

“The Least of These”: Ministering to Those in Need A Community of Servants

Lesson #13 for September 28, 2019

Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 2:14-16; Exodus 32:1-14; 1 Peter 2:12; Philippians 2:15; Ephesians 2:19; Hebrews 10: 23-25.

1. This lesson will focus on some of the ways we might work together as a Sabbath school class or a church to promote the gospel—not only among other church members but also to the community around us.
2. Clearly, there are some things that we can do as individuals such as giving Bible studies and witnessing while at work. However, there are other things that can be done more efficiently as a group. What kind of things can you think of to promote the gospel which can be done as a group? Feeding the hungry? Clothing the naked? Providing housing where possible to those who are homeless?
3. So, in what ways could a Sabbath school class like yours/ours reach out to the community?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-20. In this passage Paul compared the body of Christ—that is, the church—to a human body. Not every church member has the same skills or the same gifts; but, working together, we can accomplish a great deal.
5. So, what different skills and gifts do you have in your Sabbath school class that could combine together to produce a ministry to reach out to the community?
6. What should we learn from the experience of the early disciples about working as a community. Clearly, they had a remarkable fellowship. They worked together; they preached together; they ate together. They were like one large family. (Who joined? See Acts 6:7; 15:5.) Obviously, they were effective at reaching out to other members of their community. But, they were certainly not reaching out to Gentiles! It took years and severe persecution to get them to do that! (How was the gospel finally presented to the Gentiles? See Acts 8:1; 11:19-21.)
7. Read Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 12:12-20; and 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; 2:14-16. In what ways can we be *living sacrifices*, serving as Christ’s body, as ambassadors, or even as perfume?
8. Repeatedly, Leviticus talks about the smell of the burning flesh of the dead animals as being “sweet” to God. (See Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17, etc.) To most of us, it would be a stench. But, in New Testament times, very quickly the offering of dead animals became no longer a part of the Christian plan. We are to be *living sacrifices*. What does that mean? Living for Christ!
9. We are also supposed to be making friends not only for ourselves but also for God. God has attempted to make the whole human race His friends through Christ. That is our job.
10. What is implied by the statement: “God did not keep an account of their sins”? (2 Corinthians 5:19, *GNB**) God is Forgiveness Personified. There is no problem for God to forgive.
11. Do you think of yourself as speaking on God’s behalf, drawing people to love Him and understand Him? At our places of work, how can we speak on God’s behalf?
12. Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-16. In what ways could we be like perfume? Are people attracted to the church? And even more importantly, are they attracted to God by our presence?
13. In order for nations to live peacefully together, there are certain international laws which apply. A nation’s embassy is considered part of the sending nation. No matter where it is located, it represents and is an official part of its home nation. If we are to act as Christ’s ambassadors, are we truly representing Him in our environment, even though it may be foreign to His environment? Do people see the reality of His love and justice in our own lives?
14. Seventh-day Adventists have focused on three passages in the book of Revelation as defining our identity. Those passages are Revelation 12:17; 14:12; and Revelation 19:10. We believe

that the final end-time people in God's kingdom will keep His commandments and represent Him correctly to those around them.

Revelation 14:12: This calls for endurance on the part of God's people, those who obey God's commandments and are faithful to Jesus.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Revelation 14:12). New York: American Bible Society.†

Compare **Revelation 13:10**:¹⁰ "Whoever is meant to be captured will surely be captured; whoever is meant to be killed by the sword will surely be killed by the sword. **This calls for endurance and faith on the part of God's people.**"—*Good News Bible*.*†

15. Why do you think the giving of the three-angels' messages calls for endurance on the part of God's people? How does Revelation 13:10—with a similar call in the middle of Satan's appeals to follow him—fit? Is God trying to tell us that there will be a lot of challenges to living the Christian life in the final days of this earth's history?
16. Read Exodus 32:1-14. This is the first of at least two occasions when Moses appealed to God not to be angry with His people. It is very interesting to notice the discussion and the pronouns used by God and by Moses in this passage. God spoke to Moses and talked about *your* people whom *you* led out of Egypt. Moses pleaded with the Lord, "Why should *you* be so angry with *your* people, whom *you* rescued from Egypt." (Exodus 32:11, *GNB**) [Italic type is added.]‡ Does this sound like a couple of parents arguing over their children?
17. Did God really change His mind when Moses argued like that?

Malachi 3:6: "I am the LORD, and I do not change. And so you, the descendants of Jacob, are not yet completely lost."—*Good News Bible*.*†

Hebrews 13:8: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.—*Good News Bible*.*

How do we fit these passages together? God showed which kind of person Moses was!

18. Moses must have known God very well to be willing to speak up like that on behalf of God's people and to not be frightened by God. And notice very importantly, probably most importantly of all, that **Moses was very concerned about God's reputation. What will the Egyptians say?** (Exodus 32:12) **How many of us are concerned about God's reputation?**
19. In our world when so many do not even believe in God, how can we represent Him correctly? So many Christians today are focused on one thing and one thing only; that is, how they can be saved. Doesn't that sound selfish? We almost never hear anything about God's reputation. What are we doing about that? Seventh-day Adventists have the advantage of having a knowledge of the issues in the great controversy. This should make us very concerned about correctly representing God every day in everything we do.

