

Luke 5:12-16 — “*Seven Desires of the Heart: Touch*”

¹² In one of the villages, Jesus met a man with an advanced case of leprosy. When the man saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground, begging to be healed. “Lord,” he said, “if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean.”

¹³ Jesus reached out and touched him. “I am willing,” he said. “Be healed!” And instantly the leprosy disappeared. ¹⁴ Then Jesus instructed him not to tell anyone what had happened. He said, “Go to the priest and let him examine you. Take along the offering required in the law of Moses for those who have been healed of leprosy. This will be a public testimony that you have been cleansed.”

¹⁵ But despite Jesus’ instructions, the report of his power spread even faster, and vast crowds came to hear him preach and to be healed of their diseases. ¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

The Leper. Some people are treated by society as though they are untouchable. Some people are so gripped and enslaved, so depraved and destitute, so different and derelict, so down and out, so helpless and hopeless that they become untouchable to most people. But not to Jesus.

Leprosy was the most terrible disease in the day of Jesus, and it was greatly feared. It was deforming and sometimes fatal. In the Bible, leprosy was a type of sin, the leper was declared unclean – and more! The one stricken with leprosy was considered *dead* to the community!

He had been unclean for as long as he could remember. He couldn’t tell you the last time someone had touched him, and even if they had he wouldn’t have been able to feel it. He’s a leper; and people kept their distance.

The tragedy with leprosy was the absence of pain. He couldn’t tell by touch if an object was sharp, rough, hot or cold. Pain never told the leper to stop doing something that was damaging to the body, because the leper couldn’t *feel!* Not physically feel anyway. A leper could walk on a wounded foot until it became a stump, not even aware of the damage he was doing. A leper might burn themselves so badly, or cut themselves with a sharp object, and never notice the bleeding.

But the leper *could* feel. He could feel the deep humiliation of rejection. The loss of family and friends tortured his soul. Every day the leper had to announce to anyone who came near that they were unclean!

But even those ostracized by their leprosy had heard of Jesus! Rumors of His power reached even those who were outcasts. It was said that Jesus could heal sicknesses of every kind! The leper looked at the ugly thing that his body had become and wondered, *Could He make me feel again?*

When they heard Jesus was on His way toward the neighboring village, the leper made sure he was as close to the road as he was permitted. Expecting to call out for Jesus’ attention, Jesus noticed him right away. He didn’t turn His head in disgust or walk to the far side of the road. Instead, Jesus walked toward him. As desperate as he was to talk to Jesus, the old habits kicked in, with the leper shouting, “Unclean! Unclean,” as Jesus drew nearer.

Didn’t Jesus hear? Overcome by unworthiness, the leper fell to his face in the dust of the road, partly to hide his shame, partly to protect Jesus. The leper knew now that he dare not demand anything from Jesus; he didn’t deserve special favors from this holy man!

With his face to the ground, seeing the tips of His sandals approach, the leper murmured, “Lord if you are willing, You can heal me and make me clean.”

It wasn’t a question: “Can You? Will You?” It was an expression of faith! “If You are willing – You can...”

A hand appeared; he caught sight from out of his peripheral vision. A hand of assistance. “I am willing. Be healed!”

And like a wave of fire, the nerves throughout his body flared. Starting with the hand He touched, wholeness swept through the leper! The pain was delicious! Just to be able to feel again!

Jesus reached out and touched the man, an unheard of act. The man was an untouchable, full of leprosy, the most dreaded, contagious disease known to the world of that day. Yet Jesus lowered Himself to touch the man. No other man would.

That morning when he had awakened, the leper was still among the living dead. He had to wear a black garment so he could be recognized as from among the dead. Banished as an outcast, considered without hope of going to heaven. He could not live within the walls of any city.

By nightfall, the heartbreak of the leper’s isolation from his wife and children had come to an end!

Background. It is possible to believe that God has created us with seven basic desires. Regardless where we live or from what period in history our story is played out, each of us desires 1) to be heard and understood, 2) to be affirmed, 3) to be blessed, 4) to be safe, 5) to be touched, 6) to be chosen, and 7) to be included.

Today we’re in our fifth week with these *Seven Desires* – the desire to be touched. The human touch is a good thing, an important thing! But not everyone is comfortable with touches.

I attended a Fifth Grade graduation recently. Those who received their “degree” exited the stage area to meet the school principal at the bottom of the steps. Nearly all the students offered or received a hug from the woman principal – some with eager delight and others with mechanical stiffness leaning awkwardly away. The variety of ways they accepted the hug was likely reflective of experiences in their homes and the intimacy with which they were embraced or not embraced by their family.

A study at the University of North Carolina found that people who hug a lot have a lower risk of heart disease! *Isn’t that interesting?* It just may be that our bodies are wired to desire this kind of touch! Look at how we hug or hold hands with those at funerals. It becomes a natural way to express compassion.

