

# ***The Role of the Church in the Community Urban Ministry in the End Time***

Lesson #12 for September 17, 2016

Scriptures: Acts 18:1-28; Exodus 2:23-25; Matthew 13:3-9,18-23; John 15:12-13; 2 Peter 3:9.

1. This lesson will focus on one of the greatest challenges to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How do we reach the masses in the cities?
2. Read Revelation 14:6-7. We are supposed to be carrying the three angels' messages to every race, tribe, language, and nation. And we now know as of 2007 the United Nations has declared in its statistical report that more than 50% of the world's population live in cities. What are we doing about all those people? Why are cities a challenge? Unfortunately, in many nations Adventist outreach has accomplished more in the rural areas and small villages and very little in the metropolitan regions. In fact, there are many major metropolitan areas in the world where Seventh-day Adventists are hardly known.
3. What is the reason for this huge problem? Is it because we do not have enough members committed to spreading the gospel? How many Seventh-day Adventists know how to properly explain the three angels' messages? **Could it be that the Holy Spirit is not blessing us because we are not carrying the right message?** Or, is it that we do not have enough willing messengers? Or, is God expecting us to use modern media to accomplish the work?
4. Cities are very complex in many ways. Many of the world's large cities are made up of different cultures, ethnic groups, languages, and religions. In times past, major cities tended to be organized into cultural or language quarters. There would be Chinatown, Little Tokyo, and Little Mexico, etc. But, now, people are scattered around downtown and in the suburbs with all kinds of people living next door to one another. In most cases, this has led to a greater tolerance for new ideas, maybe even a greater willingness to listen to new religions. However, with the media the way it is, the challenge to a new religion is incredible. If we had an effective city ministry, we might be able to reach large groups of people whom we otherwise would never have the opportunity to touch.
5. Read Acts 18:1-28. In this chapter, Dr. Luke described Paul leaving Athens, going to Corinth, working with the Jews in the synagogue, taking up residence with Aquila and Priscilla, and preaching regularly in the synagogue until he was thrown out. The four largest cities in Paul's day were Rome, Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, and Ephesus. Paul worked in three of them. Initially, in Corinth, he was supporting himself by tent-making with Aquila and Priscilla; but, when Silas and Timothy arrived, he turned to full-time ministry. When the Jews opposed him, he moved to a Gentile home and focused on ministry to the Gentiles. When the Jews tried to take him to court, Gallio the Roman governor threw the case out. (Acts 18:12-17) After about a year and a half, Paul left Corinth and traveled back toward his home church in Antioch. He took Priscilla and Aquila with him. When they arrived in Ephesus, the Jews requested that they stay and spend more time. Paul left Aquila and Priscilla and moved on, traveling into northern Asia Minor, visiting Galatia and Phrygia.
6. Aquila and Priscilla, working as laymen in Ephesus, welcomed Apollos who came from Alexandria—the second largest city of the time of the early church—to build up the church. They shared with him some additional information about Jesus Christ of which he had not

been aware. Apollos then decided to go to the region of Achaia to work at Corinth. His strong arguments defeated the Jews in public debates and proved that Jesus was the Messiah. Paul and Apollos as well as Aquila and Priscilla worked in two large urban settings, Corinth and Ephesus. These cities were full of different languages, cultures, and ethnic groups. Paul used whatever he could think of to find an opening to talk with people and share his faith. To Jews he spoke as a Jew; to Romans he emphasized his Roman citizenship; to people in the tent-making business, he could speak their language. (See 1 Corinthians 9:20-23.) In what way could we be like that in our day?

7. Unfortunately, the large cities can be very lonely, hurting places. There are more people, more buildings, more traffic, and more problems. In recent times, there have been terrible massacres taking place in cities—San Bernardino, Orlando, Paris, Nice. How can we reach out to those who are hurting? Could we demonstrate the compassion, grace, and hope that Jesus demonstrated? Are we capable of that?
8. Read Exodus 2:23-25; 6:5; Psalm 12:5; Romans 8:22; and Job 24:12. It is very clear from these verses that from ancient times even to our day, there are a lot of people hurting in our world. But, hurting people tend to reach out for any kind of help they can get. Are we meeting their needs? Some Adventist churches feel like they are doing outreach when they provide a meal to people in the community once a year on a special holiday like Thanksgiving. Other churches have groups that feed people virtually every day of the year. In some cases, they provide hot breakfasts. In other cases, they distribute free food. What would happen if every Adventist church had that kind of outreach?
9. Read Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23. In an agricultural setting, Jesus used a familiar story to make it clear that people are going to respond in different ways to our message and even to our efforts to help them. In big cities there are even more varieties of people, of needs, of languages, and of cultures than there are in rural areas.
10. In some areas in certain cities, it is necessary to “prepare the soil” before one can consider doing evangelism. How does one prepare the soil?
11. Read 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4. These are the chapters in which Paul described the spiritual gifts which God has given to the church—the members of the church. There are differences in these gifts. To break up the hard soil in our large cities, it may require a variety of gifts working together. Ellen White stated:

Men of varied gifts are to be brought in. One man has not all the gifts required for the work. To make a camp meeting [an evangelistic effort] successful, several workers are needed. No one man should feel that it is his prerogative to do all the important work....

