



Unit 3: Christian Leadership

How to positively influence the attitudes and actions of others for Jesus Christ.

Lesson 16

The Tender Heart of a Leader

Day One

Love Me Tender

In Lesson 15, *Spiritual Warfare*, we learned to stand our ground and take back strongholds from Satan and his demons. We *are* confident in combat because we do not stand alone. The Holy Spirit lives in us, providing counsel and battle plans as well as strength and power to succeed.

Although God's battle plans can contradict worldly wisdom, His ways far surpass human understanding. His knowledge transcends all others! This fact is illustrated in the story of Joshua and the Israelites' conquest of Jericho (Joshua 5:13–6:27). The commander of the Lord's army instructed Joshua to lead the Israelites in marching around Jericho for seven days. On the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times, accompanied by seven priests and armed men. At the end of the march, the priests were to blow trumpets and the army was to shout.

No instructions were given regarding the use of battering rams, logs, or other siege weapons. The Israelites, instead, marched around Jericho while carrying the ark of the covenant, symbolizing the Lord's presence. At the conclusion of the seven days and doing as directed, the formidable wall encircling the city crumbled, allowing Joshua's army to swiftly conquer it.

Another example of God's plans that confound human understanding is Jesus' death sentence. Worldly wisdom would have had Jesus initially arrive as a warrior King, defeating all those who stood in His way. Instead, He came to earth as a servant in human flesh and allowed His enemies to nail Him to a cross. Although He died, He rose from the dead and won the war against Satan. Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father in power and glory helping us with our individual battles and skirmishes until He returns—this time as our warrior King (Revelation 19:11–16).

Interestingly, the names "Joshua" and "Jesus" both have their origins in Hebrew and share the same root meaning, which is "Yahweh saves" or "The Lord is Salvation." Both Joshua and Jesus are associated with the idea of salvation and deliverance. Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, securing their freedom from oppression, while Jesus is *the* Savior who delivers humanity from sin and offers eternal salvation. Therefore, some Bible scholars interpret Joshua as an Old Testament archetype, or foreshadowing, of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah.

Sometimes our battle plans prompted by the Holy Spirit may seem strange and illogical to us. In those times we should refer back to Jesus' life—read one or more of the gospels. We should focus on Christ's obedience to God the Father, His prayer life, and His miracles. Our instructions come from the mind of God and will agree with His Word. We are not going to be asked to do anything sinful. Call on Jesus—He has shown us the way by going before us. Trust God.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:11–13 and answer questions 1–4:

For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. 1 Corinthians 2:11–13

1. Who knows the thoughts of God (v. 11)?
2. Do believers receive the spirit of the world (v. 12a)? Yes No (Underline One)
3. Who do believers receive from God so we may understand what God has given us (v. 12b)?
4. Believers do not speak in words taught by human wisdom. How then, are we taught (v. 13)?

The Holy Spirit gives us discernment and sensitivity in knowing God's will and plan for the battlefield. He gives us the ability to judge between human wisdom and God's wisdom. For example, read the title of this lesson, *The Tender Heart of a Leader*. In our human experience, it would seem an oxymoron (contradictory terms) to be a warmhearted leader. How can someone command or direct, and still exhibit a gentle spirit?

Read Matthew 23:37 and answer questions 5–6:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I [Jesus] have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing." Matthew 23:37

5. Even though the Jews had rejected God's message of grace and mercy, what does Jesus say?
6. By identifying with a hen gathering chicks, what kind of picture is Jesus painting of Himself?

Jesus could have compared Himself to any kind of impressive animal, such as a tiger, bear, rhinoceros, or eagle—yet He likens Himself to a lowly hen. She has no sharp teeth, claws, or armor. Even her ability to escape danger is limited—she cannot fly, run fast, or take many defensive maneuvers. In fact, hens do not get much respect in our world unless they are producing eggs or being served on a platter.

But hens do love their babies. Chicks love to nestle under their mother's soft wings for comfort and protection. If life gets too difficult in the field or the farmyard, they run for mama.

One of the dangers chickens face in the farmyard or in the field is fire. When a forest fire burned down a farmhouse a few years ago, the owner returned to inspect the damage. As he slowly walked through the ravaged yard, he noticed a burned lump on the ground. Not knowing exactly what it was, he took a stick and turned it over. To his great surprise, four baby chicks scampered out from under the charred body of their mother.

One of the dangers people could face after death is the fires of hell. In fact, at the same time Jesus cried out with tenderness about gathering the children as a hen gather her chicks, He warns the Jews of separation from God (Matthew 23:38). We do not know the time when our earthly life will end, but like the baby chicks taking refuge in their mother, we need to take refuge in Jesus.

Jesus' body was hardly recognizable when it was removed from the cross (read the prophecy of Isaiah 52:14). But just like the hen gives her life for her brood, so Jesus gives His life for us. By describing Himself as a mother hen, Jesus is revealing Himself as a *caring* and nurturing defender. This characteristic in no way diminishes His power—He is a *strong yet tender* warrior.

