

# A Community of Servants



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *2 Cor. 2:14–16, Exod. 32:1–14, 1 Pet. 2:12, Phil. 2:15, Eph. 2:19, Heb. 10:23–25.*

**Memory Text:** “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (*Hebrews 10:23, 24, NKJV*).

In seeking to fulfill the Christian mission, we should not underestimate the potential of the church as an organized community of believers. We have already noted the challenges that we can face when seeking to deal with injustice and poverty. But by working with fellow believers in a community of faith, we can be a blessing to those around us.

The temptation is that when we get together as a church we become distracted with keeping the church itself going, forgetting that the church exists to serve the world in which God has placed it. As a church body, we must not ignore the suffering and evil that exists all around us. If Christ didn't ignore it, we must not either. We must be faithful to our mandate to preach the gospel, and along with that preaching comes the work of helping the oppressed, the hungry, the naked, and the helpless.

Together as a church community and organization, we are the body of Christ (*see 1 Cor. 12:12–20*). As such, we as a community should walk as Jesus walked, reach out as Jesus did, and serve as the hands, feet, voice, and heart of Jesus in the world today.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 28.

## Agents of Change

We have seen in the early chapters of Acts how the first Christian believers established a different kind of community, caring for those in need among them, and together reaching out to those outside the community, offering them help where needed and inviting them to join in with what God was doing among them.

Adding to Jesus' descriptions of salt and light, Paul uses a number of metaphors to portray the church's action in the world. Among others, he describes those who live as God's people as a sacrifice (*see Rom. 12:1*), as Christ's body (*see 1 Cor. 12:12–20*), as ambassadors (*see 2 Cor. 5:18–20*), and as perfume (*see 2 Cor. 2:14–16*). Each of these images talks about a role as representatives or agents of God's kingdom even now, even amid a world ravaged by the great controversy.

**Review** each of these “representative” descriptions above. Which best describes how you would like to represent God and His ways in your community, and why?

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Each of these images has action associated with them, not as a means of being acceptable to God but as people already accepted by God through Christ's sacrifice, who have responded to God's love and grace by being His agents in a hurt and dying world.

But they also can be considered on a still deeper level: because God's love and grace is what the kingdom of God is about, when we act in such a way, reflecting to others in love and grace, we enact and participate in that eternal kingdom, even now.

In international law, a national embassy is considered part of the nation it represents, even when physically located in a foreign country, perhaps a long distance from the home nation. In a similar way, enacting the ways of God's kingdom offers glimpses of that eternal reality here and now and, as such, points to and is a foretaste of the final defeat of evil. And by so doing—as Christ's ambassadors, as Christ's agents—we can experience the reality of His love and justice in our own lives, in the church, and in the lives of those we seek to serve.

**Read 2 Corinthians 2:16. What is the difference between the two aromas, and how can we know which one we are?**

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## A Servant Remnant

The standard definition of the remnant people identified in Bible prophecy is found in Revelation 12:17: those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*NKJV*; see also *Rev. 14:12*). In the Bible’s story, these features mark out God’s people in the later stages of earth’s history. But, also in the Bible stories, we can find examples of how such a remnant acts and particularly how such people serve others.

**Consider** the example of Moses in this regard. Read Exodus 32:1–14. What is the comparison between Moses in this story and the remnant described in Revelation 12:17?

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In His anger at the people of Israel, God was threatening to destroy them and transfer the promises given to Abraham—that his descendants would become a great nation—to Moses and his family (see *Exod. 32:10*).

But Moses didn’t want that. Instead, Moses had the boldness to argue with God, suggesting that for the Lord to act as He was threatening to act would make Him look bad (see *Exod. 32:11–13*). But then Moses went further and put himself on the line to urge his case with God.

Moses had been struggling to lead these people through the wilderness. They had been complaining and bickering almost from the moment he led them to freedom. And yet, Moses says to God, If You are not able to forgive them, “ ‘then blot me out of the book you have written’ ” (*Exod. 32:32, NIV*). Moses offered to give up eternity to save those with whom he had shared his journey.

