

# YOUR ONE

## How to Walk with Your ONE Through Storms

### PART 2:

#### Develop Greater Empathy in 7 Steps!

Studies have shown that it is possible to deliberately improve empathy. Here are seven ways you can enhance your empathy organized into an acrostic called **EMPATHY**.

##### **1. Enlist all of your faculties and resources.**

Empathy is enhanced when you focus all of your senses, abilities, and resources on understanding other people. Use your **time**; slow down, relax, show that you're happy to give others all the time they need. Use your **ears**; listen not only to others' words but also to their tone of voice, which often communicates the most accurate information.

Use your **eyes**; note the emotions in others' eyes and on their faces (excitement, sadness, uncertainty, weariness, etc.). Pay attention to their posture and body language (slumping, pacing, cringing, etc.), which often says what their words don't.

Empathy is also enhanced when you make full use of your **memory** ("When have I gone through something like this?"), your **imagination** ("How would I feel if I was in her shoes?"), and your **instincts** ("What is he hiding, fearing, or really wanting to say?").

##### **2. Move in physically, verbally, and emotionally.**

People seldom share deep concerns quickly and fully. Instead they usually offer hints of their problems or concerns and watch what you do with them (like laying down a hand of cards one at a time). To draw people out, you need to send convincing signals that you care and want to help.

There are many ways you can do this. **Physically**, you can sit down close to someone to show you want to hear them out. You can lean toward them to show interest and concern. Look at them (not at a football game or your cell phone) to demonstrate focus. Use touch in appropriate ways; a warm hand shake with both hands, a gentle touch on the arm, or even a friendly hug can send a convincing message of friendship and concern.

You can also move in **verbally** to show that you are really listening and caring (“That must have been hard.” “I’m so sorry.” “Please tell me more.”) Don’t shy away because you can’t solve the problem or come up with perfect words. Sometime the best thing to say is simply, “I don’t know what to say but I’m so glad you told me.” Remember that your tone of voice and facial expression will often convey more meaning than your words.

You can also move in **emotionally**, mirroring what others are feeling (a smile for joy, a look of concern for suffering, or tears that match theirs ... just as Jonathan’s tears mirrored those of David when he was driven into exile, **1 Sam. 20:41**).

### **3. Pray for discernment.**

Pray daily that God would open your eyes to see the depths of his empathy and compassion, which are revealed so clearly in Jesus. Then pray He would transform your heart to make it more like Jesus’ heart, filled with selfless, sacrificial, and effectual love.

When you actually engage people, pray that God would give you patience, discernment, understanding, and wisdom as they unveil their experiences and emotions to you. Then ask God to show you ways to serve and console them in practical and meaningful ways.

### **4. Ask caring questions.**

Empathy does not have to be a guessing game. When in doubt, ask others to explain their situations, concerns, and feelings. This is often the simplest and most effective way to understand another person.

Develop the habit of going beyond the traditional, “How are you?” and ask questions like these: “How are you, REALLY?” “What happened then?” “How do you feel about that?” “What do you plan to do next?” “You’re my friend, so I really want to help you; what can I do today that would make this situation easier to handle?”

### **5. Think deliberately.**

God has given you an incredibly powerful mind that is capable of discernment, emotion, logic, imagination, and planning. Your ability to show empathy will skyrocket whenever you bring all of these abilities to bear at the same time.

You can do this by consciously asking yourself these kinds of questions as you talk with others: "What is he feeling right now?" "Why?" "How would I feel if I was in his shoes?" "When have I had a similar experience?" "How did I feel?" "How can I show that I understand and care?" "What should I not say right now?"

One of the best ways to develop the ability to think like this during actual conversations is to practice thinking like this as you read a book, watch a movie, or watch strangers across a room (one of my favorite pastimes when I sit in airports). The more you practice thinking like this in detached situations, the more naturally these thought processes will occur in up close and personal situations.

### **6. Help in meaningful ways.**

Once you discern what others are experiencing and feeling, true empathy will show itself in concrete action. This doesn't mean you necessarily solve others' problem, but rather that you are with them as they go through those problems (see **Isa. 43:1-2**). As Henri Nouwen wrote, "To console does not mean to take away the pain but rather to be there and say, 'You are not alone, I am with you. Together we can carry the burden.'"

Sometimes this will call for words of encouragement or consolation. When you can't do this face-to-face, a phone call, a handwritten note, or an email can be meaningful. It is not easy to forget friends who quickly communicate their concern and love for you when you are going through a trials of any kind.

Sometimes actions will speak louder than words. Just being nearby can send a powerful message, even if you don't know what to say. There are times that you won't know what to say and times when saying nothing is more helpful. Being present and showing a deep interest in their life will go a long way in helping.

And of course, we should always be open to the opportunities God gives us to share our resources with others around us.

### **7. Yield your convenience, pride, and resources.**

True empathy can be very costly. It often requires that we give up our time and convenience, alter our personal agendas, let go of our expectations, change our priorities, or share our resources sacrificially. It can also require that we kill our pride, renounce personal prejudices, or let go of resentment and unforgiveness.

Check out [this short video](#) on difference between sympathy and empathy.

