

WEEK 8: EMPATHY AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Detailed Facilitator Guide with Notes and Questions

OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

Week 8 Goal: Develop genuine empathy—the capacity to feel with another person, to enter their world, to see through their eyes—as both a spiritual practice and a relational skill.

The Progression:

- Week 7: Established humility as foundation
- **Week 8:** Build empathy on that foundation
- Week 9: Apply both to authentic relationships

Why This Week Is Critical: Narcissism is fundamentally an empathy deficit. The narcissist cannot genuinely feel for others because they're too preoccupied with themselves. Until participants develop empathy, all their relationship skills will be techniques—not genuine connection.

The Core Challenge: Empathy requires:

- Getting out of your own head
- Feeling another's feelings (not just thinking about them)
- Imagining another's inner world as real as your own
- Caring about their experience for its own sake (not for what you get)
- Being moved by their pain or joy

For the narcissist, this is extraordinarily difficult because:

- Others aren't fully real to them
- They immediately relate everything back to themselves
- They're more interested in being understood than understanding

- Vulnerability (required for empathy) feels dangerous
- They confuse empathy with agreement or approval

UNDERSTANDING EMPATHY

What Empathy Is

Empathy: The capacity to feel with someone—to step into their experience and be moved by it.

Components of empathy:

1. **Cognitive Empathy:** Understanding intellectually what someone feels
 - "I recognize you're sad"
 - Necessary but not sufficient
2. **Affective Empathy:** Actually feeling something in response to their feeling
 - "Your sadness touches my heart"
 - This is where narcissists struggle most
3. **Empathic Concern:** Being moved to care/act
 - "I want to help alleviate your pain"
 - Compassion in action

Full empathy includes all three: Understanding + Feeling + Caring.

What Empathy Is NOT

NOT Sympathy:

- Sympathy: "I feel sorry for you" (looking down)
- Empathy: "I feel WITH you" (standing alongside)

NOT Agreement:

- You can empathize with someone without agreeing with them
- "I understand why you feel that way" ≠ "I think you're right"

NOT Losing Yourself:

- Empathy requires boundaries
- You feel WITH them, not BECOME them
- You can hold their pain without being destroyed by it

NOT Mind-Reading:

- You can't perfectly know what someone feels
- Empathy is humble: "Help me understand" not "I know exactly how you feel"

NOT Emotional Enmeshment:

- Healthy empathy maintains differentiation
- You can feel their pain while knowing it's theirs, not yours

The Narcissist's Empathy Deficit

Why narcissists struggle with empathy:

1. **Self-Reference Filter:** Everything goes through "How does this relate to me?"
 - Person shares pain → Narcissist immediately thinks of their own pain
 - Can't stay with the other's experience
2. **Threat to Self-Concept:** Others' needs threaten narcissist's centrality
 - If I focus on you, I disappear
 - If your pain matters, mine matters less
3. **Emotional Unavailability:** Defended against their own feelings

- Can't feel for others because they can't feel for themselves
- Numbness to self = numbness to others

4. Lack of Object Constancy: Others don't feel fully real

- People exist as functions, not as subjects
- No inner world attributed to others

5. Competitive Framework: Sees suffering as comparative

- "My pain is worse than yours"
- "You think that's bad..."
- Can't honor another's pain without comparison

WHAT MAKES THIS WEEK DANGEROUS

Resistance Patterns to Expect

Performance of Empathy:

- Exaggerated empathic responses to look caring
- "I'm SO empathetic now!"
- Using empathy as new source of specialness
- Performing understanding to manipulate

Cognitive Empathy Without Affect:

- Understanding others intellectually but not feeling
- "I get it" without actual emotional resonance
- Analyzing rather than being with

Empathy Fatigue/Overwhelm:

- Some participants may feel flooded when they start feeling

- Years of defended-against emotion may come rushing in
- Risk of collapse into others' emotions

Comparing Suffering:

- Still making it about themselves
- "That's nothing compared to what I went through"
- Competing in pain Olympics

Conditional Empathy:

- Only empathizing when the person is "deserving"
- "I'd empathize if they weren't so [whatever]"
- Empathy as reward for good behavior

OPENING SESSION (Day 1)

Transition from Week 7 (15 minutes)

Facilitator Script:

"Last week, you practiced humility—thinking of yourself less. You did menial tasks, served anonymously, acknowledged your ordinariness.

