

Someone Understands me  
By Bob Vincent

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**Bible Text:** Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 5:7-10  
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Our scripture lesson is taken from Hebrews 2, beginning at verse 17. That's on page 1864.

For this reason, he had to be made like his brothers in every way in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.  
(Hebrews 2:17-18)

The word of the Lord. ["Thanks be to God."]

May we pray.

*Heavenly Father, help me to open this passage of Scripture, along with the two others in this wonderful book of Hebrews, that we may understand. Someone understands us. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Now we have in this portion of scripture, Hebrews chapter two, and also at the end of chapter four, and also in part of chapter five, a description of who Jesus is. And the thing I want to say is this.

### **What is the difference between empathy and sympathy?**

What is empathy? Empathy is a modern word which means that we project onto an object and imagine something. That's its root meaning, this 20<sup>th</sup> century word. So, I can imagine what it feels like to be that candle burning. I can imagine it, but I can't sympathize with it. That's empathy. I project onto it a human sense of feeling. And in the course of time, that word evolved more and more to be a sense of objectivity.

And that means that even though I have never lost a child, I can imagine the pain of people who've lost a child, because I've lost my only sibling, and I've lost both of my parents. And I can project that onto someone else. That's empathy, it's kind of a modern word. But the real word that we deal with, if you turn the page over to chapter four, the end of that chapter, you will see this about Jesus on page 1866. In verse 15, Hebrews 4:15.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. (Hebrews 4:15)

Οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα μὴ δυνάμενον συμπαθεῖσαι ταῖς ἀσθενείαις ἡμῶν, πεπειραμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα, χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας. (Hebrews 4:15)

Now you've got to remove some words to really get it. We don't have this kind of person. What we do have, in effect, if you read it:

We have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. (Hebrews 4:15)

What's sympathy?

sumpatheō, συμπαθέω “to have/show sympathy with, sympathize with” (Frederick William Danker, ed. (2000), *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. Third edition (Chicago/London: Chicago University Press), p. 958)

Sympathy means that the person has gone through what you're going through. And this is what I want you to know. Sometimes you feel terrible. Sometimes you feel all alone. Sometimes you feel like nobody's there. Nobody understands. What I want you to understand is this: the Lord Jesus Christ understands what you feel because he's felt those things himself. That is sympathy; he has experienced these things himself. And so, it's interesting.

**I prayed for President Biden with sympathy.**

I was struck. I had a very negative experience early in the week in which I felt knifed in the back by somebody. And I watched a part of the Democratic National Convention, and I observed Joe Biden.

And I've prayed for Joe Biden ever since he became president, as I prayed for Donald Trump before him, and still pray for a number of politicians, pray for the governor of my state and senators and congressmen.

And I had this sense, I saw what happened to Joe Biden. He was knifed in the back, and he knew it, and he experienced it. And so, for the very first time in all of my praying for Joe Biden—and he's still our president—I prayed with sympathy. I prayed with sympathy for him because I knew what he had experienced, I had experienced. I had sympathy for him. I felt, truly felt, what he was experiencing, how he had devoted his life to his party, and at the last minute, forced to resign against his will, though he's still our president. And so, I prayed for him this way, because this is very important.

What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and to lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36)

And I began to pray with earnestness and with sympathy: "Lord, give him to see that everything that he's given his life to, everything he's given his life for, in the final analysis, it crumbles. It's dust, and it's nothing. And now in his loneliness, in his emptiness, and with a measure of slowness of his mind as he's aged, that he would have a real sense that what really matters in life is to know you, Lord. Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you; there is no greater thing. All I once held dear, built my life upon, spent and worthless now, knowing you, Jesus."

All I once held dear, built my life upon  
All this world reveres, and wars to own  
All I once thought gain I have counted loss  
Spent and worthless now, compared to this

Knowing you, Jesus  
Knowing you, there is no greater thing  
You're my all, you're the best  
You're my joy, my righteousness  
And I love you, Lord

Now my heart's desire is to know you more  
To be found in you and known as yours  
To possess by faith what I could not earn  
All-surpassing gift of righteousness

Oh, to know the power of your risen life  
And to know You in Your sufferings  
To become like you in your death, my Lord  
So with you to live and never die

And my prayer for President Biden was that he would truly come to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, because that's the main thing. That's the heart of the matter. And I still pray that way for Mr. Trump and for others.

