

# Jesus Showed Sympathy<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—AUGUST 13

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** 2 Kings 13:23; Exodus 2:23–25; Luke 7:11–16; 1 John 3:17; John 11:35; Romans 12:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “When Jesus came ashore, he saw a large crowd. He felt deep concern for them. He healed their sick people” (Matthew 14:14, NlrV).

**HOW MUCH SADDER COULD IT BE?** A 17-year-old girl, struggling with what most 17-year-old girls struggle with, except with so much more, took her own life. Who could imagine how her parents felt?

Their pastor came over to the house. He sat down in the living room next to them and said nothing for a long time. He just shared quietly in their grief. Then the pastor started sobbing. He sobbed until his tears ran dry. Then, without saying a word, he got up and left.

Sometime later, the father told the pastor how much he appreciated what the pastor had done. The father and mother did not need words at that time. They did not need promises. They did not need counseling (advice). All they needed, right then and there, was real sympathy.

Sympathy means “with pathos.”<sup>2</sup> *Pathos* is related to pity, tenderness, or sorrow. It means being “with” someone but in a profound (very strongly felt) way. Showing sympathy toward the sorrows of others takes the question of “mingling [joining]” with others to a whole new level.

Showing sympathy was also an important way that Jesus reached people.

## DEFINITIONS

1. sympathy—the feeling that you care about and are sorry about someone else’s trouble, grief, misfortune, and so on.
2. pathos—a quality that causes people to feel sympathy and sadness.

## HEARING THE GROANS (Judges 2:16–18)



God's heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our talking about them.

## DEFINITIONS

3. evolution—a theory (unproved idea) that the differences between modern plants and animals are because of changes that happened by a natural process over a very long time.

The universe can seem like a very scary place—it is so wide, cold, and big that we feel our own unimportance and meaninglessness in it. This fear became even more widespread when modern science arrived. Giant telescopes have shown a universe much larger than we can really understand. In addition to that, the theory (unproved idea) of evolution<sup>3</sup> discredits the idea of a Creator. And people can struggle with a sense of hopelessness in a great creation that seems to care nothing about us.

Of course, the Bible gives us a different view of our place in the creation.

**What do Judges 2:16–18; 2 Kings 13:23; and Isaiah 54:7, 8, 10 teach about God's compassion (mercy) toward His fallen and broken creation here on earth?**

The popular idea is that the God of the Old Testament is strict, mean, not forgiving, and not merciful. But in the New Testament, Jesus is shown to be kind and merciful. The verses we just read are a few of many in the Old Testament that show God's compassion (mercy) for people.

**What does Exodus 2:23–25 teach us about how God deals with suffering?**

God deeply cares about people (read James 5:11). This theme is found all through the Bible.

"God's heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our speaking about them. . . . Nothing about our peace is too small in any way for Him to notice. . . . Our heavenly Father does not fail to notice any event that causes great harm and suffering to any of His children. No harm or suffering happens that He takes no interest in right away." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 100.

**What kind of groans are going up toward heaven in your community? And how can God use you to show mercy toward those who are suffering and to help them?**

## OUR SYMPATHETIC SAVIOR (Matthew 9:35, 36)

Jesus mixed with people during His earthly ministry (work done for God). He faced situations that showed His sympathy and compassion (mercy) for others. “When Jesus came ashore, he saw a large crowd. He felt great concern [deep interest] for them. He healed their sick people” (Matthew 14:14, NlrV).

**Read Matthew 9:35, 36 and Luke 7:11–16. What do they teach us about how to show true sympathy and compassion?**

The word *sympathy* brings to mind other words, such as *empathy*<sup>4</sup> and *pity*. According to different dictionaries, compassion is pity, sympathy, empathy. Pity is sympathetic<sup>5</sup> sorrow for another person’s suffering. *Empathy* is the ability to put oneself in another person’s shoes in order to understand or share his or her feelings.

Compassion and sympathy show both that we understand what others are suffering and that we want to help lessen their suffering.

True compassion will lead you toward comforting and actively helping friends, as well as strangers, in useful ways. Maybe you will show compassion by sending a sympathy card. Or show even deeper sympathy by visiting and helping people with their needs. Loving action is the clear result of true sympathy.

Fortunately, people and aid organizations help with the big events. But sometimes we may not pay as much attention to the “smaller” events that deeply hurt someone.

Jesus did not just show sympathy. He took that sympathy to the next level: compassionate action. We, of course, are called to do the same. Anyone can feel sorrow or sympathy for someone when bad things happen. The question is, what action does that sympathy lead us to do?

