

# A Community of Servants



## SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 21

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** 2 Corinthians 2:14–16; Revelation 12:17; 1 Peter 2:12; Ephesians 2:19; Hebrews 10:23–25.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Let us hold firmly to the hope that we have confessed [believed in]. We can trust God to do what he promised” (Hebrews 10:23, ICB).

**JESUS GAVE US WORK TO DO** before He comes back. So, it is important for us to work together with other believers in the church. Then it will be easier to get our work done. We already learned about the problems that we must solve when we help the poor and needy. But when we work with fellow believers, we can do our job better. Then we will be a bigger blessing to the people around us.

We need to be careful. When we get together as a church, it is easy to forget why God made the church. One reason that God made our church is because He wants the church to serve the people in our communities. As a church, we must pay attention to the people who are suffering all around us. We must do what Jesus asked. We must share the Good News about Him with other people. At the same time, we must help the hungry, the helpless, and the poor.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and its members are the body of Jesus (read 1 Corinthians 12:12–20). So, we should walk as Jesus walked. We should do what Jesus did. We must be Jesus' hands, feet, voice, and heart on this earth today.



One reason God made our church is because He wants the church to serve the people in our communities.

## THE PERFUME OF LIFE (2 Corinthians 2:16)

We read about the first Christians in the book of Acts. They started a new community. This community was different from other communities on the earth. The Christian community took care of needy members in their church. The Christians also offered help to people who were not members of their church. The Christians invited the people they helped to join their church.

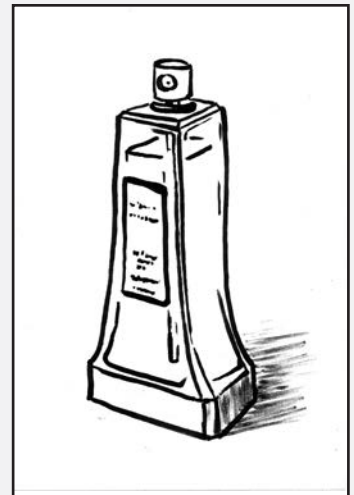
Paul uses many word pictures to show us how the New Testament believers made their communities better. Paul says that the New Testament believers were a “living and holy gift” (Romans 12:1, NLV). These believers were an offering given to God. Paul also says God’s people are Jesus’ body (1 Corinthians 12:12–20). God’s people are His messengers (2 Corinthians 5:18–20). They are the same as His perfume (2 Corinthians 2:14–16).

**Think about Paul’s word pictures for Christians. Which word picture is your favorite? Why? Which word picture best shows the picture of God that you wish to show to your community?**

Do you see that each of Paul’s word pictures shows us two things? Each word picture shows us who God’s people are and what they do for God. Remember, we cannot earn God’s favor. God saves us because we have faith in Jesus’ death for our sins. We serve God because He saves us.

Paul’s word pictures show us what God’s kingdom is all about. God’s kingdom is about love and grace. Grace is God’s gift to us of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin. What happens when we show God’s grace to other people? We show that we are a part of God’s kingdom now. Our example helps people to see that God will destroy evil in the end. As Jesus’ messengers, we can live the truth about God’s love in our own church. We can show that He is fair. We can show this truth to the people we serve in this life.

**Read about the perfume again: “To those [people] who are being lost, this perfume smells like [the same as] death, and it brings them death. But to those [people] who are being saved, it has the sweet smell of life, and it brings them life” (2 Corinthians 2:16, ERV). The perfume as we saw, is a word picture for God’s people. How is your life the same as perfume that has a sweet smell?**



**God’s people are the same as perfume.**

**GOD'S SPECIAL END-TIME PEOPLE (Revelation 12:17)**

God's special end-time church is named His remnant. A remnant is a word picture for a small piece of cloth leftover from a large roll of cloth. Revelation 12:17 shows us who God's remnant people are: "They are the ones who obey the Laws of God and are faithful [obedient] to the teachings of Jesus" (Revelation 12:17, NLV). The Bible stories show us how God's remnant behaves. These stories also show us how God's remnant serves other people.

**Moses is a powerful example. He shows us how God's remnant people should behave. Read about Moses in Exodus 32:1–14. How is Moses the same as God's remnant people in Revelation 12:17?**

God was very angry at Israel. He wanted to destroy them. Then He wanted to give to Moses and his family everything He promised to Abraham. God promised to make Abraham's future children a powerful people (Exodus 32:10).

But Moses says no. Moses tells God not to destroy His people. If God does, He will look bad in the eyes of people who did not know God (read Exodus 32:11–13). But Moses does not stop there. You will remember from the book of Exodus that Moses led God's people out of Egypt. Moses' job was not easy. What happened almost as soon as Moses led God's people to freedom? They started to complain. But what does Moses do? Does he complain about them? No. Does he tell God to destroy His people? No. Moses says, " 'Now, forgive them of this sin. If you will not forgive them, then erase my name from your book [of life]' " (Exodus 32:32, ERV). Wow! Moses offers to give up his everlasting life to save God's people! Moses is a powerful example of God's love for people who are not worthy of that love. Moses also is a powerful word picture for God's plan to save us!