So, sympathy means that we feel what another person feels because we've experienced it ourselves.

And so, we see here in Hebrews 4, page 1866, he says, I'm reading it in a positive way,

For we do have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. (Hebrews 4:15)

### **Jesus was tempted in all the ways you are.**

Why is Jesus able to sympathize with you? And here's what we're told. He says:

But we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

Tempted in every way. Think about the ways you've been tempted. Do you know that whatever it is that you've been tempted by—whatever it is, Jesus has been tempted in that same thing in a similar way.

### **Jesus prayed with deep emotion and tears.**

If you turn your hand over there to the next page, he says on page, 1867,

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death. (Hebrews 5:7)

Wow.

You think about the Lord Jesus being tempted. Did he suffer in his temptations? Do temptations cause you a suffering? Yes, they do. And Jesus suffered in his temptations. And notice what it says that "he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears."

How do you pray? Sometimes I pray with loud cries and tears. Sometimes when Sandy and I are riding down the highway, I'll scare her because I'll suddenly start praying with real loudness on behalf of an issue that is a great burden to me. And I want you to understand that's how Jesus prayed. He prayed with loud cries. He shouted when he prayed. He cried out with a loud voice. And he wept. Jesus wept. He wept as he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33-41; Luke 22:43-46). He wept throughout his earthly life because he saw the suffering of this world.

Where is God in human suffering? God is here. God is in Jesus in human suffering, entering into that human suffering. And so, we're told here, that he was heard, that next clause:

And he was heard because of his reverent submission.  
(Hebrews 5:7)

Reverent submission, wow!

You know, I see here keys to prayer.

Keys to prayer are let your emotions flow when you pray. You don't want to do it when you're walking in the mall. "Who is that crazy man?"

But what you want to do is you want to let your emotions flow. You want to let your tears flow when you feel them. You want to cry out to God, and you want reverently to submit to Him. Because in the final analysis, no matter what we're praying for and how hard we're praying for it, we do realize there's a sovereign disposition of these things. And we're told about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark, that he prayed:

Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. (Mark 14:36)

**Prayer must end in submission.**

So, in the final analysis, when we've wept, when we've shouted, when we've cried out to God, we submit to him with reverent submission. And so, we see that in Jesus.

And then he says there in verse eight:

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. (Hebrews 5:8)

When suffering comes your way, God is attempting to work something in your life to teach you something.

Think of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was perfect. He never sinned. That's what we saw in chapter 2 (actually, chapter 4).

We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—**yet was without sin.** (Hebrews 4:15)

Yet in spite of the fact of being perfect and having no sin and never having failed the test, yet he experienced growth and maturity through his own suffering. That's what we're told here. He learned obedience from what he suffered.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. (Hebrews 5:8)

God's trying to teach you something in your suffering. God's trying to mature you in your pain. And then it says, and "he was made perfect."

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. (Hebrews 5:8-9)

8 καίπερ ὢν υἱός, ἔμαθεν ἀφ' ὧν ἔπαθεν τὴν ὑπακοήν, 9 καὶ τελειωθεὶς ἐγένετο τοῖς ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ πᾶσιν αἴτιος σωτηρίας αἰωνίου· (Hebrews 5:8-9)

teleioō, τελειόω: “to bring to its goal/accomplishment” a. “of Jesus ἔπρεπεν αὐτῷ (i.e. τῷ θεῷ) διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι (Ἰησοῦν) Hb 2:10 (i.e., as the context indicates, he receives highest honors via suffering and death in his identification w. humanity); pass., 5:9; 7:28. This is usu. understood to mean the completion and perfection of Jesus by the overcoming of earthly limitations.” (Danker, ed., *Ibid.*, p. 996)

What does it mean that he was made perfect? You say, “Well, there’s a contradiction.”

No, I’ve studied the Bible very closely for well over 50 years that I’ve been a pastor. I read a chapter of the Greek New Testament every day. I read Hebrew every day. I study the scripture. I’ve never found a contradiction in the Bible. So, what is the issue here?