Jesus cares for you and expresses His feelings for you in many ways. Open your heart to new ways of His tenderness and care. He is considerate and protective of you and will never let you go. Listen and look daily for the Holy Spirit whispering His tender love for you in varied and marvelous ways.

Definition: The word *tender* is an adjective describing a loving and gentle person. A *tender* person is kind, sympathetic, sensitive, and caring toward others. A *tender* person is in touch with their emotions and often feels them intensely. *Tender* can also mean being responsive to God's guidance.

God the Father is tender. God the Spirit is tender. God the Son is tender. Remember that God has many characteristics and one trait does not reduce the reality of the others. For example, God's righteousness and power do not diminish His love and tenderness for His people. The same is, or should be, true of our character.

Read Isaiah 53:2–4 and answer questions 7–13:

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. ⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. Isaiah 53:2–4

7. Who is the prophet Isaiah prophesying about?

8. How did the Messiah grow up (v. 2a)?

9. How is Jesus, the Messiah, described physically (v. 2b)?

10. How was Jesus treated by the people He created (v. 3)?

11. What kind of person would take up your pain and carry your sorrows (v. 4)?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #5–11 with your discipleship team.

Jesus grew up “like a tender shoot,” a seedling from King David’s dynasty. David’s royal line (his family) had not seen a king on the throne for about 600 years, until it produced the King of kings and Lord of lords. Sadly, many people failed to recognize Jesus during His time on earth.

Jesus was different from the people’s view of a king. In fact, He was not like earthly kings at all. He had no majesty or beauty in His appearance and was despised and rejected by those He had come to serve and save.

Before believers place their faith in Christ, we were actively rejecting our tender King. The “we” in Isaiah 53:2–3 above, applied to the Israelites and to every person ever born, including you and me. Sadly, even as Christians, there are times when we fail to value the “man of suffering.” We hesitate to identify with Jesus in His rejection, sadness, and grief, preferring to embrace Him only in His resurrection power, joy, and glory.

We often overlook the fact that, like Jesus, our glory comes after our earthly life. In our attempts to avoid carrying our own cross and identifying with our Leader, we may overtly or subtly reject Him. For instance, to evade rejection, pain, or discomfort, we may seek to control situations or manipulate circumstances for our own benefit.

Jesus had requested to be released from the cross, but immediately prayed, “yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Through His actions, Jesus has shown us how to handle difficult situations. We pray and seek relief from the difficulties we face, but willingly accept them in accordance with God’s purposes. Our contentment lies in God—not in circumstances.

12. Reflecting on Luke 22:42, why is it significant that Jesus submitted to God’s will despite His own desire for relief?

13. How can we apply Jesus’ example of submitting to God’s will to our own lives when facing difficult circumstances or hardships?

Jesus was, is, and will always be a tender leader. He does not come adorned in the trappings of earthly authority but with the heavenly qualities of true leadership. As our royal model, Jesus is robed in compassion, mercy, sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and love. These are the defining characteristics of a “tender leader.”

14. Which of these characteristics—compassion, mercy, sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and love—do you most struggle with and why?

Action Step

Read and meditate on Deuteronomy 32:1–3; Proverbs 4:3–4; Mark 10:13–16 and answer questions 15–16. Ask God to speak to you through these verses.

Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; hear, you earth, the words of my mouth. ² Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants. ³ I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!
Deuteronomy 32:1–3

For I too was a son to my father, still tender, and cherished by my mother. ⁴ Then he taught me, and he said to me, “Take hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands, and you will live. Proverbs 4:3–4

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.
Mark 10:13–16

15. What did God say or impress upon you through these Scripture passages?

16. How will you change in thought, attitude, or action because of your answer above?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #12–16 with your team. Also pray for each other regarding the development of the characteristics of compassion, mercy, sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and love.

—End Day One—

Day Two

The Royal Cloth of Compassion and Mercy

Jesus, our leadership model, is clothed in a regal robe woven with tender hues. Each color is stunning in its own right, yet blends perfectly together with the others. The royal cloth is crafted from the blush of compassion, mercy, sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and love. These are all characteristics of our tender Leader and ones that we should embrace.

So how can we cultivate a tender heart like Jesus? Today let's focus on two aspects of Jesus' tender heart: compassion and mercy. We begin by looking at God the Father. Then we look at God the Son

(1) Compassion

Definition: *Compassion* is the concern for the sufferings of others and the desire to help.

17. Read Exodus 34:6. When God passed in front of Moses, what was the first adjective He used in describing Himself?

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness". . . Exodus 34:6

God tells us plainly throughout Scripture that He is compassionate and tenderhearted. He understands our sufferings and longs to comfort us in all our troubles. Being gracious, the Lord's compassions never fail, they are new every morning.

Like the Father, God the Son shows compassion as well. Ultimately His compassion for men and women, boys and girls sent Jesus to the cross. When putting on the royal cloth of compassion, believers are stirred and motivated to aid others in their hardships or difficulties. Concern for individuals or groups in need inspires us to extend Christ's love to them through our actions.

18. Read Matthew 9:36. Why did Jesus have compassion on the crowds?

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Matthew 9:36 (Harassed is being disturbed with troubles or cares.)

