

Jesus Ministered *to* Their Needs



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 5:22–43, 10:46–52, John 5:1–9, Ps. 139:1–13, Mark 2:1–12, Acts 9:36–42.*

Memory Text: “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness” (*Matthew 9:35, NIV*).

A retired Seventh-day Adventist woman in an African country did not wish to stop ministering in retirement. Her community needed healing because of the ravages of HIV/AIDS. The most urgent need was that AIDS orphans didn't have adequate nutrition. 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 and, as of 2012, were serving 300 children per day. That led them to start a preschool, and now 45 of those children are attending. Other services include distributing clothing from ADRA, sharing vegetables and maize from a garden that they maintain, and taking care of the sick. They started a skills-development program for women, who teach one another skills that helped them earn a living. This demonstration of the love of Jesus spawned a new church. There were five members in the beginning, and, as of 2012, 160 were attending. God provided means for building an orphanage and a new church building in 2012.

What a powerful and practical example of how meeting the needs of the community is so important for Christians.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 27.*

Interruption for Ministry

Jesus steps off the boat on the shore near Capernaum. (*See Mark 5.*) His disciples are still reeling from the harrowing encounter with the demon-possessed man in Decapolis. As usual, a crowd is there to meet Him. Eager to get His attention, individuals in the throng jostle to be near Jesus. Immediately He is asked for help, this time by a ruler of a synagogue.

Read Mark 5:22–43. While Jesus was on His way to minister to the needs of this ruler of a synagogue, what interrupted Him, and how did He respond to the interruption? More important, what lessons should we take from the story for ourselves about how we react when interrupted for ministry?

Let's face it, none of us likes interruptions, do we? We are busy. We have things to do, places to go, and jobs to get done. We set goals for ourselves and want to meet those goals, sometimes within a certain time frame, as well. Interruptions can get in the way.

That's why, if someone comes with a need or with a request for help, it can be annoying if the time isn't convenient. Sometimes you just can't drop whatever you are doing. At the same time, how often could we drop what we are doing and help but don't because we simply don't want to?

Yet, often the greatest opportunities to minister to people's needs come through interruptions. Most of us try to avoid interruptions and get upset when our plans are derailed. As we look at the ministry of Jesus, we notice that some of the needs that He cared for came as interruptions, to which He lovingly responded. If we think about it, many opportunities we get for ministry come in the form of interruptions. We have already looked at 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 with a need and a request for help? How did you respond?

How Can I Help You?

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 obvious what they wanted. And even if it weren't, Jesus would have known what those needs were anyway.

However, by asking these questions, Jesus showed the men respect. He showed that He was listening to them and, by listening, that He cared about what they were struggling with. In how many cases do people, perhaps more than anything else, simply want someone just to talk to, someone who will listen to them? Sometimes just being able to talk about one's struggles can help a person feel better.

Consider for a moment how you would feel if you entered a doctor's office and the doctor took one glance at you, wrote out a prescription, and sent you on your way. Surely you would doubt whether this person really knew what you needed. You might say, "The doctor didn't ask me how I feel or listen to my heart or check my blood pressure or . . ." One of the cardinal rules of medical practice is "Diagnose before you treat."

The same concept applies to medical missionary work, which is focused on the well-being of people and meeting their wholistic needs. Too many churches think they already know, or they guess at what needs to be done to serve others in their community. When we put forth the effort of talking to people about their needs or the needs of the community, it lets them know we care, and it informs us how we can serve in ways that will be appreciated. Also, we will make new friends.

" 'Remember that you can break down the severest opposition by taking a personal interest in the people whom you meet. Christ took 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 instructed to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the sorrowing.' "—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 162.

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

The Deeper Needs

Jesus, as the Lord, knew more about the people than they knew about themselves. There are many accounts in the Gospels where Jesus showed that He not only knew what people were thinking at the present (see *Mark 2:8*)—He knew their histories as well (*John 4:18*).

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

As we saw yesterday, Jesus knew the needs of the people, and it was to those needs that He ministered. In fact, He knew even needs that went below the surface. This reality is seen in the story of the paralytic. Though it was obvious on the surface that he needed physical healing, there was something deeper there, which is why, even before telling him to take up his bed and walk, Jesus said, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (*Mark 2:5*).

