

“I Feel the Same Way”

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. A farmer had some puppies he needed to sell. He painted a sign advertising the pups and set about nailing it to a post on the edge of his yard. As he was driving the last nail into the post, he felt a tug on his overalls. He looked down into the eyes of a little boy. Mister," he said, "I want to buy one of your puppies."

"Well," said the farmer, as he rubbed the sweat off the back of his neck, "these puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal of money." The boy dropped his head for a moment. Then reaching deep into his pocket, he pulled out a handful of change and held it up to the farmer. "I've got thirty-nine cents. Is that enough to take a look?" "Sure," said the farmer. And with that he let out a whistle, "Here, Dolly!" he called.

Out from the doghouse and down the ramp ran Dolly followed by four little balls of fur. The little boy pressed his face against the chain link fence. His eyes danced with delight. As the dogs made their way to the fence, the little boy noticed something else stirring inside the doghouse. Slowly another little ball appeared; this one noticeably smaller. Down the ramp it slid. Then in a somewhat awkward manner the little pup began hobbling toward the others, doing its best to catch up. "I want that one," the little boy said, pointing to the runt.

The farmer knelt down at the boy's side and said, "Son, you don't want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you like these other dogs would." With that the little boy stepped back from the fence, reached down, and began rolling up one leg of his trousers. In doing so he revealed a steel brace running down both sides of his leg attaching itself to a specially made shoe. Looking back up at the farmer, he said, "You see sir, I don't run too well myself, and he will need someone who understands." The world is full of people who need someone who understands.

B. Karen Gerdes, a social worker at ASU on empathy, the ability to perceive the world from other people's points of view and to feel what they are feeling. Empathy is a complex emotion because it involves both unconscious, involuntary responses and conscious, cognitive processes. For example, suppose you've had a traumatic experience, like losing a loved one. You see someone else who is going through that experience, and your brain automatically starts firing as if it's happening to you. That helps you to understand a little bit better about what that person is going through. People who are very empathic tend to be more understanding and have stronger relationships. When you have an empathy deficit, like Hitler did, you commit genocide. When you have appropriate empathy, those things don't happen because you interfere.

C. Rom. 12:14-15

1. Look at the stark contrast between the instructions of verses 14 and 15!
2. We bless those who persecute, because we do not feel the same toward others who are vulnerable, as the persecutor feels toward them. We do not feel the same way, so we do not react the same way.
3. But in verse 15, we identify with those persons, we feel the same way; so, we react the same way.

4. Empathy - Identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives. The ability to understand and share the feelings of another (Merriam-Webster)

I. DELINEATING EMPATHY

A. Compared to sympathy

1. Sympathy - An inclination to support or be loyal to or to agree with an opinion or position
2. Empathy - Understanding and entering into another's feelings. One may be sympathetic while not empathetic; the latter requires a deeper emotional involvement and commitment than the former

B. Empathy's place in the church

1. 1Cor. 12:26
2. "This command grows out of the doctrine stated in Rom. 12:4-5, that the church is one; that it has one interest; and therefore that there should be common sympathy in its joys and sorrows." (Barnes Notes)

II. DEMONSTRATING EMPATHY

A. Rejoicing with those who rejoice

1. Luke 1:57-58; Acts 11:22-23
2. Sharing in one other's happiness and success without envy or jealousy

B. Weeping with those who weep

1. Psalm 35:13-14; John 11:33-35; 2Cor. 11:29; Heb. 13:3
2. How can we rise above simple sympathy for others to become empathetic?

III. DEVELOPING EMPATHY

A. Transformation by the renewing of our minds; changing how we think

1. Rom. 12:1-2, 10

B. Taking on the mind of Christ - Phil. 2:1-5

C. As one develops the mind of Christ, there will be no envy or jealousy to prevent true empathy. We will experience a true feeling with others.

Conclusion:

- A. Jesus knows what we are going through. He has been here and felt that
 1. Heb. 4:15-16, 2:18