

## Developing the Empathy of Christ

Without empathy, it's hard to have real relationship, do effective ministry, or share the gospel. The good news is that since each of us is made in the image of God, we have a natural capacity for developing and exercising God-like empathy. In this workshop we will examine and explore seven practical principles that enable Christian leaders to read other people, show genuine compassion, and minister in life-changing ways. These skills apply to all of life and can enrich your marriage, parenting, ministry, friendships and, most importantly, your witness for Christ.

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### I. Why Empathy?

### II. A Lack of Empathy Inevitably Weakens Relationships

### III. Three Related Concepts

- A. **Empathy** is generally defined as the ability to discern and vicariously experience the thoughts and feelings of another person, or more simply, *to feel what others feel*.
  
- B. **Compassion**, which builds on empathy and literally means “to suffer together,” is a deep concern for another person who is suffering, accompanied by *a strong desire to alleviate that suffering*.
  
- C. **Consolation**, which is an outworking of compassion and literally means “to be with the lonely one,” involves action to *alleviate or lessen grief, sorrow, or disappointment*.

#### IV. The Biblical Basis for Empathy

- A. God himself, manifested as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the ultimate *model for empathy*: “With everlasting love I will have compassion on you,’ says the Lord, your Redeemer” (Isa. 54:8; see also Matt. 14:14; John 11:33-36; Acts 9:31; 2 Cor. 1:3-4).
  
- B. The *motive for empathy* is to imitate God and to obey his repeated commands to show empathy toward one another: “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col. 3:12; see also John 13:34-35; Eph. 5:1-2; Phil. 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 3:8).
  
- C. The *method of empathy* is to discern sufferings or needs and to act quickly, personally and deliberately to alleviate or meet them: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15; see also Luke 10:33-34; Luke 15:20; 1 Cor. 12:26; Heb. 10:34).

#### V. The Neurology of Empathy

#### VI. Two Types of Empathy

- A. *Cognitive empathy*, sometimes called “perspective-taking,” is a deliberate and conscious intellectual process whereby we observe others and use our imagination and logic to discern what they must be thinking and feeling.
  
- B. *Affective empathy*, sometimes called “emotional empathy,” is a more spontaneous process that causes us to actually feel what others are feeling, as though their emotions were contagious.

## **VII. Seven Ways to Exercise Empathy**

- A. **E**nlist all of your faculties and resources
- B. **M**ove in physically, verbally, and emotionally
- C. **P**ray for discernment
- D. **A**sk caring questions
- E. **T**hink deliberately
- F. **H**elp in meaningful ways
- G. **Y**ield your convenience, pride, and resources

## **VIII. You and I Really Can Change!**

### **Additional Resources for Developing Empathy:**

*Seven Steps to Empathy* *ebooklet* ([www.rw360.org/empathy](http://www.rw360.org/empathy))

*Raising Empathetic Children* ([www.rw360.org/empatheticchildren](http://www.rw360.org/empatheticchildren))

*RW360 Blog* ([www.rw360.org/blog](http://www.rw360.org/blog))

*Discovering Relational Wisdom 3.0* ([www.rw-academy.org](http://www.rw-academy.org));