. *If God cares that much about me, He can certainly help me with my problems.*

I decided that I would make time to go to the Seventh-day Adventist church the next Saturday to learn more about the God who did not want me to worry about anything. I got up and dressed before my husband awoke and slipped out of the house.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

Urban Ministry *in the End Time*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 18:1–28; Exod. 2:23–25; Matt. 13:3–9, 18–23; John 15:12, 13; 2 Pet. 3:9.*

Memory Text: “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (*Jeremiah 29:7, NIV*).

The three angels' messages call for the gospel to be preached to “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6, NKJV*). Thus, wherever people live, the message must be brought to them. And because so many now live in cities, to the cities we must go.

In fact, urgency for city work intensified in 2007, when the United Nations statistical experts declared that for the first time in recorded history, the majority of the world's population was living in metropolitan areas. Today, urban ministry has become the central issue for Seventh-day Adventist mission strategy.

In many nations, Adventist outreach has accomplished more in the small towns and rural areas outside the metropolitan regions than it has in the cities. Surveys have shown that in some major urban complexes, the majority of people have never heard of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and thus know nothing of the three angels' messages.

Hence, it's clear that to reach out to the world, we must reach out to the cities.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 17.

The Nature of Cities

Cities bring together many different cultures, ethnic groups, languages, and religions. Traditionally, each group had its “quarter,” or defined territory. Increasingly, all kinds of people live next door to one another throughout metropolitan regions. This multicultural reality creates risk and complexity, but it also provides great opportunity for the gospel. There is greater tolerance for new ideas, a greater willingness to listen to new religions, than often exists in the more traditional cultural settings outside the cities. The city could provide access to many people who otherwise might never come near the Seventh-day Adventist message.

Read Acts 18:1–28 to see one example of how Paul pursued church planting in cities. What points can we learn from what he did there?

In these urban centers, there was a mosaic of many languages, cultures, and ethnic groups, just as cities have today. Paul found specific types of people with whom he connected. He found people who shared his connections to the Jewish faith, to Roman citizenship, and to the tentmaking business in which he was trained. He used these skills to support himself. He lived in the household of a couple who became believers and evangelists themselves. He taught in the synagogue until he was kicked out, and then he started a house church in the home of a believer. He trained and mentored enough new believers so that when he moved on, he could appoint people to lead the group.

Clearly, Paul understood and was comfortable working in the multicultural, multifaith context of the city (*see also 1 Cor. 9:20–23*). He knew how to adapt to the environment that he was in, and he learned how to present the truth in order to best meet the needs of those he was trying to reach.

How can we as individuals, and our local church as a whole, be better equipped to mingle with our communities so that we can reach them?

A Hurting Place

As Christ made His way through Jerusalem, Capernaum, and other cities of His time, the sick, disabled, and poor crowded around Him, the Healer. His heart went out to suffering humanity.

In the city, there is more of everything—more people, more buildings, more traffic, and more problems. This presents a real challenge for churches. Those sharing the gospel cannot simply ignore the massive human needs around them and concentrate on the message alone, because to do so discredits the message. If our actions do not demonstrate the compassion, grace, and hope of which we speak, then what we speak will be powerless. It will be heard as just another one of the many voices competing for ears of the masses.

Read Exodus 2:23–25, 6:5, Psalm 12:5, Romans 8:22, and Job 24:12. What’s the message found in these texts for us?

Our world is a hurting place. It groans under the weight and suffering of sin. None of us, no matter who we are, escapes that reality.

This pain also offers us powerful opportunities for witness. But we also need to be careful here. When it comes to how a church is perceived by nonmembers in terms of its neighborliness, it is important to understand the difference between community events and an ongoing service that actually meets needs. There is a difference in the minds of a community between a church that delivers food to families once a year during a holiday and one like a particular Adventist church plant in a large city.

