



FREE LESSON · SHARE FREELY

A CHARACTER LESSON · AGES 8-12

The Man Who Stayed

The whole world walled off an island of the sick and looked away. One young priest sailed toward it, and would not leave.



KINDNESS · REAL PEOPLE

A QUICK NOTE TO PARENTS

Before you read together

[The Empty Seat](#) put kindness in modern clothes: a lunchroom and an empty seat. [The Good Samaritan](#) found its root in a parable Jesus told, the man in the ditch and the enemy who stopped for him. In this lesson the parable steps off the page and onto a real beach. The Good Samaritan crossed a road. **Father Damien crossed an ocean, and then he stayed.**

Here is the setting, told plainly so it does not frighten a child. About a hundred and fifty years ago, a sickness we now call Hansen's disease, then called leprosy, had no cure. People were afraid of catching it, so the Kingdom of Hawaii sent everyone who had it to a far corner of one island, cut off by cliffs and sea, and told them to live out their days there. Ships dropped people off and sailed away. Many families said goodbye at the dock and never saw their loved ones again. It was a place built entirely out of looking away.

WHAT MADE HIM DIFFERENT

Plenty of good people felt sorry for the exiles from a safe distance. Damien did the second, costlier thing the Samaritan did: he closed the distance. He went, and he did not leave, even when leaving would have saved his life.

HOW TO USE IT

Read it aloud. Stop where the other ships stop at the water's edge, and ask your child: *why is it so much easier to send help than to go yourself?* About 15 minutes.

A NOTE ON THE SOURCE

Father Damien was a real person, Jozef De Veuster, born in Belgium in 1840. This lesson is drawn from the documented record of his life; where a detail comes from later retelling, it says so. You do not need to share his faith to admire what he did; you need only a child and a question the whole world got wrong: *what do we owe the people we would rather not look at?*

HERE IS A TRUE STORY WORTH KEEPING. READ IT SLOWLY.

The island at the edge of the map

There was a young man from Belgium named Jozef, who became a priest and took the name Damien. He asked to be sent as far from home as a person could go, and he was: to the Hawaiian Islands, on the other side of the world, where he rode from village to village on horseback for years.

Then he heard about Molokai. On one edge of that island, past cliffs too steep to climb, was a place with a quiet, terrible name: the **settlement**. Everyone in Hawaii who caught leprosy was put on a boat and left there. Some were so sick and afraid when they arrived that they were simply pushed into the water near the shore and told to swim. There was little shelter, little law, and few healthy people other than family members who had come along to care for the sick. The sick were expected to arrive, suffer, and die, with no one to help them do any of it.

Damien was thirty-three years old when he asked to go. Not to visit. To live there. Four priests had volunteered, and their bishop planned for them to take turns. Damien went first. Everyone knew he might catch the sickness himself. He asked to stay anyway.

He sailed over with a load of cattle and stepped onto the beach on the tenth of May, 1873. The people who met him had open sores and missing fingers and faces the rest of the world had refused to look at. Damien looked. And then he did what visitors did not do: he unpacked his things and did not get back on the boat.

Most people in this story stop at the water. Remember that. It is the whole difference.

WHAT HE ACTUALLY DID, DAY AFTER DAY

He got down in the dust

Damien did not save the settlement with a speech. He saved it with his hands. He bandaged wounds that other people could not stand to smell. He built houses so families would not sleep in the rain, and a water pipe so there was clean water to drink. He built beds, and he built coffins, hundreds of coffins, and he dug the graves himself so that each person who died was buried like someone who had mattered. He ate with the sick from the same bowls. He put his hand on shoulders no one else would touch.

For years he wrote letters begging for medicine and help, and for years the outside world sent far more pity than hands, exactly like the priest and the Levite on the road to Jericho. But Damien had already done the thing the parable asks. He had crossed the water and stayed on the far side of it.

THE ROOT, LIVED OUT

The Good Samaritan ends with four words: “*Go, and do likewise.*” Father Damien is what those four words look like when a real person obeys them for sixteen years. The Samaritan knelt in the dust of one road, one time. Damien knelt in it every single day, and never stood back up to walk away.

Then, about eleven years in, Damien learned he had caught the sickness. The story often told is that one Sunday he began his talk not with “*Brethren*” but with two words: “**We lepers.**” He was no longer a healthy man helping the sick from the safe side of a line. He had crossed all the way over. He kept working, building and bandaging and burying, for four more years, until he died among his people on the fifteenth of April, 1889. He was forty-nine.

TALK IT OVER

Three questions, no wrong answers

1. Lots of people felt sorry for the exiles on Molokai and sent help from far away. Damien went and lived there. What is the difference between *sending* help and *going* yourself? Which one costs more, and why?

2. When Damien said “we lepers” instead of “*you* lepers,” something had changed. What do you think changed in him, and why did it matter so much to the people listening?

3. There is probably someone near you that most people would rather not sit with, or look at, or listen to. You do not have to sail anywhere. What would it look like this week for you to *go toward* that one person instead of away?

COPYWORK

Copy the line below in your best handwriting. Words worth keeping.

“Share each other’s troubles and problems, and so obey our Lord’s command.”

— GALATIANS 6:2 (TLB)

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WHERE THE TRAIL GOES NEXT

From the beach to your own street

Damien never left a settlement he could have left a hundred times. That is the whole of kindness in one life: first you *see* the empty seat, then you kneel in the dust of the road, and then, if it is real, you *stay*, even when staying costs you something. Kindness is not a feeling you have about people far away. It is a direction you walk, toward the one right in front of you.

For the week: make kindness a *practice*. Pick the one person from Question 3 and move toward them once a day for seven days. The seven-day tracker in the free lesson [Hold the Line](#) works well for this.

This free lesson is one star of a whole constellation.

Constellation Trail Unit Three: Kindness is the third star of the trail. In it, a former schoolteacher named Clara Barton brings a wagon of bandages to the battlefield at Antietam while the fighting is still going on. Then the road to Jericho, and a week-long challenge that turns “go and do likewise” into seven days your child can actually walk.

constellationtrail.com/character-units

13 print-ready pages · the Two Paths map · a certificate that lights Star 3

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