

Mission to the Needy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 5:17–26, John 5:1–9, Deut. 10:19, Lev. 23:22, Matt. 25:34–40, John 15:13.*

Memory Text: “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me’ ” (*Matthew 25:40, NKJV*).

Luke 5:17–26 provides many illustrations of how God is helping those in need. Sometimes God uses others to help us, or He uses us to help others. This work can be challenging, but it brings great rewards. By helping those in need, we are modeling the ministry of Jesus Christ. Sometimes it is easy to tell who is in need of help; at other times it is difficult to know. Whatever the situation, we are called to be God's helpers for all people in need, regardless of their background.

The Bible encourages us to draw close to strangers, and by winning their confidence we can learn better ways of helping them find Jesus.

In this week's lesson, our topic, “Mission to the Needy,” shows that God has a plan to reach those who might be needy in any number of ways. Their needs might be physical, emotional, financial, or even social: that is, some might be deemed as outcasts from their community or family. Whatever the needs are, we must be ready to do what we can to help. This is a central part of what it means to be a Christian and what mission must include.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 25.

The Faith of Friends

A powerful story in the Gospels reveals what some men went through in order to bring a needy person, probably a friend, to Jesus. We can learn from what happened here about the hard work it might sometimes take to minister to those in need.

Read Luke 5:17–26 (see also *Matt. 9:1–8, Mark 2:3–12*). **What are some of the lessons we can take from this story about mission and ministry?**

By bringing their friend to Jesus, these men took on the responsibility to care for him. God is calling us to be like this man’s friends—to lead the needy to Jesus Christ. This work requires faith, action, patience, and a willingness, if need be, to be unconventional. The men came to Jesus but encountered barriers. They could not bring their helpless friend to Jesus through traditional means. They did not give up; instead they found an innovative way of getting the man to Jesus Christ. *Dropping their friend down from the roof!* Yet, according to Luke, Jesus approved of what they did (see *Luke 5:20*).

Jesus’ desire is for us to bring our helpless friends to Him. The Bible refers to Jesus as the Great Physician who longs to forgive and heal those who are suffering, whoever they are.

Ellen G. White challenges us to help the helpless: “Do not wait to be told your duty. Open your eyes and see who are around you; make yourselves acquainted with the helpless, afflicted, and needy. Hide not yourselves from them, and seek not to shut out their needs. Who gives the proofs mentioned in James, of possessing pure religion, untainted with selfishness or corruption? Who are anxious to do all in their power to aid in the great plan of salvation?”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 29.

Jesus Himself demonstrates how to help the helpless and is calling us to do the same. First, we become their friends; then we learn about their needs; and finally, we lead them to Jesus, who is the only One who can help them. This is what the men in this story did; we need to do likewise in whatever situation we find ourselves. Help lead people to the only One who can save them: Jesus.

Who around you, right now, needs some help? What are you going to do for them?

Christ's Method Alone

What do the following stories teach us about ministry to the needy?

John 5:1–9 _____

Mark 1:23–28 _____

Ellen G. White provides a five-step process of Jesus' method in how to minister, especially to those in need: "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 Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

First, we must mingle with the helpless, spend time getting to know them, and understand their needs with the intention of doing good for them. Look at what Jesus did with the paralytic at the pool. Jesus was right there, amid the "great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed" (*John 5:3, NKJV*).

Second, we need to show sympathy. This can be challenging in some cases because of distrust, and because sometimes people use kindness as a means of winning the confidence of someone whom they later abuse. Nevertheless, God is calling us to show sympathy without expecting anything in return.

The third step is to minister to their needs. This involves more than just words. It takes action to minister to the needs of a friend or a stranger. Jesus spoke with the paralytic, asked what he wanted, and then worked a miracle in his behalf. In the story of the man possessed by an "unclean spirit," Jesus took complete control of the situation, doing for the helpless man what he could not do for himself.

The fourth step is winning their confidence. When we minister to people, when we help them, they will learn to trust us and what we say to them. So, when we talk to them about Jesus, they would be more open to listen. Jesus didn't want just to heal them physically; He wanted them to have eternal life in Him (*see John 10:10*).

The last step is to help lead them to Jesus, an act that requires faith from both you and the one whom you help.

We generally can't do the kind of miracles that Jesus did. But what are ways that we can still minister to those who need help?

