



NCFI Cares: The Empathy of God

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the people who had come with her weeping, he was intensely moved in spirit and greatly distressed. He asked, "Where have you laid him?" They replied, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. (John 11:33-35)

In John Chapter 11 we find Jesus traveling with the disciples, when he was notified that his friend Lazarus is extremely ill. Jesus, knowing God's plan, purposefully delayed his plans to visit. He explicitly told the disciples his plan and even explained why he is waiting for Lazarus to die.

"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." So Jesus then said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him."

As he gets closer to the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, Jesus explained his purpose to Martha.

Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." . . . Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

As the reader, I am familiar with the incident and know the miracle that is about to take place. Jesus has explained it to his disciples, to Martha and to me. The narrative is interrupted, and I read how Jesus was overcome with emotion and crying, *"he was intensely moved in spirit and greatly distressed...Jesus wept."*

I ask myself, "Why is Jesus crying? Why is he so upset? He knows the outcome. Jesus knows in a few short minutes, Lazarus will come walking out of the tomb, risen and alive again! How can Jesus, the son of God, omnipotent, omniscient be upset about a death he is going to rectify?" I am confused by the incident until the Holy Spirit reveals the answer--empathy!

The Merriam-Webster definition of empathy includes... "vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner." In other words, having the same "feelings, thoughts, and experience" of someone without having the same experience.

Here in three short verses of John 11, I see a facet of the heart of God. Our Lord and Savior reveals one of the most powerful emotions of humans—grief, sadness, and pain. Not because Jesus doesn't know the outcome. And, not because He can't fix it. Instead, He is overcome with the grief and pain of his friends' who were inconsolable at the loss of their brother and friend. Jesus' loving response is to share the experience with them. He cries as they cry.

As someone who has experienced loss and grief, I find comfort in knowing this is my God. He sat with me in my tears and pain. He cried when I was inconsolable. Not because He doesn't know the outcome. And not because He couldn't fix it. Instead, He is cries, when I cry.

Jesus becomes spiritually distressed by the pain and suffering we experience. He laments with me, with you and with our patients and families. This new insight into the love of God brings new meaning to Psalm 23:4

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me;

Blessings,

Carrie

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