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# **Reaching Out Together!**

**# 928-B**

**Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs**

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We serve a God who is faithful. He is faithful to love us. He is faithful to provide for us. He is faithful to discipline us (when we need it) and He is faithful to test us, especially when we seriously ask Him to do so. In the last lesson, some of us did that. Perhaps we were not sure what we were asking, but some of us said once again to God, as we have said so often in this class, “Lord, we see what your will is; we have knowledge. We see what our needs are; we have understanding. Now Lord, test us; see if we will allow you to turn knowledge into wisdom in our lives.”

The issue was learning to reach out and touch someone; learning to demonstrate practically how to love life’s unlovables, how to touch life’s untouchables. We looked at the life Jesus lived. We walked alongside the Master for a few short days of His ministry and saw that His priorities were people. For the most part, we saw they were the people we so often walk away from, walk around, or at best mail checks to, rather than having to become personally involved in their lives.

We asked God last week to redesign our schedules to more perfectly conform to His; and we laughingly said—if He were to do that—at eight o’clock on Monday morning, there would be someone to cross our paths... someone we would not normally reach out and touch... and we would have to stop and deal with them, hopefully the way the Master did.

I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is— God was faithful. I mean literally faithful. At eight o’clock on Monday morning, the front door of our store opened and a young man walked in who was definitely one of life’s downtrodden discards. He was mentally retarded. He had only the clothes on his back. He needed a bath badly. He had no friends. He was running away from another city and the circumstances life had placed him in. He was lonely. He was confused.

Terry, a young man who was present when we agreed to ask God to test us, was there when the young man walked in. I was

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outside, and he rushed out to where I was standing, tapped me on the shoulder, and said, “Russell, the guy you’re supposed to reach out and touch just walked in. You’d better come see.” That’s the good news. God was faithful. There is some more good news. God, in Terry, was faithful. He gave himself away to that young man for three days.

The bad news is that while I did not refuse to help, my inner spirit still struggled dreadfully against real involvement. I was not opposed to buying him a meal. I was opposed to TAKING him for a meal. I was not opposed to reaching out. But I was afraid, in a real sense, to touch.

Now I don’t tell you that to discourage you or convince you that your teacher has a hard time practicing what he preaches. Everyone who knows me already knows that. I tell you that to remind you that God is faithful and that He tests us to change us. Now I know a lot more about how tough it’s really going to be; but you see, that doesn’t mean we give up. On the contrary, when you get a C- on a test, it doesn’t mean you quit the course. It means you get on with it. Another test is coming and another. Our objective is to finish the course with joy... faithfully!!

The rest of my week involved a lot of reaching and touching, too. My grades weren’t all that bad, but they weren’t all that good, either. But, oh, the faithfulness our God is in spite of our unfaithfulness. He uses us, He touches us, and through us, somehow, He manages still to reach out and touch a hungry, hurting world. That, you remember, is what this whole segment of our study is all about—reaching out and touching in Jesus’ name.

We continue our pilgrimage in this lesson through the principles involved in learning to give our lives away with a lesson entitled “Reaching Out Together.” Our outline looks like this:

- I- Why do we do it?
- II- Whom do we touch?
- III- What makes us fail?
- IV- When the body moves as one

We begin by asking ourselves, “Why do we do it?” Why give our lives away? It isn’t natural. It isn’t fun. It isn’t easy. Then why not just go with the flow, do what comes naturally, take the easy way out? Why upset the applecart of evangelical exclusivism?

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Why not just concern ourselves with our own needs, our own growth, our own church, our own comforts, and in the process release just enough of ourselves to demonstrate that, compared to the world, we care. Why abandon ourselves for others? Why give ourselves away? My friends, you give yourself away for three reasons.

1- Because Jesus did! He held back nothing. No one in history ever gave so much for so many with so little in return. Jesus—God demonstrating His presence in human form—did nothing to please Himself. He lived His entire life so He could die; that by dying, we might live. And even on the way to dying, His every act of living was an act of giving. There is no question about the character of God where giving Himself away is concerned. That's the very meaning of the word "grace". He gave everything for those who had earned nothing so that everyone who wanted to could have all of God for all of eternity. That, my friend, is giving. Reason number one is clear. We must learn to give ourselves away because Jesus did.

