

# CONTENTS

Introduction .....	vii
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## **Unit One: Compassion**

1. Compassion .....	2
2. Looking .....	15
3. The Father's Looking .....	28
4. Judging .....	38
5. Two Stories of Life .....	50
6. Self-Righteousness .....	64
7. Self-Righteousness and Grace .....	78
8. Legalism .....	88
9. Relational Legalism .....	100
10. Incarnation .....	111
11. Incarnation Changes Us .....	123

# INTRODUCTION

This five-part small group study introduces a Jesus so personal, so rich in love, that you will be captivated heart-first. Paul Miller's winsome insights—conveyed through an energetic, interactive format—will lead you to discover Jesus' beauty for yourself. In watching Jesus, you will find your eyes opened to a rich encounter with God's love and your heart empowered to love others.

This interactive study is divided into five units. Since the concepts build upon one another, it is ideal to go through it in sequence. For example, the more you study compassion (Unit One), the more you wonder what the boundaries of compassion are. Units Two and Three (*Honesty* and *Dependence*) provide those boundaries. Finally, the last two units show us what love leads to (oneness) and what the journey entails (humility, sadness, and joy).

## **Unit One: Compassion**

We watch Jesus interact with people to discover the three steps of love: to look, feel compassion, and act.

## **Unit Two: Honesty**

We study how Jesus relates to different people during meals to find that a commitment to truth and justice must balance compassion.

## **Unit Three: Dependence**

We see how Jesus' dependence on his Father, rooted in a deep understanding of Scripture and a life of prayer, shapes all of his relationships and allows him to say no to others' attempts to control him.

## **Unit Four: Faith**

Are compassion, honesty, and dependence enough? Jesus reveals to his disciples how faith in God gives us the energy to love.

## **Unit Five: The Passion**

Death is at the heart of love. The final unit of *Person of Jesus* traces Jesus' journey to the cross and shows how, in the low place of humility, we learn to see clearly because God lives there.

# UNIT ONE: COMPASSION

## SUMMARY

When Jesus is confronted with suffering, he looks, feels compassion, and then acts. This pattern may be found not only in Jesus' life but also in his teaching. The Good Samaritan looks, feels compassion, and then helps. The father of the Lost Son looks for his son, feels compassion, and then runs to greet him.

Jesus' act of looking is featured in numerous Gospel stories. For instance, in the home of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus teaches Simon to look by turning toward the adulterous woman and asking Simon, "Do you see this woman?" (Luke 7:36-50).

Three enemies of compassion are judging, self-righteousness, and legalism. The story in John 9 of the blind man is a study in judging versus looking. Jesus and the disciples are walking together, but only Jesus looks at the man; the disciples simply judge him.

We conclude Unit One by seeing that Jesus' love follows the pattern of his incarnation. Love *incarnates*—goes inside the world of the person being loved. The Golden Rule is an invitation to incarnation.

# LESSON 1: COMPASSION

## OUTLINE:

1. The Funeral . . . . . 10 mins
2. The Steps of Love . . . . . 25 mins
3. Summary . . . . . 10 mins

# LESSON 1: COMPASSION

## SECTION 1: The Funeral

10 mins

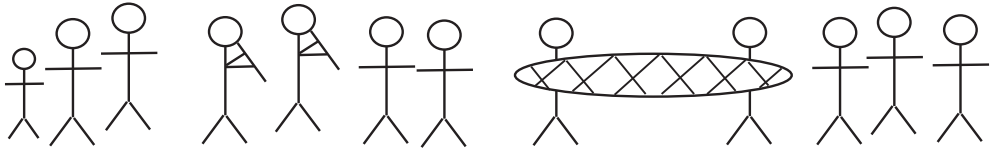
### Luke 7:11-12

<sup>11</sup> Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. <sup>12</sup> 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.

