



*Small Group Discussion Guide*



**Touch from Heaven:** Loving Touch  
October 28, 2018



## PREPARATION

### ■ STUDY

Spend the week studying Mark 1:40–45. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

### ■ DETERMINE

Determine which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

### ■ PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

### ■ LANDING POINT

A touch of compassion in Jesus's name brings healing.



## GROUP DISCUSSION

■ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

■ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

■ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

■ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

# THE NEED FOR TOUCH

As human beings, we need touch to be healthy and thrive. That need remains throughout the years, from the cradle to the grave. Sadly, this need can go unmet in a culture where we're taught to "keep a safe distance" and where on any given day we may engage with others digitally more than we do physically. While touch may be on the decline these days, the need for it has never been greater.

While not everyone's top love language is physical touch, we would all benefit from a little more of it in our lives. God created us to connect and bond through touch. Your touch has power, and it can bring healing to others. Like Jesus, your touch of compassion can do wonders.

**Q:** *How would you explain our need for touch to someone in your own words?*

**Q:** *Where do you rank physical touch compared to the other love languages [words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts and quality time]?*



## LEARN

Select 2-3 questions to discuss as a group.

# A TOUCH OF COMPASSION

Jesus was anything but conventional. He didn't see others the way society did. He saw those who had blown up their lives with bad choices. He saw those ravaged by disease. He saw those society deemed "untouchable" and "sinful." These were the kind of people Jesus, the Great Physician, came to give His healing touch. And He had no problem crossing cultural barriers to reach them. Jesus did just that when a leper came to Him with a request.

Leprosy was one of the most dreaded diseases in the ancient world. The Mosaic law stated that leprosy made someone unclean. Lepers were social outcasts commanded to live out their days in isolation from Jewish community. If a leper ever came near someone, they had to shout "Unclean! Unclean!" as they approached.

One can only imagine the physical and emotional pain this leper had endured for years. He was an outcast, someone seen as less than human. As his body rotted away, his hope of ever being well died slowly too. That is, until he saw Jesus. This leper ran to Him, fell to his knees and told Jesus, "If you will, you can make me clean."

Jesus looked at the man and something stirred in Him. His compassion moved Him. Jesus reached out, touched this leper and said, "I will; be clean." He touched him. Jesus healed the man and, immediately, the leprosy was gone. Jesus had made this man clean again.

**READ:** Mark 1:40-45. What words would you use to describe the leper in the story?  
What about Jesus?

**Q:** How did Jesus cross cultural barriers in the story?

# SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS

The man must have leaped for joy, seeing his once disease-ridden skin made new. Jesus told him not to say a word about what happened, but to go and present himself to the priest so he could be declared ceremonially clean. But the man was so overjoyed that he couldn't help but tell others what had happened. Word began to spread, and more crowds came to Jesus seeking a miracle.

**Q:** Recall a time when you experienced God's healing [physical or spiritual]. What did you learn from your experience?

**Q:** What does Jesus's encounter with the leper teach you about evangelism?



LIVE

Select 2–3 questions from this section to answer.

## FAITH THAT MOVES GOD

Desperate times call for desperate measures, which is exactly the philosophy this leper had. He risked his life to come to Jesus in the hope that Jesus could heal him. And he showed real humility and faith in doing so. We see humility in the leper's request: "If you will, you can make me clean." He didn't demand a miracle. Instead, he appealed to Jesus's compassion. He also believed that Jesus could cure him. The only question this man had was, "Would Jesus do it?"

Real faith moves God to act. Do you see your need, and does that make you desperate for Him? Do you believe He has the power to heal you? There is no wound so deep that Jesus's healing touch cannot reach.

**Q:** Why must humility and faith go together?

**Q:** Respond to the following statement: "There is no wound so deep that Jesus's healing touch cannot reach."

## PUT LOVE FIRST

Love and compassion were more important to Jesus than ritual and regulation. Sure, His actions probably caused a stir among the Pharisees, but that didn't bother Jesus. He was more concerned with the state of this leper. He put love first.

