

# Jesus Mixed With People



## SABBATH—JULY 30

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Matthew 1:22, 23; John 1:14; Luke 15:3–24; Matthew 9:10–13.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “The tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees<sup>1</sup> and the teachers of the law were whispering among themselves. They said, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’ ” (Luke 15:1, 2, NIV).

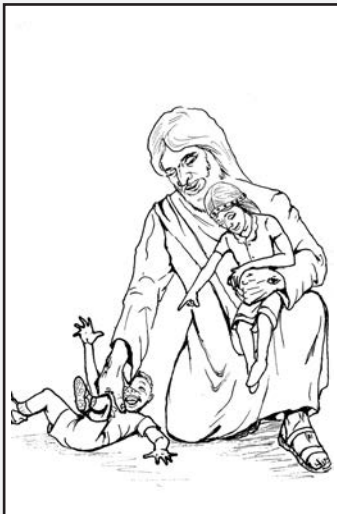
**A DEACON IN A LOCAL CHURCH** drove a van that took his church’s youth group to an old-age home. The first week, an old man in a wheelchair grabbed the deacon’s hand and held it during the service. This happened month after month. One time, the man in the wheelchair was not there. The deacon went to the old man’s room, where he lay in a coma. Taking the old man’s hand, the deacon prayed that the Lord would grant (give) him eternal life. The dying man squeezed the deacon’s hand tightly, and the deacon knew that the man had heard his prayer. With tears in his eyes, he walked out of the room and bumped into a woman. She said, “I am his daughter. He has been waiting for you. My father said, ‘Once a month Jesus comes and holds my hand. And I do not want to die until I have a chance to hold the hand of Jesus one more time.’ ” —Adapted from *The Least of These*, a video produced by Old Fashioned Pictures (2004). Used by permission.

Christianity is about becoming “Jesus” for somebody. The next several lessons call our attention to Jesus’ ministry (work done for God) method and how His church can live out His ministry.

## DEFINITIONS

1. Pharisees—a Jewish group in the time of Jesus that followed Jewish religious laws and teachings very strictly.

## CHRIST'S METHOD ALONE (Matthew 1:22, 23)



**“Jesus mixed with men as one who desired their good.”**

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mixed with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to [served; helped meet] their needs, and won their trust. Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me.’ ”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143.

Let us study this.

1. Jesus mixed with people as One who desired their good. (He opened networks.)
2. Jesus sympathized with people. (He made connections.)
3. Jesus ministered to their needs. (This also made connections.)
4. When He joined the first, second, and third steps together, He won people’s trust.
5. “*Then* He said to them, ‘Follow Me’ ” (to become disciples).

What we have here is a wholistic<sup>2</sup> way of sharing the gospel. This ministry method will guide us in preaching the gospel more fully. Jesus did not separate the need for being social (steps 1–4) from the important works of giving the people the invitation to follow Him (step 5). And neither should we. All of the steps working together will give “*true* success.” This lesson will point to the first step of Jesus’ method. Lessons 7–11 will point to the others.

**What do the following verses say about God the Son mixing with us? Matthew 1:22, 23; John 1:14.**

We are all deeply hurt and damaged by sin. But everything that has gone wrong in the world because of sin is dealt with by Jesus’ work on this earth. Jesus came as a Man to serve others. Through His ministry, we are joined to God. And the tie that was broken between God and humans is healed. Jesus mixed with and desired the good of the whole person and the whole human race. While on earth, Jesus even ministered to those who were recognized as “the worst” of all.

**Think deeply about the wonderful truth: Jesus, the One who made all created things, took upon Himself human flesh (read John 1:3). How should this wonderful truth that is so full of hope influence how we mix with and minister to others?**

## DEFINITIONS

2. wholistic—relating to or having to do with complete systems rather than with individual parts.

**LOST AND FOUND (Luke 15:3–7)**

Jesus tells three parables<sup>3</sup> in Luke 15. These parables were to help the Pharisees and the teachers of the law realize that every person is valuable. The Pharisees had accused Jesus of being one who “welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2, NIV). They did not understand God’s deep love for sinners.

**Read Luke 15:3–7; Luke 15:8–10; and Luke 15:11–24, and study the truth at the heart of each of these parables.**

Each parable begins with something lost and ends with a celebration. Each story is an example of God’s love for us and His deep interest in our salvation.

A pastor was following up with a family after a *Voice of Prophecy* radio broadcast. He discovered that the whole family was interested in Bible studies except the older son.