Read Mark 2:1–12. What was going on below the surface in regard to this man? In what ways might this deeper need be a problem for all whom we seek to minister to?

Jesus knew the issue here was more than physical. “Yet it was not physical restoration he [the paralytic] desired so much as relief from the burden of sin. If he could see Jesus, and receive the assurance of forgiveness and peace with Heaven, he would be content to live or die, according to God’s will.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 267.

Of course we are not going to be able to get below the surface as Jesus did. Yet, we can be sure that whomever we are ministering to, they are sin-damaged creatures. That is, whatever the other surface needs, they are also in need of grace, of assurance, 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 crave the assurance of salvation and of the knowledge that God loves you. How can you help others experience that same assurance and love?

Dorcas in Joppa

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

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]” who are “full of good works and charitable deeds” (*Acts 9:36, NKJV*)?

The “believers” are Christian church members; “the widows” may include church members as well as those who were not members. Dorcas likely served both. Your “Joppa” should be outside *and* inside your church. Consistent caring for those inside your church is also a powerful evangelistic strategy (*see Acts 2:42–47*). People outside 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 texts, and why is that so important for us as a church to follow? Why, though, can it sometimes be so hard to follow?

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

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

1. *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 your church’s immediate area, as gardeners view their gardens as an extension 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—out of which a new church started.

3. The *shepherd* style is serving one targeted population rather than a specific 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, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002), p. 146.

The Church at Work

“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans” (*Prov. 16:3, NIV*).

Once your church has a clear vision of how it can minister to the community, it is important to develop a plan whereby all church departments can work together in order to make this vision a reality. Even though you may not consider yourself a “leader” in your church, you can contribute. Also, it is good for all church members to understand this process, for this is about your church’s mission to your community.

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

Read Luke 14:25–35. What does this passage have to do with commitment and the planning it takes to fulfill your church’s mission?

As you think about the process required to meet your community’s needs effectively, you might think: *this takes too much commitment and time*. We’d prefer to take shortcuts. The two parables warn us against taking the responsibilities of mission and discipleship lightly. They remind us that analysis and planning for our mission are essential. It’s a matter of good stewardship. The flavor of the salt in Luke 14:34 represents devotion. Without this, our service, our discipleship, is useless and meaningless. We need fervent and faithful devotion to our Lord, and if we have that, fervent and faithful devotion to ministry will follow.

What are ways that you can do more to work with your church in organizing and planning beforehand how you can reach out to your community?

Further Thought: Read Deuteronomy 15:11, Job 29:11–17, Proverbs 14:31, 19:17, Acts 3:6, James 1:27–2:5. Read Ellen G. White, “Pioneering in Australia,” pp. 327–338, in *Welfare Ministry*.

Paul, like Jesus, was involved in meeting the expressed needs of people. We can see this, for example, in the famous story of Paul at Mars Hill in Athens. In Acts 17:23, Paul, provoked by the idolatry that he saw in the city, engaged in lively discussions with the local intelligentsia and anyone in the marketplace who would talk with him. He became aware of their needs and issues. He discovered that they had an unknown God-shaped hole in their lives and that they needed to know the true God and to stop worshiping useless idols. He then began to preach in the synagogue, where both Jews and “Gentile worshippers” (*Acts 17:17, NKJV*) were. In other words, he took advantage of the opportunity he had and reached out with the gospel. Paul sought to meet them where they were, as we can see by how he talked to the people when at the synagogue and in the marketplace. The masses believed in some kind of deity, because they had built an altar to “the unknown God” (*Acts 17:23*). Working from that premise, Paul sought to point 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’ ” (*Acts 17:28, NKJV*). Starting from where the people were, he wanted to lead them away from their idols to the living God and Jesus, raised from the dead. In short, assessing the needs of those whom he wanted to reach, Paul then tried to help fulfill those needs.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 “He who taught the people the way to secure peace and happiness was just as thoughtful of their temporal necessities as of their spiritual need.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 365. What important message is given to us here in regard to why we should minister to the needs of others?
- 2 Why do we, when thinking about outreach, have to be careful not to forget what our ultimate goal is? What is that ultimate goal? Give reasons for your answer.
- 3 How can we learn to view some interruptions not as annoyances but as sacred opportunities for ministry? How does Galatians 2:20 help us in this area?