

The God Who Walked in Our Shoes

Text: Hebrews 4:14-16

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Have you ever received a sympathy card from a friend when you were going through a difficult time? There's a note of encouragement on the cover, and maybe they write a personal message on the inside to let you know they are thinking about you.

Sympathy cards tend to be serious in tone, but every once and awhile you might get one that makes you laugh, taking your mind off of your circumstances for a little while.

I saw one the other day that said: "sending you a galaxy of hugs" and there was a picture from the movie Star Wars of R2D2 being hugged by an Ewok.

Another had a cartoon of two dinosaurs standing on a rock in the rain, watching the ark sail away. A speech balloon from one of the dinosaurs said, "Oh no, was that today?" When you open it up the message says, "A bad day is all about perspective," and there are dinosaur bones.

Another card looked pretty normal on the front, with a drawing of some flowers, on the front it said "I wish I could take away all of your pain...and give it to someone I don't like." That's not very nice, but it was funny.

It is a good thing to send one another notes of encouragement and cards. It reminds us that we're not alone, no matter what we're facing. There are friends, loved ones, family who care about you, who are thinking of you and praying for you. That means a lot to us. But still, in the midst of our struggles, we long for something more. We want to know that there is someone who understands what we're going through, who can relate to the problems that we're facing, who identifies with what we're feeling. It's nice to know people care, but what we really need is someone who is willing to enter into our suffering and walk beside us.

Our passage in Hebrews 4:14-16 tells us that Jesus is that person. He is our great high priest who is able to minister to us in our afflictions. It's not just that he sees the challenges we face, or that he feels bad for us when we are hurting. More than that, he is able to empathize with us because he has walked in our shoes and shared our humanity. Jesus came to this earth, becoming like us in every way, except that he is without sin.

That's important for us to remember, because when we call out in prayer, one of the first questions we have is: "Does God understand what I'm going through?" He is the Almighty, so how is he able to grasp what it is like for us to be weak and helpless? He is all-knowing, so how can he relate to our uncertainty and concerns about the future? He is eternal, so how can he appreciate the struggles us mortals face? Scripture tells us that he understands, because He is the God who became a man and dwelt among us. He was here. He encountered the same kinds of struggles that we face. He went through the same experiences that we go through in our daily lives. That means he is qualified to serve as our great high priest. We can approach him with confidence, no matter what we're going through, because is the God who shared our humanity.

Over the next few weeks we're going to talk about the person of Christ, and what his ministry accomplished for us. One of the essential doctrines of our faith is Jesus is both fully God and fully man. We're going to focus on the second part of that statement this morning, the humanity of Christ. It wasn't simply that he looked like a man, or that he was some kind of divine visitor who showed up in human form for a little while. No, the teaching of Scripture tells us that Christ became flesh and blood and dwelt among us. This was necessary if he were to become our Savior, and it tells us something about the depths of his love, if he was willing to go through all of this for us.

We're going to look at just a few ways that Jesus shared our human experience. Earlier in the book, Hebrews 2:17 (NASB95), "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest..." He became like us in all things...

First of all, Jesus understands our physical limitations.

As the gospels open, we read about the birth of Christ. It began with a miracle. The angel appeared to Mary and delivered the news that she was to become the mother of the Messiah. How was this possible, she wondered, for a virgin to conceive a child? The angel told her it would be through the power of the Holy Spirit. The circumstances surrounding his birth were unique and special and unlike anything that has ever happened before. Nevertheless, he Jesus was born the same way any other child is born. He grew and developed in Mary's womb, and when the time came the infant was delivered into the world, like any other baby. His earthly parents held him in their arms and marveled at his tiny feet, and tiny hands, and tiny nose. They wrapped him in blanket to keep him warm because he was helpless and fragile.

There isn't a lot of information in the Bible about his early years, but we are told that he grew and developed like a normal child, learning to walk and talk. Luke 2:52 says that "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." Eventually he became an adult, and would have looked like any other 30 year old man. There was no glowing halo floating above his head, like we sometimes see depicted in artwork. He worked with his hands in the carpenter's shop. He went to bed every night, and woke up every morning, the same as anyone else.

He had a physical body like ours. After a hard day of work he became sweaty and his muscles ached. If he was injured, he bled. He was susceptible to sickness and disease. Even though he was God, he wasn't immune from any of these afflictions. There are several places in the gospels where we see his humanity.

Mark 11:12-13 (NASB95) says, "*On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. ¹³ Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves...*"

Jesus became hungry and needed to eat. On this particular day, he was walking with the disciples along the road when they decided to stop and rest. You know how it is. After you've been hiking for a while, your stomach begins to growl telling you it's time to refuel. They

noticed a fig tree. Perfect! Why not grab a bite to eat while sitting under the shade. The only problem was that the branches were empty. There was no fruit.

That's similar to the disappointment you may have felt this week heading into the grocery store. You just have a few things on your list for a simple lunch like bread and peanut butter. When you walked the aisles you found empty shelves.

