

Jesus Ministered¹ to Their Needs



SABBATH—AUGUST 20

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mark 5:22–43; Mark 10:46–52; John 5:1–9; Psalm 139:1–13; Mark 2:1–12; Acts 9:36–42.

MEMORY VERSE: “Jesus went through all the towns and villages. He taught in their synagogues.² He preached the good news of the kingdom. And he healed every illness and sickness” (Matthew 9:35, NIRV).

A RETIRED SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST WOMAN in an African country did not wish to stop ministering to (serving) people just because she was in retirement. Her community needed healing because of the damaging results of HIV/AIDS. The most urgent need was for healthy food to be given to AIDS orphans. In 2002, she and her church started feeding the children in the community a solid meal six days a week. They started with 50 children. As of 2012, they were serving 300 children per day. That led them to start a pre-school. And now 45 of those children are attending. Other services include giving out clothing from ADRA, sharing vegetables and corn from a garden that they keep, and taking care of the sick. They started a skills-building program for women, who teach one another handicraft skills that help them earn a living. This example of the love of Jesus started a new church. There were five members in the beginning. As of 2012, 160 were attending. God gave the money needed to build an orphanage and a new church in 2012.

What a powerful, real-life example of how meeting the needs of the community is so important for Christians.

DEFINITIONS

1. ministered—to help or care for someone or something.

2. synagogues—Jewish places of worship.

INTERRUPTION³ FOR MINISTRY (WORK DONE FOR GOD) (Mark 5:22–43)

Jesus steps off the boat on the shore near Capernaum. (Read Mark 5.) His disciples still are shaken from the harrowing (very painful or upsetting) experience with the demon-possessed man in Decapolis. As usual, a crowd is there to meet Jesus. Eager to get His attention, people in the crowd fight their way to be near Jesus. Without any delay, a ruler of a synagogue asks Him for help.

Read Mark 5:22–43. While Jesus was on His way to minister to (help) the needs of this ruler of a synagogue, what stopped Him? And how did He act toward the interruption? More important, what lessons should we learn from the story about how we should act when interrupted (stopped) for ministry?

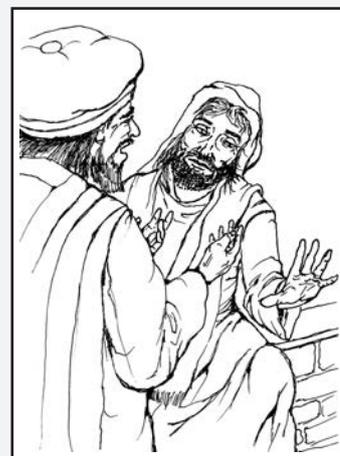
Let us be honest. None of us likes interruptions, do we? We are busy. We have things to do, places to go, jobs to get done. We set goals for ourselves and want to meet those goals on schedule. Interruptions can upset our plans.

If someone comes with a need or asks for help, it can be bothersome if the time is not right. Sometimes you just cannot drop whatever you are doing. At the same time, how often could we drop what we are doing and help but yet we do not because we just do not want to?

Often the greatest opportunities to minister to people's needs come through interruptions. Most of us try to avoid interruptions. We get upset when our plans are spoiled. As we study the ministry of Jesus, we notice that some of the needs that He cared for came as interruptions. But He patiently ministered to all who came to Him for help. If we think about it, many opportunities we get for ministry come disguised (hidden) as interruptions. We already have read the story of the good Samaritan. Who knows where he was going and what he was going to do when he got there? But he stopped anyway to minister.

Talk about an interruption!

When was the last time someone interrupted you and asked for help? How did you answer?



Often the greatest opportunities to minister to people's needs come through interruptions.

DEFINITIONS

3. interruption—the act of causing something to stop happening for a time.

HOW CAN I HELP YOU? (Mark 10:46–52)



Christ showed a personal interest in people while on this earth. Wherever He went, He was a medical missionary. We are to do good, as He did.

DEFINITIONS

4. diagnose—find the cause of a problem or sickness or disease.

5. wholistic—relating to or concerned with complete systems rather than with individual parts.

6. opposition—very unfriendly or unhelpful action(s) or condition(s).

Read Mark 10:46–52 and John 5:1–9. In both cases, Jesus asked questions. Why would He do that?