### **Jesus matured through suffering.**

The issue is it has to do with perfection in the sense of growth and maturity. In other words, he grew up.

“Do you mean that Jesus was immature?” Yes.

Yes, he was immature. And we use that word, we think of it in a pejorative way, negatively. Well, this person needs to just grow up and mature.

Jesus experienced all the growth and experience of life growing up and maturing. So, when he had completed the maturation process, when he had matured to the point where God the Father wanted him, at that point:

He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.  
(Hebrews 5:9)

And then it says:

He was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:10)

We won't go into that today.

The point I want you to see is this: The Lord Jesus Christ—somebody understands you. Somebody understands me. Somebody understands and has sympathy because he's gone through every single thing you are going through, and he's been tempted in all the ways that you've been tempted.

And going back and verse 15 of chapter four, reading it again in the positive way.

For we do have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. (Hebrews 4:15)

And he says there that:

We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

**Jesus understands you; he's been through what you're going through.**

How are you tempted today? What temptations do you face? Do you face sexual temptations? Do you face temptations over money? Do you face temptations over jealousy? Do you face temptations over anger?

Think of the things you've been tempted about.

Name them silently in your own mind right now.

How have I been tempted? And you think, "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen."

Jesus knows! Because Jesus has experienced it. He's gone through what you've gone through, and therefore he is able to sympathize. His passion, His feeling is one with you.

**Are you afraid to die?**



Turning back to chapter 2 for a moment, our text itself, and you see there, in verse 14, Hebrews 2:14, page 1864:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in his humanity that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

You afraid to die? Are you afraid to die? I can say this, I am not afraid to die. I would be very happy if this afternoon on I-49, Sandy and I were killed and went to heaven together.

You say, “That sounds weird.”

No, I’m serious. I have a total assurance that I belong to Jesus and that Sandy belongs to Jesus. And I’ll tell you this, when I see the suffering in people’s lives with cancer and other things, their inability to function—Sandy and I attended a funeral yesterday morning at my former congregation in Alexandria, a friend who made it to 98, and realizing how she died.

She was in a nursing home, and she strangled, and nobody was there to help her. And so finally they took her to the hospital, but they couldn’t revive her—98 years-old, living her life, and the end of her life in a nursing home where no one came.

I’d rather go out on a blaze of glory on I-49 this afternoon with my wife. I remember one time we were riding our motorcycle together. We don’t do that anymore. And when you get a certain age, you need to be on four wheels rather than two wheels. But she said, “You know, I had this thought.” She said, “I thought that I had died and gone to heaven.”

Because Sandy had an experience of when she was run over by that rear tandem axle of that log truck. on the old Calcasieu River Bridge near Hineston, Louisiana, and she went somewhere for three days while her body was in Christus St. Francis Hospital and ICU.

She said, “I was there and said, all of a sudden, I had the thought, ‘Oh, you are here, too.’”

Like “Surprise, Bob made it as well.” But the reason is, why am I going to make it? Why am I going to make it to heaven? How is it that I know that I know that I know, that when I die, I’m going to heaven?

### **Are you sure you are on your way to heaven?**

I know this because the Lord Jesus Christ loves me. And he gave himself up for me (Galatians 2:20). He died in my place (Romans 5:6-11). Salvation is entirely by grace, received solely by faith. And the object of our faith is the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9).

And because of that, I know that if I died this afternoon on the way home, I would immediately go to heaven and so would Sandy.

Am I ready to die yet? No, I’m not ready to die. And what do I mean by that? I mean, I have unfinished business. There are things I want to see done; things I want to see completed.

If Sandy survives me, I want to make sure she’s taken care of and isn’t dependent on anybody except the Lord.

### **The devil has real power.**

But you see, here’s the deal. If you look there at verse 14 of Hebrews 2:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil. (Hebrews 2:14)

Does the devil hold the power of death? Yes, he does. Can the devil kill you? Yes, he can kill you. Can the devil take you down to hell?

Not if you belong to Jesus. And he cannot kill you unless God authorizes it.

But let me tell you, you have somebody who hates you. He hates you. He wants to make you suffer. He wants to destroy your life. He wants to take away your pleasure in everything. He wants to vomit up, like midnight reflux, negative feelings about people who’ve done you wrong. Even when you pray, “Lord, I pray for so and so.”