Jesus and the disciples were disappointed because they were hungry. They had to keep going, and look somewhere else for something to eat. This seems like a small and insignificant detail. Why did the Holy Spirit move the gospel writers to include it in the passage? It shows us that Jesus had a human body like ours that required nutrition.

Another passage that demonstrates the limitations of his physical body is Mark 4:37-38. After a long day of ministering to the crowds, Jesus and the disciples set sail for the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He was exhausted, so he left the navigation to Peter and the others, while he stretched out in the stern for a nap. He must have been sleeping soundly, because a huge storm came out of nowhere and began tossing the boat back and forth across the waves. The disciples began to panic. Mark 4:37-39 tells us,

³⁷ And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. ³⁸ Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.

This is a great passage that shows us both the deity and the humanity of Christ. The disciples didn't know what to do. Some of them were seasoned fisherman, so they had been in this situation before, but they thought this was the end. Their little boat couldn't take much more. They looked around for Jesus, and couldn't believe he was still asleep. How in the world could someone snooze with all of this commotion going on around them? He was physically drained, that's why. So they shook him in order to wake him up and said "Save us! Can't you see we are perishing!" Jesus opened his eyes, looked around, and rebuked the storm. Instantly the wind and waves were calm. The disciples were amazed, wondering "What kind of man is this, even the wind and the sea obey him." One minute he was so tired he couldn't keep his eyes open, but the next moment he was calming the storm.

There are so many other passages like these, which show us Jesus had a physical body like ours that was subject to the same weaknesses and limitations. And so he relate to us when we are worn out and exhausted after a difficult week. You've been so busy trying to do a million things, and you don't feel like getting out of bed. He knows what that is like. And he can relate to us when our body is hurting. Jesus knows what is like to experience pain. He understands our because he became flesh and blood like us.

Jesus also understands our emotions.

You might think that being God, nothing fazed him, or that he was stoic in every circumstance, but that wasn't the case. Jesus had a heart like ours and grappled with the same kinds of feelings that we experience. He knew the joy of friendship. I'm sure there must have been times with the disciples when they laughed together, and I can imagine his smile brought warmth to those around him. But he also knew what it felt like to be overwhelmed with sorrow. More than once the Bible tells us that Jesus wept. There were circumstances that broke his heart, causing him terrible grief. One of those experiences came in John 11.

In that passage Jesus arrived in the town of Bethany and reached the home of his friends Mary and Martha and Lazarus. This was a family who had shown him hospitality on many occasions, and he grown close them. But there was a somber tone to this visit, because Lazarus suddenly passed away. Jesus arrived several days after the funeral. When the sisters heard that Jesus was coming, they went out to meet him along the road. They were heartbroken and confused. Jesus had healed so many others, and they wondered why he had not been there to heal their brother. If only he had come sooner, maybe things would be different. But now it was too late, and they couldn't imagine how they were going to get through this.

John 11:32–36 (NASB95) reads,

³² Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, ³⁴ and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!"

Jesus experienced the same emotions that we experience when a loved one passes away. Most of us have felt that kind of grief at some point in our lives, maybe in the hallway of a hospital, or at a funeral. There is a sense of anguish deep in our soul. As we try to process what has happened we can't shake the feeling of shock and disbelief. We tell ourselves, this wasn't supposed to happen. It's not supposed to be this way. There is an emptiness that is left and we can't imagine that our lives will ever be the same. No matter how hard you try, you can't stop the tears from flowing, and that's okay. Even if your friend was a believer and you know that you will see them again, that doesn't take away the pain.

The passage tells us that Jesus knew that pain. His heart was troubled and his spirit was deeply moved. He grieved for the sisters, knowing the how difficult this was for them. But he also grieved because Lazarus was his friend, and it broke his heart to think about all that he had endured. Even though Jesus already knew the miracle he would perform, that didn't diminish the sorrow that he felt in his heart. Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow and wept with the sisters. His display of emotion made an impact on everyone who was there. They made the comment that Jesus must have really loved Lazarus to react this way.

This is a passage that ministers to us when we are grieving. It makes a difference knowing that God feels our sorrow and knows what we are going through. He understands our confusion and the questions we have. We're not alone, but he is there holding us close walking beside us as one who has entered into our suffering.

It wasn't just sorrow, but Jesus felt the full range of emotions that we experience. In one passage we are told that he felt compassion for the crowds, because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mk. 6:34). In another passage Jesus was filled with anger towards the religious leaders. It wasn't the sinful anger that we sometimes have, that causes us to lose our cool and say things we regret. It was righteous indignation, because they were blind guides who were leading the people astray.

It makes a difference knowing that there is someone who understands what we're feeling, who has been there, who knows what we're going through.

This last week was a challenge for us, adjusting to a new routine, trying to figure out how to make this homeschooling thing work with our kids. At times it was frustrating. There is one kid who says, "This is boring, I don't want to do this." And another kid who is playing games on the Chromebook instead of working on their assignment. I saw something on Facebook that said, "My child is expelled from homeschool," and I smiled because apparently there is someone else out there who understands. It tells me I'm not alone, and maybe we'll get through this.