Notice, in both cases, that Jesus asked what they wanted, even though it was clear what they wanted. Even if it were not clear, Jesus would have known what those needs were anyway.

But, by asking these questions, Jesus showed the men respect. He showed that He was listening to them. And by listening He showed that He cared about what they were struggling with. How often do people just want someone to talk to, and someone who will listen to them? Sometimes just being able to talk about one's struggles can help a person feel better.

Think for a minute. How would you feel if you entered a doctor's office and the doctor took one look at you, wrote out a prescription, and sent you on your way? Surely you would doubt whether that doctor really knew what you needed. You might say, "The doctor did not ask me how I feel or listen to my heart or check my blood pressure or . . ." One of the important rules of medical practice is "Diagnose⁴ before you treat."

The same idea is true for medical missionary work. The goal of medical missionary work is the well-being of people and meeting their wholistic⁵ needs. Too many churches think they already know what needs to be done to serve others in their community. When we make the effort to talk to people about their needs or the needs of the community, it lets them know we care. It also informs us how we can serve in ways that people will appreciate. Also, we will make new friends.

" 'Remember that you can break down the worst opposition⁶ by showing a personal interest in the people whom you meet. Christ showed a personal interest in men and women while He lived on this earth. Wherever He went He was a medical missionary. We are to go about doing good, even as He did. We are told to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the sorrowing.' "—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, page 162.

Most of us have no problem expressing our opinions. How can we learn to be better listeners?

THE DEEPER NEEDS (Psalm 139:1–13)

Jesus, as the Lord, knew more about the people than they knew about themselves. There are many stories in the Gospels⁷ in which Jesus showed that He knew what people were thinking at the time He met them (read Mark 2:8). But these stories show He also knew their histories as well (John 4:18).

Read Psalm 139:1–13. What is the Word of God telling us here?

As we learned in yesterday’s study, Jesus knew the needs of the people. He also ministered to those needs. In fact, He even knew needs that went deeper than the surface. This fact is seen in the story of the paralytic.⁸ It is very clear that he needs physical healing. But there is a deeper need there. This deeper need is the reason why, even before telling him to take up his bed and walk, Jesus says, “‘Son, thy sins be forgiven thee’” (Mark 2:5).

Read Mark 2:1–12. There is something deeper going on with this man. What is it? In what ways might this deeper need be a problem for all to whom we wish to minister?

Jesus knew the issue here was more than physical. “He [Jesus] knew that the paralytic needed relief from the burden of sin more than he needed physical healing. If the paralytic could see Jesus, and receive the promise of forgiveness and peace with Heaven, he would be satisfied to live or die, according to God’s will [plan].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 267.

Of course, we are not going to be able to go deeper with others as Jesus did. But we can be sure that whoever we are ministering to, they are sin-damaged people just as we ourselves are. They are also in need of grace,⁹ of promise, and of the knowledge that there is a God who loves them, who died for them, and who wants only the best for them.

Think about how much you want the promise of salvation and of the knowledge that God loves you. How can you help others to experience that same promise and love?



Jesus knew that the paralytic needed relief from the burden of sin more than he needed physical healing.

DEFINITIONS

7. Gospels—the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

8. paralytic—a person who is unable to move or feel all or part of his or her body.

9. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He gives us to take away our sins.

DORCAS IN JOPPA (Acts 9:36–42)



Dorcas loved and cared for believers and unbelievers alike.

Read Acts 9:36–42. What does Dorcas do in Joppa when she discovers the needs around her? In Acts 9:41, what do the words “the believers, especially the widows” (NIV) mean?

Dorcas was a disciple of action. “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha” (Acts 9:36, NIV). Can it be said, “In [the name of your city] there are disciples named [name of your congregation (local church)]” who are “full of good works and charitable [kind; helping the poor] deeds” (Acts 9:36, NKJV)?

The “believers” are Christian church members. “The widows” may include church members and those who were not members. It is likely Dorcas served both. Your “Joppa” should be outside and inside your church. Caring for those inside your church is also a powerful evangelistic¹⁰ plan (read Acts 2:42–47). People outside your church can then say, “See how those Seventh-day Adventists love and care for one another!”

Read John 13:34, 35 and John 15:12. What is the same message in all three verses? And why is that so important for us as a church to follow? Why can it sometimes be so hard to follow?

When planning to serve people outside of your church, you should consider what style, or method, you will use.