Secondly, we must learn to give our lives away because Jesus said to. After He had washed the disciples' feet in John, chapter 13, Jesus, in essence, turned to them and said, "Here is the reality of living. I am the Master—and yet I am here to serve in the most menial way. If that's my calling, what do you think yours is?"

For I have given you an example—that you should do as I have done for you. The servant is not greater than His Lord, neither is He that sent greater than He that sent Him. If ye know these things, happy are ye that do them.

(John 13:15)

God did not send His Son into the world only to show us what God could do. He sent Him to demonstrate what God could do in a man, then He graciously sent His Spirit so that each of us could have the capacity to see Him reproduce His life in us, to the degree we would choose to let Him. That's why He could say, "He that chooses to save His life will lose it. But whoever chooses to give it away, (turn loose of it, relinquish claim over it for my sake), He'll find what life is really all about." We have no choice. Jesus did it. Jesus told us to do it.

And thirdly, Jesus said not only did I give myself away, and not only did I tell you to do the same, I am telling you that each

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time you do, every act of kindness, every act of unselfishness, every act of vulnerability is in essence a form of worship. Every time you give yourself away, Jesus said, you give me a blessing. Every time you reach out and touch someone in My name, Jesus said, you are reaching out and touching Me, worshipping Me, honoring Me, blessing Me. When you do those things, even to the least of these, you are, in reality, ministering unto Me. There is not a one of us that does not, at least in our better moments, claim to place as the primary desire of our hearts to please the heart of God. Jesus says, "Here's how you do it. You give yourself away and, in particular, you give yourself to those with the greatest needs." When you do, the Master reminds us, you are giving yourself away to Him.

So I believe our calling is clear. In our last study, we followed Jesus through a few days of his earthly pilgrimage and saw validated through the pages of Scripture how God spent His time on earth. He found those with the greatest needs, and He met their need so they could come to know that the very nature of God is love. Then He demonstrated that the very Love that had touched them, cared enough to die for them so they could be reconciled to a God who cares. He touched them so they would listen; then He told them who Love was and how Love had died for their sins. Jesus gave us a pattern for evangelism—a pattern called reaching out and touching by first meeting obvious needs in order to meet life's real needs, the needs of the Spirit.

So the reason for our reaching is threefold. Jesus did it. Jesus told us to do it, and Jesus said when we do, we are blessing Him, ministering to Him, reaching out to Him. We need spend no more time determining the will of God in this matter. The will of God is that we reach out and touch the lives God sends into our worlds. So that much is clear.

Our objective is to reach out, but to whom? I want to remind you that I believe God has clearly defined our priorities where ministering to needs are concerned. They are two-fold. We are to reach out to the needy, and we are to reach out to the body of Christ. Thus, we are especially to reach out to the needy who are in the body, first Jerusalem, then Samaria and then the world.

First let's define the needy. We did that to some degree in our pursuit of Proverbs previously. So let's just list them and remind ourselves of the priorities God places on each of them.

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We are not listing them in the order of their importance; I believe their importance may vary according to the burden God places in individual lives. All of them constitute the needy.

1- The poor- By this we mean the penniless, the destitute, the down and out. In Matthew 25:36, Jesus said when we feed the hungry, we feed Him; when we clothe the naked, we clothe Him. In Matthew 19:16, a searcher who had many possessions came to Jesus wanting to know God's will for Him, and Jesus told him to sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor and then come and follow Him. As we said in the first lesson, Jesus isn't calling each of us to do that; but he is calling all of us to be willing and to express that willingness by giving away all that we are willing to give to those who by virtue of circumstances beyond their control do not have even the necessities of life.

2- The orphans and widows- James 1:27 reminds us that real spirituality can be measured by a man or woman's active concern for visiting the orphan and the widow (those who have seen the family unit destroyed and need the bigger family of God to move in) reaching out to touch them with the kind of love only a family can give. And God has determined to take a special interest in the lives of orphans and widows. In Psalm 10 we read,

But you O God do see trouble and grief; you consider it to  
take it in hand, (Psalm 10:14)

The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.

