

Ministering Like Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 5:13, 14; Phil. 2:15; Mark 12:34; Eph. 4:15; Matt. 4:23–25; Matt. 25:31–46.*

Memory Text: “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (*Matthew 9:36, NKJV*).

Jesus genuinely cared for people. He was more interested in their concerns and needs than in His own. His life was totally centered on other people. His was a ministry of loving compassion. He met the physical, mental, and emotional needs of the people around Him, and thus, their hearts were opened to the spiritual truths He taught. As He healed lepers, opened blind eyes, unstopped deaf ears, delivered demoniacs, fed the hungry, and cared for the needy, hearts were touched and lives changed.

That's because as people saw His genuine concern, they were open to the spiritual truths that He taught. “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.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143. Jesus recognized that the world needed a demonstration of the gospel as much as it needed its proclamation. The living witness of a Christlike life committed to ministering to others is a powerful testimony to the words we speak and gives credibility to our witness.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 22.

Jesus' Attitude Toward People

Jesus always looked for the good in others. He drew out the best in them. One of the criticisms the religious leaders of His day had with Jesus was that He “ ‘receives sinners and eats with them’ ” (*Luke 15:2, NKJV*). They were concerned because He fellowshiped with “the ungodly.” Their view of religion was one of estrangement rather than engagement. They were surprised when Jesus said of Himself, “ ‘For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance’ ” (*Matt. 9:13, NKJV*).

The scribes', Pharisees', and Sadducees' religion was one of avoidance. They thought, *Do everything you can to avoid becoming contaminated with sin*. Though uncontaminated by sin, Jesus plunged into this snake pit of a world to redeem it, not to avoid it. He is “ ‘the light of the world’ ” (*John 8:12*).

Read Matthew 5:13, 14. What two illustrations did Jesus use to describe His followers? Why do you think He used those specific illustrations? See also *John 1:9, John 12:46, Phil. 2:15*.

Salt was one of the most important resources in the ancient world. It was extremely valuable, and at times the Roman legions used it as currency. It was a symbol of great wealth. It also was used to preserve and flavor food. When Jesus used the illustration of salt to symbolize His followers, He was really saying that the true wealth of the world is not the world's most powerful and richest people. The true wealth of the world is committed Christians who are making a difference for the kingdom of God. Their loving acts of unselfish service preserve the world's goodness and flavor its atmosphere.

The second illustration Jesus used (*in Matthew 5:14*) was that of “ ‘the light of the world.’ ” Light does not avoid the darkness. It shines in the darkness. It does not separate from the darkness. It penetrates the darkness, making the darkness light. Jesus' followers are to penetrate the darkness of this world in their neighborhoods, villages, towns, and cities to lighten them with the light of God.

After considering Jesus' words in John 17:15–18, how are we to understand the idea of separation from the world and avoidance of the world? Are they the same thing? What did Jesus mean when He prayed that His followers would be in the world but not of the world? How do we do that?

Jesus' Treatment of People

Jesus' goal was to bring out the best in people. Even when the circumstances were unusually challenging, He responded with grace. Luke's Gospel records that the crowds "marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (*Luke 4:22, NKJV*), and John's Gospel adds that "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (*John 1:17, NKJV*). His approach to people was disarming. His gracious words touched a responsive chord in their hearts.

Read Matthew 8:5–10 and Mark 12:34. What hope-filled words did Jesus speak to two unlikely people—a Roman centurion and a Jewish scribe?

Jesus' statement to a Roman military commander was revolutionary. Think of how this career army officer must have felt when Jesus claimed that He had not found this degree of faith even in Israel. Also, think about the Jewish scribe's thoughts when Jesus said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Jesus had the ability to bring out the best in people. There are few things that go as far as a compliment to open hearts for the gospel. Look for the good in people around you and let them know you appreciate them.

Compare Isaiah 42:3; Colossians 4:5, 6; and Ephesians 4:15. What vital principles do these texts teach us about sharing our faith with others and about our relationship with them?

When our words are encouraging and filled with grace, they have a positive influence on the lives of others. Isaiah's prophetic words reveal that Jesus would not "break a bruised reed" or "quench a smoking flax." In other words, Jesus was so compassionate that He was careful not to bruise unnecessarily someone who was just coming to faith or to quench the slightest embers of faith in their hearts.