Refugees and Immigrants

The topic of immigrants and refugees has become a hotly debated subject, especially because there are so many of them today. Whether displaced by war, natural disasters, or for the hope of a better economic future, millions around the world have been uprooted from their homes and are in desperate need of help.

In Matthew 2:13, 14, Jesus was a refugee. His earthly parents, Joseph and Mary, were forced to flee Bethlehem by night and seek refuge in Egypt to escape the murderous hand of Herod. The Bible says nothing about their experience in Egypt, but it's not hard to imagine that it had its challenges, perhaps some of the same challenges that refugees face today, as well. In fact, somewhat parallel to how Jesus' family sought asylum in a foreign land, many Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and nonreligious persons are seeking asylum in new lands today, as well.

Generally speaking, it is easier to make friends with individuals from our own culture and language group because we share many things in common. It is more challenging, however, to find common ground with immigrants and refugees who look different from us, who do not speak our language, who do not share the same religious values, and do not eat similar food. The gospel calls us to get out of our ethnic, national, and cultural comfort zones and to reach out to those in need, regardless of how different from us they might be.

Read Deuteronomy 10:19, Psalm 146:9, Romans 12:13, and Leviticus 23:22. What's the important theme here for us to remember?

How can we minister to immigrants and refugees? It is difficult because, in some countries, it may not be politically correct to mingle with or help these people. Yet, we must do what we can, when we can, to minister to these people, who surely have been through some very difficult times and are in need of our help. So, to whatever degree we can, we must help.

Begin with prayer, then seek information on immigrants and refugees. Many places have organizations that care for them. You can begin working with one of these organizations, or maybe your local church Sabbath School could start a ministry for immigrants or refugees.

Even if it's only a small amount, what can you do to help any immigrants or refugees you know about?

To Help the Hurting

Who among us hasn't experienced just how hurting our world really is? Whether living in an environment of wealth and materialism, or living in an environment of poverty and material needs—it doesn't matter. People are hurting, suffering, struggling. All one has to do, for instance, is read about the staggering amount of money spent on antidepressants in the Western world each year to understand that material wealth alone does not even come close to guaranteeing happiness or peace.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (*Luke 4:18, NKJV*).

What does this teach us about what Jesus did and what we, too, in our own sphere, should be doing for those in need around us?

God is calling us to meet the needs of all people, even though we don't know when or if they will ever accept Jesus. Though reaching them for Jesus is the foundation of our mission, we need to help those in need purely because they need help. We help them because we have accepted Jesus as our Lord, and that is what He calls us to do.

Jesus' example of trying to meet the needs of all people is a biblical principle to follow. We don't know if everyone whom He helped accepted Him or not.

To truly help others, we need to become aware of their needs. Every culture has its own way of showing how to treat a friend. In India, it is customary to serve food or a drink when entertaining visitors. It is easier to give a stranger token money than to comfort a friend who just lost a loved one. What your friend may need may be more than money or physical things. Often your sympathetic support during the time of a major loss could be much more helpful.

The important principle of being Jesus' helper to our friends begins first with the goal of showing selfless love toward them, understanding their needs first before trying to offer help. Provide the help they need, even though you may not know if they are ready to follow Jesus.

Read Matthew 25:34–40. What's the message for us here?

Greater Love

As we all know, and know too well, the needs never end. If you are willing to help others, you will have plenty of opportunities. Whether close friends or refugees far away, people are in need, and we should do what we can, when we can, to help. All through His earthly ministry, Jesus helped those who could not help themselves. In some cases, He took the initiative and went to those in need; in other cases, as with the men who lowered the paralytic from the roof in order to bring him to Jesus, friends took the initiative.

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (*John 15:13, NKJV*).

How do we apply this principle in our ministry to others?

One missionary family served six years in Trinidad and Tobago. The first three years they lived in a predominantly Hindu and Muslim community. Many Hindus complained that Christians refused their invitation to the annual Thanksgiving service. One day these Christians attended a Thanksgiving service of a new Hindu friend. They did this following Jesus’ example: He visited His friends when they invited Him to their special celebrations. In fact, Hinduism teaches that visitors or friends bring blessings to the home of the host.

