

# lesson nine

AUGUST 24–30

## Ministry in the New Testament **Church**

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*“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27, NKJV).*



Followers of Christ from different time periods receive the same Holy Spirit. As the mission of the early church was to spread God's love, the New Testament church is still alive today, fulfilling the commission given to them when Jesus ascended.

Acts 2:46, 47

## Introduction

# *Living as a Community*

I have had the privilege to live in some of the high-end residential areas of Nairobi, the capital city of my country. I have realized that in each of those communities, there is a presence of people in need, and I believe that is the case not only in my country but also in other parts of the world.

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Nearly every time we drive into the gated community, we spot people begging literally across the highway, perhaps for what might be their only meal for the day. In the health facilities nearby, people are sick and in need of compassion, love, and care. The correctional facilities of our country have inmates who need spiritual, mental, and physical food.

These circumstances remind us of one thing: there is a great need to live in a community rather than as an individual. We need to respond to the needs of the people and the environment around us, which will fulfill our commission as a church community.

The idea of ministering to the needs of those around us is not something new in Christian circles. In the Old Testament, God used the prophets to deliver the same message of the need to help the less fortunate members of the society (cf. Isa. 1:17). In the New Testament, Christ initiated the Great Commission, which remains the axis of evangelism, witnessing, and service for all Christians around the world. Even in the twenty-first century, governments and institutions recognize the practice of social justice.

By upholding the idea of living as a community, we can create a new society in which everyone is “praising God and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47).

The disciples practiced social justice even after Christ went to heaven. In fulfilling the objective of the Great Commission, they helped spread the Word of God to various parts of the world, responding to the needs of the people they met in the course of their ministry.

For Christians in this era, community service is a call to use what we have to meet the practical needs of the less fortunate members of our society. Some of the recipients of community service include children, vulnerable senior citizens, people with disabilities, and the natural environment.

Learning from the work of the apostles, we can also develop communities in which the Word of God thrives as we meet the practical needs of the unfortunate.

# Ministry in the New Testament Church

Matt. 25:38–40;  
Acts 5:12–16;  
Gal. 2:10;  
James 2:14–16

## **The Healing Ministry (Acts 5:12–16)**

In a show of unity after Christ ascended to heaven, the apostles continued to perform signs and wonders. In Acts 5:12–16, the healing ministry takes center stage as people with all kinds of sicknesses are healed at the hands of the apostles. It is a demonstration of God's power working through His witnesses.

In healing the sick, the apostles put into practice the precepts they learned from Christ during His ministry (Matt. 10:8; Luke 4:40, 41; 6:17–19). Therefore, we can see the early church, led by the apostles, alive with God's power that makes it grow from strength to strength.

## **God expects us to have a merciful attitude at all times.**

Armed with the commission to be witnesses in all Judea, they delivered healing to everyone regardless of race, background, or condition. All of them received total healing.

As witnesses of Christ today, we have the responsibility to continue advancing the message of healing ministry. We do this by responding to the health needs of the less fortunate members of our communities. Those who cannot afford the hefty medical bills charged in private hospitals are counting on our contribution to make a difference in their lives.

We have a duty as a church and as young adults, in word and deed, to deliver the message of the saving and healing power of God.

## **Showing Pity and Compassion (Matt. 25:38–40)**

God requires His children to demonstrate pity, compassion, and kindness to people in difficult situations. God expects us to have a merciful attitude at all times.

However, this does not mean we become so softhearted that the world can take advantage of us. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Christ illustrates the basis of His judgment upon people when the final trumpet will blow. An important lesson in this parable is that Christ is interested in how we treat Him in our present life. This reflects itself in how we treat the lowliest in our midst. Christ requires us to demonstrate genuine love to our brothers and sisters in need.

“The true love of God is seen in the sheep. As the sheep respond to their brother's need, they are united in their distress and at the same time, unwittingly, unconsciously, without hypocrisy, align themselves with Christ. . . . This is a kind of love that cannot be faked or put on. ‘By this all will know that you're My disciples, if you have love for one another.’”<sup>1</sup>

Christ, who practiced mercy, love, and compassion, requires His followers to adopt the character of the sheep—to be genuinely good, sympathetic, kind, and concerned.

### **Remembering the Poor (Gal. 2:10)**

In the Old Testament, the Bible recognizes the practice of giving to the poor and sharing with the less fortunate members of our society (Deut. 14:28, 29). Poor people are found in every age and community, and it's a divine duty to be there for them.

In helping the poor in our communities, we should address their material needs up front and then provide the spiritual food that draws them closer and makes them stay in Christ. Even so, we need to remain vigilant of the tactics of the enemy (1 Pet. 5:8). In the practice of helping the poor in our society, we must not support habits that lead to poverty, such as drinking beer, laziness, licentiousness, and every sort of evil. In such situations, we should help the victims to come out of the sin first.

We should also distinguish between those who are poor but strong and healthy and those who are poverty-stricken, sick, and disabled. In the latter case, we should offer sympathy and help.

