

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

## ***Jesus Desired Their Good***

Lesson #7 for August 13, 2016

Scriptures: Jonah 3:4-4:6; Luke 19:38-42; Matthew 5:43-47; 1 Corinthians 13; Mark 8:22-25; Philippians 2:2-5; James 2:14-17.

1. This lesson will focus on the experiences of Jesus with people for whom He sought their good despite their background, health, status, or nationality.

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.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, August 6.

2. Read Jonah 3:4-4:6. What do we know about Jonah's background? He lived and worked during the days of King Jeroboam II of Israel. See 2 Kings 14:24-25. He came from the town of Gath-Hepher which is mentioned in Joshua 19:13 as being on the border of the area of Zebulun. It was located about 2 miles from Sepphoris which in turn was about 2 miles from the town of Nazareth. He apparently worked for the government of Jeroboam II in Samaria. In light of what it says in 2 Kings 14:25, he was a respected prophet.
3. When God called him to go to Nineveh and prophesy against that great city, Jonah ran the other way. When God called him the second time, he finally decided he had better go! It would appear that he was one of the most successful prophets of all time. The entire city of Nineveh—apparently, all 120,000 residents—repented of their evil ways. But, Jonah was not happy! So, would you rather have been Jonah? Or, a Ninevite? All he seemed to care about was his own reputation! He wanted to go back home with the news that he had personally been responsible for the destruction of the Assyrian capital and all its people! Remember that Assyria was the biggest enemy and the most dangerous foe of the Israelites; about 50 years later, Assyria invaded Israel and destroyed the ten northern tribes. But, God accepted the repentance of Nineveh and did not destroy the city at the time of Jonah.
4. Read Luke 19:38-42. How does this story compare with the story of Jonah? As Jesus came over the top of the Mount of Olives and looked at the city of Jerusalem in front of Him and even though the people around Him were hailing Him as the King of the Jews, He could not avoid bursting into tears. He still loved His people; but, there was nothing more He could do for them as a nation. Only a few days later, they would arrest Him, condemn Him, and have Him crucified at the hand of the Romans.

5. What was Jonah's attitude toward the Ninevites? How does that contrast with the attitude of Jesus toward the inhabitants of Jerusalem? Which of these two attitudes most closely matches the attitude of the members of your church toward the surrounding community?
6. What is the "anyway" principle? Read Matthew 8:1-4; John 18; John 21; and 2 Corinthians 12:14-15. Lepers were supposed to stay at least six feet away from all healthy people. But, Jesus touched one and cleansed him *anyway*. Peter denied Jesus three times; but, Jesus reinstated him as a disciple *anyway*. The church at Corinth was having all kinds of problems despite Paul's best efforts; but, Paul served them *anyway*. What does this *anyway* principle reveal about the character of those who are true Christians?

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* 640.3.

7. We should not need to remind ourselves that the golden rule is foundational to the behavior of Christians.
8. Read Matthew 5:43-47; Luke 6:27-36; and Luke 23:34. Was Jesus setting an impossible standard? Is it really possible to love your enemies? What keeps us from loving our enemies? Luke 6:35 (*GNB*) says: "Love your enemies and do good to them; lend and expect nothing back." Abraham Lincoln said: "The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend." (<http://www.thequotepedia.com/quotes/war/page/33/>)
9. What group in our day might be considered enemies of Seventh-day Adventists? What personal enemies do you have? In what ways might it be feasible to love them? Does this mean we should be nice to them? Think of all that God has done for the millions, even billions, of His children who do not care about Him and may even hate Him!
10. Read Romans 2:4. Is it possible that God is kind to His wicked children because if they never repent, this is the only opportunity He will have to show His love to them! God's kindness might actually lead to their repentance and conversion. Could we be God's arms, hands, and feet to reach out to those He wants to love?
11. It is no surprise to faithful Christians that love is the preeminent characteristic of God. (1 John 4:8,16) Selfishness is the defining characteristic of Satan's kingdom. Love defines God's kingdom. Jesus told us that the two preeminent characteristics of Christians are that they love God and they love their neighbors. And those "neighbors" are anyone who is in need. (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Luke 10:29-37)
12. Why do some other groups in the world hate Christians? Could it be because of the behavior of Christians themselves? Notice these comments about and from Mahatma Gandhi of India: (Read the entire article if you can.)

