

# lesson twelve

DECEMBER 15–21

## Church Organization and **Unity**

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*“Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave’ ” (Matt. 20:26, 27, NKJV).*



Jesus provided us with the greatest example of being a servant. By living like Christ, we can continue to carry out His mission in the church and to the world.

## Introduction

# *The Ultimate Group Project*

Matt. 20:26, 27;  
28:18–20

While some students feel complete sadness and despair when these two words are uttered from their teacher's mouth, others may be filled with pure euphoria. The two words? *Group project*. Typically, the members who are ecstatic about this type of project are the ones who leave it up to all of the other members of the group to do the work. Regardless of whether there is an elected leader, each group will have one, and this person may, unfortunately, end up doing all of the work.

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### **No assignment is too small.**

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Though a common occurrence, this scenario does not have to be the case. Every group has the potential to work like a well-oiled machine. How can a group work like that? You may be thinking, *Simple. If everyone does their part, the group will thrive!* Despite that being mostly true, I believe the model group needs to be more than that. In Matthew 28:18–20, we are called to “make disciples of all nations” (NIV). To accomplish such an important task, we, the leaders, must make a special effort to connect with and encourage those we are leading. The leaders must be able to aid in uniting the group. If the group is not united, onlookers may not want to join the group (or, in this case, discipleship) and/or the current members will not be compelled to stay in it.

Along with stimulating unity, we must also be willing to serve our brothers and sisters. A true leader should be OK with both leading and serving and treat either position as having the same level of importance. Jesus said, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matthew 20:26, 27 NIV). No assignment is too small. Maintaining that mind-set is essential to a group, along with making sure everyone knows they have a specific and important task to take care of.

An unorganized and divided group sticks out like a sore thumb. Thinking of how to complete a successful group project reminds me of how churches are organized. As Christians, we are working on the ultimate group project for the greatest Teacher. We have been given the most wonderful opportunity to work in accordance with our Creator. Because this is such a big deal, staying organized and cultivating unity should be high on our priority list. We must value every position in the church, from the greeter to the pastor. Once again, no assignment is too small.

John 13:1–17

## Evidence *Sweet Leadership*

Sometimes we, as Christians, forget what it means to be a true leader. Many of us, who may hold leadership positions at church, work, school, or home, wonder why people do not follow our instructions. Leadership has nothing to do with merely giving out good instructions or ideas to others but has everything to do with being a servant leader. Jesus gives us a great example of being a servant leader in John 13:1–17.

### “Why couldn’t you tell my son to stop two weeks ago?”

In these verses we see how Jesus, who wasn’t just the leader of the disciples but God in human form, washed the feet of each and every of His disciples by Himself. At the time, the majority of the population had one kind of shoe—sandals—or no shoes at all. Sandals do not cover the entire foot, just the bottom. The roads were not paved during these times, so walking would leave the feet of travelers caked with dirt. Typically, when one would come to someone else’s residence, the host would have a servant wash the feet of the visitors. This is the role that Jesus played for His disciples, hence making Jesus the ultimate servant leader.

There’s an old story of a woman who had a son who was addicted to sugar. The boy’s mother saw how serious the child’s condition was and journeyed a great distance with the boy to get help. She took her son to see a man by the name of Mahatma Gandhi and asked Gandhi to tell her son to stop eating sugar. Mahatma Gandhi told the mother, “I cannot tell him that. Bring him back in two weeks, and I will tell him.” Upset and befuddled, the mother took her son back home. Two weeks later the mother brought her son back to Gandhi and asked him to do the same thing. This time Gandhi told the son, “Boy, you should stop eating sugar. It is not good for your health.” The child agreed and promised to stop eating sugar. The confused mother asked Gandhi, “Why couldn’t you tell my son to stop two weeks ago?” Gandhi replied, “Mother, two weeks ago I was eating a lot of sugar myself.”

This story shows the pivotal connection between being a servant leader and leading by example. Jesus was able to be a servant leader, leading by His example. When we tell others what to do and how to do it, we are merely giving instructions to others. However, when we show others what to do and how to do it, we inspire and exemplify what those watching must do.

### **REACT**

1. What actions can you take to become a better servant leader?
2. How can you change how people view you as a leader?

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Matt. 7:1–5; 20:28;  
28:18–20;  
John 13:1–17;  
Gal. 6:1, 2;  
Eph. 5:23–27;  
Titus 1:8, 9

As Seventh-day Adventists, we are Christians who believe that Jesus the Christ came down to exchange His innocent life for our salvation. God loves us so much that He sent His Son to die for us so that we all might be able to join with Him in heaven after He comes back for us. The main mission of the church and the body of Christ is to spread the gospel to the entire world by teaching and baptizing them, joining them to the body of Christ. If we are not unified as one body in Christ with the same mission and perspectives, separation and disunity are inevitable. There is absolutely One (Jesus) for all . . . but are we all for one?

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### Who are we to feel that we deserve to be served?

