



COMPASSION

The Person of Jesus: A Study of Love

Unit One Leader's Slide Deck

see Jesus®

LESSON I : COMPASSION

The Person of Jesus: A Study of Love

Unit One

LUKE 7:11-12

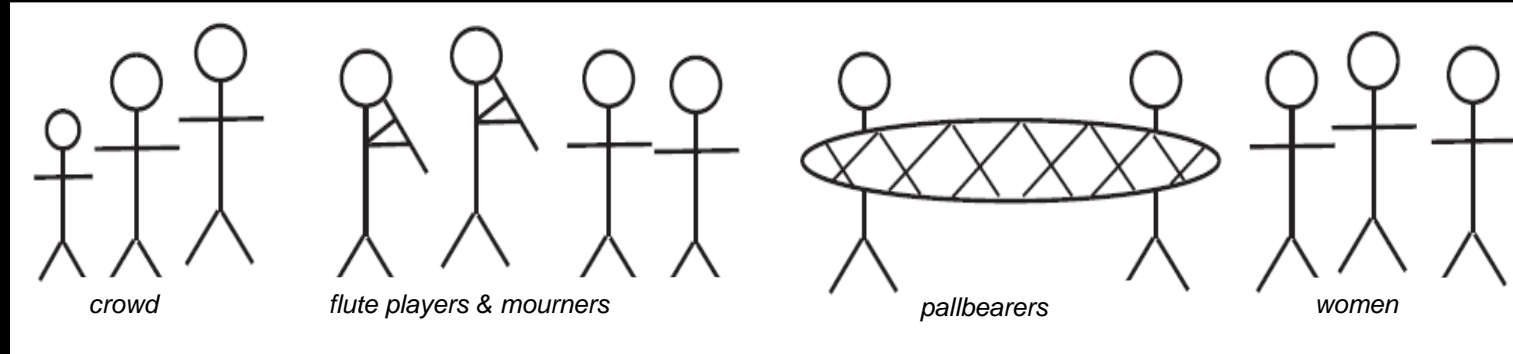
¹¹ Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹² As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.

Think about a typical American funeral.

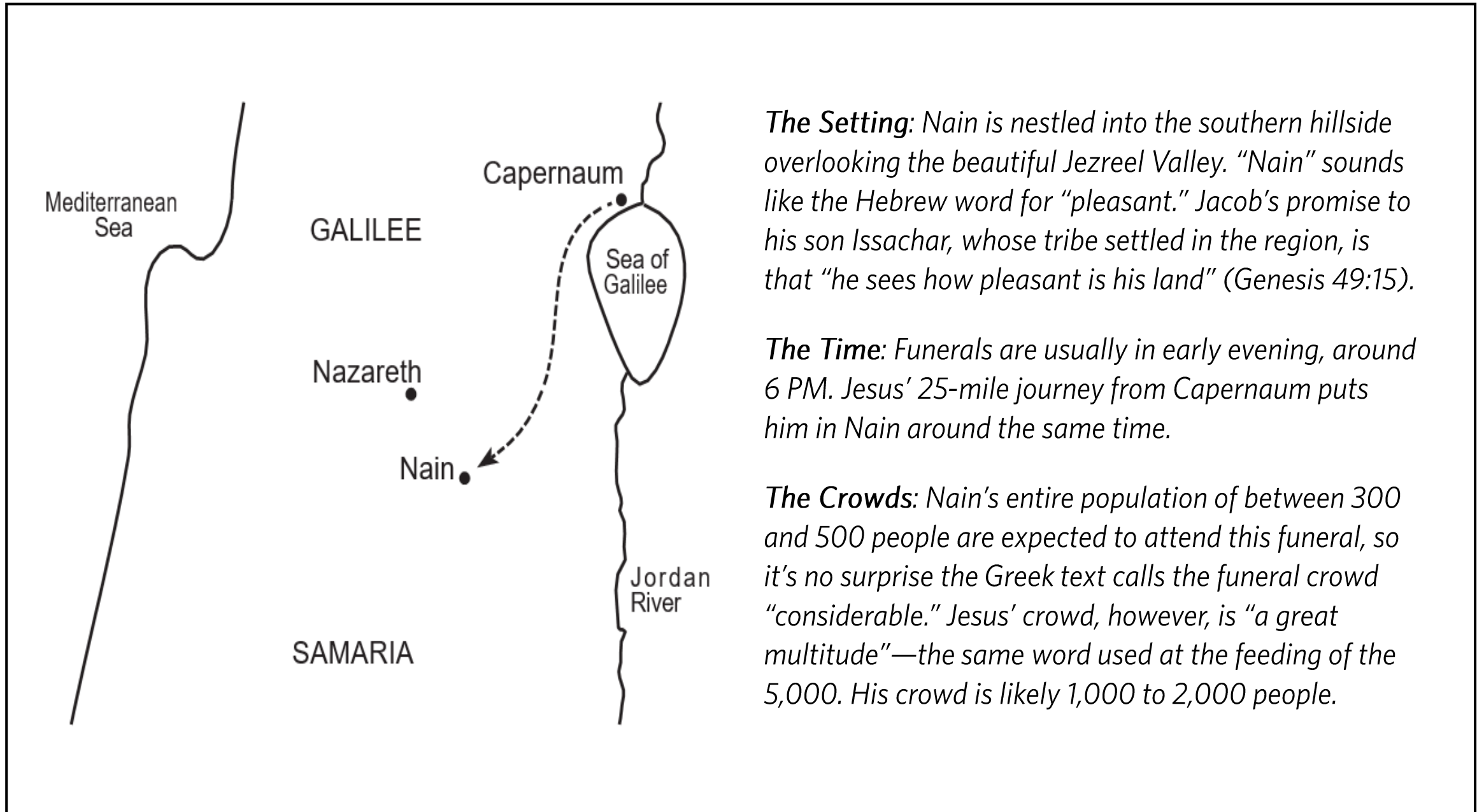
What kinds of things do you see and hear?