19. Read Mark 1:40–42. When a man with leprosy begged Jesus to make him clean, how did Jesus respond?

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." ⁴¹ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Mark 1:40–42

Definitions: The 2011 NIV Bible translates the Greek word *splagchnizomai*, (σπλαγχνίζομαι) with the English word “*indignant*” in Mark 1:41. *Indignant* is the feeling of or showing anger because of unfair treatment, or that something is unjust or unworthy. However, the Greek word *splagchnizoma*, in the Greek Lexicons (Friberg, Gingrich, and Danker), is defined as being moved with *compassion* for, feeling sympathy with, and taking pity on someone. Other Bible versions such as the NAS and NKJV translate *splagchnizomai*—moved with *compassion*.

Jesus demonstrated compassion through His actions, such as reaching out and touching a diseased man in Mark 1:41 above. Not just any diseased man, but a man with a horrible, ugly, infectious disease. The NIV translates the infectious skin disease as leprosy (Hansen’s disease).

Those with leprosy can have many deforming lesions and patches on their skin. In severe cases, leprosy can lead to the loss of fingers, toes, or other body parts. This happens because the disease damages nerves, which can result in injuries going unnoticed and untreated, leading to infections and complications that may require amputation. In the 1800s and earlier, due to the fear of contracting leprosy and the social stigma surrounding the disease, many individuals affected by it were isolated or segregated from society.

Joseph de Veuster (1840–1889) from Flanders in Belgium desired a heart of compassion like Jesus. He joined the priesthood of the Catholic Church and went to Hawaii as a missionary priest in 1864. The native Hawaiians were being infected and dying from various diseases, including leprosy that had been introduced by traders and sailors.¹

The king of Hawaii ordered that those infected with leprosy be moved to the north side of the island of Molokai. This was done to protect the rest of the population from contracting the disease. It became a chaotic leper colony with 816 men, women, and children. There was no Christian or secular leadership—sin was rampant. Think about it—in addition to the ugliness of this infectious disease, a trip to Molokai was a death sentence.

Who would want to go to an island and serve such an unappealing group? Who would have compassion for these tormented souls? Who would take pity on this particular crowd that was harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd? Who would reach out and touch them?

God witnessed the anguish and the hurt and chose someone with His Son’s compassion. Joseph, known as Father Damien, answered God’s call and journeyed to Molokai in 1873. There, he constructed a church, homes, beds, and coffins. Despite lacking medical training as a doctor, he treated the lepers’ ulcers and their wounds with care and compassion. Father Damien also conducted numerous funerals and dug many graves for the dead.

20. Would you have been willing to serve in such a leper colony? Yes No Maybe (Underline One)

We may think that we are a tenderhearted leader, but when we read about people like Father Damien, we realize that we have a long way to go. The only way Father Damien or any of us can have true compassion is through Jesus. Pray the following prayer for the gift of compassion:

¹< https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Father_Damien>(accessed 3/15/2013).

Holy Father, I pray in Jesus' name to have true compassion. Holy Spirit, move in my heart and help me to cooperate with You so that I may look on crowds and individuals like Jesus did. Move me into action immediately and use me to provide spiritual and physical comfort to those in need. Help me to develop compassion in those I am discipling, leading, or influencing by modeling Jesus' compassionate behavior. Amen.

21. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–5. What is God telling you through these verses?

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. 2 Corinthians 1:3–5

Accountability: Be prepared to share #20–21 with your discipleship team.

In our pursuit of cultivating a tender heart like that of Jesus, we have discussed compassion, and now we delve into the characteristic of mercy. Jesus is merciful and wants us to be merciful too. Consequently, God is refining our hearts, making precise “heart adjustments” so that we might enjoy a tender heart that reflects the mercy of Jesus.

(2) Mercy

Definition: *Mercy* can be defined as kindness or forgiveness toward another person. *Mercy* is also defined as withholding punishment and showing compassion to those under one's power.

A merciful leader refrains from inflicting punishment or pain on someone when it is in their power to do so. Jesus modeled mercy on the cross when He died a horrible death for the unrighteous (Romans 3:10, 5:8). Being God the Son, it was within Jesus' power to impose punishment and pain to those who crucified him. Nevertheless, He remained on the cross and asked God to forgive them.

Jesus also withstood insults and false accusations while He was physically on earth. Even today, Jesus sees and hears all the insults and false accusations spewing from the mouths of people whom He created. Still, He shows mercy, wanting all to come to repentance and spend eternity with Him (1 Timothy 2:4).

The Lord knows that if sinners fail to turn from their wicked ways, they will end up in hell. When Jesus walked the earth, He engaged with sinners for the purpose of their salvation. He did not engage in their sins or condone (overlook) them. No matter who He was with, Jesus shared about the kingdom of God.

When Jesus was eating with tax collectors and other “sinners,” the Pharisees questioned His disciples about it in a negative way (Matthew 9:11–13). They were not concerned about these sinners who needed to hear about God but were only interested in rule keeping and rule giving.

They were not reading or searching out Scriptures to know God's heart and His ways, but to keep the people in "rule-keeping" bondage.

