

THE FIRST 15

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God designed us to live in community. He knows healthy relationships will bless us. This week we study the healing miracles of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Not only does Jesus heal physical infirmity, He also frees people from places of isolation and restores them to community.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed and holy Lord, as a new day dawns I seek Your gracious presence. I quiet the busy chatter of my mind, still my body and rest in the goodness of Your love. Help me hear the message You have for me today. Thank You for the blessings of a life lived in community with others. I am grateful for my relationship with You and my relationships with family and friends. May the cornerstone of my life and our life together be Christ and Christ alone. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. 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. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.” 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!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. Luke 7:11-15

REFLECTION

Outside the town of Nain, Jesus encountered a funeral procession. No burials were allowed within the walls of a Jewish town, that is why the man was being carried outside of the town gate. The body was carried on a “bier” or a stretcher followed by the boy's mother and a procession of mourners. A widow was one of the lowest persons in the social hierarchy of Biblical times. Women had no way to earn money and were supported by a male father, spouse or relative. This woman had lost her husband and now her only son. She was in economic and social peril. She had no one, she was utterly alone.

William Barclay, 20th century Scottish minister and author, calls this story “the loveliest in all the Gospels” because it tells the pathos and poignancy of human life and adds the compassion and power of Christ. Whether we like it or not, human life cannot escape loss. Sooner or later we will experience real grief, it is unavoidable. Grief may come from the loss of a parent, the death of a spouse, a sibling or friend. We may lose a child to death or a miscarriage. We may lose a spouse to Alzheimer’s. We may lose a child to gangs, drugs or alcohol addiction. We may lose a loved one to mental illness or depression.

Grief also comes from other types of losses, the loss of a job, the loss of a dream, the death of a marriage. We experience loss when we break up with a girlfriend or boyfriend, or when a friend leaves or betrays us. We grieve when we move to a new town and mourn the loss of old friends

and familiar places. We grieve when our children are grown and leave us with an empty nest. We experience grief at retirement when our life's work and accomplishments are over, and the world moves on. We grieve the loss of our health or mobility. Psychologists tell us these griefs accumulate and can pile up inside of us.

Somewhere inside each of us is the grieving woman who has no name other than The Widow of Nain. The widow has made this journey before, we don't know how long ago, but she walked the same path from her home to the burial ground outside the town gate. She walked behind the dead body of her husband, and now she walks the same path behind the dead body of her only son.

The grieving woman was not looking for Jesus, in her grief and all the commotion, the woman may not have even seen Jesus. But the text says, "The Lord saw her." Luke 7:13 says, When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." In the same way, the Lord sees us. He sees our inner grief and loss. He sees our needs even when we are too torn apart to look for Him or ask for help. His heart goes out to us in compassion and His voice comforts our pain. He touches the bier of our loss and brings healing and hope.

Ask: What loss, grief or sorrow might I currently be experiencing? How might accumulated grief be piling up inside my heart? How might I turn to Jesus for comfort, healing, encouragement and strength?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for seeing my sorrow, grief and pain, even when I am not aware of it myself. Thank you for your willingness to touch the bier of life's losses and bring healing and restoration. Have compassion on me in my loneliness and places of isolation, and restore me to the community of Your great love. You are the Resurrection and the Life and I praise You that I can look forward to one day being in constant fellowship and communion with You and all the saints of heaven. Amen.