Why is *how* we say something as important as, or even more important than, *what* we say? How do you react to this statement: "Truth is truth, and people need to take it or leave it"? What's wrong with this statement?

Jesus' Healing Ministry: Part 1

Our Lord's method of evangelism goes beyond memorized speeches and canned presentations; it is as rich and dynamic as life itself. Every day we rub shoulders with people who have all kinds of needs: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Christ is eager to meet those needs through us as we show concern for people's loneliness, sorrow, and heartache, and as we show an interest in their joys, hopes, and dreams.

Jesus ministered to people's felt needs so that He could ultimately meet their deepest needs. A felt need is an area of life in which people already sense that they cannot solve an issue by themselves. It may be a need to quit smoking, reduce weight, get on a better diet, or reduce stress. It may be a need for food, housing, or medical care. It may be the need for counseling for the marriage or family.

An ultimate need, however, is what human beings need most—the need for a personal relationship with God and the realization that their life has eternal significance. Reconciliation with God in a broken world is our ultimate need.

Read the stories of the paralytic in Matthew 9:1–7 and the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5:25–34. What indications do we have in both of these stories that Jesus linked physical healing with meeting the ultimate need for reconciliation with God?

The healing ministry of Christ included much more than physical and emotional healing. Jesus longed for people to experience the wholeness that sin's brokenness had shattered. For Christ, physical healing without spiritual healing was incomplete. If God's love motivates us to desire an individual's physical and emotional well-being, it also will motivate us much more to desire that person's spiritual well-being so that he or she can live life to the fullest here and through all eternity. After all, every person whom Jesus healed eventually died. Hence, their real need, above everything else, was spiritual, was it not?

What kinds of initiatives can our church take in our community to meet people's needs and demonstrate that we really care for them? Think about the people in your community. What is your church doing to make a difference in people's lives?

Jesus' Healing Ministry: Part 2

Read Matthew 4:23–25 and Matthew 9:35. What threefold approach formed the basis for Christ's ministry? How did He meet people's needs, and what impact did it have on their lives?

Jesus combined the threefold ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing. He shared eternal principles so that all of us could live lives of meaning and purpose. He said, " 'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly' " (*John 10:10, NKJV*). His ministry revealed a superabundance of grace. And Jesus came to enable us to live lives of "superabundance" now and forever.

Read Mark 1:32–39. Jesus spent all day healing the sick and casting out demons. After spending time in prayer the next morning, when more multitudes were likely seeking even more healing, He left for another city. Why didn't He heal them? Notice His own reason in Mark 1:38, 39.

This story is insightful. After healing multitudes the day before, the next day Jesus leaves the crowds, who are seeking Him and who are still in need of healing. His explanation is that the purpose for which He came into the world was to preach the gospel. Jesus was not merely some spectacular miracle worker. He was the divine Son of God who came on a redemptive mission. He was not content merely to heal physical diseases. He longed for people to receive the gift of eternal life that He had to offer. He clearly stated the purpose for His coming to earth in these words: " 'For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost' " (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*). Thus, each act of healing was an opportunity to reveal God's character, relieve suffering, and provide an opportunity for eternal life.

Is it possible to live the abundant life Jesus offers if you are poverty-stricken or sick? Did Jesus offer people something deeper than physical healing? In what practical ways can we lead people to spiritual truths when we minister to their physical and emotional needs?

What Matters to Jesus

Jesus' message to His disciples in Matthew 24 that blends events regarding the destruction of Jerusalem and the days before His return is followed by three end-time parables in Matthew 25. These parables outline the character qualities that really matter to Jesus for a people waiting for His second coming. The parable of the ten virgins emphasizes the importance of a genuine, authentic, Spirit-filled life. The parable of the ten talents underlines the importance of faithfully using the gifts that God has given to each one of us. The parable of the sheep and goats reveals that genuine Christianity truly ministers to the needs of those God brings into our lives each day.

Read Matthew 25:31–46. How does Jesus describe genuine Christianity? List the areas of ministry this passage speaks about.

Although this parable speaks of meeting people's genuine physical needs—an aspect of the story we should not neglect—is it possible that there is something more here? There is a hidden hunger and thirst for Jesus in the souls of human beings that longs to be satisfied (*John 6:35; John 4:13, 14*). We are all strangers longing for home until we discover our true identity in Christ (*Eph. 2:12, 13, 19*). We are naked spiritually until clothed with His righteousness (*Rev. 3:18; Rev. 19:7, 8*).