At this time the Pharisees were the religious leaders and had power over the people. They could have shown kindness to the people and helped them in their relationship with God. Instead of showing them how to live by God's law and have their sins forgiven through the sacrificial system, the religious leaders chose to isolate themselves and feed their condemning and judgmental spirit. They were not merciful.

Father Damian wanted people to have their sins forgiven in Christ. When he first arrived in Hawaii, he began as a traditional Western missionary. He wanted to see as many Hawaiians saved as possible and fervently traveled the big island on horseback to share the gospel. Afterwards, he traveled on horseback to share the gospel on the Island of Maui.²

When Father Damian arrived at the leper colony in 1873, he began at once visiting the people and sharing Christ. He became their pastor and priest with the desire to make their island a community centered on Christ. Sin was rampant at the time and his work was cut out for him—he worked tirelessly to meet spiritual as well as physical needs.

In some cases, he showed mercy and kindness to those outside the Catholic faith. This troubled his superiors. For example, he called Protestants his brothers in Christ and shared money donated by Catholics to them as well. When nonpracticing Catholics asked for help, Father Damian responded with assistance.³ He was kind to all the people in his care and did not show partiality.

Believers have the truth of Jesus Christ and can show kindness to others also, whether in or outside of certain faith denominations. Not only can we help people in their relationship with God, but with physical needs too. While we are serving God, there will always be opportunities to forgive those who disagree, slander, or hurt us.

Action Step

22. Prayerfully consider who you need to show mercy to this week. In other words, who can you show kindness to, or forgive? Write how God leads you and what happened.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your response to the action step above with your team.

In your zeal to be merciful, remember that God does not want us to engage in the wrongdoing of others. Jesus always had a holy purpose in seeking the lost. He never participated in their sin or agreed with their lifestyle. Jesus entered into our world, not to fit in, but to bring us to His heavenly kingdom.

23. Read Psalm 1:1. Who does God bless?

²< <https://www.thirdwell.org/father-damien.html>>(accessed 7/5/2022).

³ <<https://the-low-countries.com/article/rebel-with-a-cause-father-damien-on-molokai>>(accessed 7/5/2022).

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers. Psalm 1:1

24. Read Psalm 25:8. Who does the Lord instruct and who does He guide?

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. ⁹ He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. Psalm 25:8–9

Neither Jesus nor His disciples accepted advice from sinners, nor were they following them in any way. They were in the company of sinners to give *them* instruction or counsel in the ways of God. Their intent was that sinners would turn from their evil ways and follow God.

The Pharisees did not want to forgive or help sinners. They had no mercy in their hearts. They were in love with their own self-righteous rituals and not in love with God. They missed the whole point of the law: Love your God and love your neighbor.

25. Read Matthew 9:13. What is Jesus' answer to the Pharisees when they asked why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners?

“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” Matthew 9:13 (Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6.)

In Matthew 9:13, Jesus was not saying that the Pharisees were righteous. Instead, He was making a distinction between the humble who recognize they are sinners and the proud who do not. The rest of the gospel account makes it clear that the Pharisees were indeed sinners.

Jesus said to go and learn what God meant when He said, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ The first place the Pharisees should have gone was to the Hebrew Scriptures, which we call the Old Testament in the Bible. This is also where we should go to learn why Jesus quoted this verse. Read all of chapter 6 in Hosea and in Matthew, chapters 9 and 12 for clarity and understanding.

Poetry is literature written in high-quality verse. Hebrew poetry often pairs words with equal or strongly related meanings. This form of poetry is called parallelism (parallel, similar) and is found throughout the Old Testament. For an example, see Hosea 6:6 below.

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.
Hosea 6:6 (Underlining by author)

In this verse, “mercy” is paralleled with “acknowledgment of God” while “sacrifice” is aligned with “burnt offerings.” Both mercy and acknowledgment of God emphasize the relational aspect of one’s faith. “Mercy” involves extending grace and forgiveness to others, mirroring God’s own gracious and merciful nature. To know God or “acknowledge” Him is to recognize His grace and mercy. Both concepts emphasize the importance of a personal relationship with God and living

in alignment with His will. “Sacrifice” and “burnt offerings” emphasize the idea of giving something of value to God as an act of worship and devotion, demonstrating submission to His will and seeking His favor and forgiveness.

26. Read the following three translations of Matthew 9:11–13. Explain the meaning of this verse: “‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

When the Pharisees saw him keeping this kind of company, they had a fit, and lit into Jesus’ followers. “What kind of example is this from your Teacher, acting cozy with crooks and misfits?” ^{12–13} *Jesus, overhearing, shot back, “Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? Go figure out what this Scripture means: ‘I’m after mercy, not religion.’ I’m here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders.”* (The Message)

But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with such scum?” ¹² *When Jesus heard this, he said, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do.”* ¹³ *Then he added, “Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’ For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.”* (New Living Translation)

When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹² *On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”* ¹³ *But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”* (New International Version)

God is more interested in our hearts than our rituals or traditions. For us, rituals may be attending church or reading the Bible out of habit. We may be more interested in proving our self-righteousness and in a sense, judging others, rather than seeking God. Our motivation and reasoning behind our activities are more important to God than the rules we champion. This includes the mindset of the Israelites when they offered the animal sacrifices.

