

When in Rome: The Empathetic Christian

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0:00] Well, good morning, everyone. Just a few quick announcements from me. As most of you know, Michelle and I are leaving for our anniversary celebration to Europe tomorrow.

Aw, shucks. So I'm pretty sure this is not to scale, just in case you were wondering. So please pray for us as we travel from place to place.

We're traveling by plane and boat and train and car and lots of different things and eventually back home. So we will be back with you in person on Sunday, October 18th.

While I'm away, we're going to be welcoming a guest speaker and friend of Braemar, Dr. Jerry Shepard. So he's going to be leading us in communion. Oh, sorry, leading you in communion.

We'll be here in communion in spirit. He'll be leading us in communion as well. So he's going to be bringing part two of his sermon series that was postponed this summer.

[1:01] So some of you may remember he was scheduled to come for two Sundays and his wife had a knee surgery. So he wisely opted out.

So he's going to be finishing that. Then on Sunday, October 11th, that's Thanksgiving weekend, obviously, you'll be welcoming Reverend Kent Dixon. Listen, what?

So I'm not kidding. I'll be bringing you a Thanksgiving sermon right here on the screen. So I recorded something this week. I've checked it all out.

It's all good. So it's a Thanksgiving specific message and you'll be able to watch me here. So I know many people spend long weekends doing other things, doing things with family, and I'm sure you'll be doing that as well.

But I do encourage you to be here, to encourage each other. And partly so my video production isn't for nothing. Because it was fun.

[2:02] And you'll get some laughs out of nothing too serious, but just little odd things that you're beyond your control. So the video is great. The audio is great. There's unexpected surprises.

Nothing too serious, though. Will you pray with me this morning? Father God, this morning we recognize our needs and that only you can provide for them.

But in asking for our needs to be met, we also pause to recognize the other things that you have provided. The ways that you have shown up in our lives and in the lives of others.

Lord, we pause to recognize that this morning. Lord, as Leah prayed a moment ago, we lift those up in our church family who are struggling with health concerns.

Some of them are here this morning. And there are folks who are just not able to come because they're not up to it right now. I pray that you bring a deep comfort and a deep sense of your presence to each one, both here and away.

[3:02] Lord, I also ask for provision for other needs that people have. Please provide and make a way for them, for each of us, as you always do.

Lord, you've called us to be a people of prayer. A people who seek you continually. Not in some stuffy and formal sort of way with perfect words, but simply by calling out to you and having a conversation with you.

This morning we recognize the perfect model of prayer that Jesus gave us. And we pray that prayer together this morning. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever.

[4:12] Amen. Welcome here for this Sunday, September 27, 2026. We had a meeting yesterday, a leadership meeting, and Vern said to me at the end, so we're having voting coming up soon.

He said, I just wanted to see, are you still willing to be the pastor? And I said, yeah, no other plans. I'd love to. So my name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here.

This morning we're continuing in our sermon series, When in Rome. And I've actually been counting down the number of sermons that I have between now and Advent, and we're getting closer all the time.

So we've been making our way through the book of Romans, and I hope you're continuing to learn new things as we study it together, as we explore it deeply together. We'll be pausing our series after this morning, and then picking it up again when I'm back with you on October 18th.

Our verse this morning, our anchor verse, is Romans 12, verse 15. And just as you're looking it up and starting to think about that, again, we're digging very deeply into Romans 12, chapter 12, over these last few weeks and in a few of the weeks ahead, because there is a lot there, a lot to unpack, and a lot that is very worthy of our time.

[5:32] Romans 12, verse 15 says, Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn. You've heard me say several times over the past few weeks that Romans 12 is packed with these short, impactful messages, and this one is no different.

Paul delivers us powerful reminders or correctives or directives to his audience from his time right up until the present day.

Our passage this morning is just 10 words in the NIV translation, maybe King James would flesh it out a bit more, but just 10 words in the NIV, and that's the translation I read from this morning.

But as we'll see, those 10 words are very rich and powerful. Our sermon today is titled, The Empathetic Christian. We're going to take a closer look at what all of this means, just that short passage from this morning.

How we can incorporate that then into our own lives. Just a brief recap. In chapter 12 of Romans, we find answers to questions such as, where are the signs of a true transformation in our lives?

[6:51] What are the things that we can see? What does God's good, acceptable, and perfect will for Christians look like? We've recognized in previous sermons that it includes fulfilling our function within the body of Christ.

What it means to love without being hypocritical, and also while despising evil. What it means to love our brothers and sisters in Christ with family affection, valuing and cherishing each other.

Being dedicated and passionate about serving the Lord, and actually others too, for that matter.

Rejoicing in hope, being patient in difficult times, and holding prayer as a critical posture and activity in our lives, as we seek to grow closer to God.

Seeing others around us, being willing to let go of what God has given us to bless others, and then making room for unexpected people in our lives.

And then seeking to bless people even when they treat us badly. We've covered a lot. And that's just in chapter 12 so far.

[8:08] This morning we're going to reflect on Paul's directive that we've just heard from Romans 12, 15. It says, Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn, some translations say weep, with those who mourn or weep.

And what our text for this morning is essentially calling us to do is to show empathy for other people. We're going to be fleshing this idea out with our exploration of the empathetic Christian.

So you know me and my desire for clarity. Let's start by defining some of these terms to ensure that we understand them, that we have a clear picture in our minds.

Well, empathy and sympathy. Sometimes they're used interchangeably. They are not the same.

Sympathy means feeling compassion or sorrow or pity for another person's hardships.

