How to Build Character in your Children

Day 3:

**Compassion**By Lisa Lakey

In biblical times, lepers had an incurable disease that caused them to be forced to live on the fringes of society, deemed “unclean.” There were no hugs when they had a bad day. No one was wrapping their arm around their shoulders when life was just too much. But then there was Jesus.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is one where a leper falls on his face in front of Jesus and says, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” Then Jesus, the most compassionate man in history, reaches out to touch the man and says, “I will; be clean” (Luke 5:12-13).

Jesus reached out and touched the man society had banished. He showed great compassion and was attuned to the suffering of those around him—not just the physical, but the emotional and even social suffering.

We all want to raise kids who are overflowing with compassion for the weak, the lowly, the suffering. Some kids seem to have it naturally. But even if compassion isn’t a natural gift, it is something that can be developed by learning to identify someone’s emotional or physical needs and how to appropriately meet them.

Here are a few ways to develop compassion in your children:

Serve each other. Family should be our first ministry. The compassion we have for others should be practiced in the home, as well. When my kids are testing the limits of sibling strife, I try to redirect their rivalry into service opportunities. I make them think of ways they can serve one another, either by doing a chore or making something special for that person.

Serve outside the home. Remember, you are setting the standard by which your children are learning compassion, so you must get involved in service, as well. Gather blankets for the homeless when cooler temperatures hit, spend a Saturday each month volunteering at a local food pantry, or even rake the leaves for an elderly neighbor.

Practice compassion as a daily habit. What does compassion look like in the day to day? Sometimes it looks like forgiveness. It might look like kindness when someone is being unlovable. Or maybe it is inviting a new family at church over to dinner. Whatever it is, when our kids are seeing compassion as a daily habit within the home, they’ll quickly learn to apply it elsewhere.

**Scripture:**

Psalm 103:13 The Lord is like a father to his children,  
tender and compassionate to those who fear him.

Luke 5:12-13 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.” 13Jesus reached out and touched him. “I am willing,” he said. “Be healed!” And instantly the leprosy disappeared.