

LESS THAN wk2www.oakbrookchurch.com

-morgan young 8.9.09

(This talk has a [fill-in-the-blanks handout](#).)

We're in this 2-week "mini-series" called "Less Than" that's about relationships.

And we're doing this series because of this truth:

So go our relationships. So goes our life.

Or to say it another way: **Following Christ is all about relationships.**

So we're trying to *increase our relational IQ*, in these two weeks---to help this church take a step of spiritual maturity, in how we navigate relationships.

And the title "less than" title is the key, the crux of this series—that to make any relationship work (spouse, friend) requires us to think less of ourselves and more of others.

Last week, Mark introduced us to EMPATHY.

He said that empathy is about trying to feel what it's like to be the other person. Not just hearing them—but trying to get behind their eyes.

And he said: ***"Empathy breeds understanding. Understanding breeds love. And love breeds great relationships."***

And he challenged us to walk in someone else's shoes this week.

Mark's talk and today's are based on this book, "[Trading Places](#)" by Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott (realrelationships.com). They are a therapist and psychologist who are also Christ followers...

They have a great way of helping their students understand the difference between **empathy** and **sympathy**:

Sympathy is **standing on the shore** and throwing a lifeline to a person who is struggling in the water. *Everyone would do this. It flows with our adrenaline.*

Empathy is **diving into the water** and thrashing around in the cold waves with the person to bring them to safety. *Not everyone does that.*

Empathy is risky. It will cost us time, vulnerability, emotional investment. It will change the relationship. It will change us.

And so today we'll answer Mark's cliffhanger question from last week: "How do you get empathy into your relationships?"

Let's just start with this truth: **You and I pretty much walk around wishing everyone else could be more like us.**

Seriously (*wistfully*) if only everyone could be like us...

No one would ever drive slow in the left hand lane.

Call centers would always be answered by someone who speaks “Kokomo” English.

The music blaring out of the plastic-rattling-trunk of the '98 Civic would be something I'd really like to hear.

We'd never get an email that includes the words, “*send this to 10 friends.*”

People over 40 would get over it and learn to use their computer, their iPod, and text. “*I mean seriously, OMG!—how hard is it??!!*”

And finally—if everyone were more like me then we'd all feel the freedom to slap the iPhone or Crackberry out of the hand of the person who can't go two minutes without a text or a tweet!

The point is, usually it's not “wrong” behavior that irritates us; it's behavior that's simply not like our own.

This concept of everything outside our personal preference irritating us, is called **egocentrism**. Which simply means we're concerned with ourselves more than others.

We have **egocentric memory**: forget things that don't support our view.

We have **egocentric infallibility**: what **we** believe is true (whether it is or not).

We have egocentric righteousness: feeling superior based on our confidence that we are right.

So since we're naturally self-focused, the first step towards empathy is:

(notes)

1) I **NOTICE YOU**.

Based on Matthew 19:19 “...*Love your neighbor as yourself.*”

Here are 5 secrets to notice someone else:

(notes)

a) **Know your own agenda, and set it aside, for now.**

We all have a personal agenda—all the time. It is nothing more than your *immediate goals*. Your immediate goals are what you want to DO, FEEL, TALK ABOUT right now.

It's something that changes all the time. Right now your personal agenda may include wanting me to hurry up so you can get to the *Uncle Herschel's Breakfast* at Cracker Barrel.

It's simple things like: make a phone call, reply to this text message, finish what you're doing so you can go to the gym, watch *The Office* without interruptions.

It's more sinister things like: You want everyone to know you're angry because of what someone did or didn't do. So your personal agenda is to give people some wrath.

And all the time, we are tracked on something. So be self-aware to know what it is—then set it aside... *...for now*. You can come back to it later. But don't lead with it. (Write it down, if it's something you don't want to forget.)

To “notice” someone: know your agenda & set it aside for now. Then...
(notes)

b) **Practice priming.**

Geeky first: We can *prepare* our psychological circuits for making good relational connections. Scientists call it *priming*.

Now the simple: All that means is: THINKING about an action, prepares our mind to perform it.

Which simply means: Take 10 seconds right before you come into contact with your spouse, friend, boss or whoever—and think about what they did today.

Those 10 seconds will “*prime*” you to make a connection, start a conversation, that's not about you.

I try to do this before I go to meetings here at work.

Tuesday mornings we have a staff meeting first thing. So as I'm driving into work, I'm thinking about the people there, and asking God to use me in that gathering. I'm getting myself out of the mode of all the things, “*I-I-I*” have to do today in “*my-my-my*” schedule.

I prime right before I meet with staff one-on-one. I just think about the person I'm going to be in contact with.