The Touch. Have you ever watched a newborn baby? They may cry and cry until they are picked up from the crib and held, and often just that skin-to-skin contact seems to comfort them. In his book, *The 5 Love Languages*, Gary Chapman writes that “babies who are held, stroked, and kissed develop a healthier emotional life than those who are left for long periods of time without physical contact.”

A couple on a plane flying home from Korea told about the proud set of parents on the same plane who had just adopted a little girl. This cute little baby appeared to be several months old. They asked the father how old she was, and he answered, “She’s a year old.” To their surprised reaction, the father said, “The orphanage where we adopted our daughter is a good place, but they are short-staffed, and the babies spend lots of time in their cribs without being

held.”

The good news is that little girl had loving parents who will hold her a lot, so she will catch up. That’s the power of touch and the problems the lack of touching can create.

We never outgrow the need for touch. It’s not unusual to hear how elderly widows feel isolated from people, from the community, because the thing they miss most is a simple human touch! Skin-on-skin.

There are powerful chemicals in the brain, such as oxytocin, that gets released when we experience skin touch, and those chemicals give us a sense of well-being that is essential for us to grow and prosper. When babies don’t receive enough touch, they may fail to thrive. If they are severely neglected, they might even die.

Physical touch is also a powerful way we communicate love in marriage. In fact, *physical touch* is one of the 5 Love Languages identified by Dr. Chapman for which any one of us may have a special need: to be touched. Cuddling with kids on the couch. Holding hands, kissing, embracing, and sexual intercourse in marriage are all ways of communicating emotional love to one’s spouse. For some, without physical touch, a person can feel unloved! With physical touch, their emotional tank is filled and they feel secure in their relationship with their spouse.

Here’s an example: Mandy always loved having Ross meet her at the front door when she arrived home from work. She expected him to hug and kiss her every day. Ross, on the other hand, was often preoccupied with the kids or finishing up a project he couldn’t drop in order to go to the door. The result was hard feelings between the two. It wasn’t until Mandy was able to identify her expectation of Ross that the couple could address this unspoken intimacy-killer in their marriage. Although Ross was still not able to meet her at the door every day, he was able to tell Mandy that when he couldn’t, it wasn’t because he didn’t love her. And Mandy was able to accept and understand that.

If you have not received a healthy touch, you may feel abandoned or unwanted!

Physical touch can make or break a relationship. It can communicate hate or love. To the person whose primary love language is physical touch, the absence of touching will be far louder than the words, “I hate you” or “I love you.”

A tender hug communicates love to any child, but it shouts love to the child whose primary love language is physical touch. And the same is true for adults.

But let’s keep in mind, now: Not all touches are created equal! At this time in America we understand the danger of inappropriate touching because of the #metoo red flags that are appropriately raised!

Even within marriages, the touch of love can take many forms. There are physical touch receptors located throughout the body, and lovingly touching your spouse almost anywhere can be an expression of love. But that doesn’t mean all touches are created equal. Some will bring more pleasure than others. Your best instructor is your spouse! She knows best what she perceives as a loving touch. Don’t insist on touching in your way and in your time. Learn to speak her love dialect. Some touches are uncomfortable, ill-timed, or irritating.

Crisis and Physical Touch. You will notice that in a time of crisis, people are much more expressive of their compassion and love through touches, through a hug. Why is that? Because physical touch is a powerful communicator. In a time of crisis, more than anything, we need to feel loved. We cannot always change our circumstances but we can survive if we feel

supported and loved.

The most important thing you can do for your partner in a time of crisis is to love him or her. If your spouse's primary love language is physical touch, nothing is more important than holding her as she cries. A tender touch will be remembered long after the crisis has passed. And your *failure* to touch may never be forgotten.

God's Touch. You are a unique, handmade masterpiece of the Almighty and Infinite God! God loves you and intends that these seven needs or desires be fulfilled! And perhaps God shapes us with these desires so that ultimately you have to look to Him as the only One who can fulfill in you the deepest desires of your heart! The Bible says, "**Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart!**" (Psalm 37:4)

You have to seek God because the human family is imperfect and the world is not a perfect place. Your desires do not always get met. And when you accept that others cannot give you what you need, and you accept your own powerlessness getting these needs met yourself, you can find an attraction to God, a seed of faith within your own heart that He will be the source of life and love ...like no other found on earth!

The Bible says: **My God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 4:19) He has many ways of meeting your needs! He is willing to touch you. Just as He touched the leper.

When we are touched by Jesus or we reach out to touch Him through worship, with our desire to serve Him, through prayer or in our Bible reading time, we will find the Father seeking to touch us – to bring us comfort, to speak to us with kindness, to give us direction, and it can be a wonderful healing of a personal kind. And know, too, that His touch will come to you at times, from His Church, His people – just as you will be used by Him to touch others in need of His love, so that God appears to those in need with blood, skin, and bone.

Just part of His great adventure for you!