

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

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Lesson #8 for August 24, 2019

Scriptures: Matthew 5:2-16,38-48; 25:31-46; Romans 12:20-21; Luke 12:13-21; 16:19-31.

1. Christians have one Example whom it is always safe to follow; that is the example of Jesus. So, what example did Jesus leave us in dealing with the poor and needy? Try to imagine what our lives would be like if we and our Sabbath school classes actually tried to follow the example of Jesus to the best of our ability. Would it affect our communities?
2. Living a Christlike life is very different from living a worldly-oriented life. How much time do we spend each day thinking about how we can meet the needs of others? In what ways can we most effectively serve others in our situation today? Do you think it was easy for the people in Jesus’s day to carry out these ideals? Did some of them try? Shouldn’t we?
3. Read Matthew 5:1-16. Each of these beatitudes and the lifestyles recommended after them could be discussed for hours. Think about the implications of living a righteous life, practicing humility, mercy, and peacemaking, as well as being pure of heart. What would it be like to be salt and light in the world? (Matthew 5:13-16)
4. How many of the people who heard Jesus give these guidelines were able to help others significantly? How many were desperately hoping that someone would help them?

Matthew 4:25: ²⁵Large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Ten Towns, from Jerusalem, Judea, and the land on the other side of the Jordan.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Matthew 4:25). New York: American Bible Society.

Mark 3:7-8: ⁷ Jesus and his disciples went away to Lake Galilee, and a large crowd followed him. They had come from Galilee, from Judea, ⁸from Jerusalem, from the territory of Idumea, from the territory on the east side of the Jordan, and from the region round the cities of Tyre and Sidon. All these people came to Jesus because they had heard of the things he was doing.—*Ibid.**

5. Read Luke 10:25-27. Jesus was frequently approached by Jewish leaders of one kind or another with questions that they were hoping He would answer in a way that they could use to trap Him. However, He always came up with an answer that made them look foolish. In this story, the teacher of the law actually answered his own question!
6. The Jews argued incessantly about the question of who was their *neighbor*. When the teacher of the law was able to answer his question himself, he naturally turned in his mind to the question, “Who is my neighbor?”
7. This led Jesus to the giving of the parable of the good Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-42) In passing, it is important to notice that Luke was the only Gospel writer to mention this story. Why do you think that was?
8. There are several very important issues that we need to understand about this story.

In the story of the good Samaritan, Christ illustrates the nature of true religion. He shows that it consists not in systems, creeds, or rites, but in the

performance of loving deeds, in bringing the greatest good to others, in genuine goodness.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 497.1; *WM** 42.1; compare *YI*, August 16, 1894, par. 2.

This was no imaginary scene, but an actual occurrence, which was known to be exactly as represented. The priest and the Levite who had passed by on the other side were in the company that listened to Christ's words.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 499.1.†

The Levite was of the same tribe as was the wounded, bruised sufferer. All Heaven watched as the Levite passed down the road, to see if his heart would be touched with human woe. As he beheld the man he was convicted of what he ought to do; but as it was not an agreeable duty, he wished he had not come that way, so that he need not have seen the man who was wounded and bruised, naked and perishing, and in want of help from his fellow men. He passed on his way, persuading himself that it was none of his business, and that he had no need to trouble himself over the case. Claiming to be an expositor of the law, to be a minister in sacred things, he yet passed by on the other side.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* January 1, 1895, par. 5; *Welfare Ministry** 47.1.† [The priest was a Levite also.]‡

No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons** 386.3.†

9. Try to imagine the embarrassment of the Jews as Jesus pointed to an outsider, someone who was considered to be unfaithful to God and even unsavable, as the one who did what was right in helping that Levite who was in trouble! How do you think the Levite and the priest standing among the crowd felt as Jesus told the story? How would you feel if you had been one of them?

Years ago, a group of psychologists conducted a study based on the story of the good Samaritan. They met with a group of theology students and asked each of them to prepare a short talk on the theme of the good Samaritan. Then, they were to walk through an alley to a nearby building to present the talk. On the way there, each student encountered an actor, playing the part of a man, sprawled in the alley, groaning and coughing.