The devil wants to cause that midnight reflux of hurt and pain about that person.

“Well, Lord, you know, every time I try to pray for old so-and-so, I remember what he did to me! How he knifed me in the back!”

My prayer for President Biden is that he will be able to let go of all that. And he’ll be able to say, “Jesus, receive my heart, receive my spirit, take away all this pain for the sense of betrayal that I feel of having been knifed in the back by people that I gave my life for.”

But you see the devil can take your life, but not without divine permission.

And notice again, because the devil has the power of death, he’s able to use that to make you afraid.

Does the devil want you to get goosebumps in a negative way? Does he want you afraid? Does he want you in your happiest, most peaceful moments to have a sense of, “I’m so afraid, I don’t know what to do.”

What’s the worst thing that can happen? That you die.

And that is the best thing, if you’re a believer, that you trust in Christ, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And that’s the thing. But the devil uses fear.

He’s the master fear creator. He is the master horror show creator. He is the master haunted house creator. He wants to scare you plum to death. He wants you to just live in fear your whole life. And the only way to be free of fear is to put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And notice in verse 15:

And free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2:15)

How does the devil control people? The devil controls people through fear. He said, “Well if I do this, this is going to happen. If I don’t do this, this is going to happen.”

So, the devil is a master manipulator. The devil is a strategist who works constantly to make you be robbed of the pleasure of life.

### **God desires to bless you.**

Do you realize that God wants you to be happy? Do you realize that God wants you to be at peace? Do you realize that God wants to bless you with a good measure of the things of this life that are enjoyable?

Because he gives us all things richly for our enjoyment. (1 Timothy 6:16)

Does that mean you're always going to have lots of food and lots of good health and lots of this and lots of that? No. You know, I've said this before in a sermon. The book of Proverbs gives us the big contract. The book of Job gives us the fine print in the contract.

Sometimes you'll go through Job-like experiences. Sometimes you will feel abandoned. Sometimes you'll say, "I don't know what's happening to me."

Do you know that Job never knew who the author of his troubles was? Do you know that the revelation about Satan is in the first two chapters and in the epilogue? Job never knew about Satan. He just thought, "God's just doing this to me."

You understand the devil hates you. The devil wants you to be miserable. He wants you to live in fear. He wants you to live in superstition. "I better throw salt over my shoulder because of this." And "I better do this and that in order that I don't..." He wants you to be kept in slavery and superstition.

He wants you to read the "horror scope" so that you'll be bound by fear by reading it. "Oh no, this is a terrible day. I'm going to stay in the house. I ain't going out today. Something horrible might happen to me."

He wants you to go to a fortune teller. Why? Because a fortune teller is going to put negativity on you. "Well, I see your lifeline, Bob, is very short. You're not going to make it to beyond 77."

And I'll say, "Well, praise the Lord. If I die, it's gain (Philippians 1:21). But you see, people, most people are held in bondage by fear and superstition.

And he says, “They’re held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:15).

And then he goes on and he says,

For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants.  
(Hebrews 2:16)

### **Why did God become a man?**

In other words, why did Jesus come? Why did God become a man?

There was an English archbishop by the name of Anselm, Saint Anselm, who wrote a book, *Cur Deus Homo*. That’s Latin. It has nothing to do with a cur dog or something else. “It’s why did God become a man?” And the answer to that is God Almighty, the eternal son of the eternal God, without ever ceasing to be God in any sense whatsoever, became a real and true human being, just like you and me, in every single, solitary way we’ve been seeing in these three passages, except for one, **he never sinned**.

And so therefore, he came into this world not to help angels, He came into this world to help Abraham’s seed. That’s you, and that’s I, who trusted the Lord Jesus.

