



TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God is willing to touch and heal those whom society casts aside.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

I will be the hands of Jesus to those whom society casts aside.

LESSON TEXT LEVITICUS 13:42–46; MARK 1:40–45; LUKE 17:11–16

KEY PASSAGE MARK 1:41

And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.



TEACHING OUTLINE

ICEBREAKER: What is the most meaningful connection you have made with a stranger the first time you met?

TEACHER TIP: Connect the group's answers to our need to be compassionate to everyone, including people we do not yet know.

CONNECT: Share the Connect segment.

I. THE LAW'S REQUIREMENT FOR LEPERS

- A. Lepers Were Considered Unclean
- B. Living Alone Outside the Camp
- C. The Call of Unclean
- D. I will make people society considers "unclean" welcome in my church and my life.

DISCUSS: *How can churches work together to be welcoming to outsiders?*

II. GOD TOUCHES THE OUTCASTS

- A. The Leper's Request
- B. Jesus Moved with Compassion

DISCUSS: *What are some ways to guard against apathy and maintain compassion for others?*

- C. Jesus' Gracious Touch
- D. I will be the hands of Jesus to those whom society casts aside. (V)

DISCUSS: *What acts of compassion have made a difference in your life?*

APPLY: Share the Apply segment. (I)

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer for God to increase our compassion for outcasts.

CONNECT

WHEN ASKED THEIR favorite subject in school, some students may sarcastically reply, “Lunch.” However, for many adolescents, lunch represents the most daunting period of the day. After claiming their chocolate milk and mystery meat, students without a friend group scan the cafeteria as tables are claimed by each social clique. Beyond the jeering athletic types, the academics with assignments spread between trays, and the interestingly dressed creatives, these students land at tables with a few others who are also spying out a table.

Such was the plight of Denis Estimon, a student who immigrated from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, when he was in first grade. Denis confessed, “There was a language barrier . . . and my mom was always working and my father was still in Haiti at the time, so I wasn’t able to talk to anybody. I felt isolated. I felt lonely.” As a high schooler, Denis expressed his frustration to a mentor and was encouraged to do something about it. Denis started a club called We Dine Together to help students in a school of over three thousand students to find community at tables. Students and teachers worked together to invite isolated students into the lunch club. What began with a group of fifteen students quickly grew to a weekly gathering of over eighty and then expanded to other high schools.

Lili Rachel Smith shared a similar story to Denis. Lili was born with Apert syndrome, a genetic disorder that affects the fusion of skull, hands, and feet bones. Because of her condition, Lili was treated differently by peers and even teachers. Reporters noted that “she was not bullied or teased but was often treated as if she were invisible.” Sadly, Lili passed away in high school, motivating her parents to make a positive change for other students like Lili. Her life continues to be honored through the No One Eats Alone program. Founded in 2017, the program provides training and social support for lonely students in over nine thousand schools. Students celebrate a “No One Eats Alone” day in February and are offered resources to connect through art and conversation prompts.

Isolation is not merely an adolescent problem. Most people know the feeling of walking into a room of unfamiliar faces, struggling in a conversation, or facing difficulties forming meaningful friendships. Like Lili, we might not feel intentionally excluded, but simply that we are invisible to others. Churches should intentionally create a welcoming culture to ensure everyone feels included. Ensuring that no one eats alone, sits alone, or struggles alone can be a quiet but revolutionary ministry.

Jesus’ ministry was marked by compassion for outsiders. He was moved with compassion for the poor, afflicted, widows, and tax collectors. Many rising leaders try to promote themselves to influential people, but Jesus focused on people in the margins of society. Jesus was willing to touch and heal those whom society had cast aside. As His disciples, we are challenged to look beyond our social boundaries and show Jesus’ compassion in our world.



LEARN

I. THE LAW'S REQUIREMENT FOR LEPERS

Like a teacher who leads us to Jesus, the Law used many regulations around physical and ritual purity to point to the holiness of God. Since God is holy, humanity's impurity cannot remain in His presence. Truly encountering God should cause us to pray for God to make us clean. The story of the leper reveals that God's intention was not simply to keep sick people out and whole people in. The leper's faith reveals God's desire for purity that goes deeper than the surface, and our need for healing that goes deeper than skin.

A. Lepers Were Considered Unclean

According to the Law God gave to Israel, those with leprosy were considered unclean. Unlike many areas mentioned in the Law, lepers were not simply ceremonially unclean or unready for religious rituals; they posed a safety hazard to society. People with leprosy were declared to be unclean—for the rest of their lives. Their status remained unchanged until the illness was healed and they were properly examined. The practical value of leprosy laws is obvious: God protected the nation of Israel from infectious disease by instituting rules for examining and quarantining the sick.

The circumstances were tragic, but the rules were important for Israel to survive and flourish. After recovering, lepers were examined by the priests before returning to society. Sacrifices were offered on their behalf, and they would thoroughly bathe and shave as a part of the cleansing process. Disobedience to these regulations could result in a nationwide plague. However, the laws declaring lepers to be unclean could also serve as an example of something beyond medical guidance.

