

OUTCAST: In Our Shoes

Large Group Talk 3

Objective:

The main objective of this lesson is to help your students understand the power of empathy, truth, and compassion that ultimately brings the outcast into community. We all (like the woman at the well) are broken and in need of a Savior. In Jesus, students will discover that we serve a Savior who not only put himself in our shoes but also offers the perfect grace that we all need.

Speaker's Note: These Large Group Talks are designed to give you a foundation to speak from. They are full of optional illustrations, object lessons, and anecdotes that you can use as much or as little as you'd like.

*View any illustration video clips ahead of time to make sure they will fit well with your audience.

*Also included in your Outcast download are presentation backgrounds to use with these Large Group Talks or any other place that will help make your DNow event great!

Recap of Invite Them In:

Say Something Like: *In the last session, we saw the barriers Jesus was willing to cross just by having a conversation with the woman at the well. He didn't let the awkwardness of the situation stop him because he saw her as valuable. He wasn't repelled by her social standing or her past mistakes; he looked past them to her basic spiritual needs. And he didn't wait for her to approach him (that was never going to happen); he reached out to her, risking his reputation by taking the first step in their conversation. He does the same for each of us. He values us, looks past the terrible things we've done, and reaches out to us even though we're broken and outcast. But once Jesus engaged her in conversation, what did he say? How did he address her needs and offer healing when she had been outcast for so long?*

Transition to In Our Shoes:

Ask: *Have you ever had to wear the wrong size shoes or clothing (maybe hand-me-downs from a sibling or they didn't have your size shoes at the bowling alley)? How did that make you feel?*

Say Something Like: *There have been a lot of movies and TV shows made that are based on the idea of switching places with someone else. Usually the main characters get into a fight over whose life is harder and decide to swap places for a day to settle the argument. They start out thinking the other person's life is easy, but after a series of mishaps, they start missing their own lives. Finally, they go back to their own lives with a better appreciation for the other person's difficulties. In the weird*

world of sitcoms, that's what it takes for one character to empathize with another (and we get to laugh at the characters awkwardly trying to live each other's lives). In real life, though, we can't really swap lives with people to understand where they're coming from. The logistics alone are a nightmare: teachers wouldn't let you take your friend's test, parents might wonder why some random kid is grabbing a snack from their fridge, and girlfriends or boyfriends probably wouldn't be cool with the whole situation. A bigger problem is that our friends probably aren't the ones we have the hardest time empathizing with.

More than likely, though, we could all stand to swap places with the outsiders and the people most different from us.

But here's the thing: we don't have to literally swap places with people to really understand where they're coming from. Jesus already walked that mile in our shoes. That's what made him the perfect person to talk with the woman at the well—he knew where she was coming from.

Briefly remind students about the Samaritan woman's difficult life, then read Isaiah 53:3, which prophesies about what will happen to Jesus on earth, and Luke 4:24, 28–30, which describes a time when he was rejected and almost killed in his own hometown by the people he grew up with!

Read Isaiah 53:3: He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Read Luke 4:24, 28–30: And he said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown"...When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.

Say Something Like: *Jesus gets it. He stepped out of heaven and into the uncomfortable shoes of a carpenter. He experienced this problem-filled world first hand. He is familiar with rejection, glaring stares of judgment, broken promises, and disappointment. Is it any wonder that Jesus was able to relate so well to this woman? Jesus is uniquely positioned to say just what this woman needed to hear. And he does it perfectly. Jesus was the master of empathizing while gently directing. As we continue exploring his interactions with the woman at the well, we'll see how he's able to do this.*

Illustration Option 1: Pick two or four students to do a race in front of everyone. Have them put on clothes that are way too big (giant shoes or even flippers, a huge shirt they'll have to hold up to run in, a floppy hat or sombrero, and oversized sunglasses). For an extra challenge, make it a relay race by having students pass the oversized clothes off to the next racer before they can run. Compare and contrast how actually wearing other people's shoes or clothes is like empathizing and seeing things from others' perspectives.

Illustration Option 2: We all know that yawning is contagious. But did you know that the more empathetic you are, the more likely you are to yawn when other people do? If you find it easier to see things from other peoples' perspectives, you'll be more likely to find yawns contagious. Play one of the many videos available on the internet of people yawning. Tell your students to test themselves to see how long they can watch the video without yawning themselves.

