

Reach Out *and* **Help**

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Karen, who beautifully and consistently reaches out
to help those in our family and ministry.

REACH OUT AND HELP

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Contents

	Introduction	7
<i>Lesson</i>	1 Everyone Has Needs	9
<i>Lesson</i>	2 My Responsibility to Meet Needs	21
<i>Lesson</i>	3 Meeting Needs in My Home	33
<i>Lesson</i>	4 Meeting Needs in My Church	45
<i>Lesson</i>	5 Meeting Needs in My Neighborhood	59
<i>Lesson</i>	6 Meeting Needs in My World	71
	Wrap-up	81
	Answers	82

Introduction

Perhaps you've had the experience of someone saying to you, "The Lord brought you into my life at just the right time! Thank you for being willing to reach out and help me." We believers are here on earth to serve. There is no greater joy than realizing God has used you to impact another's life.

Maybe you have never experienced this joy. This study will help prepare you to be ready to be used by God to be helpful to those around you. While it is not possible to reach out and help every person with every situation, these few studies will encourage you to strike the right balance. On the one hand, do not allow yourself to be callous and indifferent to the needs around you. On the other hand, do not become overly extended to the point of becoming frazzled with trying to help everyone. In fact, these few chapters will help you to see when to help and when not to help.

The apostle Paul declared that God comforts us in our tribulation so that we are able to comfort those who are in trouble (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4). What troubles and needs have you faced in your life? God intends for you to use those ways He helped you and those things He taught you during those times to help others now. The life lessons you have learned will never be in vain as you reach out and help those around you.

Study through these chapters with your Bible open and a pen in hand. Consider asking a friend to take the journey with you. Ask God to work in unmistakable ways to bring opportunities and His appointments to you. Pray earnestly and watch what the Lord will do as you reach out and help.



Lesson 1

Everyone Has Needs

“But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me.”

—*Psalm 40:17*

As you listen to the news, read the paper, or drive through town, no doubt there are times when you feel overwhelmed. The neediness around us seems overwhelming and it is increasing every day. The fact that needy people are everywhere is not a fact unique to our day and age.

1. Read Psalm 40:11–17. What circumstances do you think would exist in the life of a person who described himself as “poor,” “needy,” longing for help, and in need of a deliverer (v. 17)?

When you read the words “poor and needy” in Psalm 40:17, you probably envisioned a homeless, poverty-stricken person who was destitute in life. That was not the case with the man who wrote those words. This man who acknowledged being poor and

needy was none other than David, King of Israel. Seldom, if ever, would a king describe himself in this way.

Why would King David say “I am poor and needy”? This king said these things because he had an accurate view of himself before the Lord. The word “poor” gives the idea of being weak, humble, lowly, and afflicted. When David wrote of being “needy,” he chose the Hebrew word that would depict him as being dependent, in want of help. He knew he was not self-sufficient and independent. Although in many ways this king of Israel had it all, he recognized that he still had great needs. Even a king needs the Lord and other people.

Common Needs

The next time you are in a crowd, study the variety in people and marvel at the amazing creativity of the Lord! In spite of the great variety in people, there are some needs we all share.

2. Look up the passages that follow and identify at least one human need mentioned in each passage.

(a) Joshua 10:12, 13

(b) 1 Samuel 30:21

(c) Psalm 133:1; Proverbs 17:1

(d) Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10

(e) John 3:1–7

(f) Matthew 6:31, 32

To use the word “need” is to say that our well-being is diminished in some way if the tangible item or intangible resource is not ours. Clearly, material things are not the only needs people have. There are physical needs, emotional needs, employment needs, and a host of other needs (e.g., I need some rest; I need a friend; I need prayer). No doubt the greatest needs of people around us are the need to trust Christ as Savior and then the need for grace from God day by day.

With all the immense and urgent issues that surround us, some needs may seem insignificant, just a part of the daily routine. We hardly think about them. You hold the door at the post office for someone whose arms are full of packages to mail. You come to the aid of someone in the parking lot who has a heavy carton to lift into her van. To the amazement of your boss, you stop by his desk and express appreciation for how he guided you to complete a difficult job well. Every one of those activities, though seemingly small, meets an important personal need, such as attention, assistance, or appreciation.

3. Think of three or four people in your circle and a specific need each one has. List their names and needs in the space that follows, and commit to praying regularly for these people and their needs as you study these lessons. Ask the Lord for wisdom as you pray. Perhaps He wants to use *you* to meet one of those needs.

Physical Needs

Regardless of location, education, position, or station in life, every human shares common physical needs: for food, water, shelter, clothing, exercise, recreation. Within any organization every person—from those in the entry level to the highest executive position—share these common needs. Some of us currently have the means to meet our physical needs, and others do not. But the physical needs themselves are the same for us all.

4. Read 1 Timothy 6:6–8. What does the Bible teach about our attitude concerning our physical needs?

Emotional Needs

We are not unfeeling robots. In a wonderful way, the Lord has created every person with emotional needs in addition to physical needs. Each of us needs to be wanted, to be loved, to be close to another, to be appreciated, and to be accepted.