"Moses asked God to save Israel. Moses' love for God's people was so strong that it made him brave. He cared very much for God's people. Moses had done so much to help them too. The Lord heard Moses' unselfish prayer. The Lord gave Moses what he asked for. God tested Moses. This test showed what was in Moses' heart. Moses' heart was full of faith in God and love for God's people."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Old Testament fathers and leaders] and Prophets [special messengers]*, page 319, adapted.



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## LEADING PEOPLE TO JESUS (1 Peter 2:12)

Sometimes churches argue about the work they should do. Should they share the Good News? Or should they help people in their community? For the answers, we must understand the work that Jesus did on earth. Jesus' work on earth shows us that there is a close connection between our preaching the Good News and helping other people.

Ellen G. White has a famous saying that explains this close connection. "Jesus' plan will give us true success. It is the only plan that will help us save people. Jesus is our Savior. He spent time with people. He wanted what was best for them. He showed them that He cared about them. He served them. He took care of their needs. He won their trust and their hearts. Then He told them, 'Follow Me.' . . .

"We must help the poor who are in need. We must take care of the sick. We must give comfort to the ones who are sad and who have lost loved ones. We must teach the ones who do not know the truth and who do not have understanding. We must give good advice to the ones who need it. We must cry tears with the ones who cry tears. Our hearts must be full of joy for the ones who have reason to be full of joy."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [work done for God] of Healing*, page 143, adapted.

We already saw that sharing the Good News and helping people were important parts of Jesus' work and His kingdom. Jesus made these two rules of His kingdom an important part of the work He gave His followers. " 'As you go, preach this message, "The kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 10:7, NIV). Then Jesus told them: " 'Heal the sick. Bring the dead back to life. Heal the people who have leprosy [bad skin diseases]. And force demons out of people. I give you these powers freely, so help others freely' " (Matthew 10:8, ERV). So, what is one of the best ways of sharing God's message with other people? Take care of their needs.

**Read 1 Peter 2:12 and Philippians 2:15. In these verses, Peter and Paul tell us that our good works have the power to witness about God to other people. How?**

Our wish to be fair and to share the Good News starts with our understanding that God loves sinners. Then we work with God to help other people with the gifts He gives us.



"Jesus . . . won their trust and their hearts. Then He told them, 'Follow Me.' "

## MERCY AND FORGIVENESS IN THE CHURCH (Ephesians 2:19)

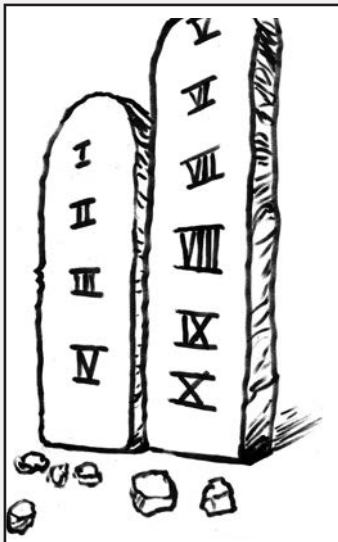
Look at Job 1:8. In this verse, God says that Job is a man of faith and obedience. Job's loyalty to God shows that God's ways are good. God is fair in His actions with sinners. Paul tells us that the church also is an example that shows people who God is: "His purpose [plan] was that all the rulers and powers in the heavenly places will now know the many different ways he shows his wisdom. They will know this because of the church" (Ephesians 3:10, ERV).

**Read Ephesians 2:19, ERV. In this verse, Paul talks about "God's family." "God's family" is a word picture for God's church. How does this word picture help us understand what God's church is and the way it should work?**

If you want to know about a community, look at its members. Is the community kind to its members? The answer to that question tells us about the community's beliefs. We are God's family. We are the body of Jesus. We are a community of believers under the Holy Spirit's power. God expects wonderful things from His church. So, as a church, we live as examples of God's love.

The rules of God's kingdom should control everything we do. God is fair. We should be fair too. He is a God of mercy and forgiveness. He is a God of love. We should show mercy and forgiveness. We should love other people. The rules of God's kingdom should guide our church leaders in all the decisions they make. The rules of God's kingdom also should help us solve problems between members. We must be kind to each other. If we are not, then how can we be kind to people who do not belong to our church?

The church also should be kind to the people who work for the church. We should always be fair to other people. Churches should be safe places. Church members should do what they can to protect their members from danger. Remember, in the New Testament church, members helped support other church family members who were in need. Jesus commanded us to do the same thing. These acts of love will change the church. This love will show other people our faith in God: "I give you a new command: Love each other. You must love each other just as I loved you. All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other" (John 13:34, 35, ERV).



**The rules of God's kingdom should help our church leaders in all the decisions they make.**

## ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER TO DO GOOD WORKS (Hebrews 10:23–25)

Working for God can be hard for us at times. We may have the deepest wish to help people. We may have a lot of faith. We may believe we are on God’s side. But our earth is filled with sin. Sin makes life difficult. That is why we need a church community. Jesus and His followers showed us an example of what a church community should be. Jesus did not often send people to work alone. But even when He did, His followers soon came back together again. They shared their stories. Their times together made them stronger and gave them hope.