Action Step: Read the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant: Matthew 18:21–35

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to convict you (to show guilt) of any unmerciful acts that you have done or any unmerciful attitudes that you have in your heart. With each remembrance, ask God if there is anything that He would like for you to do about it now. Do it immediately. Ask God’s forgiveness in the blood of Christ and move on in mercy through the power of the Holy Spirit.

27. How have you been unmerciful and what does God want you to do about it?

Accountability: Share your answer to #26 with your discipleship team. Sharing #27 is optional.

—End Day Two—

Day Three

The Royal Cloth of Sympathy and Empathy

Recall from yesterday (Day Two) that Jesus, our leadership model, is clothed in a royal, colorful robe. This royal cloth is dyed with compassion, mercy, sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and love. These are tender characteristics of Jesus we want to emulate. After exploring compassion and mercy, we now examine sympathy.

(3) Sympathy

Definition: *Sympathy* refers to the capacity to comprehend another individual's emotions or sensations from one's own viewpoint. Additionally, *sympathy* entails experiencing feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's trouble, hardship, or misfortune.

Read John 11:32–35 and answer questions 28–31:

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept.
John 11:32–35

28. How was Mary (Martha's sister) feeling after her brother Lazarus died?

29. When Jesus saw Mary and the other mourners weeping, what was His response (vv. 34–35)?

Jesus was sympathetic. He was deeply moved and troubled—He wept. Please see the order of Jesus' actions. He did not brush off Mary and the Jews' emotions even when He knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:4, 11, 15, 23). Instead, Jesus understood and shared in their grief, and then He raised Lazarus.

30. Why, or why are you not able to sympathize with or share in another's grief and pain?

31. If you are not able to sympathize with another's grief or pain, how can your discipleship team pray for you?

Accountability: Be prepared to share #28–31 and pray for each other with your team.

Even if we do not have *many* hurts or challenges, we welcome a sympathetic ear when we do hurt. It is immensely helpful and emotionally healing to have someone listen patiently and show genuine concern for our pain and misfortunes. It is important for those within our sphere of influence to witness this aspect of our leadership—to know that we genuinely care.

As with every good thing, be careful not to overdo it. There is balance in life, even in holy characteristics. Jesus was not continually weeping nor did He encourage it. If you or those you are discipling are always having problems and seeking attention, that is a different issue. These people may need trained counselors to help them get to the root of their problems.

God does raise up and work through trained professionals to heal and serve others. On the other hand, the situation could involve a sin issue whereby the person has a selfish and self-centered agenda. Prayerfully consider how the Lord wants you to proceed. We do not want to enable anyone to be a constant complainer, grumbler, or attention seeker. Our job as a shepherd leader is to allow the Spirit to move us appropriately in sympathy and in all other godly characteristics.

Read Romans 12:15–16a and answer questions 32–35:

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Romans 12:15–16a

- 32.** In addition to mourning with those who mourn, what are two other things we should do?
- 33.** Which is easier for *you*, being sympathetic with those who suffer or rejoicing with those who rejoice?
- 34.** From your answer in #33, why do you think one characteristic is easier than the other?
- 35.** How will wearing the cloth of sympathy help you to live in harmony with one another?

Accountability: Be prepared to share #32–35 and pray for each other with your team.

Not only are we to sympathize with those who are grieving, but also we are to rejoice with those who are rejoicing. Sometimes it may be easier to feel sympathy for someone having a difficult time than it is to be happy for someone's good fortune. There can be various reasons for this, such as our own feelings of depression, injustice (unfairness), jealousy, or envy.

Most likely we would not be envious of someone's illness or grief, but what about their work promotion, new house, or beach vacation? The tenth commandment directs us not to covet (desire or crave) anything of our neighbors (Exodus 20:17). God is telling us not to have an unhealthy longing for something that is not ours. A wrong desire in one's heart is the springboard for outwardly sinful actions.

Similarly, we are not covetous of believers' spiritual attacks and the devil's temptations, but what about believers' success in ministry? Sometimes another's success can make us feel unsuccessful or unacceptable. We may desire the achievement or accomplishment of others but not their sacrifice, commitment, and discipline required to get there.

Christians *can* be tempted and succumb (surrender) to earthly success and approval even in ministry. We may sympathize when a ministry leader is struggling to pay the electric bill and to see the fruit of their labors, but are we rejoicing when donations are flowing in and everyone is talking about the great work they are doing for the kingdom? The same principle would apply to a dynamic Bible teacher attracting thousands when we are teaching God's Word to only a few people.

When we are busy comparing ourselves to others, our focus is off God and His will for us. We must guard our hearts and remember to be happy for those upon whom God smiles! It does not mean that God loves us less—it just means that His plan for us is different. Understanding and sharing another's feelings, whether sad or happy, can help us live in harmony with one another.

Five Practical Ways to Rejoice with Those Who Rejoice

When faced with difficulty in genuinely rejoicing in the success or accomplishments of others, consider employing these five strategies to open your heart to celebrating in others' blessings.

