

To Love
Mercy

“Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man deals graciously and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion” (Ps. 112:4, 5, NKJV).



The gavel is a symbol of judgment and punishment. However, Scripture speaks of being merciful in how we treat others.

Introduction

Called to Make a Difference

Ps. 112:4, 5

As a Christian, I feel I have a moral obligation to share the good news of salvation with the world—in doing so, I follow the example of Christ. To fully follow His example, however, I have to do more than speak truth—I have to live it.

We are called to be the hands and feet of Christ to those around us, seeking, in whatever way possible, to lighten the load and ease the burden of our neighbor. If we overlook meeting the physical, mental, and emotional needs of those to whom we long to share the gospel, we will never truly be able to meet their spiritual needs.

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It's like people say: "Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care."

This task of ministering to the whole person, especially in times of dire need, may be conceivable when considering those we consider dear to our hearts—our family and friends—but when we expand our view . . .

It can be overwhelming.

Everywhere you turn, something terrible is happening in the world. People are being subjected to extreme violence and oppression, communities are going hungry, children are being exploited and separated from their families, abject poverty is spreading, and the greed and selfishness of leaders at various levels of government victimize those most vulnerable in their communities.

How can we meet all of these needs? Is it even feasible to do or to try?

In and of ourselves, tackling the trials and challenges of the human race as a result of sin is an impossible feat. But when God calls us to accomplish a task, He does not leave us without the means to succeed. We are granted the tools needed to make a difference in our congregations, our communities, and sometimes even the world.

We have a world to win for Christ, but we are not meant to do it alone. By the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can be compassionate, creative, and courageous in showing people that we care. Doing this opens the door to sharing the truths of Scripture that will not only improve people's lives today but also give them a chance to accept eternity with a loving Savior and Friend.

I encourage you to look at your community today. As you study this week's lesson, ask yourself, What can I, with the Holy Spirit's help, do to show others that I care and want to make a difference? You may be surprised what doors will open when you start looking for opportunities to show mercy and love to a hurting world.

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Ps. 139:13–16;
Jer. 1:5;
Matt. 6:25–33

Evidence *The Sin of Inequality*

Matthew 6:25–33 indicates that the God who provides for the birds, flowers, and grass can meet our needs for food, water, and clothing—we need not worry. But such an understanding of this text generates troubling questions to the social conscience of the believer.

More than three million children die from hunger in the world each year.¹ They don't say "I'm starving to death" when they've missed a couple of meals. They really *are* starving to death! Moreover, particularly in the developed world, many of us have practiced the principle of "shop till you drop." But to quote David Bornstein, "For very poor people, clothing is shelter. 'In earthquakes, the shake kills people; in a tsunami, the water kills people; but in winter, the cold does not kill people. It's the lack of proper clothing.'"²

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How do I reconcile this teaching in Matthew 6 with those realities? First, we can't simply say, "Those people don't trust God enough." Nonsense! A baby doesn't even know how to trust yet. And the God I know, the God who loves me and whom I love, according to Scripture, loves and values the life of each baby even before it comes forth from its mother's womb (cf. Ps. 139:13–16; Jer. 1:5)!

So what is the answer to this dilemma?

The primary cause of hunger, poverty, and lack of clothing in this world must be people's sinful decisions that cause inequity. The truth is, God has provided amply, but we have hoarded, damaged, or wasted the resources He has provided. Romans tells us that creation—and Paul is not speaking there of humanity but the earth—groans under the consequence of sin.

It is not lack of divine provision but lack of equity through my sinful choices and yours that contribute to the suffering in this world. We can't be Bible believers and deny that our choices affect the impoverished of this world. When I read Matthew 6, I see that I have a personal responsibility that I can't ignore. I must have some role in feeding and clothing humanity.

REACT

1. Am I contributing to the inequity of food and clothing in our world?
2. What can I do to decrease the suffering in our world in the following four areas: (1) time, (2) finances, (3) spiritual witness, (4) mission service?

