

# ***The Role of the Church in the Community***

## ***Jesus Mingled with the People***

Lesson #6 for August 6, 2016

Scriptures: Matthew 1:22-23; 9:10-13; John 1:14; Luke 15:3-24; Psalm 51:17; 1 John 2:16; Philippians 2:13-15.

1. Our next few lessons will focus on the ways in which Jesus mingled with people, healed them, taught them, and asked them to follow Him; and they suggest how we might do the same.

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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Saturday, July 30, 2016.

2. Could we in our lives, in our situations, become "Jesus" for someone? How might that impact them? How might it impact us? Could we actually learn to minister as Jesus did?

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."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* 143.3.

3. 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).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sunday, July 31, 2016.

4. Here we see Jesus ministering in the most effective way to the whole person. There was no separation in His thinking between healing, teaching, preaching, and evangelizing.
5. Read Matthew 1:22-23; John 1:14; and Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus left His home in heaven to come to this earth to teach us what God is like and to answer the questions and

accusations of the Devil. Could we do that? To do that, He had to come into intimate contact with the human race, actually becoming a part of it. However, He was sinless. While His genetics had been damaged by sin along with the rest of ours, He lived a perfect life. In fact, Jesus did not hesitate to mingle with anyone. He often met with those considered by His culture to be the very worst of society.

6. Try to imagine Someone who had created the entire universe, coming down, living as an ordinary Human Being, and dealing with the deteriorated models of the beings that He had created perfect in the beginning. Surely, in light of all this, there is absolutely no place for us to hold ourselves somehow aloof from even the worst of sinners around us.
7. Read Luke 15:1-2. As we know from other places in Scripture, the Pharisees and the scribes often complained about Jesus's behavior. On this occasion, Jesus told three parables: 1) In Luke 15:3-7, He told the parable of the lost sheep; 2) In Luke 15:8-10, He told the parable of the lost coin; 3) In Luke 15:11-24, He told the story of the lost son also known as the prodigal son. The sheep understood that it was lost, but it could not do anything about it. The coin, of course, did not know that it was lost and could not do anything about it. The son recognized his problem and recognized his guilt, and he knew what to do about it. Significantly, each parable began with something lost and ended with a celebration. Do we have "Pharisees" and/or "Sadducees" in our church today?
8. It is very easy for us to make preliminary judgments about who will or will not respond to the gospel.

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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday, August 1, 2016.

9. Think of the variety of people with whom Jesus came in contact during His relatively brief ministry on this earth. There was the Canaanite woman, the Samaritan woman, a Roman Centurion, and Mary Magdalene from whom He had cast out seven demons. Of course, there were countless others. (See Luke 8:1-3 which lists several women involved in Jesus's ministry.) How would you respond if your pastor was spending time with a formerly-demon-possessed prostitute and some society women?
10. Do you think you have ever avoided witnessing to a person because you thought s/he would not fit into your church family? Do we need more grace to accept these "sinners"? And how should we witness to people whose primary language is different from our own?

11. Read Matthew 9:10-13 and Hosea 6:6. Jesus repeatedly stated in various ways that religious ceremonialism cannot save us. God pleads for us to learn to do what He did when He was here on this earth, that is, reach out to those in need. Think of all the times when Jesus ate with people who were considered to be undesirables! What kind of people in your community and among your church group are considered to be undesirables? People like prisoners, criminals, drug addicts, smokers, alcoholics, etc. Sometimes, is it hard to remember that every one of those people is a child of the heavenly King? When Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 and reminded the religious leaders that He came to save sinners, how sad it was that He had to remind those religious leaders of one of the most important aspects of their faith.

12. How many Christians today believe that some form of religious ceremonialism such as attending church regularly and maybe even prayer meeting on Wednesday nights is going to save them?

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. They insist on being saved in some way by which they may perform some important work. When they see that there is no way of weaving self into the work, they reject the salvation provided.

**A legal religion can never lead souls to Christ; for it is a loveless, Christless religion. 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* 280.1-2. [Bold type is added.]

13. What is a legal religion? Things that are legal are things which are required or allowed by law. How many of our religious practices do we do because we believe we are required to?

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness [98] is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 97.3-98.0.

14. It is so easy and so ethnocentric to judge the actions of others by our own standards. How can we learn to humbly put our egos aside and allow the Holy Spirit to act through us?

15. Read Psalm 51:17. It is interesting to note in connection with that verse that the New Testament Greek word for *obedience* is *hupakoe*, a humble willingness to listen.

16. So, how can we as Seventh-day Adventists **mingle wisely**? Think of the members of your church. How many of them have significant numbers of non-Adventist friends? It is so easy for us as human beings to surround ourselves with those who think like we do, eat what we eat, worship like we do, etc. But, how can we reach out to sinners if we do not associate with them in some way? And how are we to understand Matthew 5:13-16 unless we reach out? Can we be the salt of the earth if we do not mix with others and the light of the world if we are not witnessing?

17. Read Genesis 13:5-13; 19:12-26; Numbers 25:1-3; and 1 John 2:16. The stories of Lot and his family and later of the children of Israel at Baal-Peor should provide a serious warning for us. It is very dangerous to mingle with the world if we begin to adopt the world's customs. But, somehow we need to learn how to reach out to those in the world without being unduly influenced by them.

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*, 231.2.

