

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

## ***Jesus Showed Sympathy***

Lesson #8 for August 20, 2016

Scriptures: 2 Kings 13:23; Exodus 2:23-25; Luke 7:11-16; 1 John 3:17-18; John 11:35; Romans 12:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

1. This lesson will discuss the ways in which Jesus showed sympathy, compassion, empathy, and pity. What should we do to follow His example? In what ways can sympathy and compassion best be shown?

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."—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Saturday, August 13.

2. Can you think of an example from your own experience or an example of which you are aware that showed true sympathy? Were Job's friends sympathetic? We are told that Jesus mingled with people. His examples of sympathy take mingling to a whole new level.
3. What is it that makes sympathy so important in our time? In nations of the more developed world, families have become more nuclear and isolated than they used to be. In times past, grandparents lived with parents and children. Today, we have father and mother and children, each rushing to and fro to meet their own individual schedule and responsibilities.
4. More than that, with people tending more and more to believe in neo-Darwinism and evolution, they think there is nothing beyond this life. We are a small blue dot floating in an immense universe which to many seems to have no purpose. Many think we are simply the results of the "Big Bang." How sad!
5. The Bible, of course, paints a very different picture. Read Judges 2:16-18; 2 Kings 13:23; and Isaiah 54:7-8,10. Even when the children of Israel were in deep trouble because they had abandoned their loyalty to God, He still loved them. He took care of them; and when they returned to Him, He would bless them and bring them peace, once again, because of His promises and His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How different that is from the usual Christian understanding of the Old Testament in which God is viewed as a stern, mean, unforgiving, and uncompassionate, dominant Sovereign of the universe. He is viewed as a harsh Judge—an unforgiving Father. By many, He is thought of as arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving, and severe. That God is Jesus Christ. (Luke 24:44; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4)
6. Read Exodus 2:23-25 and Hosea 11:7-8. When God saw the suffering of His children in Egyptian slavery, He had compassion on them. Many years later when the northern kingdom of Israel was about to go into historical oblivion, never to be traced again, His heart cried out after them.

**Hosea 11:8-9 (GNB):**

“How can I give you up, Israel?  
 How can I abandon you?  
 Could I ever destroy you as I did Admah,  
 or treat you as I did Zeboiim?  
 My heart will not let me do it!  
 My love for you is too strong.  
<sup>9</sup> I will not punish you in my anger;  
 I will not destroy Israel again.  
 For I am God and not a human being.  
 I, the Holy One, am with you.  
 I will not come to you in anger.”

7. Read James 5:11 and Psalm 103:8. These verses make it very clear that the Lord is full of mercy and compassion, slow to become angry, and full of constant love.
8. Ellen White went the extra mile in spelling out what our relationship with God should be.

Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. “The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” James 5:11. **His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterances of them.** Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. **Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice.** There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. **No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest.** “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.” Psalm 147:3. ***The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.***—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* 100.1. [Bold type and italic type are added.]

9. Read Matthew 14:14; 9:35-36; and Luke 7:11-16. Repeatedly, the Gospels tell us that when Jesus saw the crowds of suffering, ill, and hungry people, He had great compassion on them, recognizing that they were like sheep without a shepherd.
10. The words *sympathy*, *empathy*, *pity*, and *compassion* have similar meanings. Have we experienced these attitudes in our own lives? When we hear of a tragedy—especially if it is in our own local community—do we respond by saying, “I’m so sorry” and then just move on? Or, do we actually move to do something about it? Have you tried telephoning those who are suffering? Or, perhaps sending them a sympathy card? Loving action would be even more appreciated.
11. Fortunately, in our world today, there are large government-funded aid agencies that deal with natural disasters. But, what about the smaller misfortunes that nevertheless affect some people very severely? How should we respond if someone not far from us has his/her home burned down or destroyed by a hurricane or tornado?
12. As we all know, our newspapers and news broadcasts are full of tragedies. “If it bleeds, it

leads.” How do we respond to these tragedies? Do we think a few sympathetic thoughts and then move on to the sports page? Is that appropriate for a real Christian?