When Gandhi was questioned by the missionary E. Stanley Jones why he rejected becoming a follower of Christ he stated, "Oh, I don't reject Christ. I love Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ. If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today." Samuel, D. (2008). "Mahatma Gandhi and Christianity." *Christian Today*. Retrieved on May 18, 2012 from <http://in.christiantoday.com/articledir/print.htm?id=2837>.

13. Can you think of other examples in history when people who at least called themselves Christians and sometimes even in the name of Christianity have done terrible things? That was prophesied by the prophet Daniel. (See Daniel 7:24-25; compare Romans 2:24.) It has been said that more wars have been fought in the name of religion than for any other cause. Is that because the issue is really the religion itself? Or, is it because egocentric people look for a religious excuse for what they plan to do any way?
14. In light of these ideas, would it not be even more important for true Christians to exhibit the love of God to those around them?
15. Read 1 Corinthians 13. Notice what Paul said about what love is and what love does; he also said what love is not and what love does not do.
  - Love is: Patient and kind; not happy with evil; happy with the truth; eternal.
  - Love does: Never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail.
  - Love is not: Jealous or conceited or proud; ill-mannered or selfish or irritable.
  - Love does not: Keep a record of wrongs.
16. Read Mark 8:22-25. Bethsaida was the home town of Peter and Andrew as well as Philip. It was at the very northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. This is a very unusual account of the healing of a blind man. Notice that Jesus first took him outside of the village. We are not told exactly why He did that. It is possible that Jesus was trying to avoid publicity; it may also have been so the man could concentrate on what Jesus was telling him. It is possible that the miracle took place in two parts because Jesus wanted to increase his faith. By healing him partially, the man could begin to comprehend something more of the marvelous power that Jesus had; that would increase his faith to be completely healed. The Bible itself does not give us any explanation for why this miracle was done in two steps.
17. Why did Jesus spit on the man's eyes? (Mark 8:23) In ancient times, saliva was thought to have healing properties. So, spitting on his eyes may have also been an aide to his faith. This miracle should be compared with the healing of the deaf-mute in Decapolis as recorded in Mark 7:31-37. See also John 9.
18. When new people are converted and join the Seventh-day Adventist Church in your community, do they see everything clearly from the start? How much help are you and others willing to give them to clarify any mistaken ideas they might have about Christianity? Do we ever baptize groups of people just to impress someone with our numbers? Do we ever treat people like things and numbers instead of like friends?
19. It is interesting to note that in Mark 8:14-21, Jesus talked to His disciples about another kind of blindness. How often was Jesus disappointed because of the apparent inability to see or hear or understand even among His closest disciples? How often does God weep because of our blindness today? Is there a good reason why almost 172 years after the Great Disappointment, we are still here? Could we be blind? What was John trying to tell us in Revelation 3:18?
20. In our last lesson, we talked about churches *in* cities, churches *to* cities, and churches *with* cities. Now, we want to talk about "others-centered" churches.
21. Read Philippians 2:3-5. What should we learn about the attitudes of Jesus from this passage? Could we as ordinary mortals come close to that attitude? What would it take for a group of Adventists to become totally others-centered? How much time do we spend thinking about how we can do good for our community? Should this be a major theme in our lives?

22. While here on this earth, Jesus's life was often a life of interruptions. One day during His ministry, He was called urgently to the home of Jairus whose daughter was dying. Even while on His way to deal with that interruption, He was interrupted further by the woman who had suffered from the bleeding disorder for 12 years. (Mark 5:21-43)
23. Does your church have certain goals set? Goals, of course, are very good because they keep us focused on our activities. They are a fulfillment of Matthew 28:19-20. Are we going the second mile and reaching out to people in the community to offer them the abundant life found in Jesus Christ? (John 10:10) While working in Nairobi, Kenya, I lived in an apartment next to a dentist who worked in the same clinic. Every evening we would stand out on the balcony in front of our third floor apartments and ask each other, "What have you heard from the Lord today?" Almost every day it seemed something had happened that seemed to be a direct answer to prayer or a direct blessing from the Lord.
24. Or, does your church sound more like the two churches in this paragraph described in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, August 11?