1. "World Child Hunger Facts," Hunger Notes, updated July 2018, <https://www.worldhunger.org/world-child-hunger-facts/>.

2. David Bornstein, "Bridging the Clothing Divide," *New York Times*, October 3, 2012, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/03/clothing-the-poorest-for-survival/>.

Logos
The Least of These

Matt. 6:25–34; 7:12;
James 2:15, 16;
1 John 3:16–18

Kingdom Priorities (Matt. 6:25–34)

Jesus exhorts His listeners not to worry about their lives—about what they will eat or drink, or what clothes they will wear—and gives examples of birds and flowers that are taken care of. How much more will the heavenly Father give them all they need? He knows what we need.

Being immersed in the Word of God and spending time with Him every day will keep us from having compassion fatigue.

Life is about priorities. Not worrying comes with focusing on what is most important—the kingdom of God, which stands for a relationship with God (Matt. 6:33). When we focus on building our relationship with God first and foremost, Jesus promises that God will provide what we need. We may not get everything we want every time, but we will have what we need.

The most important part of helping the needy is pointing them toward the One who provides all we need. When we give things over to God, we are free from nagging thoughts and anxieties about life. Difficulties happen in everyone's life, but those who prioritize Jesus, claim God's Word, and call on God for help can trust that He holds it all in His hands and will take care of them. Sometimes we have to wait for circumstances to change as God teaches us about Himself and develops us through the process. Yes, we can be assured that God is working.

Compassion Fatigue (Matt. 7:12; James 2:15, 16)

There are times when we hear about someone's need and realize that we don't have compassion for their situation, at least not enough to do anything about it. We can become desensitized to need when we are bombarded by news of tragedies or when they are far enough removed that they don't directly affect us. If we see a homeless person begging day after day, we can lose the desire to help—we become compassion fatigued.

That is perhaps why Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, stated, "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12, NKJV). We call it the golden rule. Treating others well is a summary of the main message found in the Bible. In Jesus' estimation, when we read the Bible properly, we will be impressed to do good deeds.

Thus, being immersed in the Word of God and spending time with Him every day will keep us from having compassion fatigue and inspire us to make a difference for others. James emphasizes that we are not to send someone away when we see a need and just tell them that we will pray for

them; instead, we need to act. He ends the passage with “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17, NKJV). He is talking about a practical demonstration of having faith—by our works we show faith.

Generosity (1 John 3:16–18)

The Bible encourages us to give generously. First, John explains what real love is—Jesus laying down His life for us. Then he urges us to do the same for one another (1 John 3:17).

The Greek word *kleio* means “to close” or “to shut” and is used in the New Testament for doors, gates, or heavens being shut or locked. The image is about the door of our hearts being locked so that we don’t respond to the needs that we see. We may use such excuses as “I have my own bills to pay,” “I have school debts still,” or “we are already doing enough.” This verse does not promote irresponsible giving when the needy person is fiscally reckless, but, rather, it speaks against closing our eyes to another’s need. We may not always give financially; giving of time or other resources may be just as important.

Peacemaking (Matt. 5:9, 21–26, 43–48)

“Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9). Doing good deeds includes peacemaking.

Jesus uplifts peacemakers in the Sermon on the Mount and further explains what He means by it through a couple of examples: “be reconciled to your brother” (Matt. 5:24, NKJV) and “love your enemies” (verse 44, NKJV).

Reconciliation and asking for forgiveness are important aspects of relationships. One cannot have a successful marriage without the willingness to forgive and move on when the other person fails to live up to expectations. In any friendship, people must be willing to forgive. However, Jesus goes beyond peacemaking in friendship when He says that we are to love our enemies and to “agree with [our] adversary” (verse 25). Loving those who love us, Jesus says, everyone does. But as believers, we are to love and bless those who curse us, use us, and persecute us. Jesus ends the passage with “you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (verse 48). Clearly, in the context, Jesus asks us to be perfect in love. We can do that only when we are full of God’s love and understand His love for us.