The Old Testament prophets often described the human condition as one that was hopelessly sick (*Isa. 1:5, Jer. 30:12–15*). The disease of sin is fatal, but the prophet points us to the remedy. “ ‘For I will restore health to you and heal you of your wounds,’ says the LORD ” (*Jer. 30:17, NKJV*). Jesus is the remedy for the life-threatening disease of our souls.

The parable of the sheep and goats admonishes us to meet the physical needs of those around us, but it does much more. It is the story of a Christ who meets the deepest needs of the soul, and it is His invitation to partner with Him in ministering to those around us. To live self-centered lives and neglect the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of others is to risk eternal loss. In the parable, those who give their lives for something more than themselves are commended by their Lord and welcomed into eternity, while those who selfishly pursue their own agenda and neglect the needs of others are condemned by their Lord.

Further Thought: “Many have no faith in God and have lost confidence in man. But they appreciate acts of sympathy and helpfulness. As they see one with no inducement of earthly praise or compensation coming to their homes, ministering to the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the sad, and tenderly pointing all to Him of whose love and pity the human worker is but the messenger—as they see this, their hearts are touched. Gratitude springs up. Faith is kindled. They see that God cares for them, and they are prepared to listen as His Word is opened.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 145.

The unselfish ministry of Jesus opens hearts, breaks down prejudice, and creates a receptivity for the gospel. The church is the body of Christ meeting needs in love everywhere. Christ sends us out into our communities to make a difference in His name. Though we certainly need to be careful about being contaminated by the world (and that is a very real and dangerous threat to our church), we still must learn to reach the people where they are and to be used by God, who wants to take them from where they are and bring them to where they should be.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is the compassionate ministry of Christ so powerful in breaking down prejudice and opening people up to hear spiritual truths? Try to imagine how much more effective our witness as a people would be were we to reflect the same selfless concern for others as Jesus did.
- 2 Think about a time when you said something that might have been true, correct, or even needed, but you said it wrong; that is, you said it with a bad tone or attitude. What did you learn from that experience that could help you not to do it again, such as waiting until you calm down before speaking?
- 3 Dwell more on the idea that all the people healed or even raised from the dead would eventually die. What should that tell us about how we ought to be conducting our outreach and ministry to those around us?
- 4 What types of ministries can your church launch in your community that you are not currently doing?
- 5 How can we create spiritual opportunities for seekers through our felt-need ministries?

Surprise Treat in Sudan

By GLENN MITCHELL

Living in Sudan was a challenge for my wife, Suzanne, and me when we worked for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency. Daily temperatures hovered at 102–108 degrees Fahrenheit (39–42 degrees Celsius) from May to September. A cold drink was a treat after a day of work.

Returning home one day, I followed Suzanne into the kitchen and hopped up onto the counter to chat while she prepared a meal. As I sat on the counter, swinging my feet as a boy does, Suzanne asked me what I wanted to drink.

“What do you have?” I asked.

Placing her hands on her hips, she informed me in a haute voice, “I have Orange Fanta, root beer, or Sprite.”

“Hmm, I want Squirt,” I said, referring to a favorite cold drink that I hadn’t seen since leaving our home in the United States.

“I don’t have any Squirt,” Suzanne said, maintaining the same haute voice.

I jumped off the kitchen counter, threw myself on the floor, and in the manner of a child began to throw a tantrum. Kicking my feet and pounding my fist, I demanded the beverage. “I want Squirt! I want Squirt!” I cried.

It was to no avail. There was no Squirt. Suzanne and I laughed and laughed about our silliness. Moments like these made hard days easier to bear.

Two hours later, a friend pulled into our driveway. She worked with the U.S. Agency for International Development in Sudan’s capital, Khartoum, and acted as our liaison officer for several ADRA projects funded by USAID. She allowed us to receive mail at her official address, and on this day she was delivering a box with much-awaited hair products from the United States. I tore open the box, knowing our American friends would have included a bag of chocolate-covered raisins for her. Sure enough, the coveted bag of raisins lay right on top. Underneath the raisins were nestled two bottles of hair conditioner. But wait. Something more seemed to be in the box. Digging under the packing paper, waiting in all its green glory, I found a big bottle of Squirt!