Humility creates space for empathy. When you're not constantly preoccupied with yourself, you can actually see others. When you're not performing, you can be present. When you're not competing, you can feel with someone else.

This week: Empathy as spiritual practice.

What is empathy? The capacity to feel WITH someone—to enter their world, to be moved by their experience, to care about their inner life as deeply as you care about your own.

For those of us recovering from narcissism, this is profoundly difficult.

We've spent our lives:

- Making everything about us
- Relating others' experiences back to ours
- Comparing suffering
- Using people as supporting cast

Empathy requires the opposite:

- Making it about them (for a moment)
- Staying with THEIR experience without redirecting
- Honoring their pain without comparing
- Seeing people as fully real—with inner worlds as complex as ours

Romans 12:15 says: 'Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.'

This is empathy—feeling with others in their joy AND their pain. Not analyzing, not fixing, not comparing. Just... feeling with.

This week, you're learning to:

- Step out of your own perspective
- Imagine what it's like to be someone else
- Feel genuine emotion in response to others' emotions
- Care about their experience for its own sake

This is love in action. Not romantic love, but the love that sees another person as fully human and is moved by their humanity."

Opening Check-In (Go Around Circle)

Question: *"On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your current capacity for empathy? What makes it hard to feel with others?"*

Facilitator Note: Most will rate themselves higher than reality. That's okay—this week will reveal the truth. Listen for honest self-assessment vs. defended claims of being empathetic.

SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION EXPLORATION (40 minutes)

Romans 12:15 - "Rejoice with Those Who Rejoice, and Weep with Those Who Weep"

Read aloud: Romans 12:9-21 (context: love in action)

Focus on verse 15: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."

Facilitator Teaching (15 minutes):

"This verse sounds simple. It's not.

'Rejoice with those who rejoice':

This is actually HARDER for narcissists than weeping with those who weep.

Why? Because others' joy threatens you:

- If they're happy, they're not focused on you
- Their success might eclipse yours
- Their joy might make your life look less impressive
- You have to celebrate them without making it about you

The narcissist's response to others' joy:

- Subtle put-downs: 'That's great, but...'
- Redirecting: 'That reminds me of when I...'
- Minimizing: 'Well, that's not really that impressive...'
- Competing: 'I did something similar...'

- Absence: Just not showing up emotionally

Genuine rejoicing means:

- Being purely happy for them
- Celebrating without comparison
- Delighting in their delight
- No strings attached

'Weep with those who weep':

This is also hard, but differently:

- You have to feel their pain (uncomfortable)
- You can't fix or minimize it
- You have to be present in suffering (you can't control)
- You have to resist comparing: 'My pain is worse'

The narcissist's response to others' pain:

- Minimizing: 'It's not that bad...'
- Fixing: 'Here's what you should do...'
- Redirecting: 'I know exactly how you feel, when I...'
- Competing: 'You think that's bad? Listen to what happened to me...'
- Absence: Discomfort makes them leave

Genuine weeping with means:

- Feeling their pain (not just thinking about it)
- Being present without fixing
- Honoring their suffering without comparing
- Sitting in the discomfort with them

The spiritual practice: Can you be moved by someone else's experience—joy or pain—without making it about you?

This is love. Not romantic feeling, but the choice to enter another's world and be affected by it."

Discussion Questions:

1. **"Which is harder for you: rejoicing with those who rejoice, or weeping with those who weep? Why?"**
2. **"When someone shares good news, what's your typical response? Pure joy? Comparison? Redirection?"**
3. **"When someone shares pain, what do you do? Fix? Minimize? Compare? Redirect?"**
4. **"Can you think of a time you genuinely rejoiced with someone—purely happy for them, no strings attached?"**
5. **"What would it take to 'weep with those who weep' without making their pain about you?"**

Galatians 6:2 - "Bear One Another's Burdens"

Read aloud: Galatians 6:1-10

Focus on verse 2: "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

Facilitator Teaching (12 minutes):

"Paul says bearing one another's burdens **FULFILLS** the law of Christ.

