



#7 The First Touch | Matt Clark | July 26, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Today we're reading in the book of Mark about the leper who approached Jesus and asked for healing. We should focus on Jesus' response to this leper and take his example to heart. Human nature sometimes causes us to lose sight of how we should treat and care for others. Sometimes we get caught up in daily drama or the frustrations we may have at work. It's important to remember how Jesus loves people. Let us *Follow the Leader* as we read and learn about God's great passion for people. Let's begin with **Mark 1:40-45**:

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." ⁴¹Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" ⁴²Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. ⁴³Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴"See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." ⁴⁵Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

As we see from this passage, Jesus was never about the show. He came to preach that God loves us and wants a relationship with us. Perhaps this is why he told the man to not tell anyone what had happened. This request of Jesus, for the Leper to be quiet, was specific to that time and culture. It doesn't mean that we keep quiet about our faith or our healing. Jesus was also becoming increasingly "popular." People wanted to follow Him, be around Him. The leper, on the other hand, was an outcast. Lepers were considered unclean, and the Bible even addressed the situation of a leper in that time as follows: *"The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp"* (**Leviticus 13:45-46**).

Suppose this was your life, and you hear there's a prophet nearby who is healing people. All you could possibly want would be to meet this man who claims to be able to heal. Your doubts that He would choose to help you, though strong, would be overwhelmed by hope. You feel unworthy, but isn't it sometimes easier to believe in God's power than His mercy? The leper had no doubt that Jesus could heal him, but he wondered if Jesus was willing. Jesus was.

1. Be filled with compassion toward people.

Jesus responded with a tender heart. Throughout the Gospels we see Jesus is moved with compassion. There are four elements of authentic compassion: 1) Understanding. **Matthew 9:36** records, *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* Authentic compassion is born out of understanding. It understands the value and worth of people to God. 2) Outrage. Jesus was moved beyond just pity. He indicted the priests and the Levites with His story of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:30-37**. Compassion is a very powerful emotion, moving us to the depth of

our being. As Christians living in a world of pain, cruelty, and injustice, we should be moved with moral outrage and compelled with God's help to do something! 3) Identification. [Read **Luke 7:13-15** together]. Genuine compassion is the ability to identify and empathize with people in need. 4) Action. Look at Jesus' compassion in **Matthew 15:32 and 20:34**: "*Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.'*" "*Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.*"

2. Reach out and touch the untouchables.

Jesus boldly placed love and compassion over ritual and regulation when He touched the leper. Jesus is calling us to reach out and touch the untouchable.

3. Be willing to heal and help. (Read **James 5:13-16.**)

Jesus was willing to heal and help the people He rubbed shoulders with. Just as Jesus will never walk away from you, you should not walk away from others in need. [Read **1 John 3:16-18** together.] Jesus has chosen us to reach out and touch the world. We are called. We must remember to be willing to say "Yes, Lord" to anything, anytime, anywhere.

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. When have you been "left out" or undervalued in a situation? When have you seen others treated in this way? How did you respond, or how were you part of that situation?
2. Given the story of Jesus' interaction with the leper, what was His response to a man who was shunned by others? How can we take up His example and live it in our own lives?
3. When has someone reached out to you when others wouldn't? How did Jesus' reach out to you? What are some specific examples of how God's compassion has impacted you or your family?
4. Time and time again, even when He was pressed by huge matters, Jesus took time to love those around Him and showed compassion. How do you, in particular, *Follow the Leader* in this way? What does it require you to set aside so you can pay attention to others?
5. In what area or areas of your life do you need Jesus' healing touch? How has seeking and receiving Jesus' love and compassion better equipped you to love others?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- Look for others around you, in church, in your neighborhood or at work, who need to be touched by Jesus' compassion. Let God lead you to act out of compassion.
- Ensure you are incorporating service to others through such things as serving at church, volunteering in the community, and/or sponsoring a child in need. Compassion International, which we highlighted on Sunday, is online at www.compassion.com.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for showing us love and compassion through His Son, Jesus.
- Tell God what Jesus told the leper: "I am willing." Ask Him to help you say, "Yes, Lord, anywhere, anytime, anyplace."
- Ask God to give you strength and courage to follow through on where He leads you. Ask Him to show you who around you needs your compassion.
- Offer any other praises or requests that arose during your discussion.