I never knew I was “priming” before I read the book, but I know it works!

Some days I'm good at doing this as I pull my car in front of my house after work:

I tend to replay the day as I'm driving home... As I get closer to my house—as I'm driving down Indiana Ave. I try to think about Sandra, Meghan & Slater.

That's priming. It's that simple. IT WORKS! Priming helps me notice ***you!***

Know your agenda, set it aside for now—practice priming, and...

(notes)

c) **Offer an agenda-less presence.**

Is there a friend you have or a person in your family that just always wants to *change you a little bit*?

They say it sometimes or other times you can just feel it—like a “not-so-cool vibe” they give off... (are they sitting next to you?)

They wish you'd lose a few pounds. Or they wish you'd listen to more *Death Cab for Cutie*. They want you to **be more** "something"...or **less** "something."

Honestly---don't we secretly want to give them a mirror and say, "*Dude, work on THAT!*"

That's someone who has an *agenda* for you.

And guess what—at some time or other, we *all* have an agenda for people in our life too.

The only difference is: when someone has an agenda for us it's *annoying*; but when we have an agenda for others, "*we're just trying to help....*" ☺

We'd like to make people in our relational world---less talkative---or more expressive. (Ironic: some people talk thru *details: ad nauseam*, and others will at best give us *headline news...*)

>> Having an agenda for someone, does NOT lead to empathy.

>>To notice YOU—I have to give up my agenda to change you.

Know your agenda, set it aside for now—practice priming---offer an agenda-less presence, and...

(notes)

d) **Move from "It" to "You."**

Simple example: A single friend of the Parrott's used a test on all of her dates. She would keep track of how long before her date asked her a question with the word "you" in it.

The point here is, it's very easy for us to reduce people to an "it"---in other words, we can be more tracked on telling our story, giving our opinion, not really listening, and not really engaging.

We can talk, but not consider if they really want to hear what we have to say. We can hear their words without considering the feelings, thoughts, concerns behind them.

Moving from *it to you* is really taking the other person, *personally*. It's not focusing on the "conversation" (an "it"), it's about our focus on the PERSON, you're talking with.

Philosopher Martin Buber sums up "moving from IT to YOU" this way:

(notes) "*Moving your opinions and judgments aside--allowing the other person's opinions and judgments to be fully expressed.*"

So to *notice you*, I have to make sure I am not treating you, impersonally, as an "it" and I need to allow you to express yourself. And this is tied very closely with the next secret to noticing you...

(notes)

e) **Listen with the Third Ear.**

This is the idea of listening not just for words--- but listening for emotion, body language, & tone. Because we're never just communicating with words---there are always emotions, *driving* and *flowing through* the words we're saying.

The secret of listening with the Third Ear is probably best summed up with this quote:

(notes)

*"The most important thing in communication is to hear what **isn't** being said."* -Peter Drucker

Here's an example:

Your spouse or your friend plops down on the chair next to you and says,

"Man, I think I need to get out of this church I'm in and find one with deeper teaching..."

If we just listen to the words, we'll reply with a conversation about the *teaching* at the church.

But if we listen aggressively—trying to better understand what they're trying to communicate, a better response might be something like,

"Is there a part of your life that you're still unhappy with since you've been coming to church?"

And they might say, "Actually yes..."

Or they might say, "No, Morgan's just lame and I really can't take him any more."

Either way, we're keeping from *jumping to conclusions*). We're focusing on their words and emotions to make sure we really understand what they're trying to communicate.

Here's a great tip on this one: Do you ever find yourself in a conversation where someone's emotions seem much bigger than the situation calls for?

If you're thinking, "Wow, what's his deal? This ain't that big a problem?"

Then lock in the third ear and perhaps ask what else happened today, or what's been going on this week.

When I'm talking with someone and their body language is "tense" or "uncomfortable" or whatever—I am likely just to say in a non-threatening way, "You seem a little _____, do you feel that? Or are you ok?" I try to engage their feelings, not just the words.

So the first step towards empathy is "**I notice you.**" And the second step is:

(notes)

2) I feel with you.

The Parrotts call this "*Turning on your emotional radar.*"

They refer to it as "radar" because what radar does is it picks up very weak signals, and *amplifies* them (louder, clearer).

So in this point, we're talking about picking up the weak "emotional signals" that people are always sending towards us.

Researchers say that in a face-to-face conversation, we communicate (notes)

7% with words, 38% in HOW it's said, and 55% body language.

Knowing that stat: ever had a text or email exchange get sideways? Don't text/email the heavy stuff. Get face to face so you can both fully communicate.