**Read Hebrews 10:23–25. How do verses 23 and 24 help us to understand what verse 25 is saying? What are some of the ways we can “keep on encouraging each other” (Hebrews 10:25, ERV) to show more love and to do good?**

A group of people who work together can get more done than if they each work alone. Remember, we are the body of Jesus (Romans 12:4–6). We all are different parts of the body. But we must work together. When we each do what we do best, we will help one another to make a difference in this life and in the life to come.

Sometimes things do not turn out the way we expect. So, what do we do? We must trust God. At times, we will see very little change happening. It will look as if nothing we do makes a difference. But we must not lose hope. Paul says, “Let us not become tired of doing good. At the right time we will gather a crop if we don’t [do not] give up. So when we can do good to everyone, let us do it. Let’s [let us] try even harder to do good to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:9, 10, NIV; read also Hebrews 13:16).

God asks us to fill each other with hope and courage. Yes, the life of faith is hard. But it also is full of joy. Our God and our community will support us during the hard times. That love and support will cause us to invite other people to join our community of faith too.

**Do you know someone who works hard to stop the suffering of other people? What can you do to encourage this person in the work that he or she does for God?**



**A group of people who work together can get more done than if they each work alone.**

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

“We must do the same work that Jesus’ followers did. Every Christian should be God’s messenger and servant. We must be kind and loving. We must help people in need of help. With unselfish hearts, we should try to help suffering people. . . .

“We must feed the hungry. We must give clothes to people who do not have any clothes. We must give comfort to people who suffer. We must help the ones who are sad. We must help people who have no hope. We must help them to feel hope again.

“We must show Jesus’ love in doing unselfish work for other people. Our kind acts have more power to change the evil person than do punishment or the courts of law. . . . Often, the hearts of many people grow hard when we scold or blame them for doing wrong. But those same hearts will “melt” when we show them God’s love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [work done for God] of Healing*, pages 104, 106, adapted.



“We must help people who have no hope. We must help them to feel hope again.”

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 There are many people and groups that work hard to take care of people who are poor and hungry on this earth. What can we do as Seventh-day Adventists to help?
- 2 Can you remember a time when you felt your church community supported you or encouraged you? How did that make you feel? What can you learn from that experience? How can you give that same support and encouragement to other people?
- 3 The support of our church community can help us stay hopeful. What other things can help us not feel “tired of doing good”? (Galatians 6:9, NIV).
- 4 What are some of the things that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is doing to help people in need? What are we doing as a church to make things fair for people in this life? What can you do to help in this part of the church’s work?



# Social Justice

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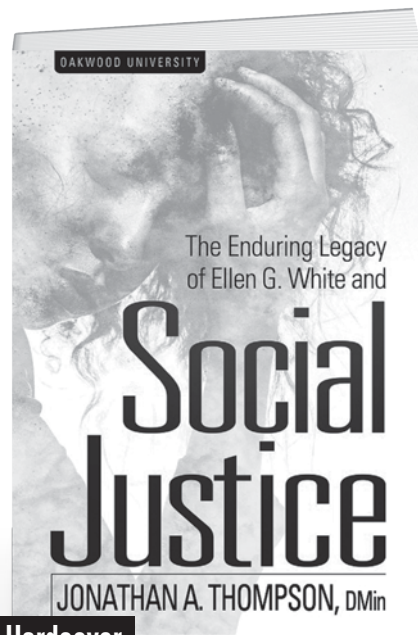
### Something New

#### What words come to your mind when you think of Ellen White—

God’s messenger, church founder, prolific writer, powerful speaker, Bible commentator? How about social-justice warrior? Is that on your list?

It’s easy to let social-justice issues be somebody else’s problem, to look the other way when it doesn’t affect you. But early Seventh-day Adventists, especially Ellen White, were heavily engaged in social issues—antislavery advocacy, health reform, dress reform, education reform. Notice any patterns?

When do we as a church take a stand? Is it only when a person’s salvation is at stake? What about when a person or group of persons are being treated without fairness or equality? At what point do the lines of spiritual intervention and social activism merge?



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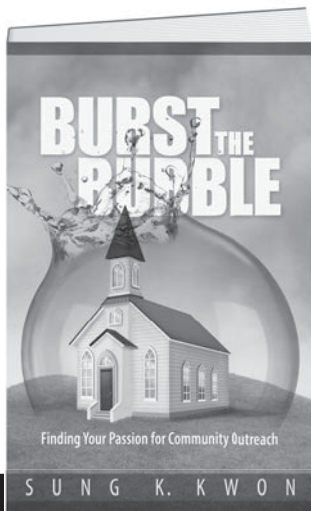


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It's not enough to stay inside the walls of a church and shout at the community, "Come and see!" Come and see what? We need to take Christ's love to the places where people are—at the mall, supermarkets, laundromats, schools, places of work, restaurants, coffee shops, and so forth. People are not coming to us; we have to go to them!

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