

**Special Needs Ministries**  
**Sabbath School Program**  
[Esther M. Doss, NAD]

**Scripture Focus**

1 Corinthians 12:4-27

**Suggested Hymns**

No. 12 Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee

No. 532 Day By Day

No. 181 Does Jesus Care?

**Opening Hymn**

No. 183 I Will Sing of Jesus' Love

**Comments**

As we read in the four gospels about how Jesus walked among us here on earth, we see again and again how our Lord was touched by those suffering all around Him. We are told that Jesus was moved with compassion as he touched the lepers and the blind as He healed them. He was even moved with compassion as He looked over a large crowd of four thousand men, not including the women and children. They stayed with Jesus for three days without food and were quite hungry. He was concerned about their hunger pains and performed a miracle to ease that pain.

How difficult it must have been for Jesus as He walked among the suffering on earth. He had created earth to be a dazzling jewel in the heavens. Joy and wonder filled the hearts of Adam and Eve. But Satan had hijacked this planet and sin brought in pain, death, and sorrow. Jesus' heart must have ached terribly as he saw the sick, the hurting, the hungry, the dying, the tears, and so much more. His precious children were suffering.

Two thousand years later, we still experience much suffering. In fact, we have become so accustomed to life on this sinful planet that we do not think much about bruises, stubbed toes, the common cold, feeling tired, or even wilted flowers. But this was not to be normal in God's original plan for our world. In fact, none of these were in existence on this earth when it was made. We are all broken people living in a broken world.

Each one of us is suffering from brokenness. Even right here in our very church we are broken in different ways: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. But because we have become so accustomed to living in this abnormal world, many of us seem to think that we are quite normal and notice those around us who are different from ourselves. We notice those who are blind, deaf, unable to walk, or have misshapen bodies. We see those who struggle

with the loneliness of losing a spouse or are left without a father and mother. And we might notice those who take care of family members touched by a disability.

Truthfully, we are surrounded by much brokenness. In fact, more than one billion people around the world experience some type of disability. In addition, among us are those who are orphaned and widowed. All these people indeed do have special needs.

Sadly, we are too often uncomfortable around those that we see different from ourselves. Perhaps we are afraid. Perhaps we feel awkward and unsure of what to do or say. Maybe we are afraid of making a commitment of some kind. Perhaps we have uglier thoughts. But we need to consider the reality. And this reality is that each single one of us is a child of God, no matter how broken we appear. And those with disabilities or special needs are among those who are the apple of His eye.

We need to remember that we are more than just broken bodies. We are living souls with tremendous value. Jesus showed how much we are worth to Him by leaving behind all that He had and dying the second death for us. And we know that one day soon Jesus is going to return to put an end to this world as we know it. And the bodies that we have now will be replaced by new and glorious ones. So, as we see one another, let us look beyond these temporary bodies that we have.

We need to look at each other as precious and unique individuals that we truly are. As we learn to cherish each other and deepen our love for one another, our fears, awkwardness and whatever in our hearts that separate us will fade away.

For this reason, we have Special Needs Ministries in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This ministry focuses on an enormous number of people. Its aim is to strengthen those who are blind, deaf, orphans, and those with mental health and mobility challenges. And it also includes providing support for caregivers of those with special needs.

More than loving one another, we need to also remember the theme of Special Needs Ministries, *All are gifted, needed and treasured*. This statement reminds us that God did not forget to give spiritual gifts to those with special needs. In fact, many of their gifts are truly distinctive. And we need those gifts within the mission of our church. We may remember that Paul wrote:

*“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Romans 12:4-5 NKJV).*

Perhaps we have not considered how the church body, just as in a person’s physical body, can experience a disability. The church needs each one of us. If we do not combine our special God-given skills and gifts and be ONE body, then the church body itself becomes disabled.

*“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the foot, ‘I don’t need you!’ No! Those parts of the body that seem to be the weaker are really necessary. And the parts of the body we think are less deserving are the parts to which we give the most honor. We give special respect to the parts we want to hide. The more respectable parts of our body need no special care. But God put the body together and gave more honor to the parts that need it so our body would not be divided. God wanted the different parts to care the same for each other. If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it. Or if one part of our body is honored, all the other parts share its honor. Together you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of that body” (1 Corinthians 12:21-27 NCV).*

So, each one of us is a unique part of the body. And we are all needed. Our church body needs all its members to do what they have been gifted to do, no matter how big or small that may be. If we fail to encourage a member to serve the Lord, then we fail to enable the church body.

To those of you who have special needs or may feel insignificant, Paul wrote:

*“The human body has many parts. The foot might say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not part of the body.’ But saying this would not stop the foot from being a part of the body. The ear might say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not part of the body.’ But saying this would not stop the ear from being a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, it would not be able to hear. If the whole body were an ear, it would not be able to smell. If each part of the body were the same part, there would be no body. But truly God put all the parts, each one of them, in the body as he wanted them. So then there are many parts, but only one body” (1 Corinthians 12:14-20 NCV).*

How differently would we view the giftedness of our brothers and sisters touched by disability if we had this perspective. We need to remember to not only to welcome these brothers and sisters into the church family but let them know that they belong and are a real part of the body of Christ.

God has a purpose for each member of the church, including those with special needs. But too often we overlook those with disabilities or other needs as we look for those who can contribute to the life and mission of the church.

We need to train our thinking to engage those with special needs. Their way of doing church activities or outreach may be unlike what most of us are used to. That is because their approach to life is different than others’. And just because it is different does not mean that it is wrong. In fact, it is this uniqueness that may make the ministry of the church much more effective.

As Jesus was moved with compassion, we should be compassionate with one another. The word compassion comes from a latin word *compati* which means “suffer with.” Other words for compassion include: empathy, fellow feeling, care, concern, warmth, love, tenderness, mercy and kindness. The words with the opposite meaning for compassion include indifference and even cruelty.

*“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous” (1 Peter 3:8 NKJV).*

Let us be like Jesus who was moved with compassion. Let us treat those with special needs with warmth, love, concern, care and kindness. Let us not be caught being indifferent toward our fellow members of the church body. Let us truly love one another. And as we do, the world will know that we are indeed Christians, disciples of Jesus.

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35 NKJV).*

### **Closing Hymn**

No. 350 Blest Be the Tie That Binds

### **Suggested Ideas for Sabbath School:**

- Identify those in the congregation who are disabled and have special talents that can be used during the Sabbath School program. Perhaps they can lead song service, play an instrument, read the Sabbath School comments, or lead in a discussion.
- Ask those with various special needs if they would be interested in sharing about their life. Be careful to not embarrass them. But let them know that the church family would like to know them in a deeper way. What are some of the challenges or difficulties that they face in everyday life? What has brought them great joy? What are some of the difficulties they experience in the church? What would help them sense that they are loved and embraced as a part of the family of God? What might a person say or do that might be offensive? What would be helpful?
- Read the following written by Ellen G. White:  
“I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. This is God’s test of our character” (Vol. 3, Testimonies to the Church, p. 511). How could this test prove our characters as individuals and as churches? How might this concept change the way you and this church treat those who have special needs?

- Discuss 1 Corinthians 12:4-27 and Paul's image of the church family to that of a human body. How important is each member of the church? If muscles are not used, they weaken. How would a weakened hand impact the body? Is a church with a strong body more effective in its mission?
- Discuss why we sometimes are uncomfortable or shy away from people that we think are different from ourselves. Dig deep to find the core issue within our own hearts and our way of thinking.
- Discuss what it means for Christians to love one another (John 13:35-35 and 1 John 4:7).