B. Living Alone Outside the Camp

Social isolation for lepers was the necessary consequence of uncleanness. They were required to live alone, outside the camp, so their disease would not spread to the rest of the nation (Leviticus 13:46). This isolation was layered and devastating: The unclean were separated from families, broader society, and the religious community. Though they were by birthright God's chosen people, lepers likely felt like God's forgotten people as they observed the nation from the distant desert. In the Gospel of Mark, a lone leper approached Jesus, risking the consequences of drawing near for a chance at healing (Mark 1:40). In the Gospel of Luke, a group of lepers standing "afar off" shouted for Jesus' attention from the village's outskirts (Luke 17:12-13).

Whatever relationships the lepers had left behind were replaced by a miserable company. Leprosy pulled them out of their communities of family and faith and into the painful bonds of shared sorrow. Sometimes we too can be isolated by tragic circumstances that strain relationships and displace us. In the midst of sin and sorrow, Jesus offers healing that not only restores us as individuals but reconciles us with others.



C. The Call of Unclean

Healing changes our circumstances and our identity. When the priest examined a patient and found the feared symptoms, the priest pronounced the patient as a leper—unclean. The priests, who acted as agents between the people and God, were assigned this clinical task. To hear from a representative of God's presence that you were unclean and unsafe for society was a heavy proclamation. After being declared unclean, a leper would announce their status through their words and clothing.

Lepers tore their clothes like a person in mourning, uncovered their heads, and wore a covering over their mouths. Wearing this uniform of infirmity, lepers warned those who passed by them, loudly shouting, "Unclean, unclean!" (Leviticus 13:45). In addition to being humiliating, this practice meant the leper's identity was completely reoriented around the illness unless the leper recovered. Anyone who heard lepers speak, saw where they stayed, or observed how they dressed could tell from a distance they were seen as dangerous.

Neither the leper in Mark nor the group of lepers in Luke were recorded as announcing themselves to be unclean. Safety protocols and declarations of danger gave way to desperate pleas for cleansing. Jesus already knew their circumstances and responded to their needs. The old labels gave way to new testimonies.

D. I will make people society considers "unclean" welcome in my church and my life.

Every society has people who are excluded on the basis of bad behavior, undesirable traits, or neutral differences. Those who have been declared "unclean" or "other" may radiate pain and isolation in their speech, appearance, and purposeful distancing from others. Drawing near requires effort and a gracious willingness to look past differences and see people in need. Jesus calls us to approach those deemed unapproachable, allowing our compassion to push out fear, disgust, or annoyance. Welcoming the outsider is the Christlike work of individual Christians and the body of Christ together. Through our sincere welcome, outcasts find opportunities to encounter Jesus in the miraculous.

DISCUSS: *How can churches work together to be welcoming to outsiders?*

II. GOD TOUCHES THE OUTCASTS

In Jesus' day, most people believed in God or in many gods; however, not everyone thought of God as personally interested in them. In the Law, God's sanctity was firmly founded. God was active in Creation and manifested His presence, yet in our minds He was above His creation, holy and distinct. After the Exile, years of prophetic silence, and generations of Roman occupation without God speaking to Israel, even some Israelites struggled to believe the Lord was nameable and near. Jesus destroyed every misconception of God being detached from His creation. God was manifested in human flesh and glorified among the lowly.



A. The Leper's Request

As Jesus traveled throughout Galilee early in His ministry, a nameless leper, defined only by his repulsive disease, approached Jesus. The man came with a posture of humility: asking and kneeling. He wasn't presumptuous or demanding. You can hear the pain in his voice as he acknowledged Jesus was able to heal him; he just didn't know if Jesus was willing. He prayed, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean" (Mark 1:40).

He had encountered Jesus on a mission to preach in other towns (verses 38–39), but the desperate man bowing at His feet immediately became Jesus' priority. Though he had been rejected from society, the leper did not allow a fear of rejection to prevent him from seeking Jesus' help. Perhaps the leper had overheard conversations of travelers talking about a new rabbi who healed various diseases and cast out unclean spirits, as Jesus' fame spread throughout Galilee. The leper came to Jesus with faith that healing was possible.

Let the testimonies of Jesus' miracle-working power awaken our hearts to hope. We approach Jesus with confidence in His power, His sovereignty, His compassion. The leper was not sure Jesus would do a miracle for him, but he believed Jesus could, so he asked. This measure of faith was sufficient to change his entire life.

B. Jesus Moved with Compassion

The heartbeat of Jesus' miraculous ministry was His consistent compassion for those in need. Miracles served a greater theological purpose, validating Jesus' mission and bringing glory to God; however, Jesus' motivation in many critical moments was simple: He genuinely cared for people. As the leper begged for a miracle, Jesus was "moved with compassion" into compassionate activity (Mark 1:41). Any ministry without tenderness toward others is hollow. We cannot truly glorify God without compassion. We should not expect to experience the miraculous without it either.

