

# The Compassionate Savior



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 1:14, John 3, John 4; 9:1–7, Eph. 4:32, 1 John 2:12.*

**Memory Text:** “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (*Matthew 9:36, NIV*).

**Key Thought:** Jesus ever ministered to the needs of the people. What can we take away from His example that can help us do the same?

These lines from “The New Colossus,” by poet Emma Lazarus, sit on the bottom of the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Her words echo the ministry of Jesus, who said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (*Matt. 11:28, 29*).

Compassion motivated every aspect of Christ's ministry. He ministered to all types of people, regardless of their social class, gender, or race. He demonstrated unconditional love and forgiveness in His life and, most powerfully, in His death on the cross, paying in Himself the penalty for our sins.

This week we will look more at Jesus and how He ministered, learning what we can that will help us as we minister, as well.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 9.*

## Reaching the Masses

**Read** Matthew 4:25 and Luke 6:17. What two specific points do the texts make about how people responded to Jesus' ministry? Also, what do those points tell us about the effectiveness of Christ's ministry?

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There was no mass transit back then; no one jumped on a plane, in a car, or even on a bicycle to come and see Jesus. Travel back then was, in contrast to our day, painfully slow and exceedingly treacherous. Nonetheless, that did not stop "a great multitude" from coming to hear Jesus.

**What** do the following texts tell us about the motives of some of those who came to hear Jesus? *Mark 5:25–29, 6:15, John 12:9.*

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The crowds who followed Jesus had mixed motives. Some had heard that He had the words of life that He spoke with authority, and they hungered after spiritual food. Others were looking for physical healing for themselves or for friends or family. Some wanted to see for themselves if He was the promised One who would liberate them from Roman rule. Still others were mere curiosity seekers. One time the crowd was so large and pressing against Him that He had to get into a boat and teach them from a distance (*Matt. 13:2*). The crowds grew so big that the Pharisees commented, "Look how the whole world has gone after him!" (*John 12:19, NIV*).

**Write out a paragraph answering this question, What is my motive for following Jesus? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

## *The Lesson in Brief*

▶ **Key Text:** *Matthew 9:36*

▶ **The Student Will:**

**Know:** What “compassion” means in terms of Jesus as a model.

**Feel:** A desire to personally experience that kind of compassion.

**Do:** Call for a moment of silence in the class, asking each member to consider personally how “compassionate” he or she really is in terms of this week’s lesson about Jesus.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

**I. The Height and Depth of Compassion** (*Luke 11:1–13*)

Talk this case study over with the class to see what comes of the discussion:

- Someone said that their congregation was very “compassionate.” What does that mean? Is compassion simply something we feel, or is it something we do? Or both? How can we know if we truly have compassion as Jesus did?

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**II. The Personal Touch** (*Mark 1:22, 11:18, 12:37*)

**A** How is compassion related to a “personal touch”?

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**B** Ellen G. White remarked that “Men’s hearts are no softer today than when Christ was upon the earth.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 234. How do you deal with such people and still show compassion and a human touch?

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**III. Components of Compassion** (*Matt. 11:28, 29*)

In what way is forgiveness a major component of compassion?

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▶ **Summary:** Jesus, the compassionate Savior, hated sin and loved sinners. His method of ministering to people in crowds and individually should be a model for our witness today.

## The Personal Touch

People were attracted to Jesus. Mark says they listened to him “with delight” (*Mark 12:37, NIV*) and were “amazed at his teaching” (*Mark 1:22, 11:18, NIV*). He often spoke and ministered to large crowds. There was, however, another whole aspect of Christ’s ministry.

**Look up the following texts. What is the one thing they all have in common? What important message does this send to us regarding ministry? *John 3, 4, 9:1–7.***

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The foundation of Jesus’ ministry was personal contact. “He went journeying from town to town and village to village, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God” (*Luke 8:1, NEB*).

Within decades His message had spread throughout the then-known world. But it happened for one reason—the Master’s hand had personally touched lives, and those lives, particularly His 12 disciples, went on to touch others personally.

The 12 disciples had seen Jesus interact with people. They had seen the way He spoke words of comfort and encouragement to those who were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (*Matt. 9:36, NIV*). They heard Jesus say, “ ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light’ ” (*Matt. 11:28–30, NIV*).