### 1. Think about a typical American funeral. What kinds of things do you see and hear?



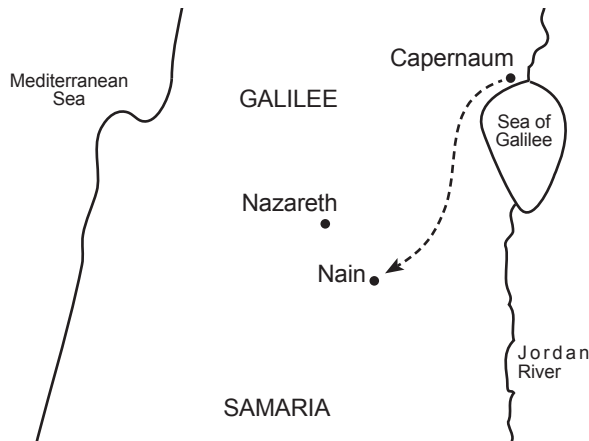
#### Historical Background: First-century Jewish Funeral<sup>1</sup>



- 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.

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 552-559. See also Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 148ff.

- 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

<sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”

<sup>14</sup> 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!” <sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

<sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>17</sup> This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

## 2. How does Jesus love the widow?

### SECTION 2: The Steps of Love

25 mins

#### 1ST: JESUS LOOKS—“WHEN THE LORD SAW HER...” (7:13)

**3. What could Jesus be looking at instead of the widow? What would you be looking at?**

**4. Considering the size of the crowd and that someone notices his gaze, how is Jesus likely looking at the widow?**

## 2ND: COMPASSION—“...HIS HEART WENT OUT TO HER” (7:13)

**5. This question is so simple that it can be hard to answer: how do we know Jesus felt compassion?**

**6. Read Luke 1:1-3 with me. Did Luke see this event directly, or did he interview an eyewitness?**

**7. How did the eyewitness know Jesus felt compassion?**



### **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<sup>2</sup>

**8. 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?**

**9. Compassion is subtle, but it still has physical expressions. What do you see, feel, or hear when someone is showing compassion?**

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<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, “The Emotional Life of Our Lord,” in *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1951), 97.



ANGER	COMPASSION

**10. When you feel compassion, where are you going emotionally?  
Physically?**

**11. 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.

**3RD: COMFORT—“...AND HE SAID, ‘DO NOT CRY’” (7:13)**

**12. Why does Jesus tell her not to cry?**

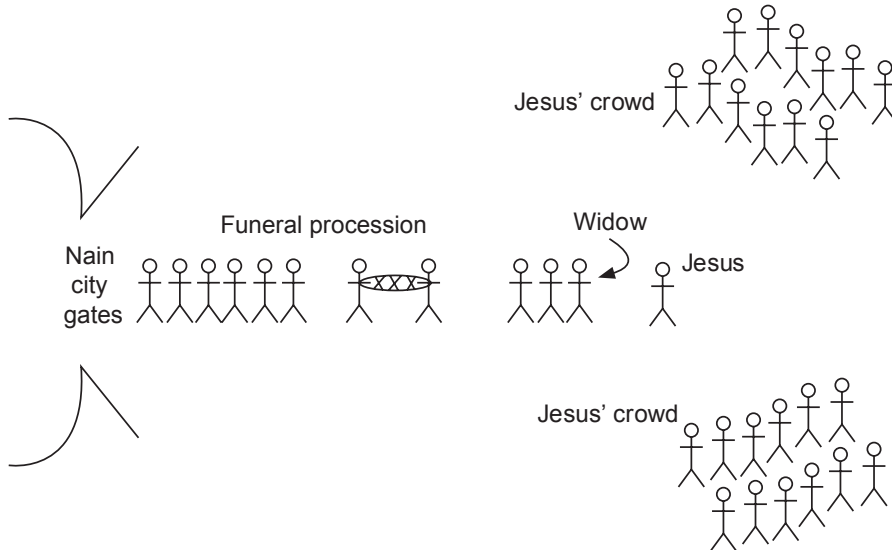
 **Insight:**

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.