Historical Background

First-Century Jewish Funeral



- Jewish funeral rites, both ancient and modern, require a body to be buried within 24 hours.
- First-century Jewish funerals, like modern American ones, move the bodies of the dead to the place of burial in processions. But Jewish processions are loud and emotional, accompanied by mourning women and flute players.
- Even a poor Jewish family is expected to have one mourning woman and two flute players. Amos 5:16 and Jeremiah 9:17 mention those “skilled in mourning.”
- As the procession begins, the body is placed face-up, with hands folded, in an open wicker basket. In the Galilee region, women lead the procession because it is believed they brought death into the world. Pallbearers frequently change hands, so that many can bear the burden.
- There are no flowers because flowers would later be introduced by Christians to symbolize the resurrection.



The Setting: Nain is nestled into the southern hillside overlooking the beautiful Jezreel Valley. “Nain” sounds like the Hebrew word for “pleasant.” Jacob’s promise to his son Issachar, whose tribe settled in the region, is that “he sees how pleasant is his land” (Genesis 49:15).

The Time: Funerals are usually in early evening, around 6 PM. Jesus’ 25-mile journey from Capernaum puts him in Nain around the same time.

The Crowds: Nain’s entire population of between 300 and 500 people are expected to attend this funeral, so it’s no surprise the Greek text calls the funeral crowd “considerable.” Jesus’ crowd, however, is “a great multitude”—the same word used at the feeding of the 5,000. His crowd is likely 1,000 to 2,000 people.

LUKE 7:13-17

¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" ¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

¹⁶ They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." ¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

How does Jesus love the widow?

Insight

Jesus' Compassion

“The emotion which we should naturally expect to find most frequently attributed to Jesus whose whole life was a mission of mercy, and whose ministry was so marked by deeds of benevolence that it was summed up in the memory of his followers as a going through the land ‘doing good’ (Acts 10:38), is no doubt ‘compassion.’ In point of fact, this is the emotion which is most frequently attributed to him.”

—B.B. Warfield

Compassion can be hard to visualize. For comparison's sake, let's visualize anger first.
What do you see, feel, or hear when someone is angry?

ANGER

COMPASSION

Compassion is subtle, but it still has physical expressions.

What do you see, feel, or hear when someone is showing compassion?

Let's consider why Jesus feels compassion.

What has the widow lost?

Historical Background

The Death of a Son

Having a son meant everything in ancient Near Eastern culture. When the prophet Jeremiah tells Jerusalem how to weep for their besieged city, he says: "O my people, put on sackcloth and roll in ashes; mourn with bitter wailing as for an only son, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us" (Jeremiah 6:26).