You hear O, Lord, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more. (Psalm 10:17 NIV)

We get a further glimpse of the character and concern of God in Psalm 146 as well.

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord, his God,

the maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them-the LORD who remains faithful forever. Now look at the evidences of His faithfulness.

He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free.

The Lord gives sight to the blind, He lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous,

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The Lord watches over the alien, and sustains the fatherless  
and the widow, but He frustrates the ways of the wicked.  
(Psalm 146:5-8 NIV)

God not only cares about the orphan and the widow. He has determined to become their special guardian. He has agreed to be as a father to the fatherless, and as a husband to the widow in her affliction. As their special, unique, guardian, God does not take it lightly when His own children take lightly their needs and their hurts. The church has special responsibilities where widows and orphans are concerned; and it seems that most Christians read those passages and forget who the church is. It's us!! And it's about time we each individually and all collectively accepted the responsibility that the needs of the widows and the fatherless are our needs; and our loving God, their personal guardian, is waiting for us to exercise our faith by doing something about it.

3- The lame and the blind- These are mentioned so many times in Scripture that to defend God's special concern for those who cannot physically compete is not even worth the time. Jesus addressed a large percentage of His time on earth to finding and touching the blind, the deaf, and the lame. They are God's special recipients of special grace. And while He may not often choose to relieve them of their physical affliction, He rather chooses often the better part of increasing the capacity of the physically blind to see the things of the Spirit, and of taking the lame and teaching them personally how to walk with God, teaching the deaf to hear His Word. The lame, the blind, and the deaf are special to God. He gives them special love gifts—deeper insights into Himself—and He personally sees that their needs are met. He expects us, individually and corporately, to do the same.

4- The prisoner- Matthew 25:36 once again pays a special tribute to the prisoner. It says that just to visit them is to visit God. It isn't always to release them from prison, but it is always to release the love of God that allows men and women in the Spirit to be truly free. We have a number of prisoners in different prisons across the country who receive these lessons. I want to stop and say to them "We love you." And oh, the letters you write...proclaiming how Jesus has set you free! What a blessing they are to those of us outside those prison walls. Paul and Silas in Acts 16 gave us a perfect picture of a prison ministry. Read it. And Paul, perhaps the greatest preacher who ever lived, actually rejoiced that God had entrusted to Him in Philippians chapter

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one, the ministry of living and giving and if need be dying in prison. God allowed him to be bound, so he could set men free. How many of you pray regularly for those who are imprisoned? How many visit them when you can? How many even write letters of encouragement? God loves the prisoner. And oh, how He loves the ones who, regardless of the reason for their imprisonment, have found in the process the reality of being free.

5- God loves the sick, those whose bodies are wracked with disease and pain. Paul said they are becoming the recipients of a special kind of strength, a strength that is made perfect only in weakness. They may not be poor. They may not be lame. They may not be blind or deaf. They may just be suffering; and they need to know someone else is hurting, just because they hurt.

6- God has a special place in His heart for the grieving, those who have become separated from loved ones through the temporary veil of death. We often avoid contact with them because we don't know what to say. But God goes to them and gives Himself to them in a way that defies explanation. There is grace for the bereaved that man cannot even describe. But so often, when the immediate shock and the funeral is over, we pass over their hurts and move on, leaving them to the long process of healing without any real continuous concern. Look at how Jesus cared about those who were bereaved. Read John, chapter 11 and Luke, chapter 7. See how the heart of Jesus beats for those whose lives have just been touched by the agony of death. See how He reaches out and touches those who remain behind. See how He weeps as they weep. See how He cares that they're hurting. We often make announcements that so-and-so lost a loved one this week with the same feeling that we announce a committee meeting or choir practice, and we wonder why men wonder, how much God really cares.

There are others. Scripture pays special tribute to the lonely, to the stranger—the one who is not settled in his normal environment; to the disturbed—those who emotionally are not able to control their responses to life. The elderly hold a special place in the heart of God. We know that from His instructions for their care. The victim of unexpected trauma is of special concern to God—we know that from His treatment of the Good Samaritan. Anyone and everyone who finds himself or herself disadvantaged, rejected, abandoned, lonely, hurting, grieving, crying, seeking, dying, hysterical, or persecuted God reaches

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down from Heaven with gallons of grace and touches them, and then He turns in love to His children, and says “Now you go, and in my name, touch them, too.”

