



SAMPLE LESSON

# COMPASSION

*Person of Jesus: A Study of Love*

LEADER'S MANUAL

*Unit One*

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*Person of Jesus, Unit One: Compassion* (Leader's Manual)

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# LESSON 1: COMPASSION

Colored text boxes throughout the sample lesson explain key features of this interactive Bible study.

## SUMMARY

Each lesson starts with a summary page to help the leader grasp its content. This page is not intended to be read aloud.

In the midst of a large crowd, Jesus sees a widow coming out of a city, at the head of a funeral procession for her only son. As Jesus looks at her, his heart goes out to her. With this one death, she has lost everything and has a lonely life of poverty ahead. Jesus first moves toward her—not toward her dead son—and comforts her by saying, “Don’t cry.” He cares for her even before he starts working on her problem. After the son is raised to life, Jesus presents him to his mother. It shows Jesus’ total focus on her.

## Chapter in *Love Walked Among Us*—1: A Mind Full of Someone Else

Paul Miller’s book, *Love Walked Among Us*, closely complements this Bible study. We recommend reading the related chapter(s) from the book before teaching a lesson.

## GOALS

**Love:** Love not only helps someone; it is also attentive to him or her as a person.

**Faith:** God looks at us with eyes of love.

**Jesus:** Jesus did not come only with power to fix a broken world. He came with a heart to feel our pain and bear our burdens.

Each lesson has one or more goals. **Love** goals deal with our obedience. **Faith** goals help us realize God’s love for us. **Jesus** goals highlight something about Jesus that makes us worship him.

**OUTLINE:** Each lesson lasts about 45 minutes. The outline helps you pace yourself as you teach.

- 1. The Funeral . . . . . 10 mins
- 2. The Steps of Love . . . . . 25 mins
- 3. Summary . . . . . 10 mins

## LESSON PREPARATION

Lesson Preparation helps you, as the leader, prepare your heart to teach.

In the week before you teach this lesson, watch how you relate to people in need: Are there any “widows of Nain” (kids, spouse, friend, coworker) that you rush by? When you help someone, do you pay attention to him or her as a person? Do you find yourself lecturing? Lecturing can come naturally when you help someone, partly because our hearts are prone to advice-giving and partly because others need correction or guidance. Let God’s Spirit teach this lesson to you before you teach it to others.

# LESSON 1: COMPASSION

## SECTION 1: The Funeral

10 mins

Read: Luke 7:11-12

<sup>11</sup> Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. <sup>12</sup> As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.

### 1. Think about a typical American funeral. What kinds of things do you see and hear?

These questions in **bold type** are the heart of each lesson

**Icons** are visual indicators of what is happening in the lesson. The same icons are used throughout.

*Brainstorm together. The pencil icon means to write participants' answers on a flip chart or whiteboard.*

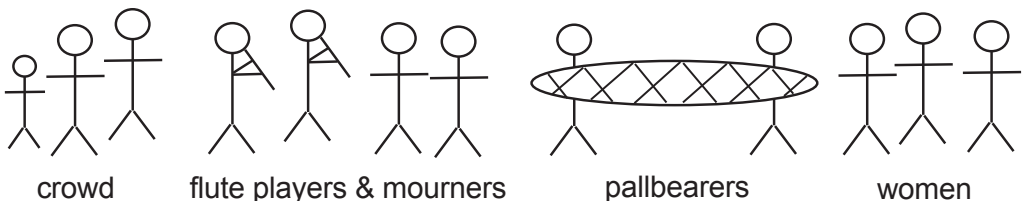
- Black clothing
- Casket with dead body
- Driving procession
- Flowers
- Quiet crying

### Historical Background: First-century Jewish Funeral<sup>1</sup>

*Draw: Funeral Procession*

*Draw these simple stick figures as you read the information on the next page.*

All sketches in the lesson may be drawn quickly.

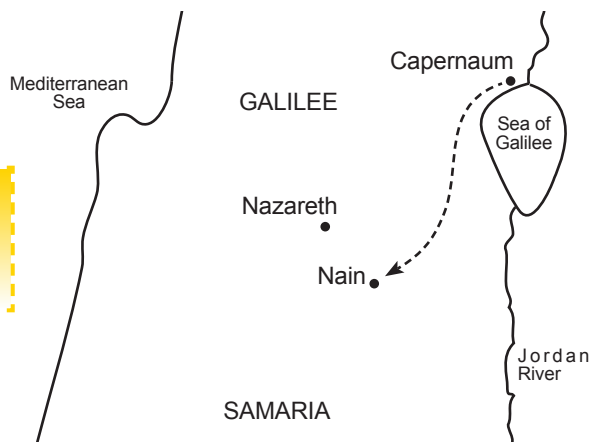


<sup>1</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 552-559. See also Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 148ff.