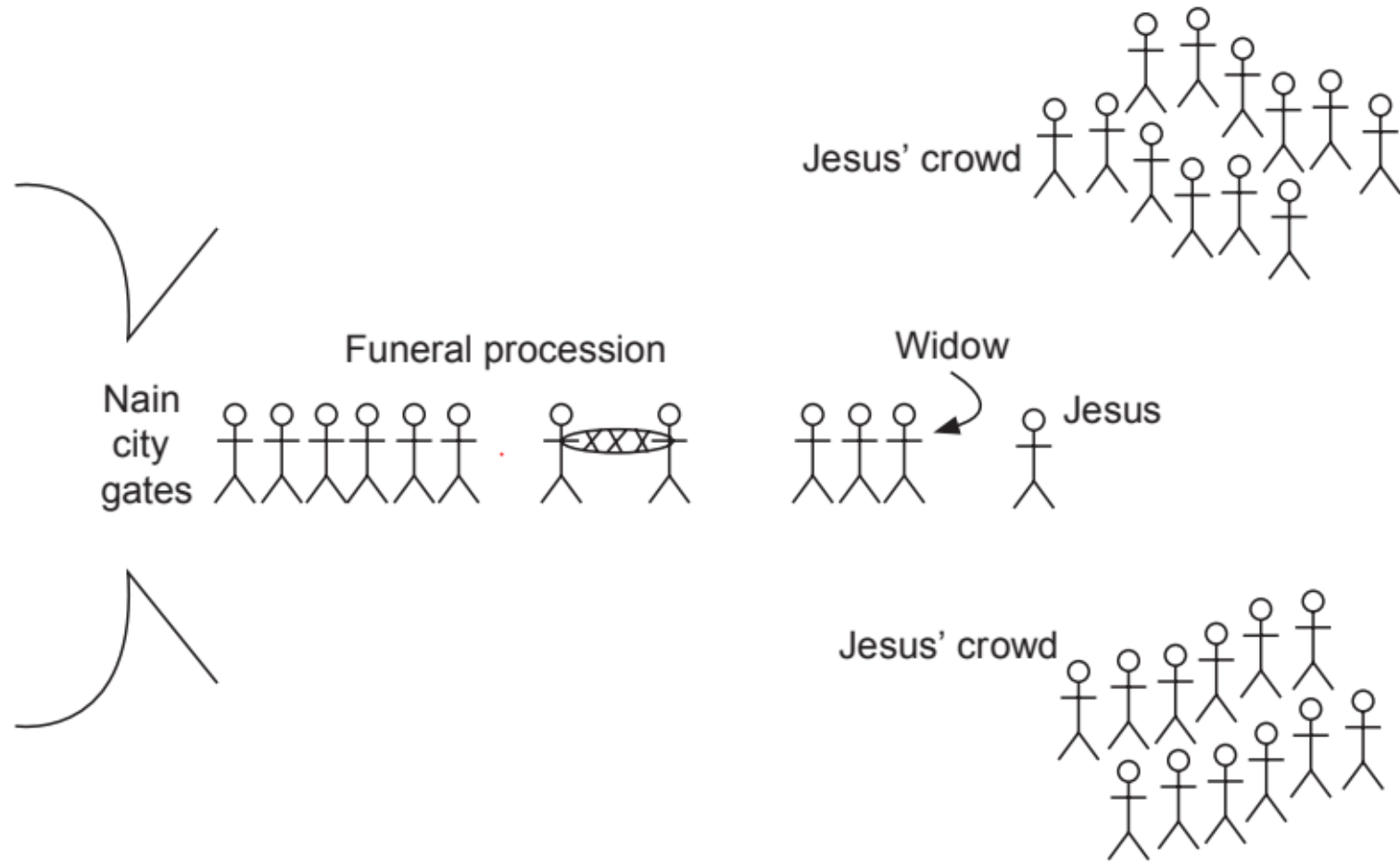
Historical Background

A Living Death

We think of death and life as distinct categories, but in Hebrew thought there was an in-between state—a person could be considered half-dead. In the Old Testament, when Naomi returns home after burying her husband and two sons, she says to the townspeople: “Do not call me Naomi [‘pleasant’], call me Bitter, because God has made my life very bitter” (Ruth 1:20). Naomi was alive but felt dead. So when you greeted Naomi on the street you would say, “Hi, Bitter.” The widow of Nain, like Naomi, has entered into a living death, cut off from Israel.