This is the essence of evangelism: meeting the needs of the needy to demonstrate the love of a God who cares, who cared enough to send the very best, His Only begotten Son, that whosoever seeing that Love and receiving that Son, might have as a permanent unfading eternal possession: life everlasting. God says to each of us and to all of us, I care about the needy; that means you care about the needy as well.

But God has another special interest group in Scripture that we are commanded not to ignore in any way. Not only are we to minister to the needy, we are to minister to the body: the body of Christ at large, and that part of the body of Christ to which we have committed ourselves in particular. In Galatians Paul writes this:

And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not.

As we have therefore, opportunity, let us do well unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:9,10)

Beck translates it

So then, whenever we have an opportunity let us practice doing good to everybody, but especially to the members of the family of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

Ken Taylor’s Living Bible reads like this

That’s why whenever we can; we should always be kind to everyone, and especially to our Christian brothers. (Galatians 6:10 TLB)

It is true that a large percentage of the admonitions in the New Testament to give yourself away have to do with giving yourself within the framework of the Body of Christ. And yet we are told to love as Christ loved—and His love prompted Him to give Himself for the whole world, even to those who rejected His offer of grace.

The key is that it isn’t either/or, it’s one before. It isn’t they or them, it’s they before them. We are to minister to both, but our first priority—should we have to choose—is to meet the needs of those within our spiritual family. Because this is how those

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*outside* our spiritual family know we love God, by the love we have one for another. New Testament believers had all things in common. They reached out to the world, but they didn't have all things in common with the world. They gave what they could to the lost. But they first gave everything they had to each other.

So, our priorities ought to be, first of all, to meet the needs of the needy in the body; then the needy in the community, as well as the lesser needs in the body. But you cannot help seeing that when anyone in the fellowship of the Saints has a real need, it becomes the responsibility of the whole Body to meet that need.

So much for why we reach out and to whom. Next question. Why don't we? Why are we so clearly commanded to give ourselves away, and yet we so often, in overt rebellion to the clear Word of God, withdraw within ourselves and refuse? I thought about that this week, especially after my own poor performance, and I would like to share with you just a few reasons I believe our hearts don't hurt, our hands don't reach, and we don't touch the way we should.

Bear with me, please, as we just touch on the reasons we do not touch the lives God sends our way with needs.

First of all, I believe the primary reason we do not reach out, both as individuals and as churches, is because we are preoccupied with ourselves. Jesus told us to die to ourselves every day. Paul told us to consider every other living person as more important than ourselves. Yet Satan has devised a clever scheme. As evangelicals we have a healthy, Scriptural desire to know Christ and to grow. This is in harmony with the Word. So Satan, knowing that this is God's way of equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry, tries to make it an end within itself when he simply cannot prevent it from happening. And we who are being trained in godliness so we can become instructors in the faith become perennial students instead. Learning becomes our god. Knowledge becomes our reason for living. We forget, in our quest for knowledge, that wisdom is where it's at. That real spirituality, as James reminded us this morning, is to take the faith you've received and demonstrate it by visiting the fatherless and the widow in their affliction. Even spiritual growth can become a god.

The church was never meant to take the searchlight of truth and use it as soft lighting on the church lawn. It was meant to

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be a lantern we carry out into the dark highways of life where Satan has gained strongholds. We are to shine the light in the darkness. We are to watch the darkness flee. Another ploy of Satan in making us preoccupied with ourselves is to make us preoccupied with our past. We become soul-searching saints who stop searching for souls because we're living in the past. We are harboring hurts, digging up the bones of our lives that by now have decayed and focusing too long on why they smell. Paul said,

...forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13,14)

We are to forget the past. We are to forsake our own pleasures, and we are to lay aside our robes of self-righteousness sewn of the fabric of pride over our own spiritual growth or accomplishments and go out into a lost, hungry, lonely world and touch the lives of those who are crying. If we're not careful, even our prayer meetings become "meet my needs" meetings. Even our share times become times of self-centered spirituality, rather than being a time of honestly communicating how we can pray together and give together to meet together the needs of someone else. The lost world is not interested in how much you've grown or how neat your church is. They want to know what God has to offer them. Unless we hush and listen long enough to know what they're asking for, and stop and look long enough to see why they're crying, we'll babble on and miss the mark.