What a powerful example of self-sacrificing intercession in behalf of those who don’t deserve it! And what a powerful symbol of the entire plan of salvation!

“As Moses interceded for Israel, his timidity was lost in his deep interest and love for those for whom he had, in the hands of God, been the means of doing so much. The Lord listened to his pleadings, and granted his unselfish prayer. God had proved His servant; He had tested his faithfulness and his love for that erring, ungrateful people, and nobly had Moses endured the trial. His interest in Israel sprang from no selfish motive. The prosperity of God’s chosen people was dearer to him than personal honor, dearer than the privilege of becoming the father of a mighty nation. God was pleased with his faithfulness, his simplicity of heart, and his integrity, and He committed to him, as a faithful shepherd, the great charge of leading Israel to the Promised Land.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 319.

**What does this tell us about how, to the degree possible, we should deal with the erring around us?**

## Reaching Souls

Church discussions sometimes seem to get stuck on the apparent need to choose between a focus on social work or gospel work, either charity or witnessing, either justice or evangelism. But when we better understand each of these concepts and observe the ministry of Jesus, the difference breaks down, and we realize that preaching the gospel and working to help others are closely linked.

In one of Ellen White’s best-known statements, she explained it like this: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’ . . .

“The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

As we have seen, these two kingdom actions—justice and evangelism—were closely entwined, not only in Jesus’ ministry but in Jesus’ first commission to His disciples: “‘As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give’ ” (*Matt. 10:7, 8, NIV*). In short, one of the best ways to reach others with our message is to minister to their needs.

**Read 1 Peter 2:12 and Philippians 2:15. What do Peter and Paul say about the witnessing power of good works done by God’s people?**

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With a broader understanding of God’s good news, evangelism does not make sense in the absence of a passion for people. Verses such as 1 John 3:16–18 and James 2:16 emphasize the contradiction in preaching the gospel without living it out. At its best, evangelism—bringing the good news of hope, rescue, repentance, transformation, and God’s all-embracing love—is an expression of justice.

Both evangelism and the desire for justice spring from recognizing God’s love for lost, broken, and hurt people—a love also that grows in our hearts under the influence of God in our lives. We don’t choose one action or another; instead, we work with God in working with people, meeting their real needs, and using whatever resources God has entrusted us with.

**How can we make sure, though, that as we do good works for others, we don’t neglect preaching the good news of salvation, as well?**

## Grace Within the Church

At the beginning of the book of Job, God points to Job and his faithfulness to Him as a demonstration of the goodness of God's ways and His dealings with fallen humanity (*see Job 1:8*). It is remarkable that God allows His reputation to hang on how His people live on this earth. But Paul expanded this faith God has in some of His "saints" to include the community of the church: "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (*Eph. 3:10, NIV*).

**Read** Ephesians 2:19. What do you think is included in the idea of describing the church community as the "household" of God? How should this description influence how the organized church operates?

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In any community or organization, how that entity treats its members reflects the foundational values of the group. As the household of God, the body of Christ and the community of the Spirit, the church has the highest of callings to live out and live up to: "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people" (*1 Cor. 14:33, NIV*).

The values of justice, grace, and love—as demonstrated in God's justice, grace, and love—should govern all that happens within the church. From local church communities to the worldwide church organization, these principles should guide church leaders in how they lead, make decisions, and care for the "least of these" among the church community. They also should guide how we resolve the disputes that arise from time to time among members. If we can't treat those among us with fairness and dignity, how are we going to do that with others, as well?

Where the church organization employs people, it should be a generous employer, valuing people before any other consideration and working against unfair treatment of members. Churches should be safe places, with all church members doing what they can to protect the vulnerable. And, as we see in the early church, members of the church community should be especially prepared to give to support those of their church "family" who are suffering or in need.

Jesus gave this as a command, saying that this would not only transform the community of faith, but it also would demonstrate the reality of their faith to those looking on: " 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' " (*John 13:34, 35, NIV*).