Few students stopped to help the man or ask him if he was OK. Some even stepped over the victim to get to their speaking appointment in the next building. The psychologists concluded that compassion and love for humanity all too often works in theory but not in practice.—Bryan Patterson, "Being a Good Samaritan Is More Than Just Showing Compassion," *Herald Sun*, August 25, 2012. C. S. Lewis is credited with saying: "It is easier to be enthusiastic about Humanity with a capital 'H' than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive. Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody

in particular.”—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 107.
[Reference for Patterson is in a footnote in the source.][†]

10. How do you feel about that experiment? Do you think it was fair? How do you think you might have responded if you had been one of the subjects?
11. How would you respond if you came upon someone who needed help? Is your church known for being open to helping those in need?
12. Try to summarize in your own mind the parable of the good Samaritan. **What was the mind-set of the priest and the Levite as they passed by the suffering victim? Were they thinking: “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?” By contrast, what was the thinking or mind-set of the good Samaritan? Was he thinking: “If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?”**
13. Read Luke 16:19-31, the story of the rich man and Lazarus. In the days of Jesus there were no governmental departments administering social welfare, no community hospitals, and no “soup kitchens.” It was common for people in desperate need to beg outside the homes of the wealthy. It was expected that the rich would share a little bit of their wealth to alleviate the suffering of the poor.
14. Notice this comment by Ellen White about the rich man in this story.

The rich man did **not** belong to the class represented by the unjust judge, who openly declared his disregard for God and man. He claimed to be a son of Abraham. He did not treat the beggar with violence or require him to go away because the sight of him was disagreeable. If the poor, loathsome specimen of humanity could be comforted by beholding him as he entered his gates, the rich man was willing that he should remain. **But he was selfishly indifferent to the needs of his suffering brother.**—Ellen G. White, *Christ Object Lessons** 261.1.[†]

15. Jesus had some fairly strong words to say against the selfishly rich people of His day.
16. Read Luke 12:13-21. There is no evidence in either of these stories that the men became rich by doing anything wrong. Maybe they had worked very hard; maybe God had blessed them; but, something had gone wrong in their thinking.
17. As we know, this story has been used by our Christian brothers and sisters to support the idea of an *ever-burning hell*. In fact, Jesus was just using a belief common among the people in His day to make a spiritual point. Jesus could have said what Paul later said: “The love of money is the root of all evil.” (1 Timothy 6:10, *KJV**)
18. How often do we allow a love for money to distort how we live?
19. On Jesus’s final day in the temple in Jerusalem, He made some comments which raised questions in the minds of His disciples.

Matthew 24:1-3: Jesus left and was going away from the Temple when his disciples came to him to call his attention to its buildings. ² “Yes,” he said, “you may well look at all these. I tell you this: not a single stone here will be left in its place; every one of them will be thrown down.”

³ As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him in private. “Tell us when all this will be,” they asked, “and what will happen to show that it is the

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time for your coming and the end of the age.”—*Good News Bible*.*

20. Jesus went on to describe several parables which have reference to the events at the end of time.
21. Would you be considered one of the foolish virgins? Or, one of the wise ones? How much oil of the Holy Spirit do you have stored up? Will Jesus commend you for having done good to the poor and needy?
22. Read Matthew 25:31-46. Could it really be true that judgment will be based on how we have dealt with the poor and needy in this life? Is it also true that Jesus considers the poor and needy as if they were Himself—Jesus Himself?
23. On his way to Damascus, Paul was struck down by that brilliant light. Notice the brief conversation between himself and Jesus.

Acts 9:5: “Who are you, Lord?” he asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you persecute,” the voice said. ⁶“But get up and go into the city, where you will be told what you must do.”—*Ibid*.*

24. So, when you see a beggar beside the road, do you think of Jesus?

Christ tears away the wall of partition, the self-love, the dividing prejudice of nationality, and teaches a love for all the human family. He lifts men from the narrow circle that their selfishness prescribes; He abolishes all territorial lines and artificial distinctions of society. He makes no difference between neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies. He teaches us to look upon every needy soul as our neighbor and the world as our field.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing** 42.2; *DA** 823.1; compare *GW* 46.3; *MH* 25.4.

The standard of the golden rule is the true standard of Christianity; anything short of it is a deception. **A religion that leads men to place a low estimate upon human beings, whom Christ has esteemed of such value as to give Himself for them; a religion that would lead us to be careless of human needs, sufferings, or rights, is a spurious religion.** In slighting the claims of the poor, the suffering, and the sinful, we are proving ourselves traitors to Christ. **It is because men take upon themselves the name of Christ, while in life they deny His character, that Christianity has so little power in the world.**—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing** 136.4-137.0.†
[Could that be us?][‡]

25. Do the ideas in this lesson make us uncomfortable? Does our understanding of Christian doctrine make it unnecessary for us to care for the poor and needy? Or, does the fact that we claim to be end-time Christians and Seventh-day Adventists make it more necessary?
26. **We are now almost 175 years after the Great Disappointment in 1844. Does our relationship to the poor and needy have anything to do with this long delay?**
27. What would happen if a Seventh-day Adventist Church today could fully implement the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount? What possible avenues could be used to deal with injustice, poverty, and disease? Could we actually live a life like the life of Jesus?