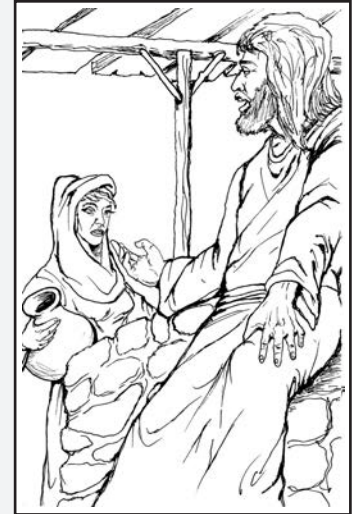
Every evening that the pastor visited, the young man left the room and would not take part in the lesson studies. After six weeks of warm and positive Bible study, the young pastor began to challenge the three who were studying with him to think about baptism. Each had a reason why he or she should wait a few months before making a decision.

Unexpectedly, the young man entered the dining room where the study was going on and announced that he wanted to be baptized as soon as the pastor felt he was ready. The young man had been sitting in his room following along in a Bible he had bought at a used-book store after the first lesson. And he was growing in belief that he needed to make a public confession of his faith.

Two weeks later the young man was baptized, and one month after that, the rest of the family were baptized too. Thinking about what we just read in the parables, we can imagine that there was joy in heaven over these decisions.

Jesus put Himself in places where He could meet with such people as the Samaritan woman at the well, a Roman centurion (Roman commander), a “sinful” woman who poured a year’s salary worth of perfume on His feet, and many more whom society looked down on as being unworthy and not holy enough to accept.

**Have you ever avoided witnessing to a person who did not seem to fit well in your church? What would it take for you and your church to find enough grace<sup>4</sup> to accept those “sinners”?**



**Jesus put Himself in places where He could meet such people as the Samaritan woman at the well and many more whom society did not accept.**

**DEFINITIONS**

3. parables—short stories that teach moral (having to do with right and wrong) or spiritual lessons.

4. grace—goodness and mercy.

## EATING WITH SINNERS (Matthew 9:10–13)

**Read Matthew 9:10–13. What important message should we learn from Jesus’ answer to His critics (faultfinders)? Read Hosea 6:6.**

Jesus reclines at the dinner table, where He eats with “sinners.”

**What kind of people does your culture judge as “sinners”?**



**Jesus challenges the Pharisees at Matthew’s feast to learn the meaning of mercy as opposed to sacrifice.**

### DEFINITIONS

5. reprov<sup>ed</sup>—to criticize or correct someone, usually in a gentle way.

6. self-righteous—having to do with wanting to show or prove to others how righteous (holy) or worthy of salvation you are.

Jesus is interrupted by the Pharisees who feel it is not proper for Jesus to mix and eat with “sinners.” Jesus challenges the Pharisees to learn the meaning of mercy as opposed to sacrifice. “ ‘Go and learn what this means, “I want mercy and not sacrifice” [Hosea 6:6]. I have not come to get those who think they are right with God to follow me. I have come to get sinners to follow me’ ” (Matthew 9:13, NIV). How sad that Jesus has to tell religious leaders to learn one of the most important truths of their own faith.

Here again we find the same problem that was happening in Old Testament times. This is the problem of religious services and ceremonies becoming more important in the minds of people than the question of how they should treat others. How interesting that Jesus quotes the Old Testament here (Hosea 6:6) to make His point.

“Thousands are making the same mistake as did the Pharisees whom Christ reprov<sup>ed</sup> at Matthew’s feast. Rather than give up some beloved (dear to the heart) idea, or remove some idol of opinion, many refuse the truth which comes down from the Father of light. They trust in self, and depend upon their own wisdom. They do not realize that they really are spiritually poor. . . .

“Fasting or prayer that is started by a self-righteous<sup>6</sup> spirit is something that God hates.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 280.

It is easy to use our own likes and dislikes to judge the actions of others. We must learn to humbly put self aside and let the Holy Spirit translate mercy into belief in Christ as Savior.

**What does Psalm 51:17 say to us all? How should the knowledge of our own sinfulness help us to understand better the meaning of this verse?**

**MIXING WITH PEOPLE WISELY (Genesis 13:5–13)**

A speaker asked the members of a group to tell how many “non-Adventist friends” they had. One man in the back of the room stood up and boasted, “I am proud to say I have none!” That man might have meant well. But his words said a lot about what kind of light to the world he was.

As we saw already, Matthew 5:13 says we are the salt of the earth. But this salt can lose its flavor. A merchant in Sidon had stored much salt in sheds that had bare earth floors. Because the salt was in direct contact with the earth, it lost its flavor. This salt was thrown out and used to pave roads. In the same way, we need to be careful as we mix with people of the world. Are we letting the world rob us of our special flavor? Are our values the same as the world’s?

**What can we learn from these stories about how not to mix with the world? Genesis 13:5–13; Genesis 19:12–26; Numbers 25:1–3; read also 1 John 2:16.**

These Bible examples show the need for being careful about how we mix with people who live by the worldly values listed in 1 John 2:16. We fool ourselves if we think that we do not need to be careful. We must not think there is no danger of getting caught up in the fallen principles (beliefs or rules) of the world. At the same time, what good are we going to be to others if we hide ourselves from them in order to avoid being negatively influenced by their ways?