**While eating breakfast, a man listened to his wife read in the news about a tragedy<sup>6</sup> in another country that left thousands dead. After talking for a few moments about how terrible it was, he then changed the subject and asked if the local soccer team had won the match the night before. In what ways are we all somewhat guilty of the same thing? What can we do about it, if anything?**



**Loving action is the clear result of true sympathy.**

### DEFINITIONS

4. empathy—the feeling that you understand and share another person’s experiences and emotions.
5. sympathetic—feelings or showing concern about someone who is in a bad situation.
6. tragedy—a very bad event that causes great sadness and often involves a person’s (or persons’) death.

## WALKING IN THEIR SHOES (Colossians 3:12)



The Father's heart of merciful love leads Him to empty all that He has in order to restore His prodigal son.

## DEFINITIONS

7. prodigal son—a son who leaves his parents to do things that they do not approve of but then feels sorry and returns home.
8. restoration—the act or process of returning something to a previous state.
9. reckless—not showing proper concern about the possible bad results of your actions.
10. restore—to bring someone back to an earlier and better condition.

Read Colossians 3:12; 1 Peter 3:8; and 1 John 3:17. What are these verses saying to us? And how can we show this compassion in our lives?

*Compassion* comes from the Latin word *compati*, which means “to suffer with.” As we ourselves have suffered, we also can understand the sufferings of others. No doubt, we often want compassion and sympathy in our suffering. So we should be willing to give the same to others in their time of need too.

We studied in an earlier lesson the story of the good Samaritan. Jesus says, “But a Samaritan came where the [injured] man was. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him” (Luke 10:33, NIV). This pity or compassion drove the Samaritan to do something for the injured man. The priest and the Levite probably asked themselves, “If I help this man, what will happen to me?” But the Samaritan may have asked himself instead, “If I do not help this man, what will happen to him?” In this story the Samaritan unselfishly puts himself in the injured man’s place and takes action. He risks his safety and his wealth for a stranger. In other words, sometimes being a Christian involves risks and expense.

Look at the story of the prodigal son<sup>7</sup> (Luke 15:20–32). The merciful hug, the robe of belonging, the ring of trust, the sandals (shoes) of freedom, and the call for celebration show the selfless joy of a father who is willing to sacrifice all for his wandering son’s restoration.<sup>8</sup> *Prodigal* means wasteful, reckless,<sup>9</sup> extravagant (spending a lot of money), and uncontrolled. This kind of action certainly describes the path of the son in this story. But stop for a minute and think about the father in this story giving up all self-respect and honor in order to give everything he has to his returning son. In the eyes of the older brother, the father is wasteful, extravagant, and uncontrolled. The father becomes prodigal (careless and foolish) at the sight of his sorrowful son. The father’s heart of merciful love leads him to empty all that he has in order to restore<sup>10</sup> his son.

This level of sympathy and compassion involves putting self aside. And it can make us weak to whatever comes as we suffer with someone and try to move him or her toward renewal and restoration. In short, true compassion and sympathy might come with a cost.

## JESUS WEPT (CRIED) (John 11:35)

**“Jesus wept” (John 11:35, NIV). What does this verse tell us about Jesus as a Human Being (Person)? What does it tell us about how, as a Man, He related to the suffering of others? Read also Romans 12:15.**

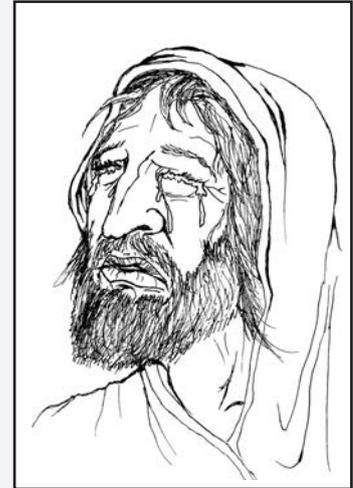
In John 11:35, Jesus shows sympathy, empathy, and pity from His heart. He is about to raise Lazarus from the dead. But the grief of a family with whom He is very close touches Him very deeply.

Jesus was not just weeping over the death of a dear friend. He saw all of the suffering of all humans for all time because of sin.

“The weight of the grief of all history was upon Jesus. He saw the terrible results of God’s law being broken. He saw that in the history of the world, beginning with the death of Abel, the war between good and evil had been going on without end. Looking down through the years to come, He saw the suffering and sorrow, tears and death, that were to happen to men. His heart was deeply touched with the pain of the human family of all periods and in all lands. The sad results of sin were heavy upon His soul. And the fountain of His tears was broken up as desire filled Him to bring relief to all their suffering.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 534.