What does this church do? It meets in a community center that operates on a daily basis. People can go there any morning and get a hot breakfast! And it is not even that large of a church. It has only about seventy-five members, but they are fully committed to meeting the needs of their neighbors in an urban neighborhood. This is a great work but one that takes dedication and a sense of obligation to help those in need.

Imagine the impact on our communities if all our churches were doing something to help to respond to the groans that are surely rising up in our neighborhoods.

Sowing and Reaping in Cities

Read Matthew 13:3–9, 18–23. Though this is a familiar story, how can we take what it teaches in order to help us better understand how to minister and to witness to our communities, including the cities?

Though set in a rural context, this parable is, in fact, more important in urban ministry than in small towns and rural areas, because urban areas have a greater variety of “soils.” This explains why it is more challenging to conduct evangelistic campaigns in cities than in more rural areas.

Different soil conditions produce different kinds of results, suggesting the need to study the soil conditions before investing in evangelism activities. If, after studying the community “soil,” your church discovers that it has limited “good ground” in its territory, you must plan to improve that soil by softening the hard pathways, removing the rocks, and pulling up the thorns. That is, for evangelism to be successful, the church must work ahead of time, preparing the soil. This can make a great deal of difference in how effective an evangelistic campaign can be.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4, the Scriptures teach about spiritual gifts. They say that there are a multiplicity of different gifts but only one mission. The types of soil mentioned in the parable show the need for many different gifts to be included in reaching the cities. In the large cities, “men of varied gifts are to be brought in,” Ellen G. White has written. “New methods must be introduced. God’s people must awake to the necessities of the time in which they are living.”—*Evangelism*, p. 70. Through the gift of divine insight, she saw what is necessary to be effective in urban ministry. It is even more necessary today to have a wide variety of approaches and gifts working within a large, multifaceted strategy. A single campaign or one major project will not achieve much in the long term. The massive scale and complex structure of the city simply swallow such programs, and within a few weeks there is no trace of an impact. More needs to be done beforehand.

Think about those you are trying to witness to. In what kind of ground are they? What can you do to help prepare the soil better?

Make It Personal

Read John 15:12, 13; James 1:27; and Galatians 6:2. Together, what are they saying to us that is so crucial for any serious outreach?

Because of the massive size of urban populations, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that faith is personal. The bottom line in reaching the cities, or any other place, is individuals finding a personal relationship with Christ. Research has shown that the vast majority of converts to the Seventh-day Adventist Church say that they joined because of a relationship with an Adventist acquaintance. And oftentimes friendships, especially in the case of outreach, involve death to self and a willingness to work for the good of others.

Plowing the ground, planting seeds, nurturing the sprouts to harvest, and preserving the harvest—all of these things work best if there is a strong relational element. We need to learn how to be friends with people; we need to learn how to listen to them; we need to learn how to love them. If these are essential elements for any outreach, how much more so in urban ministry, in which individuals can, at times, feel lost and uncared for amid the vast and teeming population?

The vital element of urban small group ministries might take the form of the “house church” as it existed in the New Testament (*Acts 2:46*), or it may simply be small groups within a larger congregation. Wherever there is an urban neighborhood or suburban town that does not have a local church, but where there are three or more Seventh-day Adventists, some kind of small group should be organized and begin to function in that community. (See Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 21, 22.)

This approach is essential to urban ministry for several reasons. One is the complex mosaic of cultural, ethnic, language, and socioeconomic groups to be reached within the hundreds of communities and subcultures in even medium-sized cities. Unless there are small groups targeting each of these segments, Christ’s mission will not be completed.

Small group ministries also are needed because of how difficult it is for believers to follow Jesus in the city. There are many pressures, temptations, and encounters with alternative faiths and ideologies. Some believers simply give in to the pressures and drop out of church, while others develop a hard shell to protect their feelings and become insensitive to the people around them who need a loving representation of Jesus.