The Christian life was meant to be an investment. You and I were to take what Christ had invested in us, and re-invest it in the lives of others. The parable of the talents explains how God feels about it, but often we are more interested in standing around and re-counting our treasures than we are in giving them away to a dying world, with the confidence that the God who gave them to us will multiply them in the process. So problem number one is that we become preoccupied with ourselves. One of the best cures is to become preoccupied with meeting other's needs, then all of a sudden yours become secondary.

A second reason we fail to become involved is confusion over what constitutes success. We have mixed our theology with the world's philosophy and come up with a world/word concept of

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success. God measures success by people; we measure success by possessions and power. Paul said he finally realized what His rewards were all about. He finally realized people were his ultimate crown. They were what he was living for. Is that what you're living for? If not, no wonder you cannot give your life away. You don't understand why you're here.

Thirdly, we fail to give ourselves away because we misunderstand God's concept of recognition. In Matthew chapter 6, verses 1-18, Jesus explains that you cannot get recognition both in this life and in the next for the same deed. What you seek recognition for here becomes final here. What you seek to do only for Jesus' glory here becomes a tribute to you in glory, and there isn't much "glory" in giving your life away. So unless you understand God's concept of recognition, you won't do it.

Fourthly, we fail to identify with people. Paul said in II Corinthians 1 that one reason God allows us to pass through certain trials in this life is to give us the ministry of identification. It works like this. If you are blind, you can identify with blind people. You understand. You can minister to them as no one else can. When you say, "Hey I know how you feel," they believe you. If you've passed through family difficulties or physical afflictions or bereavement or the loss of a job or a terrible accident, what God has done for you by giving you grace is to equip you to hand off the baton of that grace to someone who is passing through *exactly* the same trial. So you have a special ministry already. It's to go to those who are hurting from similar trials that you've been through.

You can reach out and touch them like no one else can. It's called the ministry of identification. But if you avoid them to prevent becoming vulnerable or opening up old wounds or suffering new rejection, you are failing to become good stewards of the manifold grace of God. The only other reasons I can think of that we wouldn't get involved is either because we think God's kidding, that it's really not that important to Him, or that we simply don't care ourselves whether or not we please the heart of God.

The final part of our study has to deal with perhaps the key that unlocks the door to giving our lives away. It has to do with the church acting as one in reaching out to meet needs. Many have been saying, I want to reach out, but my path simply does

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not cross the paths of those you have been describing. My life is insulated from their hurts. Others have been saying, "I've tried to reach out, but I just don't know how to begin." Still others have said, "I would like to have a ministry to those with needs, but there's no way to follow-up or know where they are" and still others have added, "My talents and my area of identification are thus and so, and how am I going to run into people with just those needs?" The answer, I believe, lies in the Body of Christ acting as one.

The best solution is for the local fellowship, the church, to organize or structure a way for those who worship there to be able to meet needs under the umbrella or leadership of the church. Then all of the above complaints can be answered.

For instance, you may not cross the path of those with needs, but your church does; so if you become available to them, then you are plugged in immediately to where those needs are. Secondly, if you just don't know how to begin, the church can train you and take you and show you how to meet needs. Thirdly, the church can set up a system of follow-up, and you can be a part of it. And fourthly, the church can come to know the gifts, the talents, and the personal experiences of its people and thus place you in the life of someone who can best identify with and be ministered to by you.

Now, not every church is equipped to do that, and not every church wants to do that. But if your church will, or does, then you can begin by making yourself available. If your church doesn't, you can begin by approaching your Pastor and asking him if you could help begin such a work, starting small, and simply being available to recruit and direct the meeting of needs. If your church won't or can't, then you can begin by either finding a Christian organization in your area that does that and volunteering to help or by just getting a few of your Christian friends together and beginning to find and meet needs on your own, first within your own group—then beyond. You may want to begin by just enlisting your Sunday School class or Bible study group to agree to meet each other's needs and together meet the needs of those your group comes in contact with.