What is the law of Christ?

- John 13:34: 'Love one another, even as I have loved you'
- Matthew 22:39: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'

To fulfill Christ's law = to bear burdens.

'Bear one another's burdens' (*bastazo allēlōn ta barē*):

- *Bastazo*: Carry, endure, sustain the weight of
- Not just acknowledge burdens, but BEAR them—carry weight

What does this mean?

NOT: Taking on others' burdens to the point of your own collapse NOT:

Rescuing or fixing NOT: Taking responsibility for their feelings

BUT: Entering into their struggle, carrying emotional weight WITH them, being present in their pain

Empathy is burden-bearing:

- When you empathize, you feel some of their pain
- You carry a bit of their weight
- You don't leave them alone in it

Verse 5: 'For each one will bear his own load.'

Wait—is this a contradiction? Verse 2 says bear each other's burdens; verse 5 says bear your own load.

The distinction:

- *Burdens* (v.2, *barē*): Heavy, crushing weights no one can carry alone
- *Load* (v.5, *phortion*): Daily responsibilities, personal work

We need help with crushing burdens. We're responsible for daily loads.

Empathy means: Helping with the unbearable, not rescuing from the everyday.

For the narcissist: You've been refusing to bear others' burdens because you're too busy with your own (even if yours aren't as heavy as you think). Love requires carrying weight for others."

Discussion Questions:

1. **"What's the difference between bearing someone's burden (v.2) and carrying your own load (v.5)?"**
2. **"When have you experienced someone bearing your burden? What was that like?"**
3. **"When have you genuinely borne someone else's burden—carried emotional weight for them?"**
4. **"What makes you resist bearing others' burdens? Too busy? Don't care? Don't know how?"**
5. **"Paul says this FULFILLS the law of Christ. Why is burden-bearing so central to love?"**

John 13:34 - "Love One Another, Even As I Have Loved You"

Read aloud: John 13:31-35

Focus on verse 34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

Facilitator Teaching (12 minutes):

"Jesus gives a 'new commandment'—but loving others isn't new. Leviticus 19:18 already said 'love your neighbor as yourself.'

What's new? The standard: 'EVEN AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.'

Not: Love others as you love yourself (Old Testament standard) But: Love others AS CHRIST LOVED YOU (New Testament standard)

How has Christ loved you?

- Sacrificially (gave His life)
- Unconditionally (while you were still a sinner)

- Empathetically (He entered your experience—became human)
- Persistently (doesn't give up on you)
- Without keeping score (grace, not debt)

The empathy piece: Christ ENTERED YOUR WORLD. Philippians 2—He became human. He experienced hunger, pain, temptation, suffering. **He empathized by incarnation.**

'That you love one another' (v.34):

- This is a command, not a suggestion
- Love is a choice, not just a feeling
- Empathy is something you DO

Verse 35: 'By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.'

The marker of Christ-followers is love—empathetic, sacrificial, genuine love.

For us: Empathy isn't optional. It's the mark of discipleship. And it's modeled after Christ who entered our world to understand and save us."

Discussion Questions:

1. **"How has Christ loved you? What does that love look like, feel like?"**
2. **"Christ entered your world (incarnation) to empathize. When have you entered someone else's world?"**
3. **"The standard is 'as I have loved you'—not 'as you love yourself.' How is that harder?"**
4. **"Jesus says others will know we're His disciples by our love. What does your love (or lack of it) say about you?"**

5. "If empathy is how Christ loved, how do you need to grow in empathy to love like Him?"

DAILY PRACTICES INSTRUCTION

Morning Intention: "Today I Will See Others as Real as I See Myself" (Days 1-7)

Detailed Instructions for Participants:

"Each morning, after your silence practice and identity prayer, set this intention:

'Today I will see others as real as I see myself.'