Go through these points quickly. Not every one needs to be covered. You are just putting the event in context.

- Jewish funeral rites, both ancient and modern, require a body to be buried within 24 hours.
- First-century Jewish funerals, like modern American ones, move the bodies of the dead to the place of burial in processions. But Jewish processions are loud and emotional, accompanied by mourning women and flute players.
- Even a poor Jewish family is expected to have one mourning woman and two flute players. Amos 5:16 and Jeremiah 9:17 mention those “skilled in mourning.”
- As the procession begins, the body is placed face-up, with hands folded, in an open wicker basket. In the Galilee region, women lead the procession because it is believed they brought death into the world. Pallbearers frequently change hands, so that many can bear the burden.
- There are no flowers because flowers would later be introduced by Christians to symbolize the resurrection.

Pagination is the same in the leader’s and participant’s manuals so it’s easy to keep everyone on the same page.



*Draw: Map of North Palestine*

- **The Setting:** Nain is nestled into the southern hillside overlooking the beautiful Jezreel Valley. “Nain” sounds like the Hebrew word for “pleasant.” Jacob’s promise to his son Issachar, whose tribe settled in the region, is that “he sees how pleasant is his land” (Genesis 49:15).
- **The Time:** Funerals are usually in early evening, around 6 PM. Jesus’ 25-mile journey from Capernaum puts him in Nain around the same time.
- **The Crowds:** Nain’s entire population of between 300 and 500 people are expected to attend this funeral, so it’s no surprise the Greek text calls the funeral crowd “considerable.” Jesus’ crowd, however, is “a great multitude”—the same word used at the feeding of the 5,000. His crowd is likely 1,000 to 2,000 people.

## Read: Luke 7:13-17

<sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”

<sup>14</sup> Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” <sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

<sup>16</sup> They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” <sup>17</sup> This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.



### 2. How does Jesus love the widow? I’m not hunting for anything deep—just what you see Jesus doing in the text.

By saying “I’m not hunting for anything deep,” you are steering them back into the text.

*Use participants’ exact words to describe the five things Jesus does, as listed below. Accept multiple answers, but fill in the five key answers below as they emerge.*

1. He sees the woman.
2. He feels compassion for her.
3. He tells her not to cry.
4. He brings her son to life.
5. He gives the son back to his mother.

Always use participants’ exact words when you write out answers. This makes participants’ feel heard and valued and prevents the leader from unnecessarily steering dialogue.

#### Teaching Tip:

Teaching Tips are drawn from the collective wisdom of teachers who have led this study. Read these carefully in advance.

- Usually, the last two things people see are the first and last things Jesus does. Draw them out by asking, “What is the very first thing Jesus does?” Good inductive study keeps uncovering mysteries.
- Keep the conversation moving. If people begin to discuss individual actions, encourage them that “we’ll come back and take a closer look after we’ve listed them all.”
- Write other comments and answers to the side to indicate that they describe the whole scene, or draw a line to show how they relate to one of the five main answers.

## SECTION 2: The Steps of Love

25 mins

Now we’ll look at each of the five ways Jesus loved.

### 1ST: JESUS LOOKS—“WHEN THE LORD SAW HER…” (7:13)

#### 3. What could Jesus be looking at instead of the widow? What would you be looking at?

The mourning women or all the people weeping.

Most of the questions in your manual are numbered, which means that the question—but not the answer—appears in the participant’s manual. Non-numbered questions, like the three that appear below #3, are not listed in the participant’s manual. They are usually follow-up questions or questions that highlight a nuance rather than a main point. You may go through non-numbered questions quickly or even skip them if you are short on time.

**If I pick out one of you to look at, can you tell who it is?**

Yes, it's pretty easy.

**Now, imagine there are 400 of you. Can you still tell?**

Possibly, but it's much harder.

**If it's clear who I'm looking at in a crowd of 400, how am I looking at that person?**

Fairly intently. It's certainly more than a glance.

**4. Considering the size of the crowd and that someone notices his gaze, how is Jesus likely looking at the widow?**

He is focused. Jesus' looking has some intensity to it.

