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“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

With Deepest Sympathy

Central Truth: You can comfort the grieving.

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Topic: Death: Of Believers; Sympathy.

Look at the word *sympathy*. It is derived from two root words: *syn*, meaning “together,” and *pathos*, meaning “feeling.” *Sympathy* means - “feeling together,” “sharing the same feelings,” or “feeling what another feels.” It is related to compassion (“suffering with another”). It was evident in the life of Christ and should be manifest by His disciples.

We have many opportunities to express sympathy. But the most obvious time is when troubles come. We show sympathy to one who has suffered a loss of any kind: health, wealth, opportunities, or even the life of a loved one. The lesson text for this study deals with Jesus' sympathy toward Martha and Mary upon the death of their brother, Lazarus.

Sympathy is expressed in many ways, depending on your spiritual gift. But every expression of Christian sympathy is to be a reflection of God's concern for us. Here are ways we can show the love of God and our sympathy to one in sorrow.

Show Sympathy By Your Presence (John 11:32)

Your presence is needed by one in sorrow. How Martha and Mary longed for Jesus to be there. Each of them said, “*Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died*” (John 11:21, 32). They longed for Jesus during Lazarus' illness. And even after his death they ran to meet Jesus when they heard He had returned to Bethany.

Jesus is no longer here in the flesh, but you are here as His

representative. So you can be personally present with people in need in the stead of Jesus. When Paul was in prison, he longed for companionship and wrote to Timothy, *“Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me”* (II Timothy 4:9). James counsels believers to visit the fatherless and widows because they are alone in their troubles (James 1:27). Jesus will still enter the sick room, the home where death has come, and the lives of the lonely and needy if you are available to go where He would go. People in sorrow need His presence, and He will minister to them through you.

Your presence will be rewarded by the Lord. Matthew 25:34-40 recounts a day of judgment. To certain ones the Lord will give His approval and mete out rewards. The reason? They will have ministered to Him when He was hungry, thirsty, lonely, insufficiently clothed, and imprisoned. But they will respond that they never saw Him in such conditions. They will ask when they rendered such a ministry. He will reply, *“Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me”* (Matthew 25:40).

What is the reward He gives for such service? It is twofold: (1) reception — *“Come, ye blessed of my Father”*; (2) inheritance — *“inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matthew 25:34). Will it be worth the effort? Abundantly so!

You serve the Lord in loving obedience. Reward is not your motive; but your receiving His reward is glory beyond estimation. He will remember every ministry performed to people in His name and repay with richest dividends. Go where there is need. You will receive blessings now and in eternity.

Show Your Compassion to One in Sorrow (John 11:33-38)

Compassion is another compound word whose meaning is made up of two root words. *Com* means “with,” and *passion* means “to suffer.” To feel compassion with other people is to feel their pain. A parent knows that feeling when helping his child who is injured and in great pain. The Lord Jesus knows that feeling because He looked at people and had compassion on them (Matthew 20:34). You are to have that feeling as you help hurting people about you.

God set an example of compassion. *“In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old”* (Isaiah 63:9). Note how His compassion was expressed. (1) He suffered what they suffered. (2) He went to them and saved them. (3) He showed His

love and pity toward them. (4) He lifted them and helped them. (5) He continued His care over them as long as it was needed. *“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him”* (Psalm 103:13). We do not have the kind of high priest who is unconcerned with our weaknesses. He has been tried in every point as we are and knows what it is like. We can come with confidence before His throne and receive His help (Hebrews 4:15, 16).

As Christians we have the opportunity to show compassion. We are God's agents in the world today. We must feel the hurt of our peers and go to them and help them. We must relieve their burdens and care for them as long as we are needed. What an opportunity! What a responsibility! What an occasion to show people who our God really is and what He is like. That is a good way to obey our Lord's instruction in Matthew 5:16: *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

Look for those opportunities. Take advantage of each one. Identify with the hurting person, whatever the nature of the hurt. Devote your best efforts to relieving the pain. But do it with a spirit of identification in which you feel with that person in the grace of Christian sympathy. What a blessing we can be to each other by manifesting our compassion by presence, word, and deed.