A Voice for the Voiceless (Prov. 31:8, 9)

Lastly, the Bible exhorts us to speak up for those who cannot speak up for themselves. In Proverbs 31, King Lemuel prods his son, “open your mouth for the speechless” (verse 8, NKJV) and “plead the cause of the poor and needy” (verse 9, NKJV). He doesn’t want his son to overlook the importance of speaking up for those who can’t do it for themselves. Sometimes they won’t do it for themselves because they either don’t see it making any difference or have never seen anyone standing up for them and don’t expect it or believe that something better is possible. Thus, God calls us to be the voice against injustice and oppression.

Testimony

The Cause

Prov. 31:8, 9

“Among all whose needs demand our interest, the widow and the fatherless have the strongest claims upon our tender sympathy and care. ‘Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.’

“. . . And how does the Lord provide for these bereaved ones? . . . He works a miracle upon human hearts. He expels selfishness from the soul; He unseals the fountain of benevolence. He tests the love of His professed followers by committing to their tender mercies the afflicted and bereaved ones, the poor and the orphan. . . . Every kind act done to them in the name of Jesus is accepted by Him as if done to Himself, for He identifies His interest with that of suffering humanity, and He has entrusted to His church the grand work of ministering to Jesus by helping and blessing the needy and suffering. On all who shall minister to them with willing hearts the blessing of the Lord will rest.”¹

“He suffers His poor to be in the borders of every church.”

“In lowly, miserable places, surrounded with poverty, disease, and guilt, many are patiently bearing their own burden of suffering, and trying to comfort the hopeless and sin-stricken about them. Many of them are almost unknown to the churches or to the ministers; but they are the Lord’s lights, shining amid the darkness. For these the Lord has a special care, and He calls upon His people to be His helping hand in relieving their wants. Wherever there is a church, special attention should be given to searching out this class and ministering to them.”²

“In a special sense Christ has laid upon His church the duty of caring for the needy among its own members. He suffers His poor to be in the borders of every church. They are always to be among us, and He places upon the members of the church a personal responsibility to care for them.

“It is the duty of each church to make careful, judicious arrangements for the care of its poor and sick.”³

REACT

1. God asks us to take up the cause of those who are poor, widowed, or orphaned. Why does He ask this of us? What does it have to do with our relationship with Him?

1. Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 214.

2. Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 14.

3. Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 245.

1 John 2:5, 6

How-to

SJW: So as Jesus Walked

Social justice issues flood the headlines of the media. Injustice affects all from the rich down to the poor of all ethnicities. Some take the causes of social injustices to the extreme, perhaps even using them for selfish reasons; these are called social justice warriors, or SJWs.

Followers of Christ are encouraged “to walk, even as he [Christ] walked” (1 John 2:6), and He walked in love because “in him verily is the love of God perfected” (verse 5). We see examples of this walk in the early church in Acts 2 and 4. We see examples of this in our Master Himself in His ministry to the untouchables: lepers, blind, lame, prostitutes, and social outcasts. But what are we to do in the twenty-first century? And how are we different from the next SJW?

Tell them of what He has done in your life.

Always point to Christ and the blessed hope soon to come. When you go out to minister to others, you may be asked why you do it. Point them to Christ (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). Confess Christ before men (cf. Luke 12:8). Tell them of what He has done in your life. Even if you think of it as small or uninteresting, confess Him. Take God at His promise that as you acknowledge Him publicly, He will do likewise for you (Matt. 10:32). Tell them that this present life of sorrow and pain will soon end. Tell them of the promise of a “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13) and of the glories that come with the earth made new (Revelation 21; 22). Herein lies one difference between us helping and ministering to others and others who know not Christ—we have hope to share.

Remember and share why you are doing this. When going out to help in any respect, remember that you are a tool. You are not doing this, but Christ working in you (Phil. 2:13). Christ is the handyman; you are the hammer.

Seek to minister every day. Before embarking on your day, ask God to place opportunities in your way so that you can minister to others and share Christ. Ask for discernment to see situations as God sees.

