

## Sympathetic

*“to sum up, let us be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted and humble in spirit”*

**1 Peter 3:8**

**Sympathetic**—*sumpatheis*. A combination word from *sum* (with or added to) and *pathos* (suffering, misfortune). This word means a lot more than the watered down version we have in English. Sympathetic in English carries the idea of sharing the same feeling. So, I can say, “I’m sympathetic to your cause” which is another way of saying that I’ll donate. Or, “He showed sympathy for their loss” which is a way of saying that he sent flowers. But not in Greek. This is a word of intensity. It is a word about suffering. You weren’t sympathetic by thinking about it or by offering a token of condolence. You were sympathetic when your heart broke, when the tears came, when you share the prison cell, the beatings, the torture of body and soul. Sympathetic was a word of deliberate participation in the plight of someone else.

How insipid our excuses for sympathy are today? A friend loses a job. Are we there to offer help or do we hear it through the grapevine and say a “God help them” prayer while we flip the channel? A family we know is breaking up. Have we spent any time praying on our knees with the wife or the husband right beside us? The neighbor has cancer. Do we visit every day, letting them talk about life, just holding hands?

My father died just before Christmas. He was a man of God. But I was distant, unsure of my own emotions. I paid attention to the business of the funeral instead of the celebration of a life. Peter would have been disappointed with me. I was.

Life presents us with only so many opportunities to demonstrate mutual suffering. God engineers life so that these opportunities open windows into His world. Most of the time, we close them in hopes of deferring the pain. They are not intended to be closed so easily. We do so at our own loss. The fellowship of suffering is a call that has “holy” written all over it. When your life encounters one of these open windows, see that you look through to heaven. Enter in to the glory of shared suffering. It will take you to another Greek word *katharsis*.