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#### ***Christ, the Head of the Church (Eph. 5:23–27)***

First and foremost, if Christ is not the head of any and every mission of the church and body of Christ, then the mission is being done wrong. Efforts being made in His name but carried out for personal agendas are where the disunity begins. In Ephesians 5:23–27, we read of the roles of Christ and His church as compared to those of a husband and his wife. The Bible says that just as the church submits to the Lord as He is the Head, wives must submit to their husbands as the head. In reality, many people don't like to hear that because in the modern world, submission of this sort does not fit the ideology. Instead of interpreting submission as a loss, this passage intends for it to be understood as a gain—gaining peace and trust with submission because the one submitting understands that she is taken care of. The body of Christ can rest with confidence, knowing that it is loved and cared for by Christ, just as a husband loves and takes care of his wife. To be more realistic, if Christ is not the head of our own personal lives, how can we expect to translate the submission we need into doing His work?

#### ***Organizing for Mission (Matt. 28:18–20)***

The mission of the body of Christ can be found in Matthew 28:18–20. Jesus charges His disciples to go out and teach what He taught them. After they are taught, they are to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The collective mission of this body should always be to teach what He has taught us. As followers of Christ, we should always want to grow the body of Christ. Although we may have many different approaches and methods of ministry, if the growth of the body is not the driving force behind it all, then Christ is not at the head.

### **Church Discipline (Matt. 7:1–5; Gal. 6:1, 2)**

In order to carry out the mission of the church successfully with our brothers and sisters in Christ, it is very important to recognize that we are imperfect people who serve a perfect God. It is easy to excuse personal imperfections when we make a mistake, but it may be harder to excuse when our siblings in Christ make mistakes. Matthew 7:1–5 reminds us not to judge one another, because we would not like to be judged. Truth be told, we share many of the same character flaws that we point out in other people. Nobody is perfect. Keeping this in mind, we learn in Galatians 6:1, 2 that we should help one another instead of hurting and saying bad things about one another. By bearing each other's burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ. We need the same love, grace, and mercy from God that we might have denied to someone else.

### **Preserving Church Unity (Titus 1:8, 9)**

By setting aside our egos and pride, we are able to treat others as we want to be treated. This unifies the body of Christ because we realize we are all on common ground and no person is above another, although, just like the body, we all have different functions. Titus 1:8, 9 explains how the body, especially the appointed and anointed leaders of the body, should be in terms of character and being faithful to the truth. We are to hold each of our counterparts to a certain standard that keeps the focus on the main mission. Since the world views us all as one, we are accountable for each other. No one person is “too good” for a certain task in ministry.

### **Servant Leadership (John 13:1–17)**

In John 13:1–17, Jesus sets the prime example for servant leadership. Jesus gets down and washes the feet of His disciples. When Peter resists, Jesus explains to him that there is no unity if the leader is not able to serve as well. Since Jesus washed their feet, He charged them to do the same for the others. Jesus finishes this act by telling them in verses 16 and 17, “A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (NKJV). It is a beautiful realization when you visualize the fact that the King of kings and the Lord of lords came down to be human and also to serve! Washing feet was surely a humbling experience, as the feet were very dirty from walking in the dirt all day in sandals. We can apply that today because a true leader is willing to do the humble work. Matthew 20:28 states, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” If the King of kings came to serve and wash feet, who are we to feel that we deserve to be served?

### **REACT**

1. Is Christ the Head of my life? Furthermore, is Christ truly the Head of my efforts to spread the gospel?
2. Do I remember that nobody is perfect and we all fall short of the glory of God? Am I bearing my brother's burden? Am I extending the same love, grace, and mercy to others that God extends to me?
3. Do I need to be humbled in ministry? Are there parts of the vineyard I feel I am “too good” to work in?

## Opinion

# Unity and Servitude

Matt. 20:26, 27

All Christians have one common purpose in the church, which is to serve and to be united with our fellow humans. Some people in high positions such as elders, deacons, deaconesses, and pastors think they're the "head cheese" because of their titles in the church. They put themselves on a pedestal high above everyone else, alienating the people they're supposed to lead and serve. In preserving unity within the church we must commit these two thoughts to our minds and hearts: remember the Great Commission and take note of Jesus' example of a great leader.

### Observing how Christ led is also very important for preserving unity in the church.

The Great Commission is a powerful instruction Christ gave to us before He went to heaven (Matt. 28:18–20). All Jesus asked us to do is to spread the gospel all over the globe so that people can hear the good news about Jesus. If we keep that mission in mind, we wouldn't think so much of ourselves but think of others, sharing the gospel so that they would know that they can inherit eternal life like us. We get so distracted by our roles in church and society that we forget to care about others, forget to put their needs above our needs.

Observing how Christ led is also very important for preserving unity in the church. Jesus did not come down to earth to be served by humans; He came to serve humans. John 13:14, 15 states, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (NKJV). "But he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7, 8). Jesus wants us to see how important it is to be servants so that we can unite others and inspire them to do the same no matter what class we come from or how uncomfortable we may feel. We should not be afraid to serve like Jesus when He washed His disciples' feet and died for us.