5. Read 2 Timothy 1:15. Paul wrote of a great emotional hurt he experienced in his personal life. What was it?

6. Read 2 Timothy 1:16.

(a) Who reached out and helped meet Paul's emotional need?

(b) What did this person do for Paul?

Sooner or later everybody experiences losses, disappointments, and emotional damage. Often emotional pain is deeper and more significant than the physical afflictions we suffer. Though an unavoidable part of life, emotional pain can be devastating. You may be surprised at how many people need encouragement from you. Just as you need to receive encouragement from others, those same people need you to encourage them.

Significant and Unexpected Needs

Some needs in life are far less routine than the daily needs, but we often take for granted the family member, the friend, or the professional who reaches out to help at these times. You awaken with a toothache. Are you thankful when the dentist works you into her schedule? You smell smoke. Are you thankful for the quick response of professional emergency personnel? A family crisis suddenly hits. Are you thankful for your pastor's help?

7. We are surrounded by people who are trained and available for significant times of need in our lives. List the names of professionals (such as pastor, medical doctor, dentist, plumber, mechanic) who have helped you in a time of need.

Have you written a note of appreciation to any of these helpful individuals? If not, choose several of these helpers and take the time to send a note of appreciation to each one. What a great blessing your words will be to them! As Proverbs 12:25 assures, "A good word maketh [the heart] glad."

Spiritual Needs

8. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. What common need is referred to in this verse?

In addition to the need of a way to escape temptations, many other spiritual needs are common to all people throughout the world.

9. Read Romans 9:1–3 and 10:1. How did Paul feel about his unsaved kinsmen?

By far the greatest need anyone possesses is the need for a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Picture the Lord Jesus looking out on the multitudes, seeing their great need like sheep having no shepherd (Matthew 9:36). His heart was greatly moved. By contrast, how often are we annoyed by the spiritually needy and the unsaved around us instead of being greatly moved by the terrible plight of those who do not know the Lord Jesus? We can learn to be wise and sensitive in reaching out to the lost.

10. List the names of two or three people you know personally who do not know the Lord Jesus as Savior. Pray for these people. Also, ask the Lord to help you to have the wisdom and the willingness to significantly reach out and help to address their spiritual needs.

How to Help without Enabling Disobedience

With so many needy people around you, how can you know when to offer help and when to withhold it? In fact, when is your help actually enabling a person to shirk personal responsibility and disobey Scripture? This is an important question to work through as you seek to uplift others.

11. Read Galatians 6:2. What did Paul tell the Galatian believers (and us) to do?

12. Read Galatians 6:5. Here, just a few verses later, Paul gave another instruction about bearing burdens. What was it?

It may seem like Paul was contradicting himself, but he wasn't. He used two different words to speak of burdens in verses 2 and 5. The Greek word translated "burden" in verse 2 expresses the idea of a heavy, crushing load that is too heavy to be carried by one person. The verse says that upon encountering someone who is under a significant, heavy, crushing burden, you can have the joy of stepping up to help carry the load.

Dealing with Denial

In chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, the apostle John received a message from the Lord for seven local churches.

15. Read Revelation 3:14–22.

(a) What did the Laodicean church say about itself (v. 17a)?

(b) What did the Lord say about this church's actual condition and need (v. 17b)?

How could a church have so many glaring needs and yet its members insist they “have need of nothing”?

There are many people in the world today who live in denial like the Laodiceans. They may be just the finest people you will ever meet. Their hearts may be breaking and their personal lives are in shambles, but if asked “How are you today?” they will reply “Fine.” When you reach out, be prepared to encounter the person who obviously has great needs and yet resists any help because of denial.

16. Why would a person deny having personal needs?

Do not be discouraged when someone refuses the help you offer. Pray for that person that in time he or she will acknowledge the need and graciously allow others to help.

Do Not Be Overwhelmed

If you are like me, after seeing the extent of the needs in the lives of the people all around us every day, you may feel even more overwhelmed than you did at the start of this lesson. On top of that, you may be feeling daunted by the challenge of being careful and sensitive about whom to help and how to reach out. Do not fret! Ask the Lord for wisdom and direction as to whom He wants you to help and how to reach out to them.

While it is important to reach out and help those around you, you must be aware of the fact that you cannot help everyone. Think of this. During Christ's earthly ministry, He met the needs of many people. Sometimes He met those needs by a dramatic, breathtaking miracle. However, He did not meet the needs of everyone.

17. Read John 5:1–14.

- (a) How many needy people were at the edge of the water?

- (b) How many people did Jesus heal?

The Lord wants to give you the joy of living as salt and light in a very dark and needy world (Matthew 5:13–16). But He does not want you to overload yourself in trying to help every person you meet. As you seek His guidance and leading, He will give you opportunities to strike the right balance of being helpful but not enabling a person to shirk personal responsibility.

For Further Thought

Perhaps right now you are the one who has a personal need. You have resisted asking for help. If so, why are you resisting? Sometimes people resist because of pride. Others resist because of embarrassment. Still others resist because of denying what is real.

Don't wait, hoping the situation will go away. If you are the one who needs help, make an appointment with an appropriate person to reach out to for that help.