



Session III: The Sin of Empathy

The goal of the Christian life, and the goal of the Church at large is to produce _____ disciples of Christ.

In his research surrounding anxiety and family systems, Edwin Friedman states,

“Religious institutions are the worst offenders at encouraging immaturity and irresponsibility. In church after church, some member is passively-aggressively holding the whole system hostage, and no one wants to fire him or force her to leave because it wouldn’t be “the Christian thing to do.” It has nothing to do with Christianity.”

In many churches, the reactors are in _____. He characterizes the reactors as the least mature, least motivated, least self-regulating, and most stubborn people. But it’s not just their fault, Friedman says there is a second part to the equation, they have accomplices. The accomplices are those people who permit and tolerate the least mature to take the church hostage most of the time, “in the name of love.” This is the tyranny of being nice.

C.S. Lewis describes one aspect of this problem in his book, *The Problem of Pain*.

“What would really satisfy us would be a God who said of anything we happened to like doing, ‘What does it matter so long as they are contented?’ We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence who, as they say, ‘liked to see young people enjoying themselves’, and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, ‘a good time was had by all’. Not many people, I admit, would formulate a theology in precisely those terms: but a conception not very different lurks at the back of many minds. I do not claim to be an exception: I should very much like to live in a universe which was governed on such lines. But since it is abundantly clear that I don’t, and since I have reason to believe, nevertheless, that God is Love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction. I might, indeed, have learned, even from the poets, that Love is something more stern and splendid than mere kindness: that even the love between the sexes is, as in Dante, ‘a lord of terrible aspect’. There is kindness in Love: but Love and kindness are not coterminous (have the same meaning), and when kindness (in the sense given above) is separated from the other elements of Love, it involves a certain fundamental indifference to its object, and even something like contempt of it. Kindness consents very readily to the removal of its object—we have all met people whose kindness to animals is constantly leading them to kill animals lest they should suffer. Kindness, merely as such, cares not whether its object becomes good or bad, provided only that it escapes suffering. As Scripture points out, it is bastards who are spoiled: the legitimate sons, who are to carry on the family tradition, are punished.”

Reactors have a _____ threshold for pain. They are automatically geared and careless about boundaries. They cannot maintain their own boundaries through self-definition; they are unable to _____ the boundaries of others.

Empathy is indicative of a _____ threshold for tolerating pain in _____.

Quadrant Diagram:

Quadrant A indicates toleration of pain in self but low toleration of pain in others. Rescuers will often suffer “compassion fatigue” or _____.

Quadrant B shows toleration of pain in self and others. This is taking responsibility for self and being able to challenge others to do the same for themselves. This is where we all want to be. This is the _____ leader.

Quadrant C displays low toleration of pain in self and others. This is where a person feels helpless, the victim who commiserates with other helpless victims. Misery loves company type of folks.

Quadrant D depicts toleration of pain in others but low toleration of pain in self. This is the person who is absorbed in their own pain in such a way that they cannot move beyond it to have compassion with others or care for others. It’s the “woe is me” crowd.

The Sin of Empathy:

The word empathy is not found in Scripture. The Scriptures use the words _____ (Psalm 103:13), _____ (Hebrews 4:14-16) and even _____ (Psalm 72:13).

To have Compassion, Sympathy, or Pity is to suffer with someone but to not allow myself to be _____ by their pain. I keep my integrity in tact while being present with them in their pain. I do not lose myself in their pain or anxiety.

“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. **But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them**, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.” (John 2:23-25)

Jesus remained differentiated. He kept His integrity. He did not entrust Himself to sinful people.

*“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to **sympathize** with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* (Hebrews 4:14-16, ESV)

*“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had **compassion** for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.””* (Matthew 9:35-38, ESV)

The Rich Young Ruler: Mark 10:17-27

The Woman at the Well: John 4

The Apostle Paul: 2 Corinthians 7:8-10