**Why do you think Jesus looks only at her?**

She is the one in pain.

Do not be afraid of silence after you ask a question. Give them time to think.

*You may insert a personal story here about how you learned to look at people like Jesus.*

## **2ND: COMPASSION—“...HIS HEART WENT OUT TO HER” (7:13)**

Now let's talk about what compassion looks like.

**5. This question is so simple that it can be hard to answer: how do we know Jesus felt compassion?**

The Bible says he did!

**6. Read Luke 1:1-3 with me. Did Luke see this event directly, or did he interview an eyewitness?**

Luke interviewed someone who saw Jesus having compassion.

**7. How did the eyewitness know Jesus felt compassion?**

We don't know. The eyewitness must have seen compassion physically expressed in how Christ related to the widow.

People are not used to easy questions, so if the answer is obvious, they may think they are missing something. It can help to simply state that a question is easy or hard.

This question is to get them to see that Jesus' compassion was physically manifested.

### **Insight: Jesus' Compassion**

“The emotion which we should naturally expect to find most frequently attributed to Jesus whose whole life was a mission of mercy, and whose ministry was so marked by deeds of benevolence that it was summed up in the memory of his followers as a going through the land ‘doing good’ (Acts 10:38), is no doubt ‘compassion.’ In point of fact, this is the emotion which is most frequently attributed to him.” —B.B. Warfield<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, “The Emotional Life of Our Lord,” in *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1951), 97.



**8. Compassion can be hard to visualize. For comparison’s sake, let’s visualize anger first. What do you see, feel, or hear when someone is angry?**

*Write their answers under “Anger” below. Draw out physical characteristics rather than emotional ones. If they offer something emotional, ask: “How does that physically look on a person?” It is fun to joke about how easily we recognize anger.*

By discussing anger first, you get them mentally prepared to visualize compassion.



**9. Compassion is subtle, but it still has physical expressions. What do you see, feel, or hear when someone is showing compassion?**

*Write their answers under “Compassion.”*

ANGER	COMPASSION
• body tense	• body relaxed
• face red	• focused on other person
• eyes burning	• eyes softening
• raised voice	• speaking quietly
• clenched jaw	• moves gently toward person
• may strike the other person	• touches other person tenderly

**10. When you feel compassion, where are you going emotionally? Physically?**

Compassion has two movements:

*Teach what they don’t say.*

- First, it moves emotionally inside the other person to feel her pain.
- Then it moves physically toward her to care for her.

This phrase clues you in to the fact that the answer to this question is critical. After giving time for participant’s to answer in their own words, teach any nuances that they haven’t mentioned.



**11. Let’s consider why Jesus feels compassion. What has the widow lost?**

- She has already lost a husband.
- She has now lost a child.
- But it’s not just any child—it’s a son.
- And it’s not just a son. It’s an only son.
- That means she also lost her health insurance, pension plan, and savings.



**Historical Background: The Death of a Son**

Having a son meant everything in ancient Near Eastern culture. When the prophet Jeremiah tells Jerusalem how to weep for their besieged city, he says: “O my people, put on sackcloth and roll in ashes; mourn with bitter wailing as for an only son, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us” (Jeremiah 6:26).



Teachings such as this **Historical Background** are included in the participant's manual. It can be helpful to ask less active participants to read this material out loud.



### Historical Background: A Living Death

We think of death and life as distinct categories, but in Hebrew thought there was an in-between state—a person could be considered half-dead. In the Old Testament, when Naomi returns home after burying her husband and two sons, she says to the townspeople: “Do not call me Naomi [‘pleasant’], call me Bitter, because God has made my life very bitter” (Ruth 1:20). Naomi was alive but felt dead. So when you greeted Naomi on the street you would say, “Hi, Bitter.” The widow of Nain, like Naomi, has entered into a living death, cut off from Israel.

## 3RD: COMFORT—“...AND HE SAID, ‘DO NOT CRY’” (7:13)

### 12. Why does Jesus tell her not to cry?

- He is telling her the truth: the situation is going to be okay.
- He is giving her hope through his love.



### Insight:

Picture a 3-year-old boy running to his mom, wailing because he scraped his knee. His mom hugs him and says, “Don’t cry. It’s going to be okay.” She knows the wound will soon heal, and the pain will go away. Her words bring hope. That’s what Jesus is doing. He feels her pain, but he’s not given over emotionally to her circumstances. He can anchor himself in a future reality and help her to do the same. It is going to be okay.

