

EMPATHY

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[Note: this article is an expansion of concepts I shared more briefly in a W.O.W (Word Of the Week) post. Parts of this summary draw heavily from a variety of easily accessible internet resources, included here without source notation.]

What is empathy?

Researchers **define empathy** as the ability to sense other people's emotions, plus the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling. ...

"Cognitive **empathy**," also called "perspective taking," refers to the ability to identify and understand other people's emotions, or to understand and share.

What is the difference between empathy and sympathy?

Empathy means "to enter the feelings" while sympathy means "to feel alongside or to feel with."

This distinction provides another answer to the question, "What is empathy?"

Empathy is literally "feeling in." There are multiple ways to express empathy.

Empathy means to "enter with compassion."

An empathetic person is compassionate, connected with people who are loved and cared about.

From a human and vulnerability perspective and according to Brené Brown, "Empathy is communicating that incredible healing message of 'You are not alone.'"

Have you heard of the three kinds of empathy? Do you know how to express them?

Not all empathy looks and feels the same, just as not all sadness, happiness, fear is the same.

The three types of empathy that psychologists define are: Cognitive, Emotional, and Compassionate.

Empathy IS important. And the type of empathy that you express or experience matters as well.

Cognitive, Emotional and Compassionate empathy all look different.

Cognitive Empathy

Cognitive empathy definition: "Simply knowing how the other person feels and what they might be thinking. Sometimes called perspective-taking" ~Daniel Goleman, author of book *Emotional Intelligence*

CAN I WRAP MY MIND AROUND ANOTHER'S EXPERIENCE/FEELINGS/THOUGHTS? HAVE I UNDERSTOOD?

This type of empathy depends on thinking, thought, understanding, intellect.

As long as empathy only exists on the thinking level, it is disconnected from deep emotions, not yet sharing in the feelings of another.

Cognitive Empathy is about thought more than emotion. It is knowing, understanding, or comprehending on an intellectual level. to understand sadness is not the same thing as feeling sad.

Cognitive empathy responds to problems with brainpower, which can be an asset in some circumstances

On the other hand, to understand another person's feelings involves being able to feel them yourself.

Cognitive Empathy may seem cold or detached.

Emotional Empathy

Emotional empathy definition: "when you feel physically along with the other person, as though their emotions were contagious." ~Daniel Goleman

CAN I CRY WITH ANOTHER PERSON? HAVE I CRIED?

Empathy involves feelings and emotion, usually depending on close personal relationship; this can be overwhelming, or inappropriate in certain circumstances.

Emotional Empathy involves directly feeling the emotions that another person is feeling.

When someone you deeply love comes to you in tears, with hurts, it is a natural response to feel that pull on your heartstrings. This may be like crying at a wedding, funeral, or celebration.

Connecting with another human in this way is an intimate experience with strong bonds.

Compassionate Empathy

Empathy definition: “With this kind of empathy we not only understand a person’s predicament and feel with them, but are spontaneously moved to help, if needed.” ~Daniel Goleman

AM I EXPERIENCING, CAN I UNDERSTAND, WHAT IS NEEDED OR HELPFUL?

Here is a combination of intellect, emotion, and experience.

This is the empathy most people want, is most needed; the ideal.

Feelings of the heart and thoughts of the brain are not opposites. They are connected.

Compassionate Empathy connects both the felt senses and intellectual situation of another person.

Many of us lean to one side or the other: more thinking or more feeling; more analyzing and fixing or more commiserating. If empathy is like a see-saw, compassionate empathy is the middle position.

Empathy is a needed quality.

Empathy is the ability to put ourselves in another’s shoes and feel their distress. Empathy requires careful thought and understanding. It requires listening with an open heart.

Jesus Christ is God’s Empathy. A man of empathy and compassion, walking this earth in human flesh.

God understands, God is just. Can we believe it?

Rom 12:19: “Do not take revenge, dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

“When He saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” ~ Matthew 9:36

“We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses.” ~ Hebrews 4:15

The kingdom of God knows no injustice, no racism, no inequality, and no cruelty. The gospel of the kingdom produces a community of people who PUT ON DISPLAY what it looks like when God is in charge.

I encourage more empathy

Think, understand, it, experience it.

Cognitive empathy is usually filtered through past experiences and understandings. Simply saying you understand, or letting your will and desires control your action or response, is not real empathy. Can you wrap your mind around the whole picture?

Emotional empathy is good, feeling and crying with others, experiencing the world beyond self. Can you cry about our world?

Compassionate empathy—Jesus is our great example, understanding, feeling, experiencing.

In the experiences of 2020, many are hurting—

- My ministry heart thinks of horrific, needless deaths.
- I think of brothers and sisters whom I know and love, those who understand mistreatment, prejudice, and hatred.
- I think of brothers and sisters who are genuine in their kingdom desire for justice and equality, peaceful and accepting kingdom people, who feel falsely accused.
- I care about peace officers who care about others and are often judged by the actions of a few, even mistreated as they try to help.
- I see those who feel the need to protest, with many different motivations – some seeking justice, others seeking revenge, yet others seeking to right a wrong but destroying everything in their path, plus protesters seeking to advance many causes and drawn together in this moment.
- I see those who have been injured, those of many different ethnic groups who have lost businesses.
- I see many who say nothing because they do not know what to say.
- I think of all who seek a cause worthy of their lives, who have never heard or understood the Good News of the kingdom. Would that they would spend their energy advancing the greatest cause.
- I think of all who are without Jesus.

Even when I cannot totally understand, feel, and experience – I hear the heart of God:

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” ~ Romans 12:15