

## Empathy Matters

Scripture used: [Hebrews 4:15-16 \(NIV\)](#) and [Luke 10:33-34 \(NLT\)](#)

### OVERVIEW

Pastor Hurmon continued with the sermon series *Character Matters* with the sermon titled “Empathy Matters”. Empathy is different from kindness. It is even deeper than kindness. It is an ability to feel what another person is feeling, to see the situation from their point of view. Empathy has emotional and cognitive components, and it manifests through a posture of compassionate response.

### KEY POINTS

- 1) Kindness is possible even without empathy, but only empathy can bridge vast differences in background, experiences, or opinion and lead to authentic relationships. Pastor Hurmon shared the story of Pastor Rick Cole, a Sacramento-area pastor who felt called to live with the homeless community for two weeks. He gained a deeper understanding of the daily realities of homeless living, and it not only changed his relationships with the unhoused community, it changed his priorities and career when he stepped down from his ministry position to lead a non-profit organization dedicated to serving the homeless. In a very similar way, [John 1:14A](#) reminds us that “the word became human”: Jesus became one of us, He lived among us. This is the source of the power of empathy. Jesus empathizes with our weaknesses - this is what makes Him unique. He lived among us, He did not sin, but He “gets us,” loves us, and saves us.
- 2) We can focus on winning the argument in relationships, or we can make space to care for others. A method is to experiment with making the argument for others. This can lead to us to see the merit of their argument, to get their point. It is the opposite of the selfish spirit, of the callous heart.
- 3) In our second Scripture in Luke 10, the “despised Samaritan” demonstrates radical empathy by using his own resources to care for the Jewish man. This would have been a scandalous story for the time, with role reversal and a highly unexpected ending. Which role is the one we most frequently align with in our own lives? Are we best known for how we criticize, argue, attack, or how we ignore others (as the Samaritan could have easily done)? Are we in a season of need, trauma, or grief, where we need God and other people to help lift us up? Or, is God calling us to greater empathy and compassionate action like the Samaritan? Jesus’ teaching in this passage demonstrates that empathy is an essential part of bridging cultural divides and historic animosities.
- 4) The story of the Good Samaritan is particularly relevant in today’s world. Election cycles and political opportunism stoke polarization and resentment. Hurt people tend to hurt other people, and sometimes this is taken to extremes, to hatred and violence. While there is never justification or excuse for violence, hatred, or malice, the divides of our world will never be bridged without empathy. At NBCC, we are a strong and united community despite our differences, because we put Jesus first, and seek to follow Him faithfully - a part of this experience at NBCC is being able to learn each other’s stories and grow in godly empathy. For Easter Sunday, we should challenge ourselves to invite people to Church who are a “stretch.” Being a good neighbor means taking risks toward bridging gaps and building friendships where God is able to work transformatively and redemptively.

### DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - What is a story that you have where empathy made a difference in your life? Maybe it was a moment when you were able to empathize with another person, or a moment when someone else empathized with you unexpectedly. What difference did empathy make in that moment?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - Consider our two passages, [Hebrews 4:15-16 \(NIV\)](#) and [Luke 10:33-34 \(NLT\)](#). What understanding of God do we gain when we consider that Jesus is the true “Good Samaritan”, who considered our need and took compassionate action for us at His own cost? What other examples of the empathy of God do we see in Scripture? What difference does it make in our lives when we realize that God relates to us with empathy? What difference does it make in our lives when we engage others with empathy? Consider the impact on our family, our work relationships, and our interactions with neighbors, strangers, and those we might consider “enemies”?
- 3) **DO** - Look for an opportunity to ask to hear someone’s story this week, to experience life through their eyes! And consider who God might be giving you an opportunity to invite to our Easter Celebration next Sunday, at 9 AM or 11 AM in Redwood City, San Jose, or Online!