#### **REACT**

1. How can you serve God to your fullest?
2. What makes a servant so powerful and inspiring?

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Matt. 20:26, 27

## How-to *Working for God*

A Pathfinder, from a young age, is taught to be “a servant of God and a friend to man.” God calls us not only to serve Him but to serve others as well. Everyone wants to become one of God’s workers, to go out and do His will and answer when He calls. I think back to my high school days, and one thing that my religion teacher told me is that “God doesn’t call the qualified. He qualifies the called.” Hearing this got me thinking, *How does God qualify us to be His servants and workers?*

### ***How does God qualify us to be His servants and workers?***

There are many important qualifications to become a worker for Christ, but for the sake of space, let’s just highlight a few qualifications:

***Don’t be ashamed of serving others.*** We should never be ashamed of serving others because of what people might think of us. Matthew 25:40 says that “ ‘ whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me ’ ” (NIV). Whatever you do for anyone, including people in need, you are doing for Jesus Christ.

***Encourage others.*** God has called us to serve Him and witness to others, but He also wants us to encourage others—not just the believers but those who are new to the faith. Titus 1:9 says, “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (NIV). Therefore, encourage those who may be struggling in their walk with Christ and challenge those who try to denounce the Word of God.

***Have humility.*** Above all, humility is the greatest qualification in working for God. John 13:1–20 depicts the ultimate act of humility, when Jesus washed the disciples’ feet. Another word for humility is *humbleness*. Jesus lowered Himself and served His disciples by washing their feet, even though the disciples didn’t know why He would do such a deed. After Jesus finished, He said, in John 13:15, 16, “ ‘ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him ’ ” (NIV). Jesus set forth this example and told them to do the same.

### **REACT**

1. Why is humility so important in serving and working for God?
2. What can you do to encourage those who are new to the faith and those who are part of the church but are compromising in their beliefs?

## Opinion

# Living on Purpose

Ps. 133:1;  
Matt. 28:18–20

What is your purpose? Why were you created? We often forget our purpose for living on earth. Sometimes we get wrapped up in earthly successes, such as being top of our graduating class, going to college, getting the highest-paying job, or becoming famous. But is that why God placed us on this earth? Matthew 28:18–20 says that we, His disciples, are to go out baptizing and teaching people about Him, our Lord and Savior. Therefore, our purpose is to teach our peers, teachers, or even our parents about God and His second coming.

### We often forget our purpose for living on earth.

One thing we lack today is unity. As church members and leaders we must make ourselves available to our neighbors, coworkers, and those living in unfortunate circumstances. We must bring as many as we can together in love and harmony. Psalm 133:1 says, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” (NIV). We are the peace this world so desperately needs! We are the peacemakers! But in order to achieve such a goal, we must reflect on our own character and spiritual connection with God.

Are you ashamed, afraid, or embarrassed to talk about God and heaven? Are you a nonconfrontational person? Fear not! You have the inside scoop and all the information there is to know about something bigger and better than anything this world could offer: a life with Jesus. Close your eyes and imagine. Imagine a life with no pain, a life where you could play with lions and tigers and bears, a life where you are never tired. That sounds great to me! However, it is our responsibility to make our brothers and sisters in Christ aware of this great opportunity before it is too late. We must never feel as if we have all the time in the world. Days turn into months—and months into years. If you haven’t noticed, the Lord said that He would shorten the days, or make time move faster, and I have noticed that time is flying. Possible people of God are dying without ever hearing about God because we are afraid or simply got wrapped up in our earthly successes. When you get lost in worldly successes, losing out on heavenly successes becomes possible. So let’s make this upcoming year a year of finding, of fulfillment, joy, peace, and purpose!

### REACT

1. Have I lost sight of my purpose?
2. How can I reclaim it?
3. What can I do that will effectively create unity and save God’s people?

Matt. 20:26, 27

## Exploration

# *More Than a Building!*

### **CONCLUDE**

When people think of the word *church*, they may think of a building that individuals go to on a particular day. Some may even consider the leaders, money taken up, or the different scheduled programs. Yes, these things are a huge part of what church is all about, but too often we forget why God instituted the church. We should gather in those particular buildings to become equipped by God to go out to minister. The individuals who meet in unity should saturate their communities with the gospel. This lesson challenges believers to look beyond the walls, become one with other members of the church through Christ, and go out and follow Christ's example of service.

### **CONSIDER**

- Asking God to show you how you can contribute to the body of Christ to better His kingdom.
- Praying for the leaders of the church.
- Joining a church outreach group.
- Writing out the blessings you've witnessed by being part of the church of God.
- Spending a few hours after church on the Sabbath going out into the community and witnessing like Jesus did.
- Asking those who have gone before you how they came into the church.
- Inviting the Holy Spirit daily to use you to minister on your own and as a part of the church.
- Being mentored by a leader in your local church to eventually one day become another local church leader.

### **CONNECT**

Acts 2, 15; The book of Ephesians.

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