## 4TH: HELPING—“‘YOUNG MAN, I SAY TO YOU, GET UP!’” (7:13)

### 13. How does Jesus stop the procession?

He touches the casket.

### 14. If Jesus needs to stop it, what has the procession been doing until this point? (*Hint: It is something modern funerals have in common with ancient ones.*)

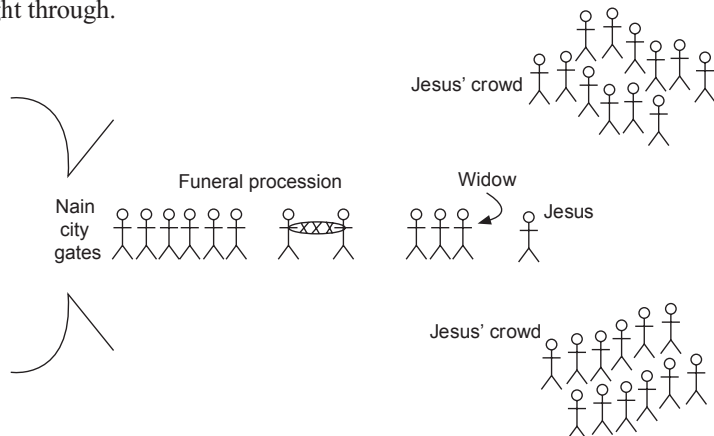
The funeral had not stopped for Jesus and his crowd. Just as modern funerals pass through traffic lights, they were going right through.



Draw:

*Procession halted*

Draw simple stick figures or else this sketch will take a long time.



 **15. What does Jesus’ method of stopping the procession tell you about him as a person?**

*Answers may vary, but focus on gentleness to connect with the following short teaching.*

Gentle. Confident authority.

The group may have difficulty picking up Jesus’ gentleness until you go on to the next question.



**Insight:**

In Isaiah 42:3, the prophet says the Messiah will be so gentle he won’t break a bruised reed or put out a smoldering wick. He will be so tender that when he holds an oil lamp whose wick is barely lit, he won’t blow it out.

**How would most American men stop a procession of 400 people?**

They would shout or wave their arms.

**How is Jesus different?** (*Hint: Are his actions overstated or understated?*)

He quietly commands authority with understated actions.

**16. What would have surprised a first-century Jew about Jesus touching the casket?**

*Teach what they don’t say.*

The simple fact he touched the casket. Touching the dead, or the things of the dead, was the greatest of all defilements. “A priest must never be in the presence of a dead person” (Ezekiel 44:25). But Jesus touches things, like the casket of the widow’s son, and makes them clean.

 **17. If this was the first time you saw Jesus, what would strike you about him as a person?**

- He is indifferent to the fanfare, yet quietly in charge of the situation.
- He looks like the gentle Messiah of whom Isaiah spoke.
- He’s bold and unafraid of human convention.



**Insight:**

Mini-teachings like this are interspersed. Review them quickly.

The American theologian Jonathan Edwards said the essence of the beauty of Jesus is that he combines characteristics not normally seen in one person: justice and mercy, glory and humility, authority and gentleness. He is both the Lion and the Lamb.<sup>3</sup>

**5TH: FOCUS ON THE PERSON—“...JESUS GAVE HIM BACK TO HIS MOTHER” (7:13)**

**18. Which two people is the crowd thinking about now?** (*Hint: See verse 16.*)

Jesus, who raised the son. God, who has now visited his people.

**19. What does the crowd call Jesus?**

A prophet.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards, A Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 161-196.

## Historical Background: A Prophet

Nain is about three miles from where Elisha raised the only son of a couple at Shunem (2 Kings 4:8-37). The last time God raised someone from the dead, it was an only son—just a few miles from this spot. So, this miracle points to an Elisha-like prophet from God. After 400 years without a prophet in the land to bring the Word of God, the crowd immediately thinks, “God has finally visited his people.”<sup>4</sup>

### 20. After the miracle, the crowd is thinking about Jesus and God. But who is Jesus thinking about? (Hint: What is the last thing that Jesus does?)

He’s thinking about the woman.

### 21. How do we know Jesus is thinking about the woman?

Jesus gives the son back to his mother after raising him from the dead.