Unpack this intention (5 minutes of meditation):

'Others are as real as I am':

- They have inner lives as complex as mine
- Their feelings matter as much as mine
- Their stories are as significant as mine (to them)
- Their pain hurts them as much as mine hurts me

The narcissist's default: I am the protagonist; others are NPCs (non-player characters). I am fully real; they are somewhat real.

The truth: Everyone is the protagonist of their own story. Everyone's inner life is as rich, complex, and real as yours.

'I will see': This is active. You have to choose to see. It doesn't happen automatically.

Throughout the day: Return to this intention.

- Before conversations: 'This person is as real as I am'
- When someone irritates you: 'They have reasons I don't understand'

- When someone succeeds: 'Their joy is as valid as mine'
- When someone suffers: 'Their pain is as real as mine'

Evening: Journal—Where did I see others as real today? Where did I fail?"

Throughout the Day: "Empathy Pauses" (Days 1-7)

Instructions:

"Throughout the day, before responding in conversations or situations, take an 'Empathy Pause'—a brief moment to feel with the other person.

How to practice:

In Conversations:

1. Person shares something (feeling, experience, news)
2. PAUSE (3-5 seconds) before responding
3. Ask internally: 'What might they be feeling right now?'
4. Let yourself FEEL something in response (not just think)
5. Then respond—from that felt sense, not from script

The Pause looks like:

- Brief silence (it's okay!)
- Soft expression (not planning your response)
- Staying present to THEM

What you're resisting:

- Immediate response (to stay in control)
- Redirecting to yourself
- Fixing their problem

- Judging their feelings

Examples:

Without Empathy Pause:

- Them: 'I'm stressed about this project.'
- You (immediately): 'Oh man, I have three projects due! Let me tell you...'

With Empathy Pause:

- Them: 'I'm stressed about this project.'
- You: [PAUSE—feel into their stress]
- You: 'That sounds overwhelming. What's weighing on you most?'

Without Empathy Pause:

- Them: 'I got a promotion!'
- You (immediately): 'That's great! I remember when I got promoted...'

With Empathy Pause:

- Them: 'I got a promotion!'
- You: [PAUSE—feel into their excitement]
- You: 'That's wonderful! You must be so excited. Tell me about it!'

The goal: Training yourself to FEEL WITH before responding. Empathy isn't just intellectual—it's affective."

Evening Practice: Perspective-Taking Journaling (Days 1-7)

Instructions:

"Each evening, choose ONE person you interacted with today and write from THEIR perspective about the interaction with YOU.

The Exercise:

Step 1: Choose a person and a specific interaction

Step 2: Write in first-person AS THEM

Not: 'They probably felt...' But: 'I felt...' (as if you are them)

Step 3: Describe the interaction from their eyes

What did they:

- See (your facial expressions, body language)
- Hear (your tone, words)
- Feel (emotionally, in response to you)
- Think (about you, about the situation)
- Need (that they may or may not have gotten from you)

Step 4: Reflect—What do you notice?

Example:

Interaction: Had coffee with colleague Sarah who shared concerns about her teenage daughter

Perspective-Taking (writing as Sarah):

'I was hoping [your name] would just listen today. I'm really worried about Emma, and I needed to talk it through. When I started telling the story, [your name] seemed present at first. But then they started giving advice—lots of advice. I didn't ask for advice. I just needed to be heard.'

When they said "When I was a teenager, I..." I felt like my concern got redirected. It wasn't about me anymore—or about Emma. It was about them.

I felt... dismissed. Like my worry wasn't valid unless they had experienced something similar. I shut down a bit after that and changed the subject.

What I needed was: "That sounds so hard. Tell me more." Not solutions. Not their story. Just... presence.'

Step 5: Journal Your Response

'Reading this from Sarah's perspective, I see: I did exactly what I've done my whole life—redirected to myself, tried to fix instead of just being present. She needed empathy, not advice. She needed to feel heard, not educated. I robbed her of that. Tomorrow, I'll try differently.'

The goal: Developing the ability to see yourself from outside, through others' eyes—building empathy through perspective-taking."