Reaching Out to the Cities

No one is saying that outreach and ministry are easy. The fact is, they are not. Humans are fallen, corrupt, and not naturally spiritual. As Paul said about himself: “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin” (*Rom. 7:14, NKJV*). If Paul says that, what about those who don’t know the Lord or who have never had a life-changing experience with Jesus?

And if our natural fallen natures weren’t bad enough, cities have always been known for their notoriously bad influence on people. People face so many temptations that the enemy of souls uses to ensnare them and keep them bonded to sin and the world. Thus, no wonder that outreach to cities especially is not a simple task; it is, though, a task that must be done, and we as a church, to be faithful to our calling, must be doing it.

What do these verses say to us about the importance of outreach in general?

2 Pet. 3:9 _____

1 Tim. 2:4 _____

According to the Word, Christ’s death was universal: it encompassed all humanity, from Adam and Eve down and all who follow. This would, of course, include the endless masses living in the great metropolitan centers of the world. They, too, need to hear the great truths that are so dear and precious to us.

“There is no change in the messages that God has sent in the past. The work in the cities is the essential work for this time. When the cities are worked as God would have them, the result will be the setting in operation of a mighty movement such as we have not yet witnessed.” —Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, p. 304.

The call to reach the cities is personal. It is a call to a deeper experience with Christ ourselves and a call to earnest intercession as well as comprehensive planning and implementation. It is built completely on the foundation of revival and reformation, for it is going to be accomplished only by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Read Romans 10:14, 15. What is being said there that, in principle, applies to all of us who claim to be followers of Christ? How can we all be more active in outreach and ministry, regardless of where we live?

Further Thought: Read *Ministry to the Cities* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2012). It is a collection from the Ellen G. White Estate of most of the Ellen G. White materials on urban ministry.

A Seventh-day Adventist expert in urban ministries did a study in the Ellen G. White periodical index regarding her counsel on moving in or out of the cities. Out of 107 articles, 24 articles gave instruction on moving out or establishing institutions outside cities. But 75 articles gave specific instruction to move into the cities to reach the cities. The other eight articles were neutral. A church historian summarized Ellen G. White's counsel on city work, showing that relating to institutions, she advocated working from outpost centers outside the city, and when dealing with local church work, she advocated working from within the city.

What are the plans in your church to reach the cities? Where is your local church located in relationship to the nearest major metropolitan area? No church should think that reaching the cities is irrelevant to them. Every Adventist congregation needs to make some contribution toward this most important missionary goal. Ignoring the cities and focusing only on reaching the areas outside the metropolitan regions is not a faithful response to the mission that Jesus has given us.

“Why should not families who know the present truth settle in these cities? . . . There will be laymen who will move into . . . cities . . . , that they may let the light which God has given them shine forth to others.”—Ellen G. White in *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 29, 1891.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about the wonderful message that we have been given. Think about the hope that we have, the promise of a better life now, and the great hope of eternity. What are some of your favorite texts, texts that especially reveal the hope that we have in Jesus? Why are they so meaningful to you? Share them together in class on Sabbath.
- 2 Try to imagine what it must be like not having any hope, just thinking that this life is it, with all its struggles and toils and hurt, and then you die and just rot in the grave. This is what many, especially the vast masses in the cities, believe. How then can we learn to have a great love for souls and a willingness to reach out to them, wherever they live?

A Changed Heart: Part 2

by AGNES MUKARWEGO and ALITA BYRD, Rwanda

At church the people greeted me and made me feel that I was part of their loving family. It seemed as though the sermon was preached just to comfort me. I returned the next Saturday and attended the midweek service too.

But a few weeks later, my husband woke up early and stopped me from going to the church. “You have been wandering around on Saturday wasting your time,” he told me. “Today I will be home at noon to eat lunch. Go to the market to buy food; have it ready as soon as I get back,” he demanded.

Reluctantly, I stayed home and cooked lunch for my husband. But he did not come home to eat. The next Sabbath the same thing happened.

The third week, when my husband ordered me to have lunch ready for him at noon, I thought, *The devil is trying to keep me away from church. I will not let him!* I decided to go to church first, then cook when I returned.