13. Read Colossians 3:12; 1 Peter 3:8; and 1 John 3:17. How do we “clothe ourselves” with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience? Do we know how to be kind and humble with each other? How does it make you feel to read: “Rich people who see a brother or sister in need, yet close their hearts against them, cannot claim that they love God”?
14. *Compassion* which comes from the Latin word *compati* means to really suffer with someone. If we have experienced some very unfortunate event, does it make it easier for us to understand the sufferings of others?
15. Review once again the story of the good Samaritan. (Luke 10:30-37) When the priest and the Levite passed by the suffering man, no doubt, they thought: “If I help this man, what will happen to me?” By contrast, when the Samaritan saw the sufferer, he asked himself: “If I don’t help this man, what will happen to him?” Which of those views most accurately represents your thoughts when you see someone suffering? To make things even worse, we are told: “The Levite was of the same tribe as was the wounded, bruised sufferer.” – Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, January 1, 1895 par. 5; *Welfare Ministry* 47.1. So, the person lying beside the road was actually a Levite.
16. Read Luke 15:20-32. As we know, in the story of the prodigal son, the father represents a correct picture of God as He welcomes sinners back home. The prodigal was wasteful, reckless, extravagant, and uncontrolled as he ran away from home and wasted his father’s money. But, when he came back home, the father’s love was wasteful, extravagant, and uncontrolled. To the older brother, the father was the prodigal!
17. What does it take to convince us to set self aside and become vulnerable to those in need? Conversion? Some of us live near cities which can be dangerous places. Are we willing to reach out to people in such places who are hurting? Would God protect us if we did that?
18. The community clinic where I work used to be in a very poor and dangerous area. Many of my associates did not think it was safe to go there. In the early days, some cars were actually stolen. But, God has protected us now for more than 20 years. Or, have we just been lucky?
19. Read John 11:35. Why did Jesus weep at the grave of Lazarus? Wasn’t He about to raise him from the dead? Jesus knew what He was going to do. But, in sympathy, empathy, and pity for His close friends, He wept. It touched Him to His very core. Sadducees did not believe in life after death and, thus, did not believe it was possible for someone to be raised from the dead.
20. Unfortunately, Jesus recognized a much larger problem in that situation than the death of a close friend.

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* 534.2.

21. Try to imagine what it would be like not only to feel the pain of all the tragedies taking place in the world right now, but also all the tragedies and sufferings that have taken place throughout the history of our world. Aren’t you thankful that we only get a tiny glimpse of all that sorrow and pain?
22. Consider this from the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Wednesday, August 17.

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?

23. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Try to imagine Christ, the Father, and the Holy Spirit gathering around you at a time when you are suffering, bringing comfort and cheer. Would that make us more willing to comfort and cheer people who are suffering?
24. The word *comfort* comes from the Latin *com* (together, with) plus *fortis* (strong). When we suffer some tragedy, does that strengthen us and encourages us to reach out to others who are suffering?
25. Has your church ever been a *house of refuge* for the hurting? (See Numbers 35 and Ezekiel 47:1-12.)
26. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, August 18 suggests the following rules for showing sympathy:
  - 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.
27. Jesus did some miraculous and amazing things to show how much He cared. Imagine feeding 5000 men not counting women and children, (Mark 6:34-44) and then later, 4000 men not counting women and children. (Matthew 15:32-38) In the later case, they were largely Gentiles! Should that matter?
28. When we do a small deed of helpfulness for someone who is hurting, does it sometimes seem like it is so little when the need is so much? We may feed the hungry for a meal; but, in a few hours, they will be hungry again! If you start to think about the need in the entire world, it might tempt us to ask, “What’s the sense of doing anything?” But, what if everyone said that? Then, no one would be helped. On the other hand, if everyone who saw the need did something, how many would be helped? We know that the Bible makes it clear that there will always be the poor and needy—those who need help, those who are suffering whether from pain or some type of illness. But, Jesus said that when we reach out to them with a glass of water or provide them a meal or some clothing, we are, in effect, doing it for Him. (Matthew 25:31-46)
29. Dwight Nelson, pastor of the Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University, in his book *Pursuing the Passion of Jesus* said: “Many wonder why God doesn’t act. God wonders why

so many of His people don't care." Is that a fair question? What could we do to respond?

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, 30.