Note this wise and balanced advice: “Shall serious Christians refuse to mix with the unconverted<sup>7</sup> and not communicate with them at all? No, Christians are to be with them. But Christians are not to take part in their unconverted ways. Christians are not to be influenced by the unconverted. The hearts of Christians are not to be open to the habits and practices of the unconverted. Such associations between believers and the unconverted are for the purpose of leading others to Christ.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, page 231.

**How many non-Adventist friends do you have? What is the nature of your relationships? Who is influencing whom more? Are you influencing them, or are they influencing you?**

**DEFINITIONS**

7. unconverted—people who have not changed their sinful behavior or negative opinions.

## IN THE MIDST OF A CROOKED (NOT HONEST) GENERATION (Philippians 2:13–15)

No question, the world needs what we have been given in Christ. And Christ commands us to give it to the world. But there is nothing in us that makes what we have so important. Rather, the command to reach others comes from what we have received from Christ. Christ has given us so much. So, He asks us to reach out to those who do not have it. “‘Freely you have received, freely give’” (Matthew 10:8, NKJV).

**Read Philippians 2:13–15. What are we being told here? How does it fit in with our duty to reach out to others without falling away ourselves?**

We have to be careful about wanting to protect ourselves from the world so much that we never mix with the souls in it. It is very easy to stay in our own spiritual “cocoon” or “cave” and to become spiritual “hermits.”<sup>8</sup>

Robert Linthicum describes three kinds of churches in his book *Empowering the Poor* (pages 21–30). First, the church *in* the city (community) has almost no connection with the community. The church’s main focus is to serve the needs of its members. Second, there is the church *to* the city (community). This church knows that it must get involved in ministry to the community. It guesses what the community needs without discussing those needs with community leaders. Then it offers programs *to* the community. But its ministry may not relate to the community’s real needs. Last, Linthicum describes the church *with* the city (community). This church studies the demographics<sup>9</sup> of the city to understand those whom it serves. Members mix *with* leaders and people of the community. The leaders and people are asked what their real needs are. This church’s service to the community is more likely to be meaningful and well-received because the community already has taken part in helping the church understand its needs. And so, the community already trusts the work the church is doing. This church joins the community in their struggles to decide what kind of community they want. It is a partner with the community toward reaching that goal. Such a church gets involved with community organizations and may help the community to add lacking services, if needed. Together, the church and the community form a partnership to meet real needs.



**We are not to stay in our spiritual “caves” and become spiritual “hermits.”**

### DEFINITIONS

8. hermits—persons who live in a simple way apart from others, especially for religious reasons.

9. demographics—the qualities (such as age, sex, and income) of a specific group of people.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Ellen G. White, “Our Example,” pages 17–28, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Levi-Matthew,” pages 272–280, in *The Desire of Ages*.

The church’s mission (important work) is to the world, not only to itself. It was organized for service to others. A church of another faith community has a sign at the end of its driveway. People see it as they enter the road into the community in front of the church. The sign says: “Servant’s Entrance.” The sign explains everything. Does it not?

Jesus was good at mixing with people. Ellen G. White teaches that God’s church today must be, too. The members are salt and must spread and mix with the community.

“There is no call here to sleep in the wilderness and to evangelize<sup>10</sup> jack rabbits. Here is a wonderful invitation given by the prophet [special messenger] of the Lord to mix, like Jesus, with the ugly, the poor, and the lost. Jesus was friends with sinners. He attended their parties. He met them where they were. Jesus never betrayed His faith. But He loved to go where there were sinners. The people most comfortable around Jesus were sinners, while the ones most uncomfortable were the so-called saints.

“For too long Adventists have shut themselves in safe places and ghettos,<sup>11</sup> as if the rest of the world did not matter. That time has ended. We cannot, we dare not, live in apostasy<sup>12</sup> by living away from others any longer. It is time to enter the community as persons and as a church.” —Adapted from Russell Burrill, *How to Grow an Adventist Church* (Fallbrook, California: Hart Books, 2009), page 50.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Discuss the idea shown above that when we shut ourselves away from people, we are “in apostasy.” Do you think that wording is too strong? Or does the author make a good point? What Bible verse can you use to back up your answer?
- 2 We need to mix with people in order to minister (serve). But why must we not forget that support from our church family is important to the success of our efforts? How can we as a church body help one another not get pulled into the world as we minister (reach out) to it?
- 3 Discuss this idea of churches spending more energy quarreling over church issues than they spend on outreach. How can we avoid this terrible trap?

### DEFINITIONS

10. evangelize—to travel from place to place preaching the good news of Christ.

11. ghettos—the parts of cities in which members of a particular group live, usually in poor conditions.

12. apostasy—a total rejection of one’s religious beliefs or principles (important rules).