**4TH: HELPING—““YOUNG MAN, I SAY TO YOU, GET UP!”” (7:13)**

**13. How does Jesus stop the procession?**

**14. If Jesus needs to stop it, what has the procession been doing until this point?**



**15. 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.

**16. What would have surprised a first-century Jew about Jesus touching the casket?**

**17. If this was 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.<sup>3</sup>

**5TH: FOCUS ON THE PERSON—“...JESUS GAVE HIM BACK TO HIS MOTHER” (7:13)**

**18. Which two people is the crowd thinking about now?**

**19. What does the crowd call Jesus?**



**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.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards, A Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 161-196.

<sup>4</sup> Two hundred years earlier (in the time of the Maccabees), after Antiochus Epiphanes polluted the altar by sacrificing a pig on it, the priests wondered if they could use the defiled altar stones. Since there was no prophet to tell them what to do, “they tore down the altar and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet” (1 Maccabees 4:45-46). First Maccabees is not a book of the Bible, yet like the writings of Josephus, it is useful for understanding historical context.

**20. After the miracle, the crowd is thinking about Jesus and God. But who is Jesus thinking about?**

**21. How do we know Jesus is thinking about the woman?**

**22. Whom does Jesus go to first? Second? Last?**

**Son**

**Widow**

**Jesus**

**23. Who is at the physical center of Jesus' love?**

 **Insight: The Balance of Love**

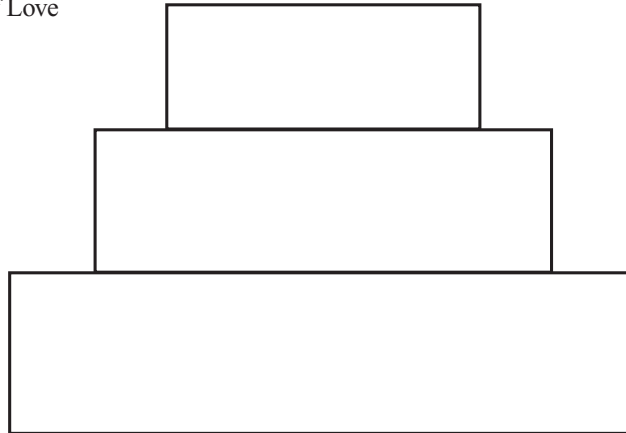
- Jesus models a balance between focusing on the person and focusing on the project.
- The compassion Jesus feels shapes the way he performs the miracle. By first focusing on and feeling for her as a person, rather than seeing her as a project or a stepping-stone, he is able to make her central to the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

**24. Why does Jesus give the son back to his mother? It seems unnecessary.**

**25. Why doesn't Jesus preach a sermon? What does this tell you about him?**

- 26. 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?**

The Three Steps of Love



- 27. When you first read this passage, what stood out to you?**
- 28. Now that you've examined the passage, what strikes you most?**
- 29. Reflect on this story. How are you different from Jesus? How does he affect you? What do you think of him?**

<b>ME</b>	<b>JESUS</b>



**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.

# LESSON 1 APPLICATION

1. What did the Spirit help you see about either Jesus or yourself through this lesson?
2. How does Jesus affect you as he loves the widow of Nain? What inspires, convicts, or encourages you?
3. How do Jesus' words to the grieving woman, "Don't cry," challenge your assumptions about feelings?
4. Think about the three steps of love: looking, compassion, and helping. Which comes most naturally to you? Which do you typically ignore or underemphasize?
5. What would happen if you helped a person without looking at him or her or feeling compassion? What if you looked and felt compassion but did not help? Why are all three actions necessary?

6. How does Jesus demonstrate humility in this story? What makes that striking for you?
7. How does Jesus' posture of humility and love contrast with how other people approach helping?
8. What is the connection between humility and love?
9. Reflect on your own life and relationships. How can you grow in humility?