1. Concentrate on your identity in Christ.
2. Be thankful for all God has given you.
3. Trust God with your past, present, and future.
4. Rely on the Holy Spirit to enable you to rejoice with those who rejoice.
5. Be an active and daily encourager to yourself and others.

36. Read the above five practical ways to rejoice with others. Which one will you put into practice and why?

Accountability: Be prepared to share #36 and pray for each other with your team.

God's plan for Father Damian was different from most. He was called to serve and live among hundreds of people with leprosy. Not too many people would be jealous of Father Damian's life purpose, although some might be envious of his self-less reputation.

One of the keys to Father Damian's success in his work with people diagnosed with leprosy was his ability to live in sympathy with them. He understood their plight and fought for them to have a normal existence. In this regard, he helped them participate in regular activities and did not treat them as people with no hope.

He organized parties, musical events, and encouraged laughter. Working through the church and government, he fought for clothing, housing, and better medical care. He even formed burial societies, so that those with no relatives or close friends would not die alone.

Through his sympathetic and caring work with the people, Father Damian realized that those who have the support of a loved one handled the disease better—their symptoms were not as severe. Father Damian shared this information often, and his findings had a long-lasting effect on care for the terminally ill and their families in the field of healthcare.⁴

⁴ <<https://the-low-countries.com/article/rebel-with-a-cause-father-damien-on-molokai>>(accessed 7/5/2022).

(4) Empathy

In cultivating a tender heart like Jesus, we studied the trait of compassion, mercy, and sympathy. Now we turn our attention to our fourth characteristic, empathy. In exploring empathy, we aim to deepen our understanding of others' emotions and experiences while further aligning ourselves with the benevolent⁵ nature of Jesus.

Definition: *Empathy* is similar to sympathy but takes feelings deeper. *Empathy* is the ability to identify oneself mentally with a person and understand his or her feelings, motives, and particular situation. In a sense, as we *empathize*, we become the other person.

Read Hebrews 2:17–18 and answer questions 37–39:

For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Hebrews 2:17–18

37. In what way was Jesus made like humans (v. 17a)?

38. What was the purpose of Jesus being made like you and me (v. 17b–c)?

39. Why do you think Jesus is empathetic in your suffering and pain (v. 18)?

40. Read Hebrews 4:15. Who is able to empathize with our weaknesses?

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Hebrews 4:15

Jesus understands people, not only because He is God, but because He was made like us in every way. He was made human so that He could become a merciful and faithful high priest, reconciling humanity to our triune God. During His earthly life, Jesus was challenged with many trials and temptations as well as suffering extreme emotional and physical pain.

When we are communicating empathically, we are receptive to what other people are expressing. We are not thinking about how we will respond but how others are feeling. Our focus is such that we can emotionally experience what is being shared. We are involved in understanding and identifying with the other person. Christ became man and totally identified with us. He

⁵ Benevolent is an adjective that describes someone or something as having a disposition or intention to do good and to be kind, generous, and charitable toward others. It typically denotes a compassionate and altruistic attitude or action.

empathizes with our suffering and encourages us with His love. We should have the same empathetic attitude when others suffer and encourage them in His love.

Jesus took the concept of empathy to a degree that we cannot replicate. He actually took all sins into His body on a cross and paid the price for our transgressions—“by His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). Although we do not have the capacity to take someone’s sins into our body, we do have the ability to tell others about the Christ who did.

Action Step: Meditate on Philippians 2:3–8 and respond to action steps 41–43:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Philippians 2:3–8

41. Memorize Philippians 2:5–8.

42. A mindset is the established set of attitudes held by someone. What is Jesus’ mindset?

43. This week, focus on practicing the same mindset as Christ Jesus. At the end of the week, reflect on the following question: What did you learn or discover about yourself from this experience? (Make a note or set a reminder to ensure you remember to do this).

Accountability: Be prepared to share your memory verse #41 and #42–43 with your team.

Father Damien likely drew inspiration from Philippians 2:3–8, prompting him to embrace a life of empathy among people afflicted with leprosy. What else would explain how a young man would give up his life to serve people suffering from such a dreadful disease. Only Jesus can give us the strength and commitment to live in tender empathy with all people.

When Father Damien introduced himself to his new flock at Molokai on May 10, 1873, he told them that he was “one who will be a father to you, and who loves you so much that he does not hesitate to become one of you; to live and die with you.” Writing to his brother some years later, he explained: “I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all to Jesus Christ. That is why, in preaching, I say ‘we lepers,’ not, ‘my brethren.’”⁶

—End Day Three—

⁶ <<https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/the-meaning-of-father-damien>>(accessed 7/5/2022).

Day Four

The Royal Cloth of Sensitivity

Our journey continues in cultivating hearts as tender as Jesus'. We have examined the royal hues and traits of compassion, mercy, sympathy, and empathy. Now we turn to sensitivity.

(5) Sensitivity

Definition: *Sensitivity* means responsiveness or openness through one's senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, or smell. It is also an awareness and understanding of the feelings of other people.