Teaching:

1. Understanding

Say Something Like: *How many of you have had a really bad day—maybe you failed a test or had a fight with a friend or wrecked your car—and you needed comfort, so you found a friend and told them about your problems. Then, when you finished, the other person said, “Wow, didn’t you study?” or “I hope you aren’t grounded from the prom for wrecking the car. I got a parking ticket and my parents grounded me for a month!”*

Illustration: Go through the following case studies with students and ask them to come up with the most unhelpful and annoying things people can say in response.

- Your friend just broke up with his or her boyfriend or girlfriend through a text. They are completely heartbroken.
- Your friend just got a rejection letter from the college that was number one on his or her list. It had the best scholarship, and he or she will be the first person in three generations of his or her family to not go there.
- Your friend didn’t make the cut for the basketball team. Worse yet, only two people got cut, and he/she was one of them.

Ask students why the responses they came up with were unhelpful or annoying. Most likely they were selfish, untrue, belittling, or minimizing of the situation.

Say Something Like: *These aren’t the kind of responses that are helpful—actually they’re the opposite. In your own life, you’ve probably figured out which friends to avoid when you have problems and which to go to when you need some empathy. They’re the ones who really care. They listen well. Their responses aren’t selfish. They don’t one-up your misery or story. They try to see things from your perspective. They steer you toward the truth in the situation, not letting lies eat you up. This is how Jesus approached the woman at the well: with a lot of empathy. He knew how she felt, resonated with her situation, and got to the heart of the matter. And because of that foundation of empathy, the Samaritan woman was willing to listen and trust Jesus when he shared the truth with her.*

That’s how we should approach everyone, outcasts and friends alike. But empathy is so much easier with friends and a lot harder with strangers—you simply have less common ground to build from. Empathizing with outsiders takes risk, inconvenience, and time, but it’s worth it. That’s how Jesus spent much of his time on earth, and it’s an important enough message that we’re still reading about it in our Bibles and trying to imitate Jesus 2,000 years later.

2. Truth

Ask: *Have you ever had to tell someone something difficult, something they didn't want to hear? How did that person take it?*

Say Something Like: *Often, the better we get to know someone, the harder it becomes to speak difficult truth to them. Maybe we want to protect them from the truth, or perhaps we fear what they will think of us. It's a tough situation. Thankfully, we have an awesome example for how to do this well: Jesus.*

When he spoke with the woman at the well, Jesus understood where she was coming from. In fact, he knew it better than she would admit. She told him that she didn't have a husband, but she was leaving out quite a bit. Knowing this, Jesus said, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband." She recognized then and there that he had supernatural abilities; he could only have known those things if he was a prophet. But what would he do with this secret information? The people from her own culture had rejected her because of it. What would this Jewish teacher say?

Object Lesson: Put three plastic cups on a table next to a pitcher of water where everyone can see (you'll probably want a towel close by). Hide a fourth cup by your feet. Explain that the three cups on the table represent people. Then use a tack or a nail to poke holes in the sides or bottoms of the three cups, explaining that our sins and bad choices leave us broken and seriously messed up. Tell students that there are three main ways we can respond when we learn a tough truth about someone—when we discover that they're broken. Picking up the first cup, explain that we could get angry that they aren't perfect and reject them. Crush that cup and toss it away. Pick up the second cup, and say that we could also just ignore the issues. Pour water in the second cup and let it slowly drain out of the holes. Pick up the third cup, and explain that the best solution is to acknowledge the person's brokenness in love and to offer the only solution that really helps: relationship with Jesus. Pull the fourth, undamaged cup from the floor and place the third cup inside. Then pour water inside, revealing that when Christ surrounds us, our brokenness is healed.

Say Something Like: *To the woman's surprise, Jesus didn't chastise her. He also didn't ignore her past, pretending it didn't exist. Instead, he just delivered the truth. By revealing that he knew her background yet still chose to dialogue with her, Jesus showed just how much he cared about her. Then he showed her the only thing that could truly heal her rejection and brokenness: himself.*

3. Compassion

Say Something Like: *Those on the fringes of life—like the woman at the well—may seem shut off and cold, but they're actually vulnerable. Why do outsiders put up so many barriers? Because they know how easily they can be hurt. When the woman at the well encountered Jesus, she felt incredibly vulnerable, so she started putting up walls. The minute Jesus revealed that he knew about her divorces, she brought up a theological argument about the best place to worship God: "Our fathers worshiped*

on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” She’s trying to change the subject. But Jesus sees her vulnerability and immediately has compassion for her. He knows that she’s been waiting for a Savior to come, and he tells her that the wait is over—he is that Savior. Finding the best place to worship doesn’t matter anymore; God has come to meet people wherever they are by sending Jesus.