## Encourage Each Other to Good Works

Even with the best motivations and intentions, and believing that we are on the side of God and goodness, working for the Lord can be difficult and discouraging. The sadness and pain of our world are real. This is one reason we need a church community. Jesus modeled this kind of supportive community with His disciples. He rarely sent people out on their own, and even when that happened they would soon come together again to share their stories and renew their energy and courage.

**Read** Hebrews 10:23–25. Hebrews 10:25 is the best known of these verses; so, what do the preceding two verses add to our understanding of the well-known verse? What are some of the ways in which we can encourage each other “toward love and good deeds” (NIV)?

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In almost any task, cause, or project, a group of people working together can achieve more than all of those people working individually. This reminds us again of the picture of the church as the body of Christ (*see Rom. 12:3–6*), in which we all have different but complementary roles to play. When we each do what we do best, but do it in a way that allows our influences to work together, we can trust by faith that our lives and work will make a difference for eternity.

While results are important when seeking to do what is right—the results are about people and their lives—we sometimes have to trust God with what the results might be. At times when working to alleviate poverty, to protect the vulnerable, to free the oppressed, and to speak up for the voiceless, we will see little progress. But we have the hope that we are working in a far greater and inevitably victorious cause: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (*Gal. 6:9, 10, NIV; see also Heb. 13:16*).

This is why we are called to encourage—literally, to inspire with courage—one another. Living faithfully is both joyous and difficult. Our God of justice and our community of justice are our greatest supports and what we invite others to join.

**Whom do you know or know of who regularly works at alleviating the suffering of others? How could you encourage that person or group in the good work they are doing?**

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**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “A Faithful Witness,” pp. 546–556, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “Kindness the Key to Hearts,” pp. 81–86, in *Welfare Ministry*.

“The work which the disciples did, we also are to do. Every Christian is to be a missionary. In sympathy and compassion we are to minister to those in need of help, seeking with unselfish earnestness to lighten the woes of suffering humanity. . . .

“We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the suffering and afflicted. We are to minister to the despairing, and to inspire hope in the hopeless.

“The love of Christ, manifested in unselfish ministry, will be more effective in reforming the evildoer than will the sword or the court of justice. . . . Often the heart that hardens under reproof will melt under the love of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 104, 106.

“Slavery, the caste system, unjust racial prejudices, the oppression of the poor, the neglect of the unfortunate,—these all are set forth as unchristian and a serious menace to the well-being of the human race, and as evils which the church of Christ is appointed by her Lord to overthrow.”—General Conference president A. G. Daniells, speaking of the work of Ellen G. White at her funeral, in *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 473.

## Discussion Questions:

- ① There are many people, groups, and organizations seeking to relieve need in the world. What unique strengths, insights, and resources can the Seventh-day Adventist Church bring to this task?
- ② Can you remember a time you felt encouraged and supported by your church community? Learning from that experience, how can you extend that same encouragement to others?
- ③ As well as the support of a church community, what other things can help you avoid becoming “weary in doing good”?
- ④ What are some of the justice and poverty projects and initiatives you are aware of that the Seventh-day Adventist Church around the world is currently supporting? How might you be able to contribute to this aspect of the church’s work?

**Summary:** Yes, as Christians, we are called to minister to the needs of others, especially others who are hurting, suffering, and oppressed. And though we have our individual responsibilities in this area, as a community focused on ministering to others, we can be much more effective working together as a church family.

## Driving Passengers to Christ

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Byungeun Oh, a taxi driver in rural South Korea, had never led anyone to Christ after years in church, and he decided to change that.

Byungeun saw many repeat customers and began to build relationships. He collected passengers' cell phone numbers and, with his wife, took them out to eat and visited them at home.

One Sabbath afternoon, Byungeun and his wife, Mihyun Yun, visited the home of a passenger named Mr. Choi. They chatted for a while, and Byungeun invited the man out to dinner. As they left the house, Mr. Choi pointed to a small church nearby and said he once had worshipped there.