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world as the unwearied servant of man’s necessity. He “took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses,” that He might

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minister to every need of humanity. Matthew 8:17. The burden of disease and wretchedness and sin He came to remove. It was His mission to bring to men complete restoration; He came to give them health and peace and perfection of character.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing** 17.1.

28. One of the things that we need to learn to do is to understand others clearly so that we understand their views and needs as they see them. How good are we at doing that? How would you judge yourself in this category?

The Beatitudes possibly reference justice. For example, the Greek word for “righteousness” in the well-known beatitude in Matthew 5:6 is sometimes translated as “justice.”

In fact, as we noted in an earlier lesson, the words *righteousness* and *justice* are at times used interchangeably in both the Old and New Testaments. Primarily one Hebrew (*tsedeq*) and Greek (*dikaioyne*) word is used for both terms. One example of the interchangeability of “justice” and “righteousness” in English is seen in the *New Living Translation (NLT)*: “God blesses those who hunger and thirst for *justice*, for they will be satisfied” (*Matt. 5:6, emphasis supplied*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 106-107. [Italic type is in the source.][†]

29. The problem with this explanation is that in our day, *righteousness* and *justice* have come to mean very different things! How should we deal with that issue?
30. Compare Matthew 5:6 with Psalm 37:12-17.

Matthew 5:6: Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy them fully!—*Good News Bible*.* [What do we want to do?][†]

Psalm 37:12-17:

¹² The wicked plot against good people
and glare at them with hate.

¹³ But the Lord laughs at wicked people,
because he knows they will soon be destroyed.

¹⁴ The wicked draw their swords and bend their bows
to kill the poor and needy,
to slaughter those who do what is right;

¹⁵ but they will be killed by their own swords,
and their bows will be smashed.

¹⁶ The little that a good person owns
is worth more than the wealth of all the wicked,

¹⁷ because the LORD will take away the strength of the wicked,
but protect those who are good.—*Ibid*.*

31. Do you think Psalm 37 is what Jesus had in mind when He gave us that beatitude?
32. We are urged by Jesus to be salt and light to the world. (See Matthew 5:13-16.)

Someone once said that it is harder to be salt than light.... What important role do both salt and light have in social ministry? (e.g., light generally shines from

afar, makes darkness disappear, and helps us find what is lost. Being “salt,” however, takes extra commitment because it must *mingle* with ingredients different from itself in order for its healing properties to have an impact.) *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 107. [Italic type is in the source.] [How often do we mix with non-Adventists?][†]

33. So, which of the groups or people in this lesson do you feel that you fit with?

Mark 14:7: You will always have poor people with you, and any time you want to, you can help them. But you will not always have me.—*Good News Bible*.*

Some people use this verse as an excuse to ignore one type of “the least of these”—the poor. They reason: “Because the poor will always be with us, the problem will not go away. Anyway, Jesus Himself said it: ‘“For ye have the poor with you always” ’ (Mark 14:7). So why try to solve the problem?”—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 108. [Italic type is in the source.][†]

34. This verse is probably a reference to Deuteronomy 15:4-5,11.

Deuteronomy 15:4-5,11: ⁴ The LORD your God will bless you in the land that he is giving you. **Not one of your people will be poor** ⁵if you obey him and carefully observe everything that I command you today.... ¹¹**There will always be some Israelites who are poor and in need**, and so I command you to be generous to them.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

35. Does the fact that there will always be poor people on this earth—primarily because of the injustice of other human beings—excuse us from reaching out and trying to help them? No! If all Christians were really good Samaritans, would the poor and needy disappear?

Christ has said that we shall have the poor always with us. The heart of our Redeemer sympathizes with the lowliest of His earthly children. **He tells us that they are His representatives on earth**, placed among us to awaken in our hearts the love He feels toward the suffering and oppressed.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* September 17, 1889, par. 23.[†] Compare *Patriarchs and Prophets** 535.3; *WM** 175.2.

36. How bright is the light that your church focuses on the community? Is it a powerful beam? Or, is it barely visible?

37. Has this lesson given you some new ideas about how to meet the needs in your community? Does it make you feel uncomfortable? Could we be like Jesus?

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