

Di121 Effective Communication

Lesson Di121-21 Attitude: Sympathy

The attitude we study in this lesson is sympathy. Compassion, empathy, and sympathy have similar meanings. All start with a feeling, a stirring of emotion. All express concern for someone's need. Compassion is love in action. Empathy refers more to meeting an unexpressed need. Sympathy is addressing an expressed need. Jesus taught by his example that feeling was not enough. He did something about the need.

Sympathy means addressing a felt need by sharing the feelings of someone else. It is expressing pity or sorrow for their distress. Have you ever had a friend suddenly fall sick without warning? They are healthy, but in just one day they are at death's door. You want to comfort them, weep with them, and change their situation. What you feel for that person is sympathy. You are trying to identify with the person. As you pray for them, you are addressing their expressed need.

To communicate the full truth of the gospel, we must first understand and feel the difficulties of others. The man in this story had a problem that seemingly had no solution. Most people have never experienced this particular need, yet could have sympathy for a blind person. The day Jesus came to his town, everything changed for blind Bartimaeus.

As Jesus approached Jericho, he was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

It seems clear that Bartimaeus had heard the wonderful things Jesus was doing for others. He suddenly realized this was his chance to receive his own miracle. He wanted the blessing only God could provide—that was to receive his sight. The fact that he called Jesus, "Son of David," indicated he believed Jesus was the promised Messiah. He believed Jesus could understand and offer the sympathy he needed. He had nothing to offer to God, but his belief. He asked for mercy, a response of love he did not deserve.

Those who led the way for Jesus rebuked the blind man and told him to be quiet. But he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

The people with the Lord, perhaps even one of the disciples, tried to silence Bartimaeus. They thought Jesus was too busy and important for this hopeless case along the roadside. The blind man, however, refused to be quiet. He shouted, perhaps several times, for mercy, for the Messiah to meet his deepest need.

Jesus stopped the crowd and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Make special note of this. Jesus stopped walking when he first heard the blind man's plea. Many people wanted the Lord's attention that day in Jericho. Jesus was never in a hurry. He took time to learn the need of each person. They all needed to experience God's mercy and that is still true today. Often Jesus asked the person to state their need. He wanted them to be clear what they were asking for. Then he would understand their priorities. Just looking at him, Jesus felt sympathy for his condition. He already knew the need of Bartimaeus.

The blind man stated his simple request: "Lord, I want to see."

It was easy for him to state his obvious need. For most people, the ability to see is taken for granted. For this man, sight would be a special gift from God. In all of Israel's history, no one had ever been healed of blindness. Yet this man believed Jesus could change his whole life. He knew Jesus cared and would understand.

Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God (Luke 18:35-43).

Jesus showed sympathy to this blind man who called out to him. The Lord understood both physical and spiritual blindness. He knew the blind man had faith, so he already had spiritual sight, though not physical sight. When the man saw Jesus and his surroundings, he also received greater spiritual sight. He understood that only God could do such a miracle and that God did care for him. He knew that through Jesus he had encountered God's concern for him.

This story is **important** because it teaches that followers of Jesus must show sympathy to those in need, just as Jesus did.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that Jesus understood the needs of people, both physical and spiritual. In his sympathy and mercy, he met both kinds of needs. He wants to do the same today.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What was the cry of blind Bartimaeus to Jesus at the city of Jericho? [Pause]
A. If you said his cry was, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" you are correct.
2. What was the response of Jesus to the cry for mercy from the blind man? [Pause]
A. If you answered that Jesus took time to hear and meet his need, you answered correctly.
3. What was the response when the blind man received God's mercy of healing? [Pause]
A. If you said that the former blind man joined in following Jesus and praising God, you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to memorize the story and tell it to someone who has not heard it before. Then ask them this question, "Why did Jesus minister to both the physical and spiritual needs of people when they came to him for help?" Answer: God delights to show sympathy toward all the needs people have. He is not interested in just meeting someone's

spiritual needs. Jesus was showing his followers that meeting a person's physical needs often opens their heart to receive spiritual healing as well.