Exodus 32:32: "Please forgive their sin; but if you won't, then remove my name from the book in which you have written the names of your people."—*Good News Bible*.*

20. What was Moses really trying to say? Did he not want to go to heaven if his friends and family could not be there? Was that really an intercessory prayer? In what sense?

As Moses interceded for Israel, his timidity was lost in his deep interest and love for those for whom he had, in the hands of God, been the means of doing so much. **The Lord listened to his pleadings, and granted his unselfish prayer. God had proved His servant; He had tested his faithfulness and his love for that erring, ungrateful people, and nobly had Moses endured the trial.** His interest in Israel sprang from no selfish motive. The prosperity of God's
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chosen people was dearer to him than personal honor, dearer than the privilege of becoming the father of a mighty nation. God was pleased with his faithfulness, his simplicity of heart, and his integrity, and He committed to him, as a faithful shepherd, the great charge of leading Israel to the Promised Land.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 319.2.†

21. Since God knew that He was planning to take Moses up to heaven, was this discussion between Moses and God for the benefit of the angels and the rest of the onlooking universe?
22. In our churches, it is often the case that groups will determine to do something for the gospel. Some groups tend to focus on social work, reaching out into the community to feed and clothe and help people. Other groups want to focus on witnessing. How do we get these two camps to cooperate? Shouldn't they be working together?

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 poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing** 143.3; *GW** 363.2. Compare *Mar* 103.5; *WM* 60.1.

Matthew 10:7-8: ⁷ "Go and preach, 'The Kingdom of heaven is near!' ⁸Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases, and drive out demons. You have received without paying, so give without being paid."—*Good News Bible*.*

23. Could we actually do any of these things in our ministries today? It was fairly easy to see how the healing miracles of Christ led to people's interest in hearing what He had to say. But, how does that work in our day? A lot of fraudulent evangelists are pretending to heal people and then claiming that since God has given them the power to heal people, what they are saying must be straight from God! But, it obviously is not from God!
24. What did Peter and Paul later have to say about good works and their witnessing power?

1 Peter 2:12: Your conduct among the heathen should be so good that when they accuse you of being evildoers, they will have to recognize your good deeds and so praise God on the Day of his coming.—*Good News Bible*.*

Philippians 2:15-16: So that you may be innocent and pure as God's perfect children, who live in a world of corrupt and sinful people. You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky, ¹⁶as you offer them the message of life. If you do so, I shall have reason to be proud of you on the Day of Christ, because it will show that all my effort and work have not been wasted.—*Good News Bible*.*

25. First John 3:16-18 and James 2:16 make it very clear that God's plan is for us to do good in the community to serve as a bridge or an opening to the spreading of the gospel.
26. Notice, especially what it says in 1 John 3:16-18. What does it mean to *give our lives for our brothers and sisters*? If we show love to those in the church, will that convince the world that they will want to be a part of us? Does *brothers and sisters* include people outside the church?

John 13:34-35: ³⁴ "And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."—*Good News Bible*.*

27. Compare Matthew 5:16. Do we shine as lights in the community? Are we the only ones around

who obviously show that we love each other? Would that attract people?

28. Have you ever had the experience of working with a pantry to give food to people, or perhaps, with a Dorcas society that is distributing clothing and had people ask questions that gave you an opportunity to witness? Should we be waiting for them to ask questions? Or, should we be seeking ways with God's help to start those discussions ourselves?
29. Think of the whole story of Job. Can you believe that God staked His reputation on the uprightness of Job? What if Job had failed? After looking at Job 1:8 and the rest of the first two chapters of Job, it is very important to read Job 42:7-8.
30. Read Ephesians 3:10 and Colossians 1:19-20. Is it really true that God intends to teach the rest of the universe something about Himself through the church on this earth? Will God finally manage to bring the whole universe back to Himself through "His Son's blood on the cross"? How was the universe impacted by the death of Jesus? It answered the questions about God.
31. Many Christians believe that the purpose of the death of Christ was/is to "pay the price" for our sins. But, there is so much more involved than that.

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but **it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe.** To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me." John 12:31, 32. **The act of Christ in dying for the salvation [healing] of man would not only make heaven accessible to men [and women], but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 68.2-69.0 (1890).^{††} Compare *Reflecting Christ* 50.3.

32. Read Ephesians 2:19. What is implied by the statement that the church community is supposed to be the "household" of God? Or, "members of the family of God"? Should we be inviting nonmembers to our potlucks and gatherings to show them what good friends we are? How we treat church members will be a good indication of how we might treat others as well.
33. The larger church organization can be a witness by how it cares for its employees. Is it doing a good job of that?
34. Working for the Lord is not easy. We may be embarrassed about speaking up. But, are we concerned about our reputation? Or, God's? We may not be doing so well as a church; but, God looks great. Have we practiced ways of speaking to people about how wonderful God is? Shouldn't that be a major theme in our gatherings together in Sabbath school and church?
35. Read Hebrews 10:23-25. Church gatherings should be especially useful for that purpose. Have you ever sat down with other members of your church community to determine who has which gift or gifts? And how they can be used most effectively in witnessing?
36. Read Galatians 6:9-10. Notice, once again, that Paul says we need to do good to all people, but, especially to those who belong to our family in the faith.
37. Are our Sabbath school classes organized and conducted in such a way as to encourage discussion and real thinking among other church members?