Let’s make an attempt to begin making a friend this week by being a blessing to someone. First, survey your context, community, village, or city. Do you know of any refugee or immigrant living there? How about the people that live on your street? Do you know them all? Regardless of your situation, making friends with a stranger is not an easy task. Let’s pray and ask God for help. He knows everyone and knows the stranger that you can become friends with. Remember, the goal is to be their friend so that you can help by leading them to God for help.

Challenge: Learn about foreigners or non-Christians who live in your country. Joshuaprojects.net is a good place to survey unreached people groups in your culture.

Challenge Up: Identify someone within your sphere of influence. Begin regularly praying for the person after answering the following questions:

- Is this person my friend—according to Jesus’ model of friendship?
- Do I know the needs of his or her life?
- How can I lead him or her to Jesus for healing?

Further Thought: Read Arthur White, “A Few Days at Long Point,” *Ellen G. White: The Australian Years: 1891–1900*, vol. 4, pp. 100–104.

The Gospel writers recorded examples of Jesus’ practice of building bridges with people from other cultures in order to save them (*Matt. 8:28–34, Mark 5:1–20*). Likewise, we also are called to make friends and minister to people from other cultures, as well. Christ’s death was for everyone, regardless of race, nationality, wealth, or background. This is a point we must never forget. “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (*1 John 2:2, NKJV*).

“Men and women are not fulfilling the design of God, when they simply express affection for their own family circle, . . . while they exclude those from their love whom they could comfort and bless by relieving their necessities. . . .

“When the Lord bids us do good for others outside our home, He does not mean that our affection for home shall become diminished, and that we shall love our kindred or our country less because He desires us to extend our sympathies. But we are not to confine our affection and sympathy within four walls, and enclose the blessing that God has given us so that others will not be benefited with us in its enjoyment.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 15, 1895.

The responsibility given to us to be a blessing to those outside our comfort zone, whether they are from another culture or just a helpless person, is a nonnegotiable mandate from Jesus Christ Himself (*Acts 1:8, Mark 11:17*).

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is your own comfort zone, and why must you be willing to step outside of it when necessary?
- 2 What are the implications of the incident when Jesus was called “‘a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners’ ” (*Matt. 11:19, NIV*)? What was Jesus doing that would have brought that accusation, and what does it teach us about mission?
- 3 To what extent should a Christian engage in the celebrations of nonbelievers? How might Christians do that without compromising biblical principles?

Mission Path to Spain: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Only five families were at home when gunmen descended on a cluster of nine houses occupied by Seventh-day Adventist pastoral families in Venezuela. Waving weapons, the attackers forced the families into a single house where they separated the men, women, and children. Police arrived and surrounded the house, leading to a standoff that ended peacefully ten hours later when, at 3:00 A.M., the gunmen fled into a forest behind the house.

The wives and children of the nine pastoral families were relocated after the 2016 attack. The pastors worked alone for several months as they waited for new placements. Several moved to other countries to serve as pastors.

Luis Paiva, who had served as a pastor for about decade, wasn't sure what to do. Life had been difficult in economically volatile Venezuela before the attack. Money was tight, and food was scarce. For three years, he had been struggling to pay off a loan. But he couldn't even keep up with interest payments, and the debt had swelled to US\$1,000.

The hostage-taking was the breaking point for Luis's wife. The family of five had not been at home at the time of the attack. But his wife was left traumatized, and she didn't want to live in Venezuela anymore. Luis agreed that the country wasn't safe, but he didn't feel right about leaving an unpaid debt.

Luis prayed for a sign. He didn't usually ask for signs because he believed that God could lead without them. But he didn't know what else to do.

"Lord, if You work a miracle and help me pay this debt, that will be the sign for me to leave Venezuela," he prayed.

The gunmen had stolen things from all nine houses, including Luis's. Being robbed was not unusual. Luis's home had been broken into many times over the past year, but he had not filed any insurance claims. Usually the thefts were too small to make them worth pursuing a claim. But after the last theft, church leaders offered compensation for everything stolen over the past year if Luis obtained a stamped police report confirming the latest theft.

None of the other pastors were able to get the police report. But Luis happened to have friends in the police force, and he secured the document.

Two months later, the insurance company deposited \$1,000 into his bank account. It was the exact amount needed to pay the debt.

"I didn't benefit from that money," said Luis, who is a missionary in Spain today. "But I understood that God sent the money so I could pay off the debt. I knew that God also would bless the plan to leave the country."



Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offering that helps support missionaries around the world. Read next week about how Luis flew from Mexico to Spain.

Part I: Overview

We cannot deny that the Old Testament emphasizes the responsibility of God's people to help those in need. In fact, the Hebrew Bible has hundreds of references (and regulations or laws) that guarantee and safeguard the rights of widows, orphans, foreigners, the poor, and so on.

Deuteronomy 15:4 states: "However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you" (*NIV*). But a few verses later it says: "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land" (*Deut. 15:11, NIV*).

How do we reconcile these two verses (*Deut. 15:4 and Deut. 15:11*)? What is the problem here? How can we solve this apparent contradiction? In essence, the Bible is telling us that because God can provide He wants to use us in helping those in need, as Jesus did. The biblical tradition, as a whole, does not regard poverty as a "normal" part of life but as an evil exception to the divine plan. What is meant to be "normal" is the concern that moves people to show kindness to those in need. "God imparts His blessing to us that we may impart to others. When we ask Him for our daily bread, He looks into our hearts to see if we will share the same with those more needy than ourselves."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 283.

Part II: Commentary

“ ‘God has come to help His [needy] people’ ” (*Luke 7:16, NIV*).

In Luke 7, we read about a large crowd that recognizes what Jesus had just done. The crowd not only recognized Jesus as a prophet—and a great one—but, filled with awe and praising God, they declared that God had come to help them. Jesus was the Prophet of benevolence and compassion, the One who came to proclaim the good news of God. Jesus also came to proclaim liberty to the captives and to announce that the kingdom of God was near (*Mark 1:14, 15; see also Luke 4:18, 19*). It was on behalf of the neediest and most neglected that Jesus spent most of His time and energy during His earthly ministry. His heart was constantly touched by the misery and suffering of the most poor, destitute, and deprived human beings.

Among the oppressed and destitute were many women, and for them, Jesus had special consideration. The women who were marginalized by society were graciously received by the Savior and cared for; thus, they

were relieved from their distresses and maladies. The compassion and merciful acts of Jesus were constantly demonstrated toward these women.

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well sets the example for all who labor in favor of women, wherever they are and whatever their condition, be they poor, outcasts, sinners, widows, mothers, prostitutes, or otherwise oppressed by the devil. Giving the Samaritan woman the water of life, Jesus relieved her of her oppression and guilt, empowering her to live a better life, as well as enabling her to become one of His witnesses (*John 4:1-26*). The Samaritan woman was thirsty, she was poor, she had to carry her own water, she was tired and needy, and Jesus met her physical, social, and spiritual needs.

The way Jesus handled the situation of the woman caught in adultery and the situations of many other women indicates His interest in relieving and restoring the dignity of women and demonstrates that His love has no preference toward any class of individuals. Jesus crossed cultural barriers and even went against strong religious traditions in order to heal, save, and develop the gifts and lives of women for His kingdom. Jesus' love has no limits, no strings attached, and is bestowed upon all women in need. Look at the following examples of women who were recipients of the Savior's love: the Canaanite or Syrophenician woman (*Matt. 15:21-28, Mark 7:24-30*); Jesus' mother (*John 19:25-27*); Martha and Mary, whom Jesus encouraged (*John 11:17-37*); and the widow of Nain, whose son Jesus raised from the dead (*Luke 7:11-17*). Jesus was anointed by a sinful woman and forgave her sins (*John 12:1-11, Matt. 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50*); Jesus healed and dialogued with a sick woman (*Luke 8:43-48, Matt. 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34*); women were cured from evil spirits and diseases by Jesus (*Luke 8:1-3*); Jesus healed a crippled woman (*Luke 13:10-13*); Jesus noticed the widow giving her offering (*Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4*); and Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene (*John 20:10-18*).

According to the Gospels, Jesus' healing ministry toward all those who needed His help, relieving their suffering and setting them free from their maladies, indicates that "none who came to Him went away unhelped. From Him flowed a stream of healing power, and in body and mind and soul men were made whole."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 17. We find Jesus healing the mother-in-law of Simon (Peter) from a high fever (*Matt. 8:14, 15; Mark 1:29, 30; Luke 4:38, 39*); Jesus cured a man with leprosy by saying "be clean" (*Matt. 8:2-4, NIV; Mark 1:40-44; Luke 5:12, 13*); Jesus healed (forgave) a paralytic by saying, "Friend, your sins are forgiven" (*Luke 5:20, NIV*) and by adding, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home" (*Luke 5:24, NIV; also see Matt. 9:2-8, Mark 2:3-12*).