But empathy is then stepping into their shoes to understand and to seek to actually share their emotional experience. So someone may be sympathetic, but also may not be empathetic.

[9:21] It's possible to be that. And it's important to recognize that empathy actually requires a deeper emotional engagement on our part, if we're seeking to be empathetic.

It involves more involvement, actually, more engagement than sympathy does. So what does empathy look like within the church?

Good question. 1 Corinthians 12, verse 26. You can turn to that if you want. 1 Corinthians 12, 26.

Paul says, he's speaking in the context of a body of believers, when he says, Christians in community with each other, that's what he's talking about here.

And he says, if one part suffers, every part suffers with it. See what it means to be part of a body, the way Paul talks about it?

[10:17] If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. So God intended for the individual members of the church to have this kind of connection with each other.

This is the best case scenario. One commentary I read said this, this command grows out of the doctrine stated in Romans 12, 4 to 5, that the church is one, that it has one interest, and therefore that there should be common sympathy in its joys and its sorrows.

So friends, if we're truly one, truly members of the same body, truly a family, then we should be empathetic towards each other.

Thankfully, our passage for this morning identifies two different ways to demonstrate empathy. And we can also see several examples of individuals who demonstrate empathy in scripture.

And we'll look at that as well. Rejoicing with those who rejoice. Well, what are some examples we can see that demonstrate rejoicing with those who rejoice?

[11:28] How about Luke 1, 58? There we read about the story of Elizabeth, who is, as most of you would know, the mother of John the Baptist. And this miraculous news of her pregnancy is what comes to the front of the story in Luke 1, 58.

Following Elizabeth's news, it says, her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

when Barnabas arrived in Antioch and saw what the Lord had done there, Acts 11, verse 23, we talked about it in Acts way back when.

Acts 11, 23 tells us this, when he, Barnabas, arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

So those are just two amazing examples of what it means to share in another person's joy, to share in their happiness, and also without feeling jealous or envious at the same time.

[12:40] Now we move to mourning with those who mourn. What does that look like? Well, maybe you think to yourself, that's pretty obvious. But what are some examples we can see that demonstrate this idea of mourning with those who mourn or weeping with those who weep, as I mentioned that other translations will phrase it.

Well, when Jesus learned about the death of his friend Lazarus, he came to be with the family and he shared their grief. As we read about this in John 11, 33 to 35.

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. Paul urges believers to seek to be empathetic with brothers and sisters who are in prison.

We read about that in Hebrews 13, verse 3. Paul says, continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

[13:58] So again, those are just a couple of examples. I'm sure you can think of more. There are many more in Scripture of rejoicing with those who rejoice and also mourning with those who mourn.

As the people of God, we're called to seek to understand and enter into the feelings of our friends, our family, our church family. We are meant to be in community.

We're created for community. So the quality and sincerity of our empathy towards others, it also opens new opportunities to bring comfort, to build relationships, to deepen community.

You probably have friends or family members or neighbors who do not know the Lord, and yet you are able to come alongside them and offer comfort or just be there as a presence, a comforting, friendly, safe person.

It opens doors. Before we continue, let me take a moment to highlight what empathy isn't. Maybe that would be helpful. If you ever shared a struggle or hardship that you're facing with someone else only to have them say something along the lines of, well, I'm sorry to hear that.

[15:16] You know, the exact same thing happened to me. They ultimately just draw the focus to themselves. sometimes this kind of approach stems from discomfort in a situation, right?

Nobody necessarily loves being wrapped in raw emotion. Sometimes people just find it challenging to relate to another person's story, especially if they have no common ground, if they haven't experienced the thing that the other person is struggling with.

empathy. Or maybe the person just really lacks the kind of true empathy that you can develop in yourself, and there's nothing wrong with that. It can be developed.

So while that person that I just talked about could mean well, the other person who is actually struggling may ultimately just be left feeling unheard, feeling unseen, as though they didn't really matter that much at all in the first place.

So how can we rise above simple sympathy, which is not unimportant, to truly become empathetic Christians? Well, let's consider that.

[16:28] It happens when our minds are truly and sincerely transformed. And you've heard this message from Paul over and over. We must be transformed in our minds to change and to continue to develop into the people God has created us to be.

And as we've been reminded in this series, we need to submit to the kind of transformation that will renew our minds. That will also allow us to focus better on God, focus better on others, as we continue to foster empathy.

A transformed and renewed mind will be kindly affectionate to our brothers and sisters, to give them attention, rather than seeking it for ourselves.

Developing this sense of humble affection also helps us to be vulnerable, helps us to be able to really weep with other people, and to make it easy for us to give the spotlight to others and rejoice with and for them.

So as we continue to develop the same mindset and servant heart as Christ, we'll see more and more true empathy becomes our default.

[17:47] As you draw closer to Christ, you will become naturally more empathetic. It'll be easier to leave jealousy and envy behind and to truly celebrate with someone.

We'll be able to sincerely rejoice and mourn with the people who need us, people God has sent us, perhaps, to comfort and encourage.

My friends, it's God's good, acceptable, and perfect will that Christians will be a people who are glad when others rejoice, glad for them, and who are moved when others mourn and weep.

Only then can I think we can be truly useful in sharing the joy and comfort of Christ with others.

Remember, as I said a moment ago, it opens doors.

Are we truly an empathetic people? Because simple sympathy is not enough. As I said, it's not nothing, but we must be able to understand and enter into each other's feelings.

[19:03] Feelings are hard. I truly want each of us to develop the mind of Christ, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and I honestly tell you that once we do that, we cannot help but become the empathetic Christian.

Amen.