We ourselves find it difficult to think about the pain of those whom we know or with whom we are close. Add to that the pain of others that we read about in the news. And yet, we have here the Lord, who knows things in ways that we do not, who can do this very thing. Here He is—weeping over all human grief. God alone knows the full measure of human sadness and sorrow. How thankful we should be that the sorrow we know or experience does not equal or come close to the sorrow He knows. And the little bit of sorrow we know sometimes even seems too much for us. Just imagine what must have been stirring the heart of Jesus at that time.

**General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, said, “‘If you cannot cry over the city, we cannot use you.’ ”—Roger S. Greenway and Timothy M. Monsma, *Cities: Missions’ New Frontier* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publication Group, 2000), page 246. What should those words say to each of us?**



**When Jesus saw Lazarus, He wept over the suffering of all humans for all time because of sin.**

**ANOTHER KIND OF COMFORTER (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4)**

**“Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He is the Father who gives tender love. All comfort comes from him. He comforts us in all our troubles. Now we can comfort others when they are in trouble. We ourselves have received comfort from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4, NlrV). What is Paul telling us about how our own suffering can help us to show more sympathy and comfort to those around us? Have you experienced how real these words are in your own life? If so, how?**

The word *comfort* comes from the Latin words *com* (together, with) and *fortis* (strong). As Christ strengthens us in our suffering, we can share this strength with others. As we have learned from our own sorrows, we can better help others in theirs.

Churches usually have members who suffer and members who comfort. This combination can change your church into a “safe house”—a “city of refuge [safety]” (read Numbers 35) as well as a river of healing (read Ezekiel 47:1–12) that flows to the community.

Showing sympathy and comfort is an art. Here are some suggestions:

- Be true. Listen more than you speak. Make sure your body language shows sympathy and comfort too.
- Show sympathy in a personal way. Some people give sympathy by quietly crying with the troubled person. Others do not cry but show sympathy by bringing or doing something that is a comfort to the person who mourns.
- *Being* there is often more important than speaking or doing.
- Let people grieve (be sad) in their own way.
- Know the stages (parts) of going through grief that people often experience.
- Be careful about saying, “I know how you feel.” Chances are that you really do not.
- There is a place for professional help from a counselor.
- Do not say, “I will pray for you” if you really do not plan to do so. When possible, pray with, spend time with, and share encouraging Bible promises with people who suffer.
- Organize support groups (if available) at your church or in your community.

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Deuteronomy 24:10–22; Jonah 3; Malachi 3:17; Matthew 15:32–38; Mark 6:34–44; Galatians 6:2; Hebrews 10:32–34. Read Ellen G. White, “Be Sympathetic to All Men,” page 189, and “Thoughtful of Others,” page 193, in *My Life Today*; “The Privilege [Special Right] of Prayer,” page 100, in *Steps to Christ*; “This Is Pure Religion” and “The Parable [Very Short Story that Teaches a Lesson] of the Good Samaritan,” chapters 4 and 5, in *Welfare Ministry*.

There are so many people out there who need comfort, sympathy, and help that it can seem like nothing we do to help can make much difference! One could think: What is the point of doing anything? We cannot make any difference! Many problems result from that way of thinking. First, if everyone thought that way, no one would help anyone. And the needs, as terrible as they are, would be even worse. But if everyone who could help others would, then the needs, as terrible as they are, would not be as bad. Second, we have never been told in the Bible that human pain, suffering, and evil will be removed on earth. In fact, we have been told the opposite. Even Jesus, when here, did not end all human suffering. He did what He could. We too are to do the same.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 How can your church be made into a safe, healing place for those with broken hearts?
- 2 Discuss in class the following quote: “Many wonder why God does not act. But God wonders why so many of His people do not care.”—Dwight Nelson, *Pursuing [Chasing; Following] the Passion<sup>11</sup> of Jesus* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 2005). Do you even agree with the reasoning behind this quote? If so, what can we do to change?
- 3 Read this quote from Ellen G. White: “Kind words simply spoken, little attentions simply given, will sweep away the clouds of temptation and doubt that surround the soul. The simple, true-hearted example of Christ-like sympathy has power to open the door of other hearts. These hearts are the ones that need the simple, sensitive [tender] touch of the Spirit of Christ.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, page 30. What should this tell us about the wonderful power for good that kindness and sympathy can have as we reach out to help people who mourn?

### DEFINITIONS

11. passion—a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something.