THE "WALK A MILE" INTERVIEW (Days 2-4)

Instructions for Participants

Facilitator Introduction (Day 2):

"This week's major assignment: Interview someone about their life experience—something significant—and truly enter their world.

You're going to 'walk a mile in their shoes' by deeply listening, asking empathetic questions, and trying to feel what they feel."

Part 1: Choosing the Person and Topic (Day 2)

Who to interview:

- Someone whose life experience differs significantly from yours
- Could be: different background, different struggle, different joy, different perspective
- Someone you want to understand better

What to explore: Ask them to share about ONE significant experience:

- A hardship they've endured
- A major life transition

- A relationship that shaped them
- A loss they're carrying
- A joy or achievement
- A current struggle

Setting up the interview: "[Name], I'm working on developing empathy, and I'd like to understand your experience better. Would you be willing to talk to me about [topic]? I just want to listen and understand—not to fix or advise, just to hear your story. Could we have 30-60 minutes?"

Part 2: Conducting the Interview (Days 2-4)

Your role: Empathetic listener (not interviewer, not fixer, not advice-giver)

Opening: "Tell me about [topic]. I want to understand what it was like for you."

Empathetic questions (use these as guides):

To understand FEELINGS:

- "What was that like for you emotionally?"
- "What did you feel when...?"
- "How did that affect you?"
- "What was the hardest part?"

To understand MEANING:

- "What did that experience mean to you?"
- "How did it change you?"
- "What did you learn?"
- "How do you think about it now?"

To understand IMPACT:

- "How does that affect you today?"
- "Who else was affected?"
- "What do you wish people understood about this?"

To go deeper:

- "Tell me more about that..."
- "What was going on for you internally?"
- "Help me understand..."
- "What am I not asking that I should ask?"

What NOT to do:

- Don't say: "I know exactly how you feel, I..."
- Don't give advice unless asked
- Don't minimize: "At least..."
- Don't redirect to your story
- Don't judge their feelings
- Don't rush to fix

What TO do:

- Maintain eye contact
- Use empathy pauses
- Reflect back what you hear: "It sounds like..."
- Validate their feelings: "That makes sense that you'd feel..."
- Show you're moved: It's okay to tear up, to look sad, to be affected

After they share:

- Thank them sincerely

- "Thank you for trusting me with this"
- "I'm honored you shared that with me"
- Resist the urge to share your parallel story

Part 3: Processing the Interview (Day 4-5)

Immediately after, journal extensively:

What I learned about their experience:

- What did they go through?
- How did it affect them?
- What did I learn I didn't know before?

What I felt during the interview:

- Did I feel sadness, joy, compassion, discomfort?
- Was I moved emotionally, or just intellectually interested?
- Where did I want to redirect to myself?

Perspective-taking:

- Write 2-3 paragraphs AS THEM, from their perspective
- Try to inhabit their experience
- Feel what they might feel

What I noticed about my empathy:

- Where was I genuinely empathetic?
- Where did I struggle?
- What made empathy hard in this conversation?
- How did they respond to being heard empathetically?

Group Processing (Day 5 or 6)

Discussion Questions:

1. **"Who did you interview? What did you learn about their experience?"**
2. **"What was it like to purely listen without redirecting to yourself?"**
3. **"Were you moved emotionally, or just intellectually interested? What's the difference?"**
4. **"Where did you struggle with empathy during the interview?"**
5. **"How did the person respond to being heard empathetically? What did you notice?"**
6. **"What did this exercise teach you about empathy? About yourself?"**

STUDYING JESUS'S EMPATHY IN THE GOSPELS

Reading Assignment (Days 3-5)

Assignment: Read the following Gospel passages specifically looking for Jesus's empathy:

1. **Jesus weeps with Mary and Martha** (John 11:1-44)
2. **Jesus with the woman caught in adultery** (John 8:1-11)
3. **Jesus with the Samaritan woman** (John 4:1-42) [already studied in Week 6, review for empathy]
4. **Jesus with the hemorrhaging woman** (Mark 5:24-34)
5. **Jesus with grieving widow at Nain** (Luke 7:11-17)

Look for:

- How Jesus FEELS for people (not just acts)

- How He enters their experience
- How He responds to suffering
- How He shows compassion (literally: suffering with)

Group Discussion (Day 5 or 6)

Facilitator Teaching (10 minutes):

"Watch Jesus's empathy in these passages:

John 11:35: 'Jesus wept.'