When people come to talk with me here at the church—first of all, people typically don't come and talk with pastors at church because their life is going SO WELL they just HAD to tell SOMEONE about it! ... ;-)

So when someone comes in. I try not to talk very much at all. I let them talk.

As I'm listening, my emotional radar is on high alert.

I'm looking at eyes, body language, listening to tone. They're sending me weak emotional signals and I'm asking the Holy Spirit to help me amplify and understand them.

And so when I finally talk, I may ask questions that have *more to do* with *tone* and what they're *doing with their body* or with their *hands*. Than their words.

I may ask about feelings of insecurity. Anger. Sadness. Resentment. Not because they SAID those words, but because they were sending out those signals.

When I meet with someone, it's not just about trying to get them to talk about what they're feeling and going through.

I'm trying to *feel what their feeling*. Like Mark said last week, I'm trying to walk in their shoes. Because empathy isn't throwing a lifeline; it's getting in the water with them.

Empathy shows up in science; e.g.:

If the doctor told you he was going to give you a shot with a large needle, a neuron in your brain would fire. (I call it the "yikes" neuron ;-)

But if I simply asked you to imagine someone close to you—and I told you that in just a moment the doctor was going to give them a shot with large needle—a neuron in *your* brain would fire. Scientists call that "primal empathy."

Science has proven that we're hard-wired for empathy. And who hard-wired us? God. And what does God ask us to do?

"Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep."

Romans 12:15 nlt

The Bible tells us we need to do more than just offer comfort & Kleenex—God says, “Weep with those who weep.” And science corroborates it—we have the capacity to feel someone else’s experience.

So when the Bible says, “weep with those who weep,” it means we need to *feel with each other*. First, “I notice you. Then, I feel with you.”
First I love my brother as myself and then I laugh when he laughs & weeps when he weeps.

One of the big signs that a marriage (or any relationship) is in trouble is that the emotional radar is turned off. You’re just saying and hearing words:

“What’s for dinner?...I’ll be in the garage...did you pay the cell phone bill? We’re out of pez...”

But this is a place we can get out of!

Because tuning into someone is a conscious effort!
Noticing their subtle emotion is intentional; it’s something everyone can do & everyone can get better at.

All we have to do to read the quiet signals people are sending us, is to SLOW DOWN! We have to CHOOSE to pay attention.

(Neuron won’t fire if we don’t give the other person our attention. We have to slow down and “tune-in” to prepare our brain for empathy.)

(Some great self-tests online w/purchase of book)

Our steps to empathy:

I notice you. I feel with you. And so...

(notes)

3) I act to help you. These are the 3 steps to empathy.

“One day a student asked famous anthropologist (studies origin of man etc) Margaret Mead for the earliest sign of civilization in a given culture. The student expected the answer to be a clay pot or perhaps a fishhook or grinding stone. But her answer was ‘*a healed femur.*’

Mead explained that no healed femurs are found where the law of the jungle, survival of the fittest, reigns.

A healed femur shows that someone cared. Someone had to do that person’s hunting and gathering until the leg healed. The evidence of compassion, said Mead, is the first sign of civilization.” (Pg 116)

When we remove “care” from a relationship, it’s over.

“I don’t care” is a lethal relational phrase. A spouse who doesn’t care is usually one step away from a divorce attorney.

But the antidote to “not caring” is not divorce or not throwing away the friendship.

To care, we simply go back to step #1 “*I notice you.*” And then to #2 “*I feel with you.*” And in doing these things, being intentional, slowing down, caring will again become natural. These are intentional acts.

Matthew 5:7 says,

“*You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being care-full, you find yourselves cared for.*”
Matthew 5:7 The Message

This mini-series has life-changing power because noticing people, feeling with people, and acting to help people is to live like Jesus.

Oakbrook needs to be a church where we’re modeling these steps to empathy in our marriages, in our relationships and as we interact in the world—empathizing and offering care for people.

Two stories...

(personal story of little leaguer with incarcerated father) e.g. of in our community

(Read pgs 121-123 “A Salute and a Kiss”) e.g. of it in our personal relationships

This talk has been information-heavy & it may even sound like self-help. But our faith is not self-help. Our faith makes *help available* as it sits *upon* and is *rooted in* the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Our ability to “notice others, feel with others and to help others” is possible because of the power of Jesus Christ working in us and through us. As we notice, feel and help—God works though it all.

So I want to read this creedal text about empathy and caring for each other. And these words will prepare us to respond to God with what we’ve heard today and what He’s done for us.

Will you please stand as I read Philippians 2:1-11 (The Message)

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if His love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of Himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, He set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

Because of that obedience, God lifted Him high and honored Him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that He is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.

Philippians 2:1-11 The Message

Worship song: *Lead me to the Cross*. -Hillsongs