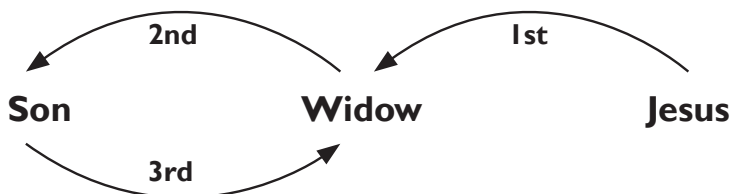


Draw: Jesus’ physical movements

The chart below shows Jesus’ physical movements during the miracle. Write “Jesus,” “Widow,” and “Son” in a line, as below. Then add arrows as questions are answered.

### 22. Whom does Jesus go to first? Second? Last?

The widow, then the dead son, and then back to the widow.



### 23. Who is at the physical center of Jesus’ love?

The widow.

## Insight: The Balance of Love

- Jesus models a balance between focusing on the person and focusing on the project.
- The compassion Jesus feels shapes the way he performs the miracle. By first focusing on and feeling for her as a person, rather than seeing her as a project or a stepping-stone, he is able to make her central to the miracle itself.

### 24. Why does Jesus give the son back to his mother? It seems unnecessary.

- She is more important than the miracle.

<sup>4</sup> Two hundred years earlier (in the time of the Maccabees), after Antiochus Epiphanes polluted the altar by sacrificing a pig on it, the priests wondered if they could use the defiled altar stones. Since there was no prophet to tell them what to do, “they tore down the altar and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet” (1 Maccabees 4:45-46). First Maccabees is not a book of the Bible, yet like the writings of Josephus, it is useful for understanding historical context.

- The act mirrors the miracle. In the miracle, he returns the son by restoring his life. Now he enacts what the miracle has done.

**What might a preacher be tempted to do after raising a man from the dead?**


Snap a selfie with the son. Sell the book and movie rights. Take up an offering. In short, show off!

 **25. Why doesn't Jesus preach a sermon? What does this tell you about him?**

- Jesus is humility in action. He doesn't draw attention to himself; instead, he remains wholly focused on the widow.
- Jesus' love is other-centered. He solves the woman's problem but continues to focus on her.
- Jesus isn't using the situation for his own gain. His concern for the woman is genuine.
- Jesus isn't into numbers and success. He is into people.

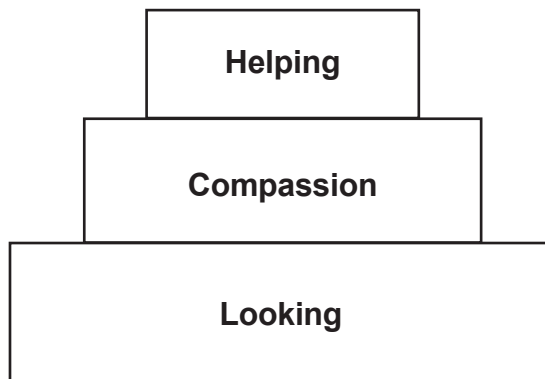
**SECTION 3: Summary**

10 mins

 **26. Based on how Jesus loved the widow, what are the three steps of love? What was the first thing Jesus did? Second? Can you give me one word to summarize everything else he did?**

*Fill in the chart from bottom to top. Draw it if they don't have participant's manuals.*

The Three Steps of Love




**27. When you first read this passage, what stood out to you?**

The dead son being raised to life.

**28. Now that you've examined the passage, what strikes you most?**

Jesus' compassion.

 **29. Reflect on this story. How are you different from Jesus? How does he affect you? What do you think of him?**

*Write their answers in the appropriate column. Answers will vary.*

- I shy away from broken people because they make me uncomfortable. But Jesus moves toward them.
- Love like this takes time.
- Jesus doesn't think about himself.
- I sense the cost of love.
- I stay on task, unaware of people. Jesus lets people slow him down.

ME	JESUS



**Gospel Connection:**

Lessons have a **Gospel Connection** to guard against moralism.

This one incident reflects the pattern of Jesus' life: he looks at us, feels compassion, and acts by giving his life on the cross for us. That is the gospel. Sometimes Jesus' death on the cross seems abstract, but by connecting it with his life, we see how concrete God's love is for us. Through Jesus, God looks at us, feels our pain, and acts for us. We are not alone.

# LESSON 1 APPLICATION

Each lesson includes 5-10 application questions. Participants may use the questions at home for further reflection. Two-hour Bible studies may use them during the second hour, or leaders may selectively intersperse them to enrich discussion.

