

Feeling Unlovable? Remember Jesus and the Leper

The book of Luke tells the story of an outcast, a leprous man who cried out to Jesus as He ministered to people. The leper knew that he was in violation of Levitical law but ran toward Jesus and, in an amazing declaration of his faith, acknowledged Jesus as Lord. "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean" (5:12). He fell on his knees, imploring Jesus to heal him from his disease. Jesus touched the man, instantly healing him and making him whole.

In Jesus' day, lepers lay at the bottom rung of society. Everyone rejected them—even their own families. They were worthless, outcasts.

As a teenager, I felt like this man in many ways. He was exiled from society because of his disease. Although I didn't have leprosy, I hid my broken, diseased heart from the world around me. I had experienced trauma as a child, and after my parent's divorce, I couldn't seem to figure out who I was, who I belonged to or if I was even worthy of being loved.

How many years passed before Jesus touched this leprous man? No one acknowledged or accepted him from the moment his leprosy became known. He lived in isolation, knowing that his life mattered to no one. What horrible rejection he must have endured.

Day after desolate day, he must have grieved all he had lost without any hope for change. Can you imagine how the touch of another human being would feel to this man? That Jesus stopped and took notice of him was a miracle in and of itself.

Lepers were required to shout, "Unclean!" as they walked. People crossed the street rather than risk even their shadow touching them. But Jesus did stop. He looked the man in the

eyes, and love poured through them.

Jesus took hold of this man, demonstrating his worth and value, accepting him. And the moment He embraced him, the man was healed. See, love heals. And the Bible tells us that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8). Jesus did more than just heal him physically; He touched the depth of the pain in his heart and made him whole.

Many of us spend our entire lives just wanting to be accepted. We want to be accepted by our parents, our friends, our bosses and the people around us. This desire can drive us to do all sorts of things. For me, it drove the way I dressed and presented myself to the world around me. I wore all black because I truly felt like the light inside me had gone out. I soon quit talking because I felt like the expression of my heart was silent—there were not words to express the pain I felt.

We are wired to receive the acceptance of our heavenly Father. In Him, we find the acceptance and love our souls long for.

For many years of my life, I felt just like the leprous man. Like an outsider—rejected, lost and unworthy. I didn't know that I had a Father in heaven who loved and accepted me. As a result, I carried shame.

We're human. That means our hearts desire acceptance. Even when we don't know how to put it into words, our hearts long for acceptance by the One who fashioned us.

We want to be loved by God—our heavenly Father. We want to understand how we were made and why we were made. Each of us longs to know our identity and rest in the security that God created us for a purpose.

We find hope in the Lord when we call on the name of Jesus; He stretches out His hand and pulls us out of the pit of despair. He touches us—grabs hold of our hearts. Jesus sympathizes with

us when no one else can. He wants us when no one else does. When the rest of the world turns their backs on you, He always turns His face toward you. He desires you.

Without any apprehension, Jesus immediately responded to the leper. I love this moment most because Jesus could have just spoken to the man. The power of His spoken word was enough, and the leper would have been healed at the sound of His voice.

Instead, Jesus chose to touch him in a display of His deep love and compassion. I believe Jesus healed more than the man's leprosy that day; He healed his broken, rejected heart, too. One touch from Jesus changed everything.

In the Bible, leprosy symbolizes sin. Just as Jesus didn't turn away the leper, He doesn't turn us away in our sin. Even if you feel that your sin has moved you far away from God, created distance between you and Him, when you come to Him with an open heart, He will touch you, remove your sin and restore you.

Sometimes we feel like we need to have it all together before we come to Him, but in reality He wants us to come to Him as we are. God's love for you is unconditional, which means you can't do anything to earn or lose it. He loves you because *He is love*. Your failures and sins cannot stop Him from loving you—He loves by nature. Because you are the priceless apple of His eye, Father God will pursue you and never let you go (Deut. 32:10). He will go to extraordinary lengths to demonstrate His matchless, extravagant love for you. God loves you with an everlasting love.

You need to know that Jesus accepts you—just as you are right now. There is nothing you need to do before He loves you. You don't need to earn His affection; He's already crazy about you! He values you and what He speaks over you is all that matters.

The Bible tells us we are the apple of His eye—His chosen, His beloved.

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