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.

25. Why is it so difficult for us to accomplish the things discussed in this lesson? Do we need to learn how to die to self? That is not easy for ordinary human beings.

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, *Redemption: Or the Miracles of Christ, the Mighty One* 10.2 (1877); *My Life Today* 186.4; *2SP* 106.1; compare *DA* 152 (1898).

26. How often do we expect people to come knocking on our door at the church? That will not happen very often. We need to get out into the community and meet them where they are. We may need to help them physically before we can help them spiritually. But, our deeds should reflect a true faith.
27. Read James 2:14-17. What can we learn from these verses? Compare Acts 9:36. Clearly, Tabatha (Dorcas was her name in Greek) was always doing good and helping the poor. How many Dorcas's do you have in your church? Are some of them doing it just because of the praise they receive? The real Christians are those who continue doing good even when no one is looking!
28. The story is told of someone who asked a Christian, "What is the purpose of your life?" He answered, "To give, and ask nothing in return." How many Christians do you know who could and would honestly give such an answer?
29. In one of the most incredible chapters in the entire Bible, writing from prison to the

Philippians, Paul told them what is found in Philippians 2:2-5.

30. Could we truly have the attitude of Jesus? What kind of an impact does it have on people when someone shows genuine love and care for them? What simple but practical ways can we do that in our communities?
31. Can you think of any other examples in which Jesus reached out to people to do them good? Didn't Jesus go out of His way to speak to the Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar in Samaria? (See John 4.) Didn't Jesus go way out of His way to reach the Canaanite woman whose daughter was possessed by an evil spirit? (Matthew 15:21-28)
32. As we know, there are constant gatherings of people taking place around us. Why do people get together in gatherings? For some it is a social occasion. For others it is an opportunity to sell things. Sometimes, it is just for network building. Could we share the gospel in any or all of these situations? What would happen if the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church determined to set aside a certain period of time to be the hands, feet, and voice of Jesus Christ to their community? Could we learn to reach out in love and in practical ways do them good?
33. There are many examples in the Bible in which Jesus ate with people, using it as a time to build friendships and stronger social bonds. Luke particularly mentioned many of these. (Luke 5:27-32; 7:36-50; 9:10-17; 11:37-52; 14:1-24; 22:14-38; 24:28-32)
34. Don't we still get together as small groups or as families to build social networks and come closer to each other? Why were the religious leaders in Jesus's day so upset by the fact that Jesus ate with publicans and sinners?
35. Corinth was a very wicked city. When Paul first went there, he wondered if he should stay! Later, writing back to the Corinthians in what was probably his first letter he said:  
**1 Corinthians 5:9-12:** <sup>9</sup>In the letter that I wrote you I told you not to associate with immoral people. <sup>10</sup>Now I did not mean pagans who are immoral or greedy or are thieves or who worship idols. To avoid them you would have to get out of the world completely. <sup>11</sup>What I meant was that you should not associate with a person who calls himself a believer but is immoral or greedy or worships idols or is a slanderer or a drunkard or a thief. Don't even sit down to eat with such a person. <sup>12-13</sup> After all, it is none of my business to judge outsiders....—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., 1 Corinthians 5:9–12). New York: American Bible Society.
36. Do we need to worry about mingling with nonbelievers? Are there some dangers in doing that? If we do not do that, we are very prone to become so inward looking that we lose our sense of mission.
37. In Leviticus 19:18, Moses wrote that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. But, the Jews clearly interpreted that to mean they were to love other Jews. By telling the story of the good Samaritan, (Luke 10:25-37) Jesus clearly wanted to expand that concept. He had already given the Sermon on the Mount in which He clearly stated, "Love your enemies." (Matthew 5:44)
38. So why don't we do more outreach? Do we feel uncomfortable trying to do that? Or, do we not even desire to do that good?
39. Daniel and his three friends became involved in the administration in the city of Babylon. No doubt, they provided very good service to the kings who reigned there. But, at the same

time, they clearly witnessed for God.

40. Has the time come for every Seventh-day Adventist to find ways to reach out to her/his community?

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