Shortest verse in the Bible, profound significance. Jesus knows He's about to raise Lazarus. So why weep?

He's moved by Mary and Martha's grief. He feels WITH them. Even though He knows the outcome, He enters their present pain.

Mark 5:34: Jesus with hemorrhaging woman

She touches His garment, is healed. Jesus stops: 'Who touched Me?'

Why stop? He could keep walking. But He sees her—makes eye contact, calls her 'Daughter,' gives her dignity.

He doesn't just heal her body; He empathizes with her isolation
(ceremonially unclean for 12 years).

Luke 7:13: Jesus with grieving widow

'When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep."

He's MOVED by her grief (splagchnizomai—deep, visceral compassion). Then He acts—raises her son.

The pattern: Jesus FEELS → Acts. Empathy leads to compassion leads to action."

Discussion Questions:

- 1. "What strikes you about Jesus's empathy in these passages?"**
- 2. "Jesus weeps even though He knows Lazarus will live. What does that teach us about empathy?"**
- 3. "How is Jesus's empathy different from just being nice or doing the right thing?"**
- 4. "Jesus is moved to His gut (splagchnizomai). When have you been moved like that?"**
- 5. "How does Jesus's empathy challenge or inspire your own?"**

ROLE-PLAY SCENARIOS FOR EMPATHY PRACTICE

Group Exercise (Day 6)

Facilitator Introduction:

"We're going to practice empathy through role-play. This might feel awkward—that's okay. You're building a muscle."

In pairs, you'll practice responding empathetically to various scenarios."

How to Structure the Exercise

Setup (5 minutes):

- Divide into pairs
- One person is "Speaker," one is "Empathetic Responder"
- Give a scenario to Speaker
- Speaker shares as if this is their real experience

- Responder practices empathy
- Then switch roles

Scenarios (choose 3-4, rotate through group):

Scenario 1: Job Loss *"I just got laid off. I'm scared about finances, embarrassed to tell people, and feeling like a failure."*

Empathetic Response:

- NOT: "Don't worry, you'll find something!" [Minimizing]
- NOT: "That happened to me too, let me tell you..." [Redirecting]
- BUT: "I can see this is really scary for you. Tell me what you're most worried about." [Feeling with]

Scenario 2: Relationship Conflict *"My spouse and I are fighting all the time. I don't know if we'll make it. I feel so alone."*

Empathetic Response:

- NOT: "Have you tried counseling?" [Fixing]
- NOT: "Marriage is hard for everyone." [Minimizing]
- BUT: "That sounds incredibly lonely and painful. What's the hardest part right now?" [Feeling with]

Scenario 3: Achievement/Joy *"I just got accepted to graduate school! I can't believe it—I worked so hard for this!"*

Empathetic Response:

- NOT: "That's great. I got my degree from..." [Redirecting]
- NOT: "That's cool. It's a lot of work though." [Minimizing]
- BUT: "That's amazing! You must be so proud! Tell me about it!" [Rejoicing with]

Scenario 4: Chronic Illness *"I'm exhausted all the time from this condition. People don't understand—they think I'm lazy or making it up."*

Empathetic Response:

- NOT: "Have you tried [treatment]?" [Fixing]
- NOT: "I get tired too..." [Comparing]
- BUT: "That sounds incredibly frustrating—hurting AND not being believed. What's that like day to day?" [Feeling with]

Scenario 5: Grief *"It's been six months since my mom died. I'm not 'over it' like people expect. I still cry randomly."*

Empathetic Response:

- NOT: "She's in a better place." [Spiritual bypass]
- NOT: "You should be moving on by now." [Judgment]
- BUT: "Six months is nothing when you've lost your mom. Of course you're still grieving. Tell me about her." [Honoring pain]

Debrief After Each Round (3 minutes)

Ask Speaker:

- "What did it feel like to be heard empathetically?"
- "What responses helped? What didn't?"