Jesus found great faith in a centurion whose servant was sick and about

to die, and He rewarded the centurion's faith by healing his servant (*Luke 7:1–10, Matt 8:5–13*). It was also by such great faith that a woman who was suffering from a flow of blood for 12 years touched Jesus and was healed immediately by His power. Jesus confirmed her faith by saying, “ ‘Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace’ ” (*Luke 8:48, NIV; see also Matt. 9:20–22, Mark 5:25–34*).

Jesus not only healed those who came, or were brought, to Him, but He often demonstrated His love when He saw a person in need. For example, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on a Sabbath day where there happened to be a crippled woman who was bent over and could not straighten herself up. Jesus said to her, “ ‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity’ ” (*Luke 13:12, NIV*). What a relief to be set free after being crippled by an evil spirit for 18 years! The record says that Jesus put His hand on her, and she was immediately made straight and able to praise God in her newfound freedom.

Jesus' ministry of healing went far beyond what the Bible tells us, but it must suffice to mention here what the inspired writers of the Gospels recorded to us. Many other sick people with varied illnesses were healed by the Great Physician. An official in Capernaum had a son who was sick, and he asked Jesus to heal him. Jesus graciously granted the official's request by saying, “ ‘You may go; your son will live’ ” (*John 4:50, NABRE*).

The apostle Paul wrote, “ ‘Though He [Jesus] was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich’ ” (*2 Cor. 8:9, NKJV*). Christ's identification with the poor is clearly stated by the apostle. Jesus was rich but gave up His possessions and became poor in order that poor humanity could inherit the riches of temporal, as well as eternal, salvation.

True Fellowship in the Apostolic Church

The early Christian community was characterized by true fellowship. This fellowship was the trademark of the apostles and new believers. They had decided to abide in unity with Christ and with one another, having everything in common (*Acts 2:42–44*), and being of one heart and mind. The desire of each one of them was to share the possessions they had in order that their goods might be distributed to those in need. It was because of this practice that “ ‘there were no needy persons among them’ ” (*Acts 4:34, NIV*). Thus the act of sharing their possessions was what made it possible for the new believers to meet the needs of those who were in distress (*Acts 4:32–47*).

James rightly emphasized the integration of listening to the Word and

practicing it, of love that manifests itself in words but also in actions. What, then, is true religion? “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (*James 1:27, NIV*). It seems that James is somewhat echoing these words of Jesus: “ ‘For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me’ ” (*Matt. 25:35–37, NIV*). Needy orphans and widows suffer distress that touches the heart of the Father, so the one who lives a religion that is true will “take up the cause of the fatherless” and will “plead the case of the widow” (*Isa. 1:17, NIV*).

It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians (*Acts 11:26*). Further in the chapter, the text reads: “The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul” (*Acts 11:29, 30, NIV*). To provide help (*eis diakonian*) in this context can mean to provide resources (money, gifts) to be used for needy individuals living in distress.

Part III: Life Application

The poor and needy have a special place in the ministry of Jesus because it is to them that the gospel (the good news, the kingdom of God) is preached (*Matt. 11:5, Luke 4:18*). Other biblical passages confirm that the poor are not only poor in the spiritual sense but also in the material sense (*Matt. 5:3, Luke 6:20*). The story of the poor widow’s offering illustrates this point well.

As He looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “ ‘Truly I tell you,’ he said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on’ ” (*Luke 21:3, 4, NIV; see also Mark 12:41–44 and 2 Cor. 8:9, 12*).

The story does not tell us that the woman had any relatives to care for her; instead, it mentions that she was a poor widow and gave all she had to live on. Jesus’ reference to this poor widow is interesting because, again, His attention is focused on the poorest of the poor, not only in a spiritual sense but very much in the material sense: “ ‘She, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on’ ” (*Mark 12:44, NIV*).

When needy people, such as the poor widow, look at you or your church, in what ways do they see the embodiment of Jesus Christ and the comprehensive healing and help that He imparts through His church?