Show Christian Sympathy by Your Faith (John 11:21-27, 40)

Behold the blessed ministry of faith. It gives substance to your hopes and provides you with certainty concerning unseen realities. That is faith. Your certainty concerning spiritual realities which no one can see will enable you to extend healing sympathy to those who suffer and sorrow. John 11:21-27, 40 indicates two blessed unseen realities which you can claim and use as comfort in trouble.

Have faith in Jesus' promise of the future. Martha lamented that if Jesus had only been present, Lazarus would not have died. Jesus replied, *“Thy brother shall rise again”* (verse 23). What a blessed hope! Without the Resurrection we would sorrow as those who have no hope. But the truth of the resurrection of the dead when Jesus returns greatly lessens the sorrow suffered at the death of a loved one who is a Christian.

The Resurrection is one of those unseen realities. We have never seen a person raised from the dead or met one who has been raised. How do we know it will happen? We know it because Jesus has risen and is alive. We know it because He has promised it and we trust Him. It is unseen, but it is

as certain to us as if it had already transpired. When you turn away from the grave of a Christian loved one, know that the parting is only temporary and the reunion is certain. Have faith in Jesus' promise of the future and be consoled in your sorrow.

Have faith in Jesus' power in the present. Martha believed in the resurrection of the dead at the last day and confessed her faith to Jesus. But Jesus called her faith from the future to the present. *"I am the resurrection, and the life,"* He assured her (verse 25). She had no idea that He could raise Lazarus from the dead. Such a thought had never entered her mind. However, Jesus told her that if she would believe she would see the glory of God (verse 40). And He called Lazarus from death!

Our faith must move from the "there and then" to the "here and now" in order for us to have assurance or to minister in sympathy. It is not what Jesus did in the distant past or what He will do in the indefinite future. Where is He now? He is here. What is He doing here? He is here to minister healing where there is hurting. Jesus' challenge is as follows: *"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth"* (Mark 9:23); and *"According to your faith be it unto you"* (Matthew 9:29). Share your faith in God with one who is hurting; by doing so, you will help his healing.

Show Christian Sympathy By Your Prayers (John 11:41, 42)

Jesus prayed, then commanded Lazarus to come forth. He who was dead lived again! Your prayers will not accomplish such a miracle, but they can show your sympathy and aid in the healing of sorrowing people.

Your prayers must claim your relationship with God. You can call Him *"Father"* (verse 41). He is truly your Father in Jesus Christ. He so delights to answer prayer that He calls himself by that name (Psalm 65:2). Call on the Father who hears and answers.

Your prayers will be assisted by the Spirit of God. He knows our hearts, and He knows the will of God. He joins the two into an acceptable prayer which will receive an answer (Romans 8:26). Believe it, and pray with confidence.

Your prayers ascend before the throne of God. They are like the fragrant perfume of sweet incense. They are offered upon the altar before God in heaven (Revelation 8:3, 4). Your prayers for people in need are received before God! So pray.

Your prayers will receive an answer. God promises, *"He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him"* (Psalm 91:15). Thank God for the assistance of

answered prayer as we show sympathy to those who hurt.

Show Christian Sympathy Based Upon Your Experience (II Corinthians 1:3-5)

Have you ever been in great trials or deep sorrow? Of course you have, as have we all. Have you ever experienced the comfort of God himself in those times? Yes, if you are a Christian you have. God promises, “*As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted*” (Isaiah 66:13). Did God comfort you to make you comfortable? Yes, but much more than that. God comforted you to enable you to bear your burden and then to make you a comforter to others. God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.

You can give comfort to those who need it. You have experienced the comfort which comes from God alone. Now you can pass it on. God comforted Paul by the presence of Titus (II Corinthians 7:6), and He will comfort others through your presence if you will permit Him to do it. Will you? As Christians you can “*comfort yourselves together, and edify one another,*” if you will (I Thessalonians 5:11). You will find that sharing God's comfort with those who need it will be a blessed ministry.

“*Wherefore comfort one another with these words*” (I Thessalonians 4:18).

Questions for Discussion

1. What is sympathy?
2. How is sympathy related to compassion?
3. How do you show sympathy by your presence?
4. How do you show sympathy by your faith?
5. How do you show sympathy by your prayers?
6. On what occasion have you received comfort from God?
7. How has that helped you to comfort another person?
8. In what way is our God “the God of all comfort”?
9. Whom do you know who is in need of comfort now?
10. What will you do personally to comfort that person?