

3. I can't begin to imagine what it feels like for the families.

Romans 12:15

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

How can anyone else other than the families themselves possibly know what it feels like?

I can identify with someone who said it is too painful to try to imagine what it must be like for some of our friends at the moment. But God has told us to rejoice with those who rejoice and to mourn with those who mourn. That means we *must* imagine.

Not that we can ever say, "I know what it feels like". After all, we are all different and the identical crisis can hit two people in completely different ways. But if we want to develop what is perhaps the most Godlike character quality of all, we are going to have to open ourselves up to imagine what it would have been like if it had been our child, brother or parents. Godlike compassion is only for the brave.

I know that after the events of 2nd June, some will conclude that if there is a God at all, he can surely have no compassion. But history shows otherwise.

It would be remarkable if God had simply *imagined* stepping into human history to offer us compassion; if he had so much as *imagined* becoming a poor child of refugee parents; had he only *imagined* being subjected to an unjust trial, flogging, crucifixion and death in order to be compassionate to us; if these thoughts had so much as crossed his mind, it would be a miracle.

But God has not only imagined what it would be like to suffer with us and for us; he has actually done it in history, through his Son, Jesus Christ.

My closest friend at primary school was diagnosed with leukaemia. I am ashamed to say that I hardly ever went to see him after that. His suffering intruded uncomfortably on my carefree childhood. It was an unwelcome cloud in my sunny life.

By contrast, Ashley Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury was perhaps the most significant man of charity in British history. The cloud of suffering intruded his sunny life as he walked down the road at Harrow School in the 1810s. He witnessed five drunken men carrying a pauper's coffin, only to drop it as they reached the church yard.

Compassion was awakened. Decades later, in 1885, Shaftesbury's own funeral was attended by representatives of, "One hundred and ninety six missions, schools, societies, hospitals and funds, all of which had been his personal concern".

Who knows what good things may result if we can sit next to those suffering at the moment, first in our imaginations, then in personal presence and action.