I had never requested the beverage from anyone in the United States. But on a hot day in Sudan, God provided a special treat. Weeks before I had asked Suzanne for the drink, the bottle was on its way to Khartoum. God cares about even the smallest details of our lives, and He loves to give.



“To give is to live” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 623). God promises, “Those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing” (*Ps. 34:10, NKJV*). When God saw me being silly and throwing my tantrum, He must have smiled and thought, *Wait and see what I have in store for you.*

Key Text: *Matthew 9:26*

Study Focus: *Matthew 5:13, 14; Philippians 2:15; Mark 12:34; Luke 15:2; Matthew 9:23; Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 9:35; Matthew 25:31–46.*

Part I: Overview

Jesus' words made an impact on the lives He touched because His selfless life was in harmony with His Word. His teachings made an impact because His loving actions were the outgrowth of His teachings. If Christ's actions were not in harmony with His words, He would have had little influence on the people around Him. There is an old saying that "actions speak louder than words." This is certainly true when it comes to our Christian witness.

This week's lesson underscores the importance of self-sacrificing service that totally is others-oriented, making a lasting impression in their lives. We will examine the outflowing of love from Jesus' heart as His most effective means of witness.

Millennia ago, in the vast heavenly realms of space, Lucifer rebelled against God. He claimed that God was unfair, unjust, and unloving. Jesus' life testifies to His Father's immense love. Every miracle of healing reveals the Father's love. Every time a demon-possessed individual is delivered, it speaks of the Father's love. Every time Jesus feeds the hungry, comforts the sorrowing, forgives the guilty, strengthens the weak, severs the chains of sin, or raises the dead, He reveals the Father's love.

This week, we will explore how our church can model Christ's love in our community. We will uncover biblical principles in the life of Christ that define what church is all about. The church is the body of Christ, ministering in Jesus' name, revealing His love, and meeting needs everywhere.

Part II: Commentary

Christ calls us to engagement with the world, not estrangement from the world. We are not called to isolate ourselves. We are called to light the darkness with the light of Christ's love. Light overcomes the darkness. Darkness does not overcome light. Where light is, there can be no darkness. The apostle Paul states it beautifully: "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give

the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6, NKJV).

Did you catch the significance of Paul’s teaching? The light of God’s love shines out of our lives to those in darkness, so we can reveal the truth about God, a knowledge of His loving character, to a world in darkness.

The Bible also uses the imagery of salt to illustrate the role of Christian witness in our world. Salt is not going to give food much flavor if it stays in the saltshaker. It is only as salt is mixed with the food that it can both flavor and preserve it. Christians who remain together in the comfortable confines of their churches and have little contact with the world will have little opportunity to impact it for Christ.

The monastic movement of the Middle Ages considered the world to be evil. The monks believed that the way to holiness was abandonment of the things of this world. Some of them went to extreme lengths to avoid contact with the world.

Illustration: Simon Stylites

In his attempt to achieve holiness and be separate from the world, Simon Stylites dwelt atop a series of pillars for 37 years in a small town outside of Aleppo, Syria. As an ascetic monk, he spent his days meditating, praying, and contemplating the divine. Often people gathered around the pillar where he stood. They gazed at this “holy man” and sometimes asked for advice. His fame spread through the surrounding area, and many other monks imitated his lifestyle. One basic tenet of these ascetics was that inner oneness with God was achieved through separation from the world.

The Scriptures do call each one of us to prayer, meditation on the Word of God, and separation from evil. The purpose of spending time with Christ on the “mountain” is so we can witness to the multitudes. The monastics often missed a vital aspect of the Christian faith. Light shines in the darkness. Salt penetrates the food it flavors, and Christians are the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

Jesus’ great intercessory prayer in John 17 puts it this way: “ ‘I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one’ ” (John 17:15, NKJV). Someone has said that Christians are like a boat in the water. It is all right for the boat to be in the water if there is no water in the boat. Christians are in the world to influence it for Christ; but when the world is in Christians, absorbing their time, attention, and energies, something is wrong.