We are bound by divine authority to support the poor because they are our brethren. In most cases, the poor cultivate our farms, manage our capital, do our laundry, prepare our meals, tend our businesses, and more. In essence, we depend on them as much as they do on us. When we remember and support them, we remember ourselves. And according to God's Word, we gain good by doing good (Ps. 41:1–3).

### **Faith and Action (James 2:14–16)**

James 2 emphasizes how faith and good deeds are inseparable in the life of a Christian. When we speak of our faith without doing it, we cannot meet practical needs. It's easier to talk about faith than to live it. However, talking of our faith does not mean we have done it.

If we don't act on our faith but simply talk of it, we risk ending up self-deceived, thinking that we're doing well before God (James 1:22, 26). The world will see our faith through the good deeds that we perform. Adding good deeds to our faith shows we are mature in Christ. We cannot achieve this level of maturity before we participate in solving the needs of the less fortunate members of our society, such as the poor, widows, orphans, and sick.

### **REACT**

1. How can we participate in social justice without slipping into sin?
2. What do you think Jesus meant when He said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matt. 5:7, NKJV)?
3. Why is it important to meet both practical and spiritual needs?

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1. John W. Ritenbaugh, “The World, the Church, and Laodiceanism: Matthew 25:31–46,” *Forerunner Commentary*, BibleTools, accessed August 19, 2018, <https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm?fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/24047/eVerseID/24047.n>.

## Testimony

# *The Least of These*

2 Cor. 9:6-9

“Christ on the Mount of Olives pictured to His disciples the scene of the great judgment day. And He represented its decision as turning upon one point. When the nations are gathered before Him, there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering.

**“Their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering.”**

“In that day Christ does not present before men the great work He has done for them in giving His life for their redemption. He presents the faithful work they have done for Him. To those whom He sets upon His right hand He will say, ‘Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me.’ But those whom Christ commends know not that they have been ministering unto Him. To their perplexed inquiries He answers, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.’

“Jesus had told His disciples that they were to be hated of all men, to be persecuted and afflicted. Many would be driven from their homes, and brought to poverty. Many would be in distress through disease and privation. Many would be cast into prison. To all who forsook friends or home for His sake He had promised in this life a hundredfold. Now He assured a special blessing to all who should minister to their brethren. In all who suffer for My name, said Jesus, you are to recognize Me. As you would minister to Me, so you are to minister to them. This is the evidence that you are My disciples.”<sup>1</sup>

“As you open your door to Christ’s needy and suffering ones, you are welcoming unseen angels. You invite the companionship of heavenly beings. They bring a sacred atmosphere of joy and peace. They come with praises upon their lips, and an answering strain is heard in heaven. Every deed of mercy makes music there. The Father from His throne numbers the unselfish workers among His most precious treasures.”<sup>2</sup>

### REACT

How can we differentiate between genuinely needy people and false ones?

1. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 637, 638.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 639.

Acts 1:8

## Evidence

# *The Scope of Witnessing and Community Service*

On May 4, 2011, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) received a Best Practice Award for empowering rural women through its community projects.

Speaking during the ceremony held in Silver Spring, Maryland, Ken Flemmer, then ADRA International vice president for programs, said, “The evidence of this project’s impact confirms we have developed a successful project model, and we look forward to implement it across similar cultural settings.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Above all, Christ provided the spiritual food and water that could satisfy hunger and thirst forever.**

Social justice includes several different activities. Empowering disadvantaged women, for instance. In addition, we need to understand that the practice of community service is in line with our Lord’s command to “be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). In fulfilling this grand assignment, the Holy Spirit is to guide us in doing what is right and to convict us when we do wrong.

During His ministry on earth, Christ recruited followers by meeting their needs. He healed the sick and fed the hungry. Above all, Christ provided the spiritual food and water that could satisfy hunger and thirst forever.

After His death and ascension to heaven, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to guide His followers in executing activities that promoted social justice. In the footsteps of Christ, the apostles healed the sick, helped widows and orphans, and ministered to the spiritual needs of the people. Therefore, meeting the practical needs of others is the duty of every Christian because it goes together with the commission to evangelize the world before Christ’s second coming.

God has given us enough resources to help us effectively carry out community service. We can deploy skills, our time and energy, monetary resources, or material donations to make a difference in the lives of people across the world.

True fellowship requires that we work together as children and witnesses of Christ, such that even as we carry out community service, we must guard our relationship with Him to remain “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

### **REACT**

1. What can we do to promote social justice?
2. How can we use the skills we acquire from our learning institutions to make a difference in our communities?

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1. Christina Zaiback, “ADRA Receives Best Practice Award for Women Empowerment Project,” ADRA, May 12, 2011, <https://adra.org/best-practice-award-for-adra/>.

# How-to *Benefits of Engaging in Community Service*

2 Cor. 8:7-9

Youthfulness comes with several advantages. We have the time; we have the skills that we acquire from our education and talents that we can use to carry out activities for the good of others in our communities.

## **Making a difference in the lives of others comes with a fulfilling satisfaction that money cannot buy.**

While we expect no payment for meeting the practical needs of others, we can experience several benefits from participating in community service. The Bible teaches that Christ, “though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:7–9, NKJV).