For this characteristic, we are going to talk about Jesus' sensitivity to God the Father and God the Spirit. Jesus listened and watched for God. He complied with and acted upon what He heard and observed. Jesus had a tender and soft heart toward God—always open and sensitive to the Father's leading no matter how difficult the assignment. He was responsive, which means Jesus reacted quickly, strongly, and favorably toward God and what He desired.

44. Read John 14:31. What are the two things that the world must learn?

I [Jesus] will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world [Satan] is coming. He has no hold over me, ³¹but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me. "Come now; let us leave." John 14:30–31

45. Read Exodus 8:19. Who had a hard heart and was not responsive to God?

The magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said. Exodus 8:19

The opposite of having a soft (sensitive, aware, responsive) heart to God is having a hard (insensitive, unaware, unresponsive) heart to God. After the third plague (gnats), even Pharaoh's magicians were aware that God was working powerfully in Egypt. But Pharaoh refused to listen.

Read Zechariah 7:12–13 and answer questions 46–49:

They [Israelites] made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry. ¹³"When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen," says the LORD Almighty." Zechariah 7:12–13 (Flint is a hard, sedimentary rock.)

46. Did God's people make their hearts hard as flint (v. 12a)? Yes No (Underline One)

47. How did the Israelites respond to the law and God's words through the prophets (v. 12b)?

48. Was the Lord Almighty very angry (v. 12c)? Yes No (Underline One)

49. How does God respond to hard-hearted people who are not sensitive toward Him? (v. 13)

Zechariah began preaching in about 520 BC, about 900 years after the Lord freed the Israelites from Pharaoh's captivity. The Israelites had hardened their hearts and would not listen to the law or the prophets, two important ways God communicated with His people. Due to their insensitivity to God and His desires, when they called on Him, He chose not to respond.

Another 900 years go by and Jesus was born. Religious groups called the Pharisees and Sadducees were leading God's people at the time. Their hearts were so hardened that they were unable to recognize the Son of God. Jesus was working around them with signs, miracles, and healings—yet they attributed His work to the devil (John 8:52).

This lie spread through their hard hearts. Even after Jesus' death, the miracles He performed and those done through His disciples were considered by some to be from the devil. A Jewish text, the Babylonian Talmud, which was finalized in the sixth century, has two references to Jesus and His unusual powers. The references charge that the "Nazarene" practiced sorcery and led Israel astray. The Talmud warned others not to have anything to do with these people.⁷

Read John 12:42–43 and answer questions 50–53:

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³for they loved human praise more than praise from God. John 12:42–43

50. Can a person believe Jesus is the Son of God and not acknowledge Him outwardly (v. 42)?
Yes No (Underline One)

51. Why can people believe in Jesus and not openly acknowledge their faith in Him (vv. 42–43)?

52. Why do you think some people are more sensitive to other people rather than to God (v. 43)?

53. How should *you* respond to Jesus?

54. Read Hebrews 3:12. What is the author of Hebrews warning the church about?

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. Hebrews 3:12

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 58–59.

55. Read Hebrews 3:13. What is one way that you can help others develop a soft heart toward God?

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13

You can support and cheer on one another in many ways. However, the encouragement should be centered on the Lord. It is not solely about boosting someone’s self-esteem apart from Christ. Rather, we encourage believers so they remain sensitive to the Lord.

We live in a day or era of grace whereby our sins are forgiven in Christ. But sin is devious and cunning. Sin does not always present itself as sin. For example, suppose the Lord had impressed upon you that you are to rest or worship on a particular day. He wants to spend time alone with you. Then someone calls with a physical need, and you immediately rush off to help.

Did God change His mind about your spending time with Him? This is where we need to be careful. Perhaps your impression of what God wanted was incorrect. It is possible for us to be mistaken. On the other hand, God may want someone else to help this person and not you. There is also the possibility that you may want to help because you are afraid of what the person or others may think of you and your reputation as a caring Christian.

In this way sin tries to deceive you into disobeying God with a “good work.” Anything that takes you out of God’s will, no matter how honorable it appears, is sin. It usually comes down to seeking people’s approval and praise rather than God’s. To this end, we are presented with regular tests that reveal where our true sensitivities lie.

Now it is excellent to help others and we are commanded to do so, but nevertheless, it is always a matter of God’s will and His priorities. Consider Lazarus and how Jesus did *not* answer the sister’s urgent message immediately. He waited two days before responding (John 11:1–12:19).

Action Step

56. Ask God to “tenderize” your heart and to give you practical ways to develop sensitivity. What are some of the ways God has led you in developing a soft heart?

Accountability: Be prepared to share #49–55 with your discipleship team.

After 13 years of service, Father Damien contracted leprosy. On his deathbed he said, “It is the will of God, and I thank Him very much for letting me die of the same disease and in the same way as my lepers.”⁸ Father Damien was sensitive and grateful to God even in death.

—End Day Four—

⁸ <<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/father-damiens-legacy-leader-example-martyr-charity-john-fenzel>>(accessed 7/5/2022).