What more attractive message could there be for people today who are stressed, burned out, and looking for comfort and peace?

**Why is the personal touch so important? How have you been blessed by those taking time to minister to you, personally, one on one? Think about ways you can use your gifts and time to minister directly, one on one, to the needs of someone else.**

## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1**—**Motivate**

In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus is described with the words: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (*Matt. 9:36, NIV*).

If Jesus had compassion on the thousands who followed Him all those centuries ago, what does He feel today for the millions who are oppressed, exploited, and marginalized?

Every day headlines scream the details of the horrific destruction caused by natural disasters and the resulting loss of life and property. Television reports chronicle tales of human misery caused by ethnic and religious hatred and intolerance and the widows, orphans, and other refugees displaced by such atrocities. Direct mail appeals solicit financial support for people caught in the endless cycle of disease, poverty, oppression, and exploitation.

When Jesus preached “ ‘the kingdom of heaven is near’ ” (*Matt. 10:7, NIV*), His deeds of compassion, ministry, and service reinforced His commitment to improving people’s quality of life now, not just sometime in the distant future.

### ► **STEP 2**—**Explore**

## Bible Commentary

### I. God With Us (*Review John 1:1–18 with your class.*)

One of the fundamental truths of Christianity is that Jesus, Himself fully God, came down to the level of fallen humanity. Theologians call that His “incarnation.” The word in John 1:14 translated “dwelt among us” (*John 1:14*) literally means that Jesus “pitched His tent” among us. In his paraphrase of the Bible, Eugene Peterson renders this verse: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (*John 1:14, The Message*).

There is, in fact, an Old Testament precedent for what Jesus did in the New Testament. The earthly sanctuary system was set up with the express purpose of allowing God to be close to His people. He told Moses, “ ‘Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them’ ” (*Exod. 25:8, NIV*).

C O N T I N U E D 

## Forgiveness

Compassion drove everything Jesus said and did. Note how often the Gospel writers say He was “filled with compassion” or “had compassion.” Sometimes this meant strongly condemning sin. At times Jesus did speak harshly to the religious leaders, but He always did it in love.

And central to that expression of compassion was forgiveness. So often Jesus taught and revealed forgiveness. Considering the essence of Christian theology, that we are sinners in need of God’s forgiveness, no wonder it is such a powerful theme in Jesus’ life and teachings.

**What** do these texts reveal to us about forgiveness? *Matt. 18:21, 22; Luke 23:34; John 8:1–11; Eph. 4:32; 1 John 2:12.*

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Jesus often likens His grace to being forgiven a great debt. Imagine you owed someone one million dollars, and they canceled the debt. Imagine how you would feel. That is what God’s grace is like. And the reason that debt has been canceled is that Jesus, Himself, paid it for us.

Also, again and again, Jesus taught that those who have been forgiven must forgive others. An unforgiving Christian is a contradiction in terms. Think of the parable of the ungrateful servant (*Matt. 18:21–34*), the story of Mary and Simon the Pharisee (*Luke 7:36–50*), and even the Lord’s Prayer—“ ‘Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us’ ” (*Luke 11:4, NIV*). When we consider what happened at the Cross, and what it cost God in order to be able to justly forgive us our sins, it is not that hard to understand why such an emphasis is placed on our learning to forgive others. Think about our world and how different a place it would be if we learned how to forgive others. Think about the difference, not only in world politics but in our own personal relations, our families, our homes, etc.

**How much resentment, anger, and bitterness resides in you because you still refuse to forgive? How can you better learn to forgive those who have done you wrong?**

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

**Consider This:** What does Jesus' incarnation (and the Old Testament sanctuary) say about God's desire to be close to His people? Think about the implications of this idea: The Creator God, the One who made the heavens and the earth, that is, all creation, chose to dwell in a human building. What does this tell us about God's love for us and His willingness to reach down and impact our lives?

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## II. He Spoke Their Language

Jesus often used parables to describe His kingdom to His followers. His listeners could easily identify with the everyday events and people He described—weddings, feasts, farmers, shepherds, fathers and sons, etc.

Unfortunately, the more theologically “sophisticated” we get, the more we debate the finer points about what it means to be a Christian and the less likely we are to be able to communicate with people who may not have the background in Christianity we have.