Amy Sherman describes three styles a church can use when serving its community.

1. The *settler* style focuses on meeting the needs of the community around your church. The woman with the HIV/AIDS ministry chose her nearby community as her “Joppa.”

2. The *gardener* style means developing ministry ties with neighborhoods outside of your church’s area. In the same way, gardeners think of their gardens as another part of their homes. Sometimes, several churches partner to operate a community service center outside of each of their communities. In one city, several churches ran a health food store. Soon a new church started out of this project.

3. The *shepherd* style is serving one chosen area filled with people rather than a certain geographic neighborhood. —Adapted from Ronald J. Sider et al., *Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2002), page 146.

DEFINITIONS

10. evangelistic—having to do with going from place to place to preach the good news of Jesus.

THE CHURCH AT WORK (Proverbs 16:3)

“Commit [Give] to the LORD everything you do. Then your plans will succeed” (Proverbs 16:3, NlrV).

Suppose your church has a clear vision of how it can minister to the community. It will be important to develop a plan in which all church departments can work together in order to make this vision work. You may not consider yourself to be a “leader” in your church, but you can help. It is good for all church members to understand how the plan works. The success of your church’s mission to your community depends on it.

Ideally, a church plan should be based on ideas from at least three sources: (1) principles (important rules) from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy;¹¹ (2) knowledge of community needs; and (3) input¹² from the congregation (members of a church). Some churches have collected ideas from the congregation by holding meetings during which all church members are invited to share their ideas and dreams for outreach and for improving their church.

Read Luke 14:25–35. What do these verses have to do with the decision and the planning it takes to fulfill (satisfy) your church’s mission (job; work)?

As you think about the method needed to meet your community’s needs, you might think, *This takes too much planning and time*. Often, we would rather take shortcuts. The two parables¹³ warn us against thinking that responsibilities of mission and discipleship are not important. They remind us that careful study and planning for our mission are very important. It is good stewardship (management). The flavor of the salt in Luke 14:34 shows faithfulness. Without this, our service, our discipleship, is useless and meaningless. We need serious and faithful devotion to our Lord. If we have that, serious and faithful devotion to ministry will follow.

How can you do more to work with your church in organizing and planning before you reach out to your community?

DEFINITIONS

11. Spirit of Prophecy—the writings of Ellen G. White.

12. input—advice and opinions.

13. parables—very short stories that teach moral (difference between right and wrong) or spiritual lessons.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Deuteronomy 15:11; Job 29:11–17; Proverbs 14:31; Proverbs 19:17; Acts 3:6; and James 1:27–2:5.

Paul, like Jesus, was involved in meeting the needs of people. We can read about this, for example, in the famous story of Paul at Mars Hill in Athens. In Acts 17:23, Paul is stirred up by the idols that he sees in the city. He becomes involved in discussions with well-educated people and anyone in the marketplace who would talk with him. Paul recognizes their needs. He discovers they have an unknown-God-shaped hole in their lives. He also notices that they need to know the true God and to stop worshiping useless idols. So Paul begins to preach in the synagogue, where both Jews and “Gentile [non-Jewish] worshipers” (Acts 17:17, NKJV) are.

In other words, Paul took the opportunity he had and reached out with the gospel. Paul tried to meet people where they were. He talked to the people at the synagogue and in the marketplace. The crowds of people believed in some kind of God, because they had built an altar to “the unknown God” (Acts 17:23). Working from that belief, Paul tried to lead them to the God “‘whom you worship without knowing’” (Acts 17:23, NKJV). He even later quoted one of their own poets, who happened to have written something true: “ ‘ “We are also His offspring [children]” ’ ” (Acts 17:28, NKJV). Starting from where the people were, Paul wanted to lead them away from their idols to the living God and Jesus, raised from the dead. So, Paul’s method was to study the needs of people and then help to fulfill those needs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① “Jesus taught the people the way to get peace and happiness. He was just as thoughtful of their physical needs as He was of their spiritual ones.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 365. What important message is given to us here about why we should minister to the needs of others?
- ② When we think of outreach, why do we have to be careful not to forget our most important goal? What is that most important goal? Give reasons for your answer.
- ③ How can we learn to think of some interruptions not as stumbling blocks but as holy opportunities for ministry? How does Galatians 2:20 help us in this area?