Day Five

The Royal Cloth of Love

In Lesson 2: *Triple Love Poured Out*, we learned about God's incredible love for us. Our belief and trust in God's unfailing love is an act of faith, just like our belief in salvation. Although during our lifetime as Christians we will *feel* and *see* the effects of both God's love and salvation, there may be times when we do not. This does not mean God has deserted us or that He loves us any less.

This belief of God's love, no matter how we feel, will help us tremendously when donning our colorful, regal cloak and practicing the traits it represents. In cultivating a tender heart like Jesus, we have studied the traits of compassion, mercy, sympathy, empathy, and sensitivity. Today, we pursue love, our sixth and final characteristic.

(6) Love

Definition: We are going to define *love* in terms of the Greek word *agapao* (ἀγαπάω). The following are definitions based on three Greek Lexicons (Danker, Friberg, and Gingrich). *Agapao*, translated *love* in English Bibles, is defined as having such an interest in another that one wishes to contribute to the other's well-being. *Agapao*, is also defined as being loyal to, or regarding someone highly. Lastly, it means to have affection for, hold in high esteem, cherish, and show the greatest concern or care for someone.

God loves you and desires for you to love others. For a greater understanding of love, read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Although there are four different words in the ancient Greek language for love, this Corinthian passage and the following verses use *agapao* (ἀγαπάω).

Read Matthew 5:44 and answer questions 57–59:

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:44–48

57. According to the definition of love above, describe how you are to love your enemies?

58. Why is it so difficult to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you?

59. What motivation (inspiration) do you get from these verses to love and pray for enemies?

Israel was ruled by the Roman Empire during the time of Jesus' ministry. The Jewish tax collectors worked for the hated Romans. Not only were the tax collectors considered traitors, but robbers as well. They collected more money than Rome required and kept it for themselves.

Therefore, Jesus used the tax collectors as a common example of a foe or enemy. But He added that even these rogues and pagans loved their family or friends who loved them. Jesus calls believers to a higher standard. Beyond loving those who love us, we are tasked with loving our enemies—not merely acknowledging the command but actively praying for and desiring their well-being.

Jesus did not suffer and die just for His family and friends—He loved and died for everyone. Some repent and accept His love and salvation, others do not. We are to love and share God's plan of salvation with everyone. Some will repent and accept God's love and salvation—others will not. Still, we keep our royal cloth of love fixed firmly over our tender hearts.

Read 1 John 4:19–21 and answer questions 60–62:

We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. 1 John 4:19–21

60. Why are we able to love (v. 19)?

61. Can you love God and hate others (v. 20)? Yes No (Underline One)

62. Write the command of verse 21:

Accountability: Be prepared to share #57–62 with your discipleship team.

If we love God, we will seek to love everyone. That is, we will pursue or desire to love everyone. It is still a process and may not happen overnight. Do not be discouraged; you *will* grow in love and mercy. Like anything else, some develop faster than others. Loving those who hurt us is a challenge, and we may not have reached such a level of excellence. But we, and those we shepherd, must still seek perfection.

Paul plainly states that he has not attained perfection, yet he persists in pressing forward (Philippians 3:12–14), refusing to give up. Similarly, Peter urges us to exert every effort to be found blameless (2 Peter 3:14). As Christians, our love should continually deepen with each passing day. Rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the wisdom of God's Word, the power of prayer, and the grace of God to be perfected in love.

Remember that any love that is not based on God's love will be tainted and self-serving. Our Christian leadership will become about us and our gifts and abilities. We will desire to lead for our own self-satisfaction, emotional support, and ego. May we keep our hearts and our love pure.

Pray: *Lord, I pray for tender love for Your people. Open their hearts to see and feel Your love in all that I say and do. Amen.*

Action Step

63. Review all the colors of your royal robe of tenderness: (1) compassion, (2) mercy, (3) sympathy, (4) empathy, (5) sensitivity and (6) love. Which one needs the most development and what will you do to improve this characteristic?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #62 with your discipleship team.

After 13 years of compassionate service, Father Damien died on April 15, 1889. "Above his grave on Molokai his friends set a black marble cross with the inscription, 'Damien de Veuster, Died a Martyr of Charity.' His body was reburied in Louvain, Belgium in 1936."⁹

Critics might say that Father Damien was too careless or too cavalier (showing a lack of proper concern) in working with the people with leprosy. He shared his pipe, food, and other items with them. Did he presume on God's protection against this contagious disease? We cannot answer those questions. They are only for God to decide.

What we do know is that even with the deadly disease of leprosy, he kept right on serving until his physical strength was gone. "Damien, known for his compassion, provided spiritual, physical, and emotional comfort to those suffering from the debilitating and incurable disease. He served as both pastor and physician to the colony and undertook many projects to better the conditions there. He improved water and food supplies and housing and founded two orphanages."¹⁰ He followed our model, Jesus Christ, as a tender-hearted leader.

—End Day Five and Lesson 16—

Next—Lesson 17: The Leader in Worship, Unit 3: Christian Leadership

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⁹ <<https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/roman-catholic-and-orthodox-churches-general-biographies/father>>(accessed 7/5/2022).

¹⁰ <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Damien-of-Molokai>>(accessed 7/5/2022).