It is not the opposition of the world that most endangers the church of Christ. It

is the evil cherished in the hearts of believers that works their most grievous disaster and most surely retards the progress of God's cause. There is no surer way of weakening spirituality than by cherishing envy, suspicion, faultfinding, and evil surmising. On the other hand, the strongest witness that God has sent His Son into the world is the existence of harmony and union among men of varied dispositions who form His church. This witness it is the privilege of the followers of Christ to bear. But in order to do this, they must place themselves under Christ's command. Their characters must be conformed to His character and their wills to His will.—Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles** 549.1.

The work which the disciples did, we also are to do. **Every Christian is to be a missionary.** In sympathy and compassion we are to minister to those in need of help, seeking with unselfish earnestness to lighten the woes of suffering humanity....

We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the suffering and afflicted. We are to minister to the despairing, and to inspire hope in the hopeless.

The love of Christ, manifested in unselfish ministry, will be more effective in reforming the evildoer than will the sword or the court of justice.... Often the heart that hardens under reproof will melt under the love of Christ.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing** 104.2; *Ibid.**106.1-2.† Compare AG 334.4.

The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within. It is the atmosphere of this love surrounding the soul of the believer that makes him a savor of life unto life and enables God to bless his work.

Supreme love for God and unselfish love for one another--this is the best gift that our heavenly Father can bestow. This love is not an impulse, but a divine principle, a permanent power. The unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce it. Only in the heart where Jesus reigns is it found.—Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles** 551.1-2.†

38. Do we as Seventh-day Adventists have a unique and important message for the world? What is implied and included in *the three angels' messages*? Seventh-day Adventists are known around the world as being people of the Book. We also have a very powerful health message which can literally extend the lives and improve the health of people. More than that, we have an understanding of the great controversy which helps to explain so many challenging parts of the Bible.
39. Have you ever been a part of a church which is doing several of these things and actively recruiting new members? How does that make you feel?
40. We have looked at the example of the early disciples in the early Christian church as the early rain and used that as an example for what might happen in the latter rain.
41. Think of the experience of Jesus with His disciples in the upper room, washing their dirty feet. Do you think the disciples were quick to follow the example of Jesus given on that occasion? What are we doing as individuals and as a group to serve the community in ways that lead to the sharing of the gospel?
42. Research has shown that people who belong to a regular faith community and attend religious services regularly live longer lives. Why do you think that is? Do you ever feel like you are being called to commit yourself in so many ways that you become exhausted?
43. Read Galatians 6:9-10. Research has shown that people who are actively helping others

experience what is called a *helper's high*. What is a helper's high? It makes you feel good. More than that, it results in a sharp reduction in stress due to the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. So, when you reach out to help others, you are helping yourself. (Isaiah 58:10-11)

44. One of the best passages talking about the way in which Jesus humbled Himself is found in Philippians 2:5-11.
45. Read Matthew 20:26; 23:11-12; and Acts 17:6. Jesus seemed to be promoting an “upside down gospel.” One scholar has said:

“What we need today are not, as is so often suggested, more *servant leaders*, but properly understood more *leading servants*.”—Robert Banks, quoted in Siang Yang Tan in *Full Service: Moving From Self-Serve Christianity to Total Servanthood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), p. 55.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 173.] [Reference is in a footnote in the Bible Study Guide. Italic type is in the source.][‡]
46. How would you understand the difference between *servant leaders* and *leading servants*?
47. One other note of interest: It is not enough just to say that we are servants of Christ. There are bad servants as well as good servants. Do we clearly understand the *upside down* philosophy that Christ was trying to teach His followers?
48. Read John 15:15. This is an incredibly important verse. It is one of Jesus's final statements to His disciples before His crucifixion. What do you think was implied by His telling His disciples that they were no longer servants or slaves but friends?
49. For one thing, if we are friends of God, we will always be prepared to speak up on behalf of His reputation. Do we do that? Jesus had been an incredibly wonderful Friend to His followers. They could not imagine what it would be like to lose Him. But, when He died that awful death and then arose in His own power on Sunday morning, they began to get a better picture of who He really was. And when He ascended to heaven, they must have had a “fruit basket upset” in their thinking—a change in their paradigm—to imagine that their personal Friend Jesus was actually God! Can we think of Jesus as our Friend?
50. Often, our larger churches have a number of different programs going on. How well do those programs work together? If we are following the example of Jesus, we should be able to experience a synergy with more than one program working together.

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. The Saviour has given His precious life in order to establish a church capable of caring for sorrowful, tempted souls.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 640.3-4.[†] Compare *ML* 225.4.

51. Our God has a mission. He wants to save as many of His human children as possible. Isn't that why our churches exist? Are we really fulfilling the mission for which we were established? Could we become a capable community of servants?

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