**Consider This:** Every specialty has its own vocabulary—carpenters, mechanics, doctors, professors, etc. How can Christians translate the principles of Christ's kingdom into language that people can understand?

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Jesus used parables to describe His kingdom. If you look at today's technology, do you see any possibilities for spreading the gospel that include, for example, stories told in the medium of film or television?

## III. They Responded

While the Gospels record several times that Jesus spoke to audiences of hundreds or thousands, there are at least as many times that He spoke to an audience of just one or two. Jesus' conversations with Nicodemus (*John 3*), the woman at the well (*John 4*), the disciples on the road to Emmaus (*Luke 24*), are all examples of when He took time to focus on His followers' individual needs.

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## God With Us

**Read** John 1:14. What are the amazing implications of that text? What does it tell us about the character of God? Think about the size and complexity of the universe as you contemplate your answer.

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In the 1700s and the 1800s, an idea arose, an outgrowth of the scientific revolution, called deism. Though it taught that God created us, this God—far from being involved in our everyday lives—has left us on our own, basically to fend for ourselves. According to this view, the world was like a clock that God wound up and then left. God created His natural laws, and we here have to live within those laws the best we can. It is like a parent who raises a child until that child is 18 and then says, “OK, Sonny, you’re on your own. I’ll never see you again. Good luck.”

But that god is not the God of the Bible, that is not Jesus Christ, who became one of us, who lived among us, who took upon Himself our humanity and in that humanity died for our sins, the God depicted in John 1:14.

The Greek word translated “dwelt,” *skenoo*, in John 1:14 means to “pitch one’s tent” or “live in a tent.” When Jesus came to this world, He did not live at a distance from the people to whom He ministered. He “pitched His tent” among them, living and working among them—relating to them at their level.

Matthew quotes Isaiah’s prophecy about a virgin giving birth to a son named Immanuel and directly applies it to Jesus. He even translates the meaning of Immanuel—“God with us” (*Matt. 1:23*).

Besides coming to die as a substitute for us, Jesus came to earth to show us exactly what God is like. On one occasion Philip asked Jesus, “‘Show us the Father.’”

**How did Jesus respond to Philip’s request (*John 14:8–11*)? What does Jesus’ answer tell us about what God is like? What aspects of that character come through very clearly? Are there some that you find disturbing? If so, what are they? Bring your concerns, if any, to class.**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

**Consider This:** The intimacy of private conversations often allows for more focused, direct communication. Yet, relationships of this kind take time to develop. Ask your class to suggest what made Jesus so effective in person-to-person conversations.

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### ► STEP 3—Practice

#### Thought Questions:

- 1 Even though God spoke often through His prophets, that was not as effective as His Son living and teaching as a man (*see Heb. 1:1, 2*). What does that say about the importance of letting Christ’s character be reflected in our lives?
- 2 What does it mean to be “in the world” but not “of the world” (*John 17:16*)? How important was it for Jesus to live among those He was trying to reach with the gospel?
- 3 When it comes to modeling the values of Christ’s kingdom, who is likely to do it better in the long run: evangelists, who live in a community for a few days or weeks? Or pastors, who live and serve parishes for years? What are the implications for those of us who want to serve our communities?

#### Application Questions:

- 1 Jesus told Philip, “ ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’ ” (*John 14:9, NIV*). How realistic is it to tell our friends, “Anyone who has seen me has seen Jesus”?
- 2 For generations Adventists have advanced the ideal of moving away from large population centers to live in rural settings. How do you reconcile Jesus’ example, as well as His words “ ‘You are the salt of the earth’ ” (*Matt. 5:13, NIV*), with that ideal? Are they contradictory? What advantages are there to country living as opposed to urban living? Or vice versa?

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## Speaking in Parables

Jesus knew how to communicate with people. His speech was aimed at their level. He did not use deep philosophical and theological language, although He spoke the most profound truth. He spoke in simple, practical terms that everyone could understand. He spoke of things that people could apply to their lives.

Jesus illustrated His teaching with objects from nature and common household items. He spoke about coins (*Luke 15:8–10*); farmers sowing seed (*Mark 4:26–29*); yeast and flour (*Matt. 13:33*); sheep (*Matt. 18:12–14*); fig trees (*Mark 13:28–32*)—and numerous other items to which the people could relate.