If none of the above fits you, then just get alone with God and tell Him you want to be available, but see no way to do it. He'll take care of the rest, I can promise you. He may send

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them to your door the way He did with me this week, or to your telephone, but God delights in giving you people to minister to in Jesus' name.

One reason the church is the church is that we need each other. Now I would hasten to add that none of these activities are to take the place of receiving the Word and applying it to our lives. They are not substitutes for Sunday School or Home Bible Studies or Discipleship Groups or Accountability Groups. They are to be the *result* of those things, the outward expressions of what we are learning.

I would like to explain some possible ministries that are working in many churches. The whole idea is that we reach out together. Let me share with you, once again, some of those ministries. You might call them "Agape Ministries."

1- Nursing Home Ministries- Here is a way to meet and befriend the sick and the elderly. No training is needed. You can simply go and be a friend, visit, talk, sing, lead singing, help with chores, or do whatever is needed, in Jesus' name. Many churches have such a program, and God uses them mightily. Here's something everyone can do to reach out and touch people who, for the most part, feel forgotten, and many of whom are in the sunset years of their lives without Jesus Christ.

2- Hospital Visitation Ministry- The purpose here is for people just to be available to assist the church staff (when needed) to go to the hospitals and visit the sick, and when necessary and long hospital stays are involved, to spend longer periods of times spelling family members by taking their place for a few hours. No training is needed. The gift of mercy is an asset, but the gift of availability is all you have to have.

3- Meal Preparation Ministry- The purpose of this group is to be available to cook and, when possible, deliver meals to families whose lives have been interrupted by sickness, death, or separation, and who have no convenient way to receive home-cooked meals. What a testimony these people have. It may seem insignificant to you, but when the family of one who has passed away sees total strangers reaching out and touching them, serving them, feeding them, they want to know who these people are and why these people care. Reach out and touch someone by cooking, God will honor it.

4- Moving And Furniture Ministry- The purpose of this group

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is to reach out and touch someone who needs help moving, or who is in need of furniture and can't afford to buy new things. We, as a church, have a storage area filled with used furniture that has been donated, and when a family has a need for a sofa or a bed or a lamp or table we try to meet that need. Usually God has sent us just what they needed. The moving ministry is another way to bear testimony to family and neighbors and at the same time meet real needs. The motto: "Have Christ, will travel."

5- Transportation Ministry- The purpose of this ministry is two-fold. 1) To provide transportation to the elderly or others who cannot come to church or go shopping, or make it to the doctor on their own, and 2) To provide used cars for people in the fellowship who have lost their transportation and are unable at the present time to replace it.

6- Newcomer Welcoming Ministry- The goal is to provide a people-link between the newcomer and the church by being available to be a "big brother" or "big sister" to someone who knows virtually no one.

7- "Mobile Missions" Ministry- It's purpose is to organize a team of musicians, teachers, audio-visual people, etc. to go out into the nursing homes and old-folks homes and orphanages and prisons with programs that will both entertain and present Christ at the same time. This group would be at the disposal of the other groups to help them meet needs by using their talents to reach out and touch lives.

8- Hospitality Ministry- people who are willing to open their homes to individuals, couples, or small groups just for an evening now and then, in an effort to allow those who are new in the Body, or those who do not yet know a lot of people, to build relationships.

9- Service Corps Ministry- The purpose of this group is to meet physical needs by actually sending forth laborers to do painting, fixing, mowing, mending, whatever is needed... primarily for widows, single parents, and others in the Church who are not able to do these things for themselves; what a testimony this group has. And oh, how you retired people can help! I heard just this week about a group called RVICS—Roving Volunteers in Christ's Service—comprised of retired couples who travel around the country in recreational vehicles making, themselves

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available for weeks at a time just to help meet the needs of other ministries.

10- The Emergency Child Care- This group's role is to provide baby-sitting in short-term situations where emergencies have caused parents to be unable to care for their children, either in your home or theirs. That's reaching out! Other possibilities include:

A medical helps team to assist families and the elderly who cannot afford to seek adequate medical help, either by clinic or referral.

A legal helps team to assist those in the Body who need Christian legal counsel but cannot afford it.