**New methods must be introduced.** God’s people must awake to the necessities of the time in which they are living. God has men whom he will call into his service,—men who will not carry forward the work in the lifeless way in which it has been carried forward in the past. Many who have not yet heard the message to be given to the world, have learned the meaning of self-denial and self-sacrifice. Men will accept the truth who will work with earnestness and zeal, tact and understanding. Let none discourage these zealous workers. In some things they will make mistakes, and will need to be corrected and instructed.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, September 30, 1902, par. 6,13; *Evangelism* 69.4-70.1. [Content in brackets and bold

type are added.]

Are the Internet and satellite television some of the newer methods?

12. We may get headlines by sending in a large, expensive team into a city to conduct a multiple media evangelistic series. A number of people may be baptized. But, if one goes back a year later, he may find that very few of them are still attending church. If we really want to make a difference in their lives, we need to reach out to people and befriend them.
13. Read John 15:12-13; James 1:27; and Galatians 6:2. These verses are a tremendous challenge. How do we fill the furrow of the world's needs? We must reach out to people with love and caring, even helping to bear their burdens. We need to remember that even in cities with their massive populations, the most effective witness is personal. If we can develop a personal relationship with people in the cities, we have a much greater chance of introducing them to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It has been demonstrated again and again that the most effective and lasting means of bringing people into the Seventh-day Adventist Church is through a personal relationship. And for many that involves death to self and a willingness to work for the good of others.
14. Small group ministries are often the best approach. Sometimes, they take the form of house churches. Read Acts 2:46-47. It may require two or three families even in a larger church working together as a small group to reach out. See *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, 21,22. If you live in a multicultural, multilingual area, it may be necessary for families to gather together in separate language groups. But, given what we know about the spread of the gospel, it seems unlikely that the gospel will ever be finished unless small group ministries become a major part of our outreach.
15. Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that this is going to be easy.
16. Read Romans 7:14. Even after ministering for a number of years and after that remarkable conversion on the Damascus road, Paul still said: "We know that the Law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin." (Romans 7:14, *GNB*) If Paul could make a statement like that, having been through all of his experiences, what does that say about the rest of us? And what about the people that we are trying to reach?
17. Cities have always had a bad reputation. There are so many temptations; avoiding them may be very difficult.
18. One thing is very clear: God is doing everything within the limitations of the great controversy to save as many as possible. (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:3-4) If we are working to bring souls to Christ, we are working with the Holy Spirit.
19. We believe that by answering the Devil's lies in the great controversy, the life and death of Christ were sufficient to provide salvation for anyone of whatever background who is willing to accept Him. God won the great controversy by decisively refuting every one of Satan's claims or accusations against Him. Or, did God pay some kind of debt to the Law? Or, to Satan? Salvation is universally available to all from the days of Adam and Eve to the end of time. But, people will not respond and become Christians unless someone takes the message to them. This is how Paul put it:

**Romans 10:14-15:** <sup>14</sup> But how can they call to him for help if they have not believed? And how can they believe if they have not heard the message? And how can they hear if the message is not proclaimed? And how can the message be proclaimed if the messengers are not sent out? As the scripture

says, “How wonderful is the coming of messengers who bring good news!”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Romans 10:14-15). New York: American Bible Society.

20. Ellen White commented:

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* 304.1; *compare* MM 331.3; *RH*, November 17, 1910, par. 8.

21. Those who have carefully studied the writings of Ellen White might be inclined to say: “But we are told to get out of the cities.” A careful study of what she has said shows a somewhat different picture.

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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, September 16.

22. So, what plans are your church making to reach out to cities in your area? Are you located somewhere close to a major metropolitan area?

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, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 29, 1891, par. 9.

23. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have the greatest access to truth of any group of people in the history of the world. Shouldn’t we try to reach out to those people who are without hope and who think that life is nothing more than what we see here and now and believe that when they die they are just going to rot in the grave?

24. Have you ever considered participating in Jesus’s model of wholistic ministry to the cities? It is not easy; but, we must do it.

25. Considering all the sin there is in the great cities, how does God feel about them? “Should I not have concern for the great city?” (Jonah 4:11, *NIV*)

26. **Jonah 4:11:** How much more, then, should I have pity on Nineveh, that great city. After all, it has more than 120,000 innocent children in it, as well as many animals!”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Jonah 4:11). New York: American Bible Society.

The Ninevites worshiped the god of war. They would sometimes beat people until they were black and blue and then skin them alive!