And then he says again, verse 17,

For this reason he had to made like his brothers in every way  
(That should include sisters there as well. And he says), in order  
that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in  
service to God. (Hebrews 2:17)

Wow, you’ve got a high priest who is at the right hand of the Father, and he’s praying for you right now, at this very moment, on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of August 2024. And he says,

That he might make atonement for the sins of the people.  
(Hebrews 2:17)  
εἰς τὸ ἰλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας τοῦ λαοῦ (Hebrews 2:17)

hiláskomai, ἰλάσκομαι: “1. to cause to be favorably inclined or disposed, propitiate, conciliate” “2. to eliminate impediments that alienate the deity, expiate, wipe out” (Danker, ed., *Ibid.*, 476)

What is that? It means that he died as your substitute. He died in your place. He went to hell for you, so that you never have to go to hell. He descended into Sheol, into the realm of the dead. And he conquered hell and death. And then he says, in the last sentence here, which is the key, verse 18:

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted. (Hebrews 2:18)

Is temptation a form of suffering? Absolutely. Absolutely.

When the devil tempts you with things, when he throws things your way, those temptations are painful, they hurt, they rob you of peace and joy. You may be reading a wonderful book and enjoying it, and all of a sudden this thought comes into your head out of nowhere. And it's robbing you of your peace, robbing you of your joy. And that temptation always hurts. It's always painful. And so, he says:

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Hebrews 2:18)

So, I want to make an appeal right now, particularly for those who are watching us on the Internet.

Do you ever feel abandoned? Do you ever feel totally put aside by everybody. Do you have the deep-seated feeling, nobody understands me?

In the words of that spiritual: Nobody knows the trouble I've seen.

You ever experienced that sense of abandonment? Nobody understands me. I'm unique. Nobody understands me. Nobody knows what I've gone through. “You don't know, Pastor, what I've gone through.”

Perhaps you're tempted to same sex attraction. I have to say: I can't say that Jesus was never tempted in that area. The Bible says that he was tempted in every area just as we are.

We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)  
πεπειραμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ’ ὁμοιότητα, χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας.  
(Hebrews 4:15)

homoiotēs, ὁμοιότης: “state of being similar to someth., likeness, similarity, agreement” “in quite the same way”  
(Danker, ed., *Ibid.*, 707)

Perhaps you’re tempted to steal. Was Jesus tempted to steal? Of course, he was tempted to steal. Was he tempted to lose his temper? Well, he got angry, but he always controlled his temper. But he sure was tempted to let go and let that temper just take over with mindless rage (John 2:14-17).

What are the ways that Jesus was tempted? Are you jealous of people ever? Do you ever envy people? Do you think Jesus struggled with that?

Do you think when he was nailed to that cross, he envied those who were not hanging by a cross with nails holding them there in his feet and hands with his skull having been penetrated—at least the scalp with a crown of thorns. Do you think he didn’t struggle with envy?

Do you think he didn’t struggle with getting mad at God? Ever been tempted to be getting mad at God?

My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me? (Psalm 22:1)

Quoting from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm, he experienced that sense of abandonment on the cross.

There is nothing, absolutely nothing, you’ve ever been tempted with, whatsoever, that Jesus hasn’t been tempted in the same way.

And yet, we’re told clearly, it was without sin, which was what we saw in chapter 4.

So, I want to urge you today, whoever you are, when you look at the miseries of life, when you look at children suffering, when you look at

genocide being committed by foreign powers with the support of the United States, and you get angry and say, "Where is God in all of this?"

I want you to understand. You have somebody at the right hand of the Father who fully understands you, who fully understands your feelings, who sympathizes with you because he's gone through what you're going through.

And he's praying for you right now (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). He is praying for you right now. He's praying for you at this very moment that you will allow him to extend his nail-pierced hand of help and say to you, "Let me help you. Let me help you through your pain. Let me help you through your loneliness. Let me help you with your fear of death. Let me help you with your sense of guilt. Let me help you with your sense of shame."

And I would urge you to close with Christ.

### **Why don't you pray with me?**

Why don't you pray a prayer like this? And I'll pray it out loud, and if you feel led, pray it with me.

*I've lost control of my life. Like giving my car keys to another person, I give you the keys of my life. What do you want to do with my life? Lord, I give it to you now.*

*And Lord, my sense of shame, I thank you that when Jesus died on the cross, he died in my place as my substitute.*

*Lord Jesus, cleanse me. I claim your promise in 1 John. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

*Lord, take away all my guilt, all my shame. and cover my sins by the power of your precious blood.*

*Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in today. Come in to stay. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Amen.*