

Touching the Untouchable: Following Jesus' Example of Compassionate Love

In a world that often pushes away those who are different, broken, or struggling, Jesus shows us a radically different approach. Through the powerful story of Jesus healing a leper, we discover what it truly means to reach out with compassionate hands and touch the lives of those society has labeled "untouchable."

What Does It Mean to Be "Untouchable"?

In Jesus' time, lepers were the ultimate outcasts. They lost everything - their businesses, communities, families, and human contact. According to Luke's account, this particular man was "covered with leprosy," meaning he had been sick and isolated for a very long time. He hadn't experienced human touch or companionship in years.

Who Are Today's Untouchables?

While we may not have lepers in the same way today, we still have people who are physically and socially isolated because of their circumstances. Today's "untouchables" include:

- The homeless
- Drug addicts
- Those struggling with mental illness
- People with diseases like AIDS
- Orphans and abandoned children
- Lonely elderly people
- Anyone excluded from community, worship, or human contact
- People judged as less worthy of love, dignity, and belonging

How Did Jesus Respond to the Untouchable?

The story in Mark 1:40-42 reveals three powerful truths about Jesus' response to the desperate leper:

The Leper's Desperate Cry

The man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged on his knees, saying "If you are willing, you can make me clean." This wasn't just a polite request - it was a desperate cry from someone who had been discarded, hidden, and forgotten by society.

Jesus Was Filled with Compassion

Compassion isn't just feeling sorry for someone. True compassion involves both deep emotional understanding for another's distress AND an active desire to help them. Jesus didn't just feel bad for the leper - He was moved to action.

Jesus Touched the Untouchable

Here's what makes this story remarkable: Jesus didn't just speak healing from a distance. He reached out His hand and touched the man. In the original Greek, it indicates that Jesus didn't just lightly touch him - He "took hold of" the man, coming close with no space in between.

What Can We Learn from Jesus' Example?

Jesus calls us to "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me" (Matthew 11:28-30). When we spend time with Jesus and learn from Him, people will recognize that we've been with Him, just like they did with Peter and John.

God Uses Ordinary People

The disciples were described as "unschooled, ordinary men" (Acts 4:13), yet God used them powerfully. He still uses ordinary men and women today - not just pastors or paid staff, but all of us who are willing to follow Jesus' example.

We Have the Same Spirit and Mission

Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1 when launching His ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free" (Luke 4:18).

This same Spirit empowers us for the same mission - to reach the broken, bound, and blind with God's love.

A Real-Life Example of Touching the Untouchable

Sometimes touching the untouchable starts with simply seeing a need and responding with whatever we have in our hands. In 1995, a group of five ordinary mothers learned about abandoned babies in a South African hospital who were placed in cribs with sick children because there was nowhere else for them to go.

These babies cried themselves to sleep every night with no loving arms to hold them. The mothers felt compelled by compassion to act. Despite safety concerns, they began visiting twice a week to hold the babies, take them outside to feel grass and sunshine, and show them love.

What started as five moms with time and love in their hearts eventually grew into a full orphanage that provides the best education and care for abandoned children. It began when ordinary people asked, "What is in our hands?" and were willing to put their hands in God's hands.

What Is in Your Hand?

When God called Moses to rescue the Israelites from Egypt, Moses felt inadequate. God asked him, "What is in your hand?" Moses replied, "A staff" - just a simple stick. Yet God used that ordinary staff to part the Red Sea and deliver His people.

God isn't looking for perfect people with extraordinary abilities. He's looking for ordinary people willing to offer what they have - whether it's time, love, resources, or simply empty hands ready to be filled with His purpose.

Life Application

This week, ask God to open your eyes to the "untouchables" around you. Who in your community, workplace, or neighborhood needs the compassionate touch of Jesus through you?

Don't let fear hold you back from reaching out. Jesus shows us that no one is too far or too unclean for the touch of God. He wants to use your hands - ordinary hands filled with His extraordinary love - to make a difference in someone's life.

Consider these questions as you reflect on this message:

- Who are the "untouchables" in my community that God might be calling me to reach?
- What is currently in my hands (time, resources, skills, love) that God could use for His purposes?
- What fears are holding me back from stepping out in compassion toward those who are hurting?
- How can I follow Jesus' example of moving with both compassion and action this week?

Remember, Jesus is saying to each of us today: "Behold my hands" - the same hands that created the world and intimately formed you are ready to work through your hands to touch the untouchable with His love.