Jesus did not treat needy people like tasks to be checked off a heavenly to-do list. He was compelled forward by His responsibility to preach, though socially exhausted by crowds of needy people who swarmed Him, facing pressure from those who rejected Him, and confronting the very powers of Hell. Yet, the intensity of His ministry did not dull His sensitivity to others.

We can experience "compassion fatigue," a gradual numbing of sympathies when we feel emotionally depleted by needy people. Jesus' example challenges us to guard our hearts against apathy, inviting the Holy Spirit to make us people who are both stable and able to be moved by compassion.

DISCUSS: *What are some ways to guard against apathy and maintain compassion for others?*

C. Jesus' Gracious Touch

Jesus' compassion was not reduced to an emotional moment; it moved Him into faithful action. Jesus did the unthinkable: He reached out and touched the leper (Mark 1:41). As soon as Jesus declared, "I will; be thou clean," the disease left the man's body. Jesus



was quite possibly the first person since the man's diagnosis to willingly touch him. Though He could have healed him with a simple word, Jesus sought to communicate His care through His hands reaching out to a lonely man. Jesus restored more than his health; Jesus restored his humanity. Everyone gasped. They expected Jesus to be unclean, but Jesus was not defiled. Instead, Jesus made the leper clean.

Jesus urged the man to go to the priest and offer the necessary sacrifices for his cleansing so he could lawfully reenter the community. The priest would not cleanse or heal the man; he would simply testify that the leper was cleansed. In this way, even if the priest was a critic of Jesus, he was now a witness. This act of ritual cleansing was a testimony to the priest of Jesus' power and reverence for God's law.

Restoring the outcast may involve more than speaking words of faith. We communicate our compassion through real acts of love. Whenever Jesus touches us, He is not corrupted by our sin or our stories of pain. Healing virtue flows through Him, making us whole and clean. We do not earn this healing through human effort. There was nothing the leper could offer Jesus in exchange for such a valuable gift; he received it by grace.

D. I will be the hands of Jesus to those whom society casts aside.

When the leprous man was diseased, his ailment isolated him from society. When he was cleansed, he became highly influential, broadcasting his testimony from Jesus throughout his city. Even though Jesus urged him to tell no one but to go directly to the priest, the joyful man went away and shared his testimony everywhere in the region. His witness was so effective that Jesus could no longer publicly enter the city because people from every quarter came out to see Him. Ironically, the leper and Jesus changed places; the man was welcomed back into the city, while Jesus was forced to receive the masses from without. We may be surprised at the impact of ministering to one lonely person. The most isolated individual can become the greatest witness.

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DISCUSS: *What acts of compassion have made a difference in your life?*



TEACHER OPTION: *Share the story below or one of your own to illustrate the value of human touch.*

APPLY

ONE STUDY BY Ruth Feldman and her colleagues illustrated the power of touch comprehensively in a ten-year developmental study on incubated premature babies. In one group of seventy-three mothers and babies, mothers were instructed to hold their babies skin-to-skin one hour a day for two weeks. In the first hour after birth, direct contact between an infant and a mother regulates a baby's temperature, heart rate, and breathing, and begins establishing a secure bond.

The control group of seventy-three mothers was instructed not to do this. Over ten years, the researchers conducted seven encounters to assess development. The children who received physical touch at a critical period showed greater cognitive development from six months to ten years and at ten years old were less reactive to stress and had better sleep quality.

Mothers in the test group understandably experienced less anxiety although their infants faced serious health concerns. Science has well established what most mothers know intuitively: Babies benefit from being held by an affectionate caregiver. Touch surrounds us before we comprehend words and is the earliest communication of love (Feldman et al., *PubMed*).

I DISPLAY IMAGE NOW

However, for parents with babies in intensive care, providing constant contact can be a challenge. Many hospitals have a heroic volunteer base saving the day with the power of a hug. One such hero is Vietnam veteran Lyn Harris. In the military, he bravely served as a medic, and in retirement, Harris's lifesaving mission

took a tenderhearted turn. Beginning as a front-desk worker, Harris volunteered at St. David's Medical Center in Austin, Texas, for over fifteen years, eventually moving to the hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). At eighty years of age, Harris spent approximately six hours a week in the NICU, comforting and cuddling babies during their parents' absences.

Harris vocalized commitment to his calling, stating, "I'm an old man, so I'll keep going until I can't." In a beautiful twist, a man nearing the end of his life offered many of his precious hours to ensure the well-being of those whose lives were only beginning. Many infants and parents have received comfort from Harris's sacrifice of time, and Harris found the act of providing comfort and closeness to be deeply rewarding.

Like parents who entrust their children to medical professionals and volunteer staff, God has entrusted us with His most valuable possession: His children. In the wait before Jesus' return, we have been given a ministry of proximity: to hold the hurting and comfort the afflicted. When the church surrounds the new believer with a sense of nearness and support, healthy development can occur.

This normal dependence in the early stages of discipleship can enable spiritual maturity down the road. From the infant to the elder, we all thrive in an environment filled with tangible expressions of love. Perhaps your caring touch could help someone grow. This calling has no age limit or advanced qualifications. It simply requires us to have a heart like Jesus, abundantly moved with compassion.