After church, I went to the market to buy the fish my husband wanted for lunch. That is when my husband’s friend saw me dressed in my best clothes.

I bought the fish and hurried home to cook them just the way my husband liked them. But again he did not come home. I waited for him all day, but he did not return until late that night. He knocked on the door, and I opened it. He stumbled in, drunk, and began hitting me. I tried to get away from his blows, but he followed me into the bedroom and dragged me back to the front room. Then he left me there, closed the door of the bedroom, and went to bed, leaving me alone in the sitting room.

In the morning when he awoke, I took him some water to wash with, for I did not want him to be angry.

“Why did you hit me last night when I let you in?” I asked him.

“Because you do not respect me!” he shouted. “I told you to go to the market in the morning and buy the fish, but my friend told me that you were at the market late and had been to church. You are not an obedient wife, and this will not continue any longer!” he yelled.

To be continued in next week’s Inside Story.

How Shall We Wait?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 24:35–25:46, 2 Peter 3, James 2:14–26, John 4:35–38, 1 Cor. 3:6–8, Rev. 21:1–4.*

Memory Text: “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (*Romans 12:11–13, NIV*).

For several years preceding the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the Seventh-day Adventist churches in San Francisco and Oakland, California, were buzzing. Members were involved in visiting the sick and destitute. They found homes for orphans and work for the unemployed. They nursed the sick and taught the Bible from house to house. Members distributed Christian literature and gave classes on healthful living. The churches also conducted a school for the children in the basement of the Laguna Street meetinghouse. A workingmen’s home and medical mission were maintained. They had a health-food store along with a vegetarian café. The members had started ship mission work at the local port, and their ministers conducted meetings in large halls in the city from time to time.

Ellen G. White had called these churches the two “beehives” and was thrilled by their work (*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 5, 1900). What powerful examples of what we should and could be doing now as we await the Second Coming. Our Lord is coming back; that we know. The crucial issue for us is: What are we doing while we wait?

On that answer hangs the destiny of souls.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 24.

While We Wait for Jesus

The disciples had just been admiring the glorious scene as the sun's rays glistened off the temple. Jesus, wanting to focus their attention on the realities facing the Christian church in the near future and the end of time, cryptically gave them a dose of reality by saying: "Do you see all these things? . . . Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (*Matt. 24:2, NIV*). Surprised by His comment, the disciples asked, "When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (*Matt. 24:3, NIV*). In Matthew 24:4–31, Jesus then tells them the things to expect to see unfold in the world before He returns.

In revealing the signs, Jesus warns, "But the end is still to come" (*Matt. 24:6, NIV*), and that "all these are the beginning of birth pains" (*Matt. 24:8, NIV*). The direct answer to the disciples' question comes in verse 14. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (*Matt. 24:14, NIV*).

In this discourse, the first 35 verses in Matthew 24 motivate us to take the signs seriously, but Jesus also tells us *how we are to wait* for "the end of the age" (*Matt. 24:3, NIV*). In other words, we just don't sit there and wait for Him to come as we would sit at a bus stop and wait for the bus. No, we are given plenty to do as we wait for the Lord's second advent.

Read Matthew 24:36–25:46. Each one of these parables talks about what God's people should be doing as they await the second coming of Jesus. Summarize the essence of what the Lord is telling us here. Then we need to ask ourselves, both individually and as a church: *How well are we following the Lord's instructions for us in each of these parables?*

Jesus here begins to exhort His disciples about the way His true followers will wait for Him to come again. During this period Jesus' disciples will always be ready. They will show love, care, and respect to each other while waiting; they will stay alert, prepare ahead, and be responsible for their own spiritual condition. They will multiply the resources that God has placed in their hands, invest talents and money in God's cause, respect the true character of their loving God, and care for "the least of these."