**Pick** a few of the parables listed above. Read them. What point was Jesus making in each case? Why were those images so appropriate? Ask yourself this: Were Jesus walking among us today, in the flesh, what images might He have used to make those same points?

As you read those parables, perhaps you noticed something about them, and that was how most, if not all, of those images would be just as appropriate today. That is, there was a timelessness, a universality, of those images that in a way paralleled the timelessness of His message.

**How** does that fact help us understand why, perhaps, Jesus used those specific images?

Matthew records several mini-parables Jesus used to try to describe what the kingdom of heaven is like. He said that the kingdom of heaven is like “a grain of mustard seed” (*Matt. 13:31*); “leaven” (*vs. 33*); “treasure hid in a field” (*vs. 44*); “a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls” (*vs. 45*); “a net” (*vs. 47*); “a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (*vs. 52*); “a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard” (*Matt. 20:1*); “a certain king, which made a marriage for his son” (*Matt. 22:2*).

**Which one of those images works best for you? Why would Jesus use so many different images to make the same point? What message could the Lord be sending us through this deliberate use of different images that could help us learn how to witness to others?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

How can we know what's best for us in our own individual circumstances?

**Witnessing**

Countless options exist for reflecting Christ's compassion to our communities and to the larger world. Examine the following and discuss their advantages and disadvantages:

- A community-based homeless shelter operated by a consortium of churches
- Adventist Community Services (Dorcas Society)
- A community-funded shelter for battered women
- Stop Smoking classes taught by church members
- Supporting a development organization in a foreign country

**► STEP 4—Apply**

The word *compassion* literally means “to feel with” or “to sympathize with.” It's not enough to say about a painful situation, “Isn't that a shame; somebody really should do something about that.” When Jesus saw that the people “were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,” He told His disciples, “‘Ask the Lord of the harvest . . . to send out workers into his harvest field’” (*Matt. 9:36, 38, NIV*). We are those workers.

This doesn't mean that we all have to preach or give Bible studies or minister to the sick. But it does mean that we have all been given gifts for spreading the gospel and building up God's kingdom. How can we, in whatever situation we are in, best use our talents for witnessing to others?

**Consider This:** In the final moments of your class, ask each person to share what gift he or she has been given to build up Christ's kingdom. Ask each person for which community or church-based outreach program does he/she plan to use that gift.

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Invite a class member to pray that members will find a way to demonstrate Christ's compassion to the community and global needs they're aware of.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Go Teach All Nations,” pp. 818–828, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“In all true teaching the personal element is essential. Christ in His teaching dealt with men individually. It was by personal contact and association that He trained the Twelve. It was in private, often to but one listener, that He gave His most precious instruction. To the honored rabbi at the night conference on the Mount of Olives, to the despised woman at the well of Sychar, He opened His richest treasures; for in these hearers He discerned the impressible heart, the open mind, the receptive spirit. Even the crowd that so often thronged His steps was not to Christ an indiscriminate mass of human beings. He spoke directly to every mind and appealed to every heart. He watched the faces of His hearers, marked the lighting up of the countenance, the quick, responsive glance, which told that truth had reached the soul; and there vibrated in His heart the answering chord of sympathetic joy.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 231.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Since 1983, the majority of new Adventist congregations around the world have been established by Global Mission pioneers (for more information, visit <http://www.adventistmission.org>). These Adventist lay people live among the people to whom they are ministering at the same socioeconomic level. Why do you think they have had so much success?
- ❷ As a class, discuss your answers to the questions at the end of Sunday’s and Wednesday’s lessons.
- ❸ As we saw, it was the personal touch that was so central to Jesus’ ministry. In what ways did someone’s personal touch influence you to accept Jesus? Share your stories and then ask yourselves, How can we as a local church work better to minister to people’s needs on a personal level?
- ❹ Because of Jesus’ example of love and acceptance, should we accept anybody to worship in our church—no matter what their lifestyle?

**Summary:** Jesus, the compassionate Savior, hated sin and loved sinners. His method of ministering to people in crowds and individually should be the model for our witness today. Because of the salvation we have received through Him, we can extend His love and forgiveness to others.