

EMPATHY WITHIN FALTERING

Hebrews 4:14–5:10

You're going through hard times, relationship problems, physical illness, grief, or some other difficulty, and someone says, "I know just how you feel." You think, *No, you don't*. It's impossible for one person to know precisely how another person feels. Yet the offered empathy is more believable if you know that the other person has experienced *something* at least *somewhat* similar to what you are experiencing.

Scripture assures us that Jesus understands us because he actually has experienced all that we experience. He did not stay aloof from our frail human condition but freely entered into our brokenness—yet without succumbing to sin.

Group Discussion. What are some ways people show empathy for others?

Personal Reflection. Who is the most empathetic person you know? What are some ways that person shows empathy for others?

This passage begins with the word *therefore*, indicating that it flows naturally from what has come before. The writer has been expounding to Jewish Christians the many ways that Christ is superior to Moses and that Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of everything in the Jewish law. *Read Hebrews 4:14–5:10.*

1. Throughout this passage, what are the ways Jesus serves as believers' high priest?

2. Reading only verse 14, we would get the impression of Christ as high above us ordinary weak mortals. How do verses 15-16 assure us that we can confidently approach God?

3. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record that Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert after his baptism (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). Certainly those were not the only times he was tempted during his earthly life. What other temptations would Jesus have endured (v. 15)?

4. What are the differences between the human high priest and Christ (vv. 1-4)?

5. How does God validate Christ as high priest (vv. 5-6)?

6. Jesus "offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears" in Gethsemane before he was arrested (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46) and no doubt at other times "during the days of [his] life on earth" (v. 7). When have you prayed with something like that intensity, and how did God answer?

7. Jesus was already the perfect and holy Son of God. Yet when he became incarnate as a human being, he had to learn "obedience from what he suffered" and be made perfect (vv. 8-9). How does that fact give you confidence that he understands and empathizes with you in your own struggles?

8. What are the results of Jesus' faithful obedience (vv. 8-10)?

9. Consider ways that you have faltered in faith or obedience. Where do you most need the assurance that Jesus empathizes with your weaknesses?

10. What will you do this week to stay aware that you are not alone in your weakness, but Christ understands and is ready to help you?

 *"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). As you pray, approach God with confidence, ask for what you need, and accept his gracious help.*

NOW OR LATER

Study what the book of Hebrews goes on to say about the priest Melchizedek in Hebrews 6:20-7:28.