Byungeun saw an opportunity to share his faith.

"We have a very beautiful church," he said. "Would you like to visit it?"

Mr. Choi agreed to visit the church in the town of Chuncheon.

Byungeun drove to a local restaurant. Its Adventist owner expressed delight that Mr. Choi planned to attend church and declared that the meal of buckwheat noodles was on the house. The kindness surprised Mr. Choi and strengthened his resolve to visit the church.

After that first Sabbath, Mr. Choi returned to the church every week and was baptized.

Byungeun had won his first soul for Christ, and he didn't intend to stop.

One day, he saw an elderly man emerge from a house as he drove past. He had seen the man before and stopped to greet him.

"I was about to call for a taxi," the man said.

Byungeun quickly offered to take the man to his destination. As he drove, he learned that the man was named Mr. Park and decided to visit him at home that evening.

Byungeun and his wife showed up with several small gifts. Mr. Park ushered them into the living room and introduced them to his wife, Chunja An. Byungeun learned that the wife had a problem. She couldn't attend Sunday services at her church because she worked six days a week, with only Saturdays off.

"We go to church on Saturday," Byungeun said. "Why don't you come with us?"

Soon she was baptized.



*In two years, Byungeun, pictured left, has led three people to Christ. He is convinced that if he, a 58-year-old taxi driver, can do it, so can anyone.*

*"Reduce your work so you can do God's work," he said. "Simplify your life, and then fill it with the joy of meeting souls."*



*Ezra and Nehemiah* is the title of the fourth quarter guide by Jiří Moskala. Both of these exceptional leaders desired that God's people prosper and that His name be proclaimed worldwide. Their lives model what God can do through faithful leaders. This quarter's lessons focus on the books that bear their names. When obstacles appear and opposition arises, only God can secure victory. The themes of these books are God's providence, His faithfulness, and His covenant. Through His servants, God called His people to revival and reformation. By carefully studying the pattern revealed in these two books, we can discern God's actions and leadership. As we study this quarter, may the Lord transform our thinking and enable us to daily follow Him faithfully.

## Lesson 1—*Making Sense of History: Zerubbabel and Ezra*

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The First Return of Exiles** (*Jer. 25:11, 12*)

MONDAY: **Overview of Kings and Events** (*Ezra 4:1–7*)

TUESDAY: **The Second Return of the Exiles** (*Ezra 7:1–10*)

WEDNESDAY: **Artaxerxes's Decree** (*Ezra 7:11–28*)

THURSDAY: **Importance of Education** (*Ezra 7:6, 10*)

**Memory Text**—*Ezra 1:2*

**Sabbath Gem:** God promised that His people would return home after 70 years of Babylonian exile. King Cyrus was God's instrument to allow this to happen, but God was the guarantor that Jerusalem would be rebuilt. The people, in turn, responded to God's mighty and gracious acts.

## Lesson 2—*Nehemiah*

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Nehemiah Receives Bad News** (*Neh. 1:1–4*)

MONDAY: **Nehemiah's Prayer** (*Neh. 1:5–11*)

TUESDAY: **Nehemiah Speaks Out** (*Neh. 2:1–8*)

WEDNESDAY: **Nehemiah Sent** (*Neh. 2:9, 10*)

THURSDAY: **Nehemiah Prepares for His Task** (*Neh. 2:11–20*)

**Memory Text**—*Nehemiah 1:4, 5*

**Sabbath Gem:** The lesson speaks of two groups of captives who already have returned to Judah in at least partial fulfillment of God's promises to the Hebrew nation. However, God is preparing a final company of exiles who are commissioned to carry out His will to build Jerusalem and its walls.

**Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind** The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on audio CD, and via online download to people who are legally blind or physically disabled. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; email: [services@christianrecord.org](mailto:services@christianrecord.org); website: [www.christianrecord.org](http://www.christianrecord.org).