A prisons ministry support team to help those who are ministering in jails and prisons by accompanying them or by writing letters or helping with follow-up.

A jobs assistance team to help those who are unemployed to draw up resumes, find areas of vocational interest, and to actually assist in locating jobs whenever possible.

In addition, an "Agape Helps Fund" should always be available to provide financial assistance within reasonable limits to help those who are disadvantaged to get back on their feet again, or in a few cases, to offer longer-term help where necessary.

These are not new ideas. Other churches and church groups have these plus clothing ministries, food pantries, orphanages, half-way houses, and dozens more. The organization of it is not the issue. The issue is that you and I have a responsibility. It is to reach out and touch the lives of a hurting world. We know it's our task because Jesus did it. We know it's our task because Jesus told us to do it, and we know it's our task because Jesus told us that when we minister to others in need, we are worshipping and blessing Him. We know it's what God wants us to do. We know who He wants us to touch, too. Among others, we are commanded to pay special attention to the hungry, the poor, the orphan, the widow, the lame, the blind, the prisoner, the sick, the grieving, the lonely, the stranger, and the elderly.

These people are special to God, and, therefore, ought to be special to us. We call them "the needy". But secondly, we are to reach out to the Body. In other words we are to do good to all men, but *especially* those of the household of faith. So we must

## Reaching Out Together!

pay even closer attention to those with these needs who are in our own church family or even in the church family at large. But we resist it, don't we? *Why?*

1- Because we are preoccupied with ourselves

2- Because we are confused about what constitutes success, so we spend our time doing the wrong things.

3- Because we misunderstand God's concept of recognition, and we wait to minister until we are noticed, thus losing the very rewards we are seeking.

4- Because we fail to identify with people. We forget that every experience in our lives has been allowed by God to equip us to identify with the needs of others who are now experiencing the same kinds of trials.

Sometimes we're willing, but we don't know how, or can't find the people, or lack training, or follow-up, or the ability to find a way to match our lives with needs we can meet. But God hasn't called us to minister alone. He has a sea of people who are just like we are. He calls them His Church. So the sum total of it all is that we can begin today if we are willing to begin reaching out together.

We're going to leave this subject for awhile, or, at least, this aspect of it. I know many of you are relieved. But we'd best not forget the principles; and we'd best not forget our priorities.

My friend, this is Christianity. Christianity is not simply groups of believers huddling together in little clusters to feed themselves spiritually and physically, and then go their ways and try to hang on until they get together again. Christianity is a Person. His name is JESUS CHRIST. His plan is for believers to come together to be trained at the church to go out from the church and do the work of the ministry. If His Life and His Teachings are to be our example, then the work of the ministry involves going where people are and meeting their needs.

I believe God has been saying to some of us these past three lessons: "It's time to open your eyes; everywhere people are crying." I believe He has been saying as well, "Look at my Son". The answer is not just to see these people crying. The answer is to reach out and touch them—touch their lives where their needs are—in order to demonstrate that you belong to a God who cares, a God who cries, a God who loves, a God who gives,

## Reaching Out Together!

a God who gave Himself away, so you and they could have life everlasting. The purpose of it all is that men and women come to know Him whom to know aright is life eternal.

You might call it lifestyle evangelism. You might call it Christian Concerns. You might call it Agape ministering. You might call it Personal Involvement. You might call it The Body of Christ in Action. You might call it a Christian Service Corps. I believe I would just call it *Normal Christianity!* For all that it is—is Jesus Christ living His life in the Christian's life doing what He has always done, giving Himself away. Reaching out, touching, caring, giving, loving.

When we act as we ought to act as a church, all we are doing is what ought to come naturally. We are simply reaching out together.

### REACHING OUT TOGETHER

Reaching out together,  
God's message the Body heeds;  
Together finding where people hurt,  
Together meeting their needs.

Together touching each other's lives  
Showing the love of Christ;  
Together caring, together sharing  
Together paying the price.

Reaching out together,  
Declaring the love of God's son  
By reaching down and meeting needs  
And moving together as one.

Beloved, let's go together,  
Touching lives day by day.  
The Body of Christ—together  
Giving its self away!!!

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