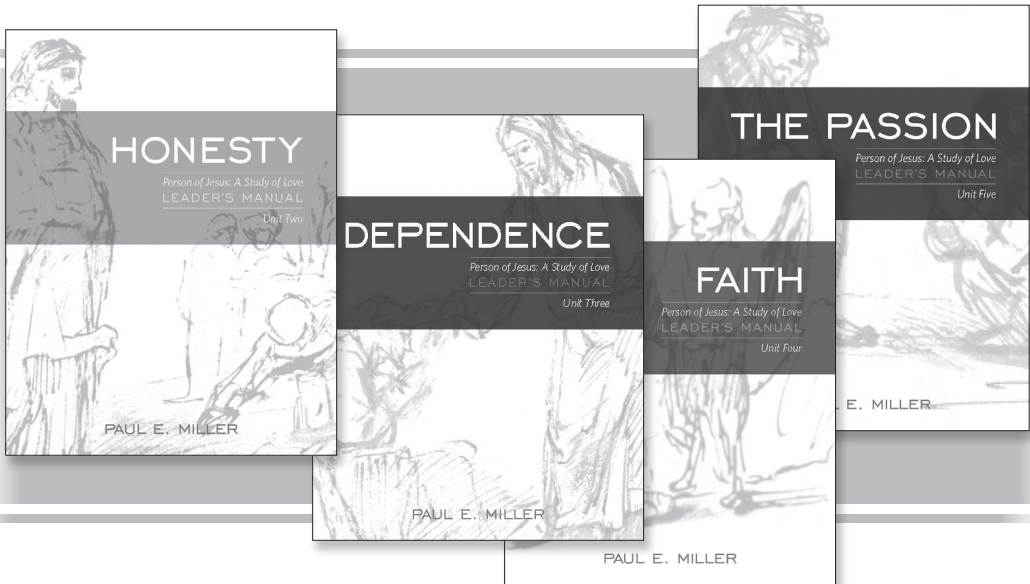
*See page xiii in the Quick Start Guide for ideas on how to use the application questions.*

1. What did the Spirit help you see about either Jesus or yourself through this lesson?
2. How does Jesus affect you as he loves the widow of Nain? What inspires, convicts, or encourages you?
3. How do Jesus' words to the grieving woman, "Don't cry," challenge your assumptions about feelings?
4. Think about the three steps of love: looking, compassion, and helping. Which comes most naturally to you? Which do you typically ignore or underemphasize?
5. What would happen if you helped a person without looking at him or her or feeling compassion? What if you looked and felt compassion but did not help? Why are all three actions necessary?



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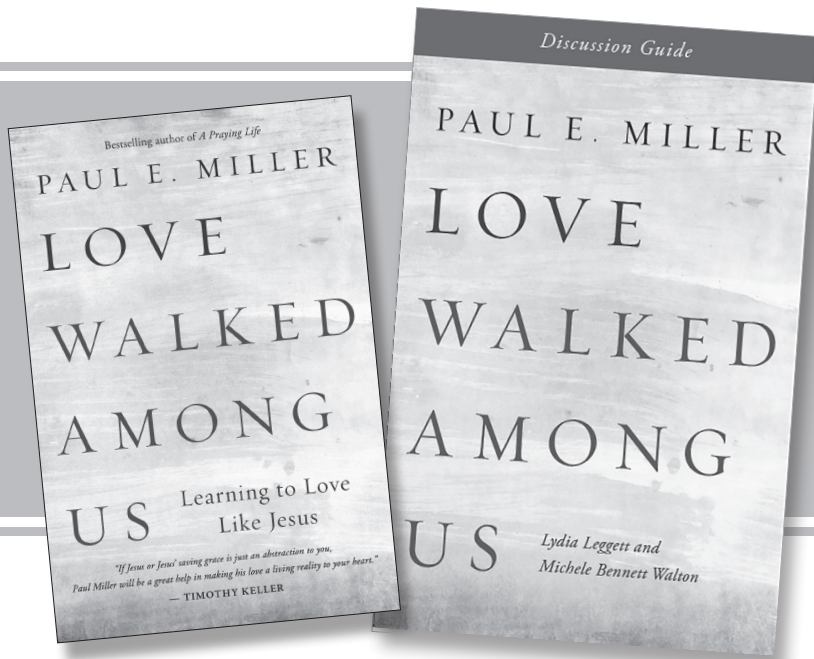
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For situations in which the interactive Bible study format is not appropriate, consider the *Love Walked Among Us* book and discussion guide, which cover similar content.

DISCOVER

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