18. How many non-Adventist friends do you have? What kind of relationships do you have with them? Are you influencing them for the gospel? Or, are they influencing you for the world? This is a very challenging question. It must be answered on an individual level. What could we as church members or Sabbath school class members do to reach out to others?
19. When we consider our relationships with others, it is easy for us to think that we need to share *our* faith. In fact, everything we have that is worth sharing we have been given by Jesus Christ. And He said in Matthew 10:8 (KJV): “Freely ye have received, freely give.”
20. Read Philippians 2:13-15. How can we become shining stars in a world of corrupt and sinful people? It can be a very tricky business if we are not firmly grounded in our faith. But, it is a serious and fatal condition to remain as spiritual introverts. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* mentions some material from Robert Linthicum in his book *Empowering the Poor* (pp. 21-30) in which he described three different 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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, August 4, 2016. [Italic type is in the source document.]

21. The church is not just here in the world to wait for Jesus to come back; it has a mission to accomplish. Second Peter 3:10-12 suggests that God is waiting for us to get the job done. The church was intended to be a service organization. One Christian church has an interesting sign as one leaves the church parking lot to go out into the community which

says, “Servants’ Entrance.” As we move out into the world, do we recognize that we are servants of the Lord, reaching out to a hurting world?

22. Notice these interesting words from one Adventist author.

“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.—as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, August 5, 2016.

23. Is it really true that if we isolate ourselves away from the world and refuse to reach out to others, we are “in apostasy”? How can we help each other as Sabbath school class members or as church members in our attempts to witness to others?

24. How many Adventist churches spend more time arguing and sometimes even fighting over internal issues than they spend on outreach? Paul called himself a slave. What did he mean? Was the fire of the gospel burning so strongly in him that he could not keep quiet?

25. It should be very clear in the lessons we have studied so far in this series that Jesus never intended for us to live in an isolated spiritual bubble. What active steps can we take to think outside the box, move outside the box, and witness outside the box? How can we make friends of nonbelievers? What are the pros and cons of isolating ourselves in an Adventist community? Jesus prayed:

**John 17:15:** <sup>15</sup>I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but I do ask you to keep them safe from the Evil One.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Jn 17:15). New York: American Bible Society.

26. Are there places or people that Christians should avoid? On a personal level, I have only once in my life gone to a cocktail party. Of course, I did not drink any alcohol, and I was there with my wife. Incredible as it might sound, that was the beginning of a conversation with a woman who became a Seventh-day Adventist university professor and church leader! Let us not hesitate to mingle.

27. How comfortable do you feel in reaching out to non-Adventists? What kind of an emotional response comes to your mind when you consider the possibility of witnessing to a non-Adventist?

28. Sociologists who study human behavior teach us that if one forms a committee with a lot of people who have similar backgrounds and think the same, they will be very comfortable drawing conclusions on whatever the subject is. But, they will not come up with many new

ideas. By contrast, if one forms a committee with a group of people who have very different backgrounds, many of them may be uncomfortable with the conclusions they come to; but, their ideas will be much more creative and useful than the first group!

29. Do you fear spending time with non-Adventists because they might ask questions about your diet? Or, your Sabbath? Or, your beliefs? Have you spent enough time with the Scriptures and perhaps with instructions from other sources so that you feel comfortable answering those kinds of questions?
30. An influential French philosopher by the name of Jacques Derrida suggested that whenever we come in contact with someone or something outside our normal range of experience, it will provide for us a possible opportunity to learn and to grow. In his description of this, he called it “eating well.” However, he recognized the risks that could be involved. If we become too much influenced by these new encounters, he would describe that as “being eaten.” That, of course, is not a good thing.
31. So, in considering our lesson for this Sabbath, are we afraid to approach others because we are not well-founded in our faith? We need to remember that Revelation 18:4 tells us to “come out of her, my people.” So, how do we get the right balance? The right kind of balance will result in growing constantly in our faith. The wrong kind of balance may destroy our faith.
32. Why do you think Jesus was called “A Friend of sinners”? Is that a title that you would look forward to having? Many times, Jesus went out of His way to reach people that others considered to be undesirables. We need to rub shoulders with them and to love them into the truth. But, if sinners are uncomfortable around us, how can we win them? Do they enjoy being near us? Or, do they just think that we are strange and weird?
33. In one very important and additionally significant way, Jesus reached out to people during His ministry. He not only reached out to them but also actually touched them. He touched the leper and healed him. (Matthew 8:3) He took the hand of Peter’s mother-in-law and healed her fever. (Matthew 8:15) He took the hand of a young girl who had died and raised her back to life. (Matthew 9:25) He touched the eyes of some blind men and restored their sight. (Matthew 9:29) In Matthew 8 & 9, was Matthew illustrating what Jesus had said in the Sermon on the Mount? (Matthew 5-7)
34. An Adventist pioneer in Indonesia by the name of Budiman Soreng decided that he needed to go to some “unentered” territories in Borneo to see if he could start Adventist groups. He went there and made friends with Animists, Muslims, and Chinese Buddhists, as well as other Christians. He played sports with them, went jogging in the mornings with them, and worked with them in the rice fields. At night, he prayed that God would guide him in reaching out to them. His methods have proven very successful.
35. So, what about us? Do we have to travel to far-off parts of the world in order to be missionaries? Or, are there people near us, in our communities, and maybe even among our associates at work and even in our church or Sabbath school class who really desperately need to hear the gospel? How are we going to reach out to them?

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