



More Than You Can Handle: Empathy | June 5, 2019

Discussion Guide

The Scoop

We have a tendency to want to fix things, and so we also have a tendency to want God to fix things. But what if in those difficult times, in times of need, it's enough to just be with him?

Key Verses

John 11:32-37 (NIV)

"When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 'Where have you laid him?' he asked. 'Come and see, Lord,' they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'"

Discussion

If you've ever walked through something like losing a beloved family pet, you may have asked yourself why it was so hard on you. We all know and are exposed to many people who are dealing with painful things in life, things that could seem way more painful than losing a pet. As humans, we have a tendency to compare our pain with others. We rate what we are going through and compare it with what our neighbor is wrestling with. But when we do this, the truth is that we undermine our ability to express empathy.

1. Have you ever lost a family pet? Did the amount of pain or grief surprise you? Why?
2. Do you have a tendency to compare your pain with others? Why do you think comparison makes it hard for us to be empathetic? Have you experienced this?

In his book, *More Than You Can Handle*, Nate Pyle says that the enemy of empathy is comparison. It's not fair for us to rate and compare our pain with others, because it's our own individual reality. And so instead of thinking about our pain as more or less than others, we should start thinking about it as just being different. In addition to comparison, we also like to fix things. So immediately when we see someone in pain, we are tempted to say "this is what worked for me in your situation." Instead of comparison and fixing, we need to allow ourselves to simply walk through the pain, with God by our side. If we are onlookers, instead of trying to fix other people's pain, we should instead be present with encouragement and love.

3. When is a time you tried to "fix" someone else's pain? What happened as a result?
4. Why do you think we lean on comparison and fixing when faced with our own pain and the pain of others? Why is presence much more powerful in those situations?

In John 11:32-37, we read about Mary's pain when a man named Lazarus dies. We know that Jesus has the power to fix that situation and to make things right. But before he fixes it, he takes time to sit with Mary and Martha in the midst of their pain. The Bible says that "Jesus wept." He experienced real human emotion and grief, alongside his friends. The people around were able to see how much Jesus loved Lazarus because of the way he expressed empathy.

5. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to express empathy in this story instead of simply fixing the situation right away (or before it happened)?
6. How does Jesus give you hope in this story for when you are traveling through your own pain or difficulty?

What's Next?

The key to empathy in difficult situations is just to sit with people. To see them, to hear them, and to be with them. People in pain don't want to be fixed or to be told answers. They simply want someone to sit next to them and acknowledge their pain, to encourage them by being present and attentive. That's exactly what God does over and over again in the Bible.

This week, as you live out and engage your faith, instead of looking to God and asking him what he's going to do about your pain and when he's going to fix it, also look to God and know that he wants to sit with you in your pain. Just like we should do for others.