REACT

1. Why do we go out and march for social reforms?
2. What are some social injustices you are passionate about?
3. Do you think Jesus would march, and for what cause?

Opinion

It's Easy! (Or Is It?)

Matt. 22:35–40;
1 Corinthians 13

In church, we tend to skip over the “love” mandate (Matt. 22:35–40), because, well, we already know that part. And love is easy. Isn't it?

Truthfully, it's the hardest thing God asks of us, and it's not something that we can do on our own. Why not? For one thing, people are terrible. People traffick other people; They are greedy, maximizing their profits at the expense of others' well-being. People are lazy, trying to take the easy way out. People are cruel and cause destruction everywhere they go.

It's easier for us to love those who look and live like us; the ones whose lives we approve of; those who have the “right” aspirations. We must not only love the nice ones: We are to love everyone.

You can be too busy to love.

As everything gets busier and more chaotic, finding time and energy to put into loving nonstop gets harder. Because love is hard work. It requires vulnerability, authenticity, and a God-given love for others. This doesn't come naturally, and it also takes practice.

You can be too busy to love. You can also forget that this is your most important mission from God. Find a way to plan for love—schedule it, come up with creative ways to demonstrate God's love in your community, and keep yourself accountable. Love multiplies. When you share it, you never run out, because love keeps growing.

You can and should be generous—recklessly so—with your love. It's God's gift that we are meant to share, and it takes many forms. Love looks like standing up with and for the voiceless (Prov. 31:8, 9), advocating for the downtrodden and outcasts (Isa. 1:17), and treating the strangers among us fairly and kindly (Lev. 19:33, 34). The Bible makes it clear that actions are expected, not just words. Jesus tells of a people so dedicated to living out God's love in practical ways that they don't question who they are helping (Matt. 25:31–46). They just love.

Trust God to be glorified through your humility. Trust Him to work miracles. He only asked you to love. He didn't ask you to save the world. But by throwing yourself wholeheartedly into love, the world just might be saved anyway, one person at a time.

REACT

1. What is the connection between social justice and love? Why are these intertwined?
2. What holds you back from being recklessly generous with your love?

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Isa. 61:1, 2; 58:6

Exploration

Come, You Blessed of My Father

CONCLUDE

Social justice has become heavily politicized in recent decades, and especially so in recent years. This has caused many Christians to abstain from becoming involved in such issues. However, by Jesus' example, we see that we are called to be active participants in this arena.

Much of Jesus' ministry while on earth was focused on providing justice and mercy to oppressed and marginalized individuals. Jesus fulfilled the words of Isaiah that stated that He would "tell the Good News to the poor" and "tell the prisoners of sin that they are free, . . . tell the blind that they can see again" and "free those who have been treated unfairly, and to announce the time when the Lord will show kindness to his people" (Luke 4:18, 19, ICB).

Ultimately, as we seek to follow Jesus' mandate to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, take care of the sick, and visit the imprisoned, our involvement must be rooted in a desire to see God's love and mercy shared with all people across all sectors of life.

CONSIDER

- Reading about a few of Jesus' miracles and interactions with people of questionable character (suggestions: Mark 2:13–17; Luke 5:12–16; 7:1–10; 14:1–6; John 7:53–8:11) and identifying the individuals who received His physical and spiritual healing. Compare and contrast how He treated each person with how society might treat that person today.
- Researching the term *social justice* and prayerfully allowing the Holy Spirit to guide your personal philosophy on issues of social justice.
- Connecting with a local community organization to learn more about how you can become involved in current projects to assist marginalized individuals in your community. If no opportunities exist, consider creating an opportunity.
- Writing an encouraging letter to someone you know who may be experiencing injustice or discrimination in his or her life.
- Creating a visual representation of compassion through a drawing, painting, or another art form.

CONNECT

Matthew 25:31–46; Luke 4:14–30; 17:1–4; John 4:5–42.

Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, chap. 43, "Barriers Broken Down."

C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, chap. 23.

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