30. As we noted in the story at the beginning of this lesson, even the simplest act of true compassion and sympathy may make a huge difference to someone who is hurting.
31. How often have you experienced the joy of showing unselfish kindness and sympathy to someone who is hurting or hungry or suffering? Could we make it a point each week to reach out to at least one person who is hurting or suffering and practice Christ's compassion? What do the people in your community think about your church? To them, does your church seem to be aloof and unsympathetic? A smile, a handshake, a sympathetic word can touch hearts.
32. What factors do you think tend to make us unsympathetic toward others? Are language, differences in culture, certain illnesses, race, even poverty and filth, barriers that we have a hard time getting around? How often do we see think, "Their problems are their fault"? Can you think of a time when you were unsympathetic or even unkind to someone who was suffering? What could you do to make restitution? Are there people surrounding your church who are tired, lonely, even discouraged? What best way can we reach out to them?
33. Some Christians feel like they need to do some great thing as their mission. They feel they are required to do so because we are told to witness or maybe even because we are trying to baptize more members. Christ calls us to a higher motivation: Love, sympathy, and compassion for people.

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.

34. In our busy, hectic world, we look for quicker ways to express ourselves with the least amount of disruption to our busy programs. Facebook is the world's largest online social networking site. Almost from the beginning, it has allowed people to respond to a post with a "like"—"thumbs up" with one quick press of a button—without the chance for "dislike" or "thumbs down." But, if someone reports a tragedy that has happened to himself or to a friend of theirs, should we respond with a "like"? Or, ignore it? Facebook now offers an emoji for each of several different emotions—"love," "laughter," "shock," "sadness," and "anger." Now, we can simply push the button and go on our way!
35. Is a personal touch essential to real sympathy? When we tell someone who is in the midst of a tragedy that we will be praying for him/her, do we do so?
36. Read Matthew 14:14.

The word *compassion* in this verse is translated from the Greek word *splangchnistheis*, which William Barclay describes as "the strongest word for pity in the Greek language." He points out that it derives from the word *splangchna*, which means the bowels. According to Barclay, "it describes the

compassion which moves a man to the deepest depths of his being. In the gospels, apart from its use in some of the parables, it is used only of Jesus.”—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* page 108.

37. Read Luke 7:1-10. We have studied how Jesus reached out to the Roman centurion. Being aware of Jewish purity laws, the Roman centurion himself was trying to be sympathetic to Jesus, recognizing that Jesus was probably not even supposed to come to his house. Thus, with sympathy for Jewish customs, he suggested that Jesus did not need to appear in person; Jesus only needed to speak the word. Did the centurion know of any case in which Jesus had healed someone at a distance?
38. Read Mark 2:1-12. The men who brought that paralyzed man to the home of Peter and then carried him up to the roof, opening a hole in the roof, and lowering him down before Jesus, probably wondered how Jesus would respond. The suffering man himself must have been apprehensive and nervous, knowing the cause of his illness. Jesus, so gentle, so kind, so sympathetic, simply said: “Courage, my son! Your sins are forgiven.” (Matthew 9:2, *GNB*)
39. Read Luke 8:40-56. Jesus dropped what He was doing to rush to the home of Jairus to heal his very ill daughter. On the way, He was touched by that suffering woman and He spoke gently to her saying: “Courage, my daughter! Your faith has made you well.” (Matthew 9:22, *GNB*) In the original language, these are all illustrations of *splangchnistheis*.
40. To the ancient Jewish people, emotions were located in the bowels and thinking was located in the heart. Today, we have moved everything up about 18 inches. We do thinking with our brains and feeling with our hearts. Notice these words from Jeremiah 4:19, (*KJV*): “My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart;...”
41. The early Christian theologian Augustine of Hippo used the expression: “With love for humanity, but hatred for sin.” In our day, we have modified the expression slightly to say: “Love the sinner, but hate the sin.” Can we do that without being condescending or suggesting that we are in some way superior to the one who is a sinner? Even when someone is a drunkard, do we remember that s/he also might be a mother/father, a daughter/son, even a friend? We need to remember that God looks at things very differently.

God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation, as well as in that of man; but however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God. Man’s judgment is partial, imperfect; but God estimates all things as they really are. **The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God; for they are contrary to the benevolence of His character, to that unselfish love which is the very atmosphere of the unfallen universe.** He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; but pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* 30.1. [Bold type is added.]

42. Is it possible to call sin by its right name without sounding superior?
43. In this lesson we have seen many examples of how we can be sympathetic, compassionate, empathetic, even pitying those who are suffering. Are we ready to practice these traits?

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Last Modified: June 4, 2016

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