Making a difference in the lives of others comes with a fulfilling satisfaction that money cannot buy. By addressing the temporal needs of the less fortunate in our societies, we give them the opportunity to draw closer to Christ, especially when they see the good deeds we perform. Above all, Christ is our example when it comes to community service (Matt. 8:14, 15; 14:14).

And as we seek to draw more souls to Jesus, we get something in return. Doing good is a win-win situation for the provider and the recipient. Here are some of the benefits of serving others:

*The opportunity to make a difference.* Participating in meeting the needs of others gives us the opportunity to know that we are doing something to improve someone’s life and make our community a better place.

*Experience personal growth.* A Christian’s life is one of growth and development. By engaging in activities that help us meet the needs of others, we cultivate skills in organization, responsibility, and compassion, which are all qualities of Christ. The same qualities are also important for young adults to build their careers, family, and overall future life.

*Acquire hands-on experience.* By meeting the needs of others through community service, we can acquire hands-on experience in various activities such as painting, construction, customer service, or medical care. These can go a long way to boost our résumés.

*Make new friends.* Importantly, being close to people in need and helping them to meet those needs enables us to make new friends, many of whom we may treasure for the rest of our lives.

### **REACT**

1. What personal benefits are derived from meeting the needs of others?
2. How can we make a difference in communities we cannot reach physically?

*Emily Grace, Homa Bay, Kenya*

Matt. 25:38–40

## Opinion

# *It's About Serving Christ*

The story of the rich young man (Matt. 19:16–30) paints a picture of how important it is for a Christian to practice social justice.

The material possessions and resources we have in this world are for us to use to improve the lives of others. We often think that our possessions belong to us alone, without recognizing that God, who has endowed us with the resources, also created our brothers and sisters who do not have enough.

### **The material possessions and resources we have in this world are for us to use to improve the lives of others.**

If we maintain the notion that our wealth is for us alone, we miss the blessings of heaven. The Bible teaches us, “He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack” (Prov. 28:27).

God requires His children to cultivate and embrace the Spirit of giving so that we can uplift the less fortunate members of our society. When we love our neighbors (1 Pet. 1:22) and respond to their needs, we reflect the love of Christ embedded in His habit of compassion upon the less fortunate and the suffering. The act of giving to the poor or helping the sick should come from the heart, without expecting any favor in return.

The story of the rich young man illustrates the point that many people are unwilling to let go of their worldly possessions, especially when it comes to helping others. However, Christ says that whoever forsakes material possessions and worldly riches for His sake shall inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:29).

The little acts of kindness that we show to “the least of these” constitute our service for Christ. Each day is an opportunity to make a difference in the life of another person who is struggling with life in one way or another. The apostles learned the habit of giving and sharing from Christ, and He expects us to do the same in our generation.

Oscar Wilde purportedly said, “The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention.” Today, you can offer a small act of kindness to change your community. And if all of us can do that, we can change the world.

### **REACT**

1. What are some of the little acts of kindness that you can offer to show that you care about the lives of others?
2. It might be easy for an individual to show compassion, but how can we do the same as a church, with so many people of different backgrounds under one roof?
3. Whom do you consider “the least of these” in your community?

*Nelly Achieng', Homa Bay, Kenya*

## Exploration *Touching Lives*

Acts 20:35

### CONCLUDE

As Seventh-day Adventist young adults, it behooves us to touch lives so as to create a community in which everyone contributes to the needs of other people. Christ left for us the mantle of service, which we must hold high until He comes to take us home. When our hearts fill with compassion, we can passionately reach out to touch the lives of the people around us through material donations, service, and more important, drawing them closer to Christ. This week's lesson is a challenge for us to put our faith into practice.

### CONSIDER

- Volunteering to teach a foreign language or creative class to young pupils in your community. How does this service fit into the context of this week's lesson?
- Starting a YouTube channel on which you share teachings about social justice and its benefits. Include as many benefits as you can.
- Forming a community support group with like-minded young people, in which you go out once a week to visit the less fortunate members of your community. Think of material donations or service, which you can deliver to improve their situations.
- Reading Acts 9:36–42. On a piece of paper, make a column with the headline, "What I Can Do to Support My Community." List all the things you can do and put them into practice.
- Creating Bible tracts that you can share with members of your church. Include stories of people who did or are doing good to improve the lives of the poor and the suffering in various communities. At the bottom of each tract, share Romans 12:21 as a memory text.
- Visiting specific places in your community such as hospitals, aged care homes, or prisons to identify with the people in these situations. In addition to praying and sharing Jesus with them, what can you do to meet their practical needs?
- Using digital animation technology to give life to the following characters: Mercy, Sympathy, Compassion, Love. How do these qualities help you contribute better to social justice?

### CONNECT

Deuteronomy 14:28, 29; Psalm 41:1–3; Matthew 5:3–11.

Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 31, "The Sermon on the Mount"; chap. 70, "The Least of These My Brethren."

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George Otieno, Migori, Kenya