Jesus calls you to put love first and touch those who are “untouchable” in our society. Who is “untouchable”? It might be the immigrant family down the road. Maybe it’s the girl people make fun of in your class. It might be the addict or someone who served time in prison. Maybe it’s the homeless guy who needs someone to care enough to help him get back on his feet.

A love like Jesus’s does three things:

- *It overcomes fear.* You disregard what others might think and do whatever love demands.
- *It needs no reward.* Real love doesn’t seek recognition or even thanks. It simply flows out of you and puts the needs of others above your own.
- *It always points back to Jesus.* When you put love first, you give others a glimpse of Jesus and His compassion.

**Q:** *What keeps us from showing love and compassion to others?*

**Q:** *What’s one thing you can do this week with someone else to put love first?*



Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

## CRAZY COMPASSION

Did you know that you have healing power? Really, you do. Jesus has called us to go out into a world sick with sin and take His healing touch with us. He wants us to show crazy compassion because we are crazy about Him. What we say and do in our day-to-day has the potential to bring healing, renewal and life to others.

Here are five ways you can start showing crazy compassion today in Jesus’s name:

- *Words.* Encourage someone with words of life. Call a family member or friend you haven’t talked to in a long time.
- *Positive Touch.* Give someone a hug. Hold your wife’s hand when you take your evening walk.
- *Presence.* Be there for someone in a difficult time. Listen to them without feeling the need to fix them.
- *Generosity.* Give your time, talent and treasure to those who need it. Sign up for that volunteer

opportunity. Pick up the check for someone's lunch.

- **Prayer.** Go before the Father on someone's behalf. Plead for them and ask God to move in their life.

**Q:** *Where do you need to feel Jesus's touch of compassion most in your life?*

**Q:** *Which of the five ways of showing crazy compassion is strongest for you? Which is weakest?*



## PRAY

Pray for a heart that sees the “untouchables” in your society differently. Ask God to reveal specific people and specific opportunities to put love first and show compassion to them.



## FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read Matthew 9:9–13 and reflect on what Jesus's words say about who He is and who we are in relationship to Him.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



## COMMENTARY

**POSITIVE EFFECTS OF TOUCH** A recent article from Robyn Reisch lists four positive effects of touch.

- *Frequent touch increases a person's physical well-being.* Regular hugs have been shown to lower a person's heart rate and blood pressure.
- *Physical contact strengthens team dynamics by building non-sexual intimacy.* When teammates high-five, shake hands or give a pat on the back, their non-verbal message is one of cooperation and support.
- *Physical touch promotes trust and security.* We were created to bond physically. Touch activates nerves and releases chemicals that make us feel safe and loved.
- *People who experience lots of physical contact are less violent.* Children who lack positive touch and affection are more prone to violence later in life. Children who experience positive touch learn to attach in a healthy way. As they develop, they tend to be emotionally stable and less aggressive.<sup>1</sup>

**WHAT THE MIRACLE SYMBOLIZED** In the Bible leprosy is a symbol of sin and death that must be cleansed. Jesus's cleansing the leper revealed His authority and power to forgive sin. It also foreshadows His death and resurrection, which cleanses us from the disease of sin and its terminal diagnosis— spiritual death and eternal separation from God.

**A STRANGE COMMAND** Why did Jesus command the cured man not to tell anyone about the miracle Jesus did? Walter W. Wessel explains that:

The reason for the command is likely similar to the muting of demons. Jesus wants to define His messiahship on His own terms rather than through the expectations of others. Jesus also recognizes that widespread acclaim for His miracles will create a level of popularity that will hinder the essential purpose of His ministry, namely, to proclaim the kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup>

### ENDNOTES:

1. Robyn Reisch, "The Human Touch: 4 Reasons It's Important," iheartintelligence.com, October 4, 2018, <https://iheartintelligence.com/human-touch/>.

2. Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, "Mark," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew–Mark (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 722.