Illustration: Tell (or show if you have access to the movie*) the story of Bishop Myriel and Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*. In it, a bishop shows compassion to a lowly thief named Jean Valjean by offering him food and a place to sleep. But Valjean repays the bishop’s kindness by stealing the silver on which his meal was served. Later, Valjean is caught by the authorities and taken back before the bishop. Rather than demanding justice or becoming angry over Valjean’s actions, the bishop shows compassion a second time by not only letting him go with the silver but also offering two silver candlesticks that Valjean had left behind. The bishop does not condone Valjean’s actions, but he turns the tables on the thief’s sin by offering him the physical and spiritual means to escape his brokenness. The bishop demonstrates the truth of Christ’s forgiveness by showing Valjean that he is valuable. *Wingclips makes this clip available here: www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/les-miserables-2012/release-him

Say Something Like: *As you can see, compassion is ultimately about self-sacrifice. People are driven away from community because others are willing to put them down to prop themselves up. They’re brought back into community by those who are willing to put themselves down to prop others up. That’s what Jesus came into the world to do. We are all so concerned with making ourselves look good that we step on others to get ahead. The irony is that as we put our own interests first, we walk away from community with God, which is actually the worst thing we could do for ourselves. On the other hand, Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who deserved nothing but honor and praise, chose to give up those things to live a life of suffering and service to others. He stepped into our shoes by becoming a man. He made the ultimate sacrifice—death on a cross—because of the compassion he felt when he saw us on the fringes and separated from God. He chose self-sacrifice to bring us back into community with God.*

Putting It All Together:

Optional Illustration 1: The story of Valjean in *Les Misérables* continues. Tell (or show if you have access to the movie*) how Valjean has moved up in the world, but for years he’s been hunted by Inspector Javert, who wants to arrest him because he knows that Valjean used to be a thief. Through a series of events, Valjean is given the opportunity to kill Javert and end his fear of being arrested forever. But Valjean has empathy for Javert—he’s been in Javert’s shoes before. Remembering the compassion the bishop showed him years before when he was vulnerable, Valjean shows the vulnerable Javert compassion and lets him free, sacrificing his own security in the process. Javert, who only cares about making himself look better, doesn’t understand why Valjean would sacrifice his safety to free his enemy. *Wingclips makes this scene available here: www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/les-miserables-2012/freeing-javert

Optional Illustration 2: Choose a few students to come up to the front and divide them evenly into two groups. Have them play a game of old-fashioned tug-of-war (you'll need a rope). This game will help bring home the point that choosing to love someone no matter what is both a physical and a spiritual tug-of-war. It's not easy to love someone when we won't benefit from it in any way. You'll have to pull against your natural tendencies to avoid, ignore, and judge people who are on the outside. But (unlike a game of tug-of-war) it's worth it. The energy you spend showing compassion and offering truth has kingdom impact. It's a huge step in becoming more like Jesus.

Say Something Like: *Jesus had great empathy for the other people. He came to the world and walked in our shoes. He knows what it's like to be rejected, to be an outcast. But it doesn't end there. He doesn't just look at us and say, "Been there; done that." He offers us the truth and healing that only he can provide. He had compassion for us, so he sacrificed his life so that we would no longer have to live on the fringe. Now we can have community with God again.*

Looking Forward:

[Speaker's Note: The questions below will be discussed in the Small Group Session that follows this lesson. Remember to pose these questions and encourage students to write down their responses on **page 20** of the Student Book.]

Question 1: What kind of walls do people put up when they feel vulnerable or like an outsider?

Question 2: What do you think it takes to break those walls down?

Need to Know: Let the students know that the next lesson will look at our response to the compassion Christ shows us. Remind them that the next session will be the last one. Be sure to give them any instructions (or schedule info) they might need to go from here.

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***LeaderTreks recommends watching all video clips and visiting all websites in this lesson before sharing them with students. These links are optional and not required in order to lead an effective large group talk. Websites often change, and links may not always have the same result. LeaderTreks will do its best to keep them updated and fresh; however, in the event that they do not function properly, we cannot retain responsibility.