We're never alone. You may be feeling lonely and isolated, as the corona virus is keeping in our homes and away from others. You may be dealing with uncertainty and are anxious about the future. You might feel discouraged and overwhelmed. Some people are frustrated and just want life to go back to normal.

But matter what you're going through, you're not alone. Jesus understands because he has walked in our shoes. We can go to him with our burdens and pour out our hearts to him in prayer. He has compassion for us.

Jesus understands our temptation.

If we go back to our passage, in Hebrews 4:15 we read, *"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."*

One of the challenges that we face as human beings is doing the right thing. It's almost as if there is a force that is constantly pulling us in the opposite direction from where we are supposed to go. There are choices that we make every day that determine the kind of life we're going to live. Will I obey God, or will I give in to my own selfish desires? Will I do good, or do what is easy? Will I follow the Lord, or follow the crowd?

We might think that God could never understand this struggle. After all, he is holy and righteous and pure and righteous. What does he know about temptation? Actually, these verses tell us that Jesus was tempted in all things as we are.

We don't know much about his childhood, but we can imagine there must have been times when it wasn't easy to obey his earthly parents. I think most families struggle at bedtime. Mom or dad says, "It's time to brush your teeth and put your pajamas on." How do the kids respond? "Aw, do I have to? I'm not even tired. Can't we stay up a few more minutes?" There is a choice the child has to make: either to listen to the voice of their parents or to defy their wishes. A child might drag their feet and move as slowly as they possible can. Or they might continue to come downstairs a hundred times over the next hour: "I'm thirsty," "I need to use the bathroom," "I forgot my stuffed animal" "I hear noises under the bed." As a child, Jesus would have felt the temptation to do the same, but instead of acting in defiance he chose to obey.

And he grew into a man there must have been times when he was tempted to take the easy path through life. He didn't have to complete his mission. He knew where his journey would lead him. If he was going to become our Savior it would involve suffering and death. He could have chosen a different path, putting his own self-interests ahead of ours. At any moment along the way he could call the whole thing off and said, "Sorry world, but I'm going to do what's best for me." Jesus was tempted to abandon his purpose, to save himself, to defy the will of his Heavenly Father, but instead he kept going even though he knew what it would cost. He chose obedience every time.

The temptations that he experienced were even greater than our own. The gospels tells us that before Jesus began his earthly ministry, he spent forty days in the wilderness, and the devil met him there with one objective... to cause Jesus to stumble.

Matthew 4:1-2 says, "*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*"² *And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.*"

Satan recognized an opportunity, and he hit Jesus with everything he had. First he appealed to his physical desires. "Aren't you hungry? You have been fasting all this time, and unless you eat something soon, you're not going to survive. Go ahead, just this once, do a miracle to benefit yourself. "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." (Mt. 4:3). But Jesus refused use his power selfishly. He trusted his heavenly Father to provide.

And so Satan tried a different tactic. Taking Jesus to the top of the temple he looked at the crowded streets below, and challenged him to throw himself down. "Doesn't the Bible say that He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands..." He was telling Jesus to prove how much the Father loved him, and in the process show off a little and amaze the people. But Jesus refused. The Bible also says "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

And so the devil took him to the top of a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. "All of this can be yours," he whispered. "All you have to do is bow down before me." But Jesus responded, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" (Matthew 4:10 NASB95)

Wayne Grudem explains, “The temptation was to use his divine power to cheat a bit on the requirements and make [his ordeal] somewhat easier. But unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus refused to eat what appeared to be good and necessary for him, choosing rather to obey the command of his heavenly Father... Jesus rejected the easy path and chose the path of obedience that led to the cross.” (Wayne Gruden, Systematic Theology, p.536).

Maybe you think it was easier for Jesus to overcome temptation because he is God. But that wasn't the case. His experience was more difficult than we can imagine. The same author uses the analogy of a weightlifter who successfully lifts the barbell over his head. He feels the force of that weight more fully than the person who only lifts it part way up and drops it. And so Jesus felt the full weight of temptation in a weight that no one else has, because while we stumble and fall, he overcame every time.

And so when we are tempted we can call out to him and know that he is there to come to our aid. He understands what it is like to be tempted, and will give us strength to do what is right. There are days when we're tempted to do things our way instead of God's. Satan might be sowing seeds of doubt in our mind, causing us to question God's commands, whispering how good the forbidden fruit will taste. We might feel the pull of pride, or be enticed by our selfish desires. But we can call out to Jesus, and he will help us.

He Understands

In each of these ways, we see that Jesus shared our humanity and he understands the struggles that we face each day. He can relate to our physical limitations. He has experienced our emotions. He has felt the weight of temptation. And so we can turn him for the strength that we need each day. “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15–16 NASB95)

We should be bold in prayer. We should find in him a pattern or example of a godly life. We should give thanks for all that he willingly went through for us.