Revival and Reformation While We Wait

Read 2 Peter 3. Summarize the teachings in this chapter that pertain to revival and reformation. How do these verses fit in with the topic we have been studying all quarter?

God's desire is that "everyone" will "come to repentance" (*2 Pet. 3:9, NIV*). Though we cannot do the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to repentance, we are called to reach them with the message of salvation, which, if accepted, will lead to repentance.

We, too, as church members, need to be in an attitude of repentance. Repentance is part of the process of revival and reformation. Revival means to come back to life, to be renewed, restored. Reformation means to be reshaped, reformed—to be a new creation (*2 Cor. 5:17*). "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."—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 121.

The "how should we wait" passages in yesterday's study illustrate conditions and outcomes of revival and reformation. For example, all 10 virgins needed to be revived, awakened out of sleep (*Matt. 25:1–13*). The foolish virgins needed to increase their capacity for the Holy Spirit in their lives. When we humble ourselves, die to self, unselfishly pray, study God's Word, and lovingly share it with others in word and loving deeds, we increase our capacity for an infilling of the Holy Spirit in latter rain power. However, it is possible to study the Bible for hours and still be a selfish person. We could pray for revival and the latter rain but selfishly want it only for ourselves. *Revival always leads to unselfish concern for others.* When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be reformed into passionate mission- and service-centered disciples.

We need revival and reformation in our prayers, in Bible study, and in our focus on asking for the Holy Spirit in latter rain abundance. But as a church we also need revival and reformation in our attitudes and methods. We need revival and reformation in our attitude and actions toward "the least of these." All this has been the focus of this quarter's lessons.

How can we guard ourselves against complacency in regard to the second coming of Jesus? That is, as the years go by, how can we always keep before ourselves the reality and urgency of the Lord's return?

The Mission of the Church While We Wait

Read James 2:14–26. In what ways do these verses encapsulate who we are and why we are here?

In Sunday’s study, the disciples start out pointing to the beauty of the temple buildings. Jesus points their attention to the condition of the church within and its mission to an ending world. The fact is that the church exists because there is a mission, and not vice versa.

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as expressed in the General Conference *Working Policy* (A 05) is “to make disciples of all people, communicating the everlasting gospel [gospel of the kingdom (*Matthew 24:14*)] in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6–12, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and unite with His remnant church, discipling them to serve Him as Lord, and preparing them for His soon return.” Preaching, teaching, and healing are the suggested methods to pursue this mission. Under “Healing” the *Working Policy* says: “Affirming the biblical principles of the well-being of the whole person, we make the preservation of health and the healing of the sick a priority and through our ministry to the poor and oppressed, cooperate with the Creator in His compassionate work of restoration.”

This quarter began with the concept that Jesus wants to restore His image in humanity and empower us as His followers to be instruments of wholistic restoration in our communities. “The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation of Christ. A great work of reform is demanded, and it is only through the grace of Christ that the work of restoration, physical, mental, and spiritual, can be accomplished.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

After hearing a seminar that presented the ministry of Jesus as a model and mission for His end-time church, a church member made this statement: “In our part of the world, we are not very open to new ideas and new ways of doing things. What we have heard this week about following the ministry method of Jesus actually is not new. It’s an old idea. We just forgot it.”

“Faith without works is dead.” How have you discovered the reality of how closely linked faith and works are? In what ways do works increase your faith?

Preparing for the Final Harvest While We Wait

Jesus used farming language in His teaching about the kingdom, as pointed out in lesson 5. As we have seen, farming is not merely an event; it is a patient *process*! It is a regularly repeated cycle with different stages and different jobs for different people at different times. We need to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and the providences of God in regard to how we can be used by the Lord in the process of preparing the ground, planting seeds, and reaping the harvest.

Read John 4:35–38. What kind of imagery is being used there, and what is the message to us in regard to how we should work for others?

