



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

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## You Don't Know How I Feel

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It is easy to absorb conventional wisdom without really thinking about it. It may be that “everyone says it,” or it sounds sensible at first blush. We can adopt a cultural maxim without scrutiny and be led astray by it.

Consider, for example, the comeback, “You don’t know how I feel.” This is usually a sharp rebuff to someone who has offered well-meaning advice or needed correction. The person uttering it is trying to neutralize a contrary viewpoint by creating an impassable gulf of experience. They say, in essence, “If you have never had my specific experience, you cannot understand and have nothing constructive to offer.”

This often comes across as a powerful, in-your-face putdown and leaves the target of it stumbling for words. Just recently this tactic was used by the White House spokeswoman to silence a member of the media who was questioning the president’s contradictory position on abortion. Rather than answer the question about a Catholic violating his church’s doctrinal position, Jen Psaki just dismissed the question by saying the reporter had no right to speak on the subject since he is a male. In essence, “You do not know how (we/women) feel.”

I’ve also heard this response from those who are overly grieving over a personal loss. If someone tries to counsel them and suggest a way forward, they will likely be drilled with a terse, “If you haven’t suffered the loss of a \_\_\_\_\_, you cannot possibly understand.”

I admit that there is some legitimacy to this pushback. It is true that the one who has experienced a particular aspect of life will understand it on a different level than one who has not. My brother in the flesh, who has not always lived an exemplary life, said to me recently, “Little brother, let me tell you something you don’t know: Your drinking buddies are not your friends.” Well, he’s got me there. I’ve not had the opportunity to learn this by experience, and I must say I’m glad I haven’t. But it does not take the proverbial rocket scientist to figure out what kind of people get drunk together, what character flaws lead to such destructive behavior and whether such people genuinely have your best interests at heart – even as they are urging you to drink yourself into a stupor where all kinds of accidents, violence and illness occurs.

That said, I want to challenge this notion: Is it legitimate to say, “Since you haven’t had my specific experience, you can never understand; you have no right to an opinion; your advice is irrelevant”? Or is this just a smokescreen? Or is it possible that some find perverse benefit in the role of perennial victim and are subconsciously protecting their status? I know that sounds harsh, but I also know that our emotions can deceive us, warp our sense of reality and severely handicap our usefulness to the Lord.

First, I believe the statement is wholly unbiblical. For example, where does Scripture say that it takes experience with sin to understand and speak to it? Did Paul have to be a homosexual to say it can be overcome (1 Cor 6:9; Rom 1:24-27)? Did Peter have to attend drinking parties in order to speak against them (1 Pet 4:3)? “Ah,” but someone retorts, “they were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write those things.” True, but am I not supposed to take their very words and apply them to the sins of my day? In fact, this objection supports my point: God has defined for us what sin is, and He warns us not to commit it and urge other to avoid it as well.

Secondly, what about helping restore a fallen brother or sister? Paul addresses this in Gal 6:1: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Please note what Paul *does not* say. He does not say, “You who have experience with the particular sin in question are the only ones allowed to counsel the fallen brother.” In fact, in some cases it might be best to do the opposite: If a brother or sister has fallen into drunkenness, it may be unwise to have a recovering alcoholic intervene

lest they succumb to their own personal weakness. Note that the passage itself issues this warning: “lest you also be tempted.”

Third, as human beings we all experience very similar categories of emotional and mental challenge. Paul makes the point in a different context: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man ...” (1 Cor 10:13). God’s revelation stresses essential oneness of the human experience. Jesus “was tempted in all points as we are” (Heb 4:15), but that doesn’t mean it was necessary to suffer temptation of every individual sin that exists. Whatever unspecified temptations Jesus endured, it fully qualified Him as human, i.e., “one of us” (with one major exception: He did not experience emotional guilt due to personal fault or failure).

So, suppose someone has lost an infant child and remains in a state of inconsolable grief for years. Eventually, someone tries to urge them to a healthier state of mind, to put the loss in perspective and move forward. You can guess what’s coming next ... “Have you lost a child? If not, you don’t know how I feel, so keep your suggestions to yourself.” How do we respond to this?

#1 – While I may not have lost a child, I have said goodbye to several family members and friends. I do know something about grief, recovery, an altered perspective on life and death, etc. I wouldn’t say this to an emotionally fragile person, but thinking that one’s suffering is unique displays a degree of arrogant exceptionalism. Our culture is drowning in the muck of victimhood wherein we all think our challenges are unique and deserve special treatment. This includes an inability to accept tragedy.

#2 – I also know that God does not want us to wilt in the face of life’s brutality. Few will suffer to the degree that Job did, but can we not relate to him via our own lesser trials and be inspired by his struggle to understand God’s will? The human psyche is tough and resilient – unless we allow the world to dishearten us with its misguided psychological claptrap.

#3 – We don’t have to know grief in every form to understand that God is the source of comfort, that He will gradually restore us to emotional health so that we can continue to productively serve Him. We may not all suffer in exactly the same ways, but we deal with it according to the same principles that emanate from God’s word. Our ability to handle trauma and tragedy comes from the common knowledge that God has shared with us all. 09/26/21 - The Centreville Journal

## Counting Noses

- by J. W. McGarvey

One of the most common devices of the advocates of error in all ages has been that of counting up the number of persons who adhere to, or have adhered to a certain theory or system, as proof that it is true.

In the days of Ahab, there were four hundred prophets claiming to be prophets of Jehovah who said that if he and Jehoshaphat went up to Ramoth-Gilead to battle, the Lord would prosper them, While Micaiah alone said the opposite. Ahab had four hundred to one in favor of his enterprise, yet he went and lost his life, as the one prophet said he would. (1 Kings 22)