27. In 1909, Ellen White had this comment to make about working the cities.

There is another line of work to be carried forward, the work in the large cities. There should be companies of earnest laborers working in the cities.

Men should study what needs to be done in the places that have been neglected. The Lord has been calling our attention to the neglected multitudes in the large cities, yet little regard has been given to the matter. —Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* 537.3; *RH*, November 11, 1909, par. 16.

28. Working the cities with their varieties of people, languages, professions, and sinful practices may seem like an insurmountable task. Have you talked to God about how you might be involved in an urban mission?
29. It is interesting to read verses like Jeremiah 29:7. God told the exiles in Babylon to settle down, to pray for the peace of the city where they were living, and to carry on normal activities. He had already told them that they would be in Babylon for at least 70 years.
30. Their captors would come to them sometimes and say, “Sing for us a song of Zion.” Try to imagine how difficult that would have been under the circumstances. Are we as Seventh-day Adventists trying to reach out to cities a little bit like those captives in Babylonia? God seemed to be concerned about Nineveh, about Babylon, and about Jerusalem. Are we concerned about the cities in our area?

**Jeremiah 29:7:** Work for the good of the cities where I have made you go as prisoners. Pray to me on their behalf, because if they are prosperous, you will be prosperous too.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Jeremiah 29:7). New York: American Bible Society.

31. Consider this:

The old story is told of a man standing under a streetlamp, head down, intently looking for something. His friend David stops to help.

“What did you lose, John?” he asks.

“I dropped my watch and can’t find it anywhere.”

“That’s a shame,” says David. “Let me help.”

So, David drops to his hands and knees and for the next 10 minutes helps John look for his watch on the pavement under the streetlamp.

Finally, after covering every last bit of ground several times, he turns to John and says, “Are you sure you dropped it here?”

“Well, not exactly here,” John replies.

“What do you mean?” exclaims David. “Where did you drop it?” John points out into the darkness. “About 20 meters over there.” David can’t believe what he hears. “You dropped it over there, but we’ve been searching here all this time? That’s ridiculous. Why on earth have we been looking here?”

“Well, that’s obvious,” says John. “The light’s better here.”—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Saturday, September 10.

32. Is that a description of our attempts to reach out to the cities? Do we find it much easier to reach out to those who already have a strong Christian base, that is, “where the light is stronger”? How well are we doing at reaching out to Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and even atheists and members of the secular society such as bankers and lawyers?
33. When you look at your own church budget, what percentage of the money that is available

is spent on taking care of the local building and the local membership as opposed to efforts to reach out to others?

34. Will Jesus be able to come back if we fail to do our job in reaching the cities? Or, will He send angels to do our work? Or, will He just have to continue waiting?
35. The cities may seem like an almost impossible task to us. But, how do you suppose Jonah felt about the warlike Assyrians in Nineveh? Jonah had to walk about 500 miles to Nineveh.
36. Read Nahum 3:1. Nahum described Nineveh as “the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!”(Nahum 3:1, *NIV*). He asked: “Who has not felt your endless cruelty?”(Nahum 3:19, *NIV*)
37. And yet, God sent Jonah a long distance from his home in Galilee to preach to the people in Nineveh; and the whole city repented! However, Jonah felt like a failure.
38. Jesus often was exhausted from His long days of teaching, healing, and preaching. But, when He saw the crowds, “He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36, *NIV*)
39. Are some of the largest barriers against working in cities really our own fears and prejudices? What would it take to change our attitudes about working in cities?
40. Read Jeremiah 29:7; compare Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10. We are not sure how these writings from Jeremiah in Jerusalem got to Babylonia and the people there. Perhaps they did; perhaps they did not. But, considering the fact that God gave the message for them to Jeremiah, it is likely that provision was made by God for them to receive the messages. They were told that they were not to set up some separate Jewish ghetto in the region of Babylonia. That, of course, would be the natural inclination. In a Jewish ghetto, it would be easier to keep the Sabbath, to eat kosher food, to stay separate from idolatrous Babylonian practices, and to share memories and hopes. But, God told them to do exactly the opposite—to mix and mingle and bring peace to the city of their occupation. Historically, the Adventist Church has not done well in the “neglected cities.”

As a people we greatly need to humble our hearts before God, pleading His forgiveness for our neglect to fulfill the gospel commission. We have made large centers in a few places, leaving unworked many important cities. Let us now take up the work appointed us, and proclaim the message that is to arouse men and women to a sense of their danger. If every Seventh-day Adventist had done the work laid upon him, the number of believers would now be much larger than it is.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, 25 (1909); *Ev* 17.3.

41. If you live not too far from an urban center, when was the last time you walked through that area and tried to understand the challenges of the people who live there? What are those people reading, watching, listening to, and doing? And what are they worshipping? Everyone worships something. What are their sources of income? What are their needs? What are their interests and activities? These are the things that we need to explore if we are going to reach out to them. Are we ready?

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