The fact is, we don't know people's hearts. We don't know how the Holy Spirit has been working in their lives. We might look at various people and think that they have a long way to go before being ready to be harvested when, in reality, all they need is someone to urge them to make a commitment to Jesus. There is a battle for the heart and mind of every human being, and God is calling us to help people choose Him.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:6–8. What is the message to us here in the context of outreach?

In his own way, Paul is saying here what Jesus said in the previous example. The work of outreach is like the work of a farmer. We might not all be doing the same tasks, but that work is still a crucial part of the process of reaching out and winning souls. And though we are to be used by God in various capacities, in the end it is God alone who can bring about the conversion of a soul.

How can we learn to be thankful and humbled by whatever role God has given us in the process of ministering to others? Why is it truly a privilege?

The Wait Is Over

Many years ago, English author Charles Dickens wrote a book called *A Tale of Two Cities*. Those two cities were London and Paris. In a sense, it could be said that the Bible is also a tale of two cities. In this case, the two cities are Babylon and Jerusalem.

In Revelation 14:8 and Revelation 18, the apostle John describes Babylon. She has been the home of demons and the haunt of evil spirits. She has caused every nation to commit spiritual adultery. Her doom has been pronounced, and she has been declared “fallen.” This city, a symbol of evil and apostasy and rebellion against God, will one day be defeated and destroyed.

Read Revelation 21:1–4. How does the New Jerusalem contrast with Babylon?

The second city is the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, described in Revelation 21 and 22. This city houses those who have chosen the Bridegroom and rejected the selfishness and spiritual adulteries of Satan and his followers. By God’s grace, the redeemed have obeyed His commandments and reflected the faith of Jesus (*Rev. 14:12*). Their patient endurance and their eagerness to embrace the ministry of Jesus provided a taste of the kingdom of heaven while on earth. They have been saved through faith in Jesus; His righteousness alone made them worthy of heaven. Their care for “the least of these” (*Matt. 25:40*) has been the outward manifestation of that saving faith.

By the blood of the Lamb (*Revelation 5*), the church’s role in compassionate restoration has changed to jubilant celebration (*see Rev. 5:13, 14*). In that happy Holy City, “ ‘God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away’ ” (*Rev. 21:4, NKJV*). True peace has been restored. The full restoration of the image of God, mentally, spiritually, and physically, has taken place. The great controversy is over, and from “the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Read Revelation 22:21. In what way does that verse, the last one in the Bible, capture the essence of all that we believe?

Further Thought: Read Matthew 5:16; Colossians 3:17; Hebrews 13:15, 16. Read Ellen G. White, “On the Mount of Olives,” pp. 627–636, and reread “The Least of These My Brethren,” pp. 637–641, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Jesus told us what the signs of the end would be before He returned, and they are not pretty. Wars, rumors of wars, pestilence, et cetera. If people often use the excuse of evil to reject God, they certainly have plenty of excuses now, and they will have more excuses as we get nearer to the end. Thus, it becomes even more crucial for God’s people, those who claim to be His followers, to reflect His character to the world and to help people get a better view of what God is like. “If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 189. What a simple yet powerful statement in regard to outreach and ministry to others. While we wait for Jesus’ second coming, He expects members of His church to preach and live the whole gospel; to invest ourselves and our resources in His work; to love, respect, and care for people; and to open our lives for the Holy Spirit in His fullness. That’s a witness that all the arguments in the world can’t nullify.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, talk about the difference between what it would be like living in “Babylon” as opposed to living in “Jerusalem.” What would be the major differences between the two cities? That is, where is the major difference to be found—in what the places look like or in who lives in them?
- 2 The great question for Christians is not “Do works have a role in the Christian faith?” Of course they do. Instead, the question is “If works cannot save us, then what is their role in the Christian faith?” How do we answer that question, especially in the context of reaching out and ministering to others in need?
- 3 How are we waiting for Jesus to return? That is, what are we doing in our lives that reveals the reality of our belief in His return? Why should we be living differently from those who don’t believe in the Second Coming?