Insight

Picture a 3-year-old boy running to his mom, wailing because he scraped his knee. His mom hugs him and says, "Don't cry. It's going to be okay." She knows the wound will soon heal, and the pain will go away. Her words bring hope. That's what Jesus is doing. He feels her pain, but he's not given over emotionally to her circumstances. He can anchor himself in a future reality and help her to do the same. It is going to be okay.



What does Jesus' method of stopping the procession tell you about him as a person?

Insight

In Isaiah 42:3, the prophet says the Messiah will be so gentle he won't break a bruised reed or put out a smoldering wick. He will be so tender that when he holds an oil lamp whose wick is barely lit, he won't blow it out.

If this is the first time you saw Jesus, what would strike you about him as a person?

Insight

The American theologian Jonathan Edwards said the essence of the beauty of Jesus is that he combines characteristics not normally seen in one person: justice and mercy, glory and humility, authority and gentleness. He is both the Lion and the Lamb.

Historical Background

A Prophet

Nain is about three miles from where Elisha raised the only son of a couple at Shunem (2 Kings 4:8-37). The last time God raised someone from the dead, it was an only son—just a few miles from this spot. So, this miracle points to an Elisha-like prophet from God. After 400 years without a prophet in the land to bring the Word of God, the crowd immediately thinks, “God has finally visited his people.”

Whom does Jesus go to first? Second? Last?

Son

Widow

Jesus

Insight

The Balance of Love

- *Jesus models a balance between focusing on a person and focusing on a project.*
- *The compassion Jesus feels shapes the way he performs the miracle. By first focusing on and feeling for her as a person, rather than seeing her as a project or a stepping-stone, he is able to make her central to the miracle itself.*

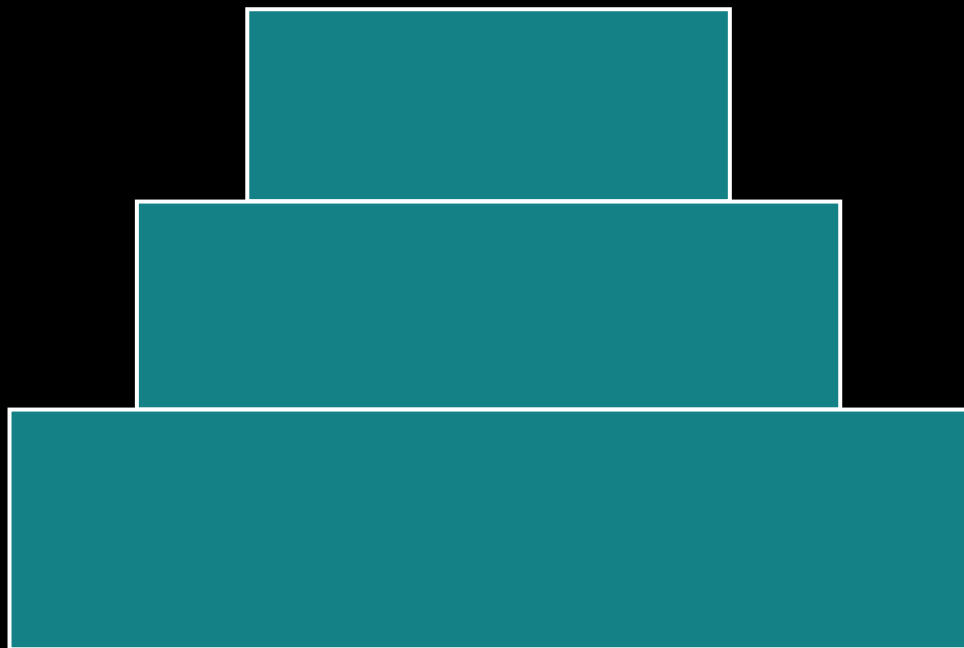
Why doesn't Jesus preach a sermon?

What does this tell you about him?

Based on how Jesus loved the widow, what are the three steps of love?

What was the first thing Jesus did? Second?

Can you give me one word to summarize everything else he did?



Three Steps of Love

Reflect on this story.

How are you different from Jesus?

How does he affect you?

What do you think of him?

ME

JESUS

Gospel Connection

This one incident reflects the pattern of Jesus' life: he looks at us, feels compassion, and acts by giving his life on the cross for us. That is the gospel. Sometimes Jesus' death on the cross seems abstract, but by connecting it with his life, we see how concrete God's love is for us. Through Jesus, God looks at us, feels our pain, and acts for us. We are not alone.