Empathy: Your Pain in My Heart

I. Introduction.

A. Responsibility to Self.
   1. God tells us that we should provide for ourselves and our families.
      a. 1 Timothy 5:8, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he had denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."
   2. God tells us to mind our own business.
      a. 1 Thessalonians 4:11, "that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you."
   3. God tells us to bear our own load.
      a. Galatians 6:5, "For each one shall bear his own load."
   4. God tells us we are responsible for our own actions and nobody else's.
      a. Philippians 2:12, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."
      b. Ezekiel 18, "the soul who sins shall die."
   5. And we also realize that we have many responsibilities that are limited to ourselves and our immediate family.
      a. Our jobs.
      b. Providing for our family.
      c. Responsibilities at home.
      d. Personal study.

B. Yet the Bible also teaches that we have a responsibility to Others.
   1. God tells us to help those who are in need.
      a. 1 Timothy 6:18, "ready to give."
      b. Ephesians 4:28, work "that he may have something to give him who has need."
   2. God tells us to be hospitable to others.
      a. Romans 12:13, "given to hospitality."
      b. 1 Peter 4:9, "be hospitable to one another without grumbling."
   3. God tells us to teach others.
      a. Hebrews 5:12, "by this you ought to be teachers."
   4. God tells us to bear the burdens of others.
      a. Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."
   5. God tells us to exhort and encourage other Christians.
      a. Hebrews 3:13, "exhort one another daily."

C. What's the Problem?
   1. We get so wrapped up in fulfilling our responsibilities to self.
   2. That we neglect our responsibilities to others.
   3. The Bible Plan.
      a. Philippians 2:4, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."
      b. God doesn't tell us or expect us to completely neglect ourselves so that we can take care of others.
   4. Why do we have a hard time fulfilling these responsibilities to others?
   5. Perhaps it is because we have a hard time realizing what others are going through.
   6. This thought leads me to the lesson that I want to bring this morning.
      a. A lesson about sympathy and empathy.

II. There is a Difference between Sympathy and Empathy.

A. Definitions.
   1. Sympathy.
      a. "sad concern for someone in misfortune."
2. Empathy.
   a. "identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives."
3. Sympathy is feeling sorrow for someone and what they are going through.
4. Empathy is more along the lines of actually being able to feel what the other person is going through.
5. Empathy—your pain in my heart. - Jess Lair
6. Sympathy says in words: "Boy, I'd really hate to be in that man's shoes."
7. Empathy says; "I have imagined what it must be like in that man's shoes, and what I'd want someone to do for me if I were in that condition, I will do now for that man."

B. I believe the Bible teaches us to empathize with others, particularly our brethren.
1. Romans 12:15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."
2. 1 Corinthians 12:26, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."
3. 1 Peter 4:8, "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous."
4. Hebrews 13:3, "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them---those who are mistreated---since you yourselves are in the body also."
4. God empathizes with us.
   a. Psalm 103:13-14, "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust."
   1. God understands what we go through; He can empathize with us.
   b. Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."
   1. Jesus lived as a man; He can empathize with us.
   c. Hebrews 5:2, "He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness."
5. Paul is also an example of empathy.
   a. Example of 1 Thessalonians.
   b. 1 Thess. 2:7-8, "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us."
   c. 1 Thess. 2:11, "as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children."
   d. 1 Thess. 2:17-20, "But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you---even I, Paul, time and again---but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy."

III. Thoughts concerning Empathy.

A. It's easy to sympathize; it's harder to empathize.
   1. It's pretty easy to sympathize with someone who is going through a difficult time.
      a. To feel bad for them.
      b. Only the most cold-hearted person doesn't feel sympathy.
   2. And we should have sympathy for people.
   3. But we should also learn to empathize with people, particularly our brethren.
      a. To try to understand what their going through.
   4. That is not going to be an easy thing to do.
      a. Especially if we’ve never been through anything like it.

B. Empathy for others will grow as we grow closer to each other.
   1. The closer that two people become, the more they will be able to empathize with each other.
   2. An example.
      a. A mother and her young child.
      b. When a young child is sick and in pain, a mother doesn't just feel sympathy for the child.
      c. That mother almost literally feels that pain with the child.
d. That's empathy.
3. There is no relationship that would be closer than a mother with her child.
   a. The bond is so strong.
4. It's hard to have empathy for someone you don't know.
   a. You might have sympathy for people who are starving in a third-world country.
   b. But it's hard to have empathy for them.
   c. Why? Because you don't know them.
5. To be able to empathize with each other, we must get to know each other.

C. The ability to empathize is often gained through experience.
1. It is hard to have empathy for someone when you have never gone through anything that is remotely similar.
2. For example.
   a. It would be hard for a young single man to empathize with the trials of parenting.
   b. It would be hard for a person who has never had major health problems to empathize with someone who has a terminal illness.
3. As we go through things in our lives, we gain the ability to empathize with others.
4. Today, I can empathize with more people in more situations than I could when I was 20.
   a. I can empathize with parents of young children.
   b. I can empathize with those who have lost a loved one.
   c. I can empathize with those who have major illnesses.
5. What experiences have you had in your life that allow you to empathize more easily?
   a. This doesn't mean we shouldn't try to empathize with people who are going through things that we haven't.
   b. It just means that there are certain situations which are easier for us to relate to.

D. We should particularly help those who are going through things we have already gone through.
1. With that said, we should help those who are going through the same things.
2. If you've lost a spouse in the past, you should help those who go through that.
3. If you've been a parent, you should help those who are going through the trials of parenthood.
4. If you've gone through the struggles of losing a job, you should help those who go through this.
5. Look for people you can help.

E. Empathy can lighten someone's load and give them courage.
1. Showing empathy is a way that we can lighten someone's load.
   a. When someone is going through troublesome tires, there is a lot of pain and stress.
   b. The empathy of someone else is a way to share that pain and not have to bear so much of it themselves.
2. Example of carrying something heavy.
   a. Like a piano or a piece of furniture.
   b. For one person, the burden is just too much.
   c. But when that burden is spread out to several people, it becomes more manageable.
3. We can encourage others by empathizing.
   a. Letting them know that we feel their pain too.
4. "So long as you can sweeten another's pain, life is not in vain," wrote Helen Keller.

F. Empathy will strengthen our relationships and prevent much dissension.
1. As we learn to empathize, our relationships will grow stronger.
2. The reason is that empathy is really about learning to see things through the eyes of others.
   a. We can empathize with those who are sick because we try to imagine what it must be like to be in their shoes.
   b. We can empathize with those who are older and feeble because we try to understand how they must feel.
3. We may not completely understand, but we try to view life through their eyes.
4. Learning this trait will help us in so many areas.
   a. It will make us reluctant to criticize others or complain.
5. There is an old Sioux Indian prayer that gets at the solution to this common problem. It says: "Oh Great Spirit, grant me the wisdom to walk in another's moccasins before I criticize or pass judgment."

IV. Conclusion.

A. Hand in hand.
   1. Responsibilities to Self.
   2. Responsibilities to Others.
   3. To please God, you must take care of both.

B. Are you fulfilling your responsibilities?
   1. Am I fulfilling my responsibilities?
   2. Do you need help this morning?