A Changed Heart: Part 3

by AGNES MUKARWEGO and ALITA BYRD, Rwanda

My husband invented other things for me to do to keep me away from church. I thought, *He might keep me from attending church, but he cannot keep me from praying.* I told God about my husband's attempts to keep me from attending church, and asked God to make his heart softer toward religion.

A few weeks later I returned to the church, and this time my husband didn't hit me. Then I went every Sabbath, and I began reading the Bible to our children, and my husband didn't say anything. He began noticing that on Friday the house was neat and clean, the children were bathed, and food was prepared for the next day. He noticed that I was happier and that our home was happier. One Friday evening, he came home to find the Sabbath preparations complete, and the children gathered for worship. I invited him to sit down with us.

"I see that your life is different now, and you are happier," he said. "This way of living is better." While he seldom joined us for prayers, he never again forbade us from worshiping.

I wanted my husband to witness my baptism, but he refused, saying, "I don't have time for such things." I asked him again on the Sabbath I was baptized, but he still refused. However, he said I could invite my friends home afterward if I wished. "I'll stay home and welcome your friends when they come," he said.

I wasn't sure what to expect, but I brought friends home from church. My husband welcomed them, and I was amazed to hear what he told them: "My wife has changed. I want to thank you who helped her find God, because I see the difference that God has made in her life and our home."

I was thrilled with his words! I thank God for changing my husband's heart and his attitude.

My husband never again forbade me to attend church, and sometimes he went with us. He died last year never having openly given his life to God. But I know that God sees what we cannot see, and I pray that one day I will meet him in heaven when Jesus comes. In the meantime, I thank God for lifting me up from despair and giving me hope and peace in my life.

AGNES MUKARWEGO is an active lay worker in Rwanda. She shares her faith with others wherever she goes and has led many to salvation in Jesus through her testimony. ALITA BYRD is a writer living in London, England.

Despite science's claims, many find the idea of an eternally existing God the most satisfying explanation for Creation. Even with logic and reason on our side, there's still the ever-present problem of evil.

This quarter's study on Job by Clifford Goldstein deals with the difficult question of why there is so much suffering if God exists.

Job shows that the natural and supernatural are inseparably linked and is the story of us all. We all suffer in ways that make no sense. Job's story appears in the context of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, which is portrayed in a literal sense.

Our study examines Job's story, close up, in the narrative's immediate drama, and from a distance. We know not only how the book ends but also the bigger background in which it unfolds. We try to understand why we live in a world of evil, but more important, how we are to live in such a world.

Despite evil's existence, we can rest assured in the solution: Jesus Christ, in "whom we have redemption through His blood" (*Eph. 1:7*).

Lesson 1—The End

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Happily Ever After?** (*Job 42:10–17*)

MONDAY: **Unhappy Endings** (*Gen. 4:8; Acts 7:59, 60*)

TUESDAY: **The (Partial) Restoration** (*Job 42:10*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Final Kingdom** (*Dan. 2:44, 7:18*)

THURSDAY: **The Resurrection and the Life** (*Job 14:14, 15*)

Memory Text—*John 11:25*

Sabbath Gem: Job's story has a happy ending despite all of his suffering. As we begin our study of the book of Job, we also are reminded of the ultimate hope we have in Jesus—of His second coming and being with Him eternally.

Lesson 2—The Great Controversy

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **A Little Heaven on Earth** (*Job 1:1–4*)

MONDAY: **Cosmic Conflict** (*Job 1:6–12*)

TUESDAY: **The Conflict on Earth** (*Gen. 3:1–4, Rev. 12:9*)

WEDNESDAY: **Job as a Microcosm** (*Isa. 14:12–14*)

THURSDAY: **Answers at the Cross** (*John 12:31, 32; Heb. 2:14*)

Memory Text—*Zechariah 3:2*

Sabbath Gem: The great controversy theme forms a template that can help us to better understand "the total message" of the Bible, especially the plan of salvation.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.