Jesus plunged into this sinful, rebellious world to reveal the love of God and redeem humanity. He looked at each person through the eyes of divine compassion. To a Roman military officer, He said, “ ‘I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel’ ” (Matt. 8:10, NKJV). Surprisingly He encouraged a Jewish scribe by saying, “ ‘You are not far from the

kingdom of God' ” (*Mark 12:34, NKJV*). The scribes spent their lives studying the Jewish Torah. While the disciples may have wanted to debate with this scribe, Jesus believed the best about him. Jesus saw each person as a candidate for the kingdom of God.

According to Isaiah’s prophecy, Jesus would not “bruise a tender reed” or “quench a smoking flax.” In other words, Jesus gently healed bruised people. He did not further condemn them. Think of the stinging words of condemnation Jesus could have given to the woman caught in adultery or the Samaritan woman at the well. Think of the rebuke He could have given Simon Peter after his denial or the stern criticism He could have had for the thief on the cross. But Jesus did none of this. His words were words of hope. They were words of grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Paul gives us this admonition, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (*Col. 4:6, NKJV*). As Ellen G. White states so clearly, “Only by love is love awakened.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22. She then adds, “The wonderful love of Christ will melt and subdue hearts, when the mere reiteration of doctrines would accomplish nothing.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 826. When loving words are combined with thoughtful actions that meet practical human needs, unconverted hearts are changed.

Jesus’ method of evangelism was to find a need and meet it. His comprehensive, threefold ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing transformed lives. The Gospels reveal Jesus meeting the “felt” needs of people so that He could touch them at the point of their deepest spiritual needs. Consider the Gospel of John. In John 2, at the wedding feast of Cana in Galilee, Jesus meets a social need by saving the host from embarrassment. In John 3, Jesus meets Nicodemus’s deepest heart hunger for an authentic faith. In John 4, Jesus treats the Samaritan woman with dignity and respect, meeting her emotional need for a sense of self-worth. In John 5, Jesus meets physical needs in the miraculous healing of a desperately ill man who hopelessly lies by a pool of purportedly therapeutic waters for 38 years. In John 6, when Jesus breaks the bread and feeds 5,000 hungry people, the crowd wants to make Him king (*John 6:14, 15*).

What made Jesus’ popularity so high at this point in His ministry? The world had never seen anyone with so much unselfish love who could meet their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs. It was here in John 6 that Jesus preached that powerful sermon on the bread of life. For the first time, many of His hearers understood that He was calling for a deep spiritual commitment—a commitment that many of them were unwilling

to make; so, they walked away (*John 6:66*).

Jesus came not only to meet the “felt needs” of people for good public relations for the Christian church. But His mission also was much more than a philanthropic organization. The purpose of Jesus’ life was “ ‘to seek and to save that which was lost’ ” (*Luke 19:10, NKJV*). After healing scores of people on a Saturday night, Jesus was up early the next morning, seeking the Father in prayer. Although there were still more sick people to heal, Jesus said, “ ‘Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth’ ” (*Mark 1:38, NKJV*). There is nothing more important to Jesus than saving lost people. Jesus did not heal people so they merely could return to lives of sin healthier. Jesus did not relieve disease so that individuals would have more energy to live lives of selfish indulgence. He relieved physical suffering to reveal the Father’s love and to provide tangible evidence of His ability to heal hearts. All of Jesus’ physical miracles served to illustrate His divine power to deliver from the bondage of sin.

Part III: Life Application

Spend a few minutes thinking about someone in your sphere of influence who has a tangible spiritual need. Maybe there is a single mom who needs a break from the kids. What can you do to give her a “mom’s night out”? How can you befriend her? Can you possibly invite her home for a meal? What about offering to change the oil in her car?

Possibly there is a retired man living across the street whose wife has recently died. He is lonely and needs friendship. What practical things can you do for him? What about the young couple that has just moved into the apartment down the hall from yours or into the house across the street? How can you help them become better acquainted with the community? What are their needs, knowing that they are new to the area?

Think about the people in your community that need and want better health. They may have a desire to quit smoking, adopt a healthier diet, lose weight, reduce stress, exercise more, or have a better lifestyle. How can our church develop an ongoing, comprehensive health outreach into our communities?

And what if the community is in an underprivileged area where people need to learn to read, develop basic computer skills, and need groceries or some of the necessities of life?

If we are going to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, let’s think of concrete ways to meet our community’s needs in the loving name of Jesus.