Ask Responder:

- "What was hard about responding empathetically?"
- "What did you want to do instead?"

Full Group Processing (After All Scenarios)

1. **"What was hardest about responding empathetically?"**
2. **"What did you want to do instead of empathizing?"**
 - Fix, minimize, redirect, compare
3. **"When you were the Speaker, what responses felt most empathetic?"**
4. **"What's the difference between FEELING with someone and just saying the right words?"**
5. **"How can you tell when empathy is genuine vs. performed?"**

THEOLOGICAL AND CLINICAL DEEPENING

Dr. Daniel Siegel Quote Discussion

"Empathy is the antidote to narcissism. It's physiologically impossible to be empathically attuned to another while simultaneously self-obsessed."
— Dr. Daniel Siegel

Facilitator Teaching (15 minutes):

"Siegel, a neuropsychiatrist, makes a fascinating claim: Empathy and narcissism are neurologically incompatible.

Why?

The brain can't do both:

- Empathy activates parts of the brain associated with: feeling, connection, attunement to others
- Narcissism activates parts associated with: self-reference, evaluation, comparison

You literally can't be empathizing with someone while thinking about yourself.

They're mutually exclusive neural states.

Siegel calls empathy the 'antidote to narcissism':

Like an antidote to poison, empathy neutralizes narcissism. Not by shaming you out of self-focus, but by activating a different neural pathway.

The more you practice empathy:

- The stronger those neural pathways become
- The weaker the narcissistic pathways become
- Your brain literally changes

This is why empathy practices matter: You're not just being nice. You're rewiring your brain.

The narcissist's problem: They've built superhighways of self-reference in their brain and dirt paths of empathy.

Recovery: Building empathy highways until they become the default route.

This takes practice, repetition, intention. But it works—neuroplasticity is real."

Discussion Questions:

1. **"Siegel says you can't be empathetic and self-obsessed simultaneously. Does that match your experience?"**
2. **"When you're genuinely feeling with someone, can you also be thinking about yourself?"**
3. **"If empathy is the antidote to narcissism, what does that mean for your recovery?"**
4. **"Siegel implies empathy is a practice that changes your brain. Have you noticed any changes this week?"**

Brené Brown Quote Discussion

"True empathy requires the sacred art of stepping into someone else's story while leaving your own at the door—even briefly." — Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead*

Facilitator Teaching (15 minutes):

"Brown calls empathy a 'sacred art'—it's holy work to enter another's story.

'Stepping into someone else's story':

- Not just listening FROM your perspective
- But entering THEIR perspective
- Seeing through their eyes
- Feeling with their heart

'While leaving your own at the door—even briefly':

This is the key. You don't lose your story permanently. But temporarily, you set it aside.

The narcissist's problem: Can't leave their story at the door. Every door they walk through, they bring their whole narrative with them.

Someone shares pain → Narcissist: "Let me tell you MY pain story" Someone shares joy → Narcissist: "That reminds me of MY achievement"

Brown says: Leave it at the door. Even briefly. For this moment, their story is the only story.

'Sacred art': Why sacred?

Because empathy is an act of love. It's self-forgetfulness in service of seeing another. It's making space for someone to exist fully.

In a narcissistic culture that says 'make everything about you,' empathy is counter-cultural, prophetic, sacred.

For recovery: Can you leave your story at the door long enough to enter someone else's? Even for 5 minutes? That's the practice."

Discussion Questions:

- 1. "What does Brown mean by 'stepping into someone else's story'? How is that different from just listening?"**
- 2. "Why is it hard to 'leave your own story at the door'?"**
- 3. "Brown calls empathy 'sacred.' Do you agree? What makes it sacred?"**
- 4. "Can you think of a time someone entered your story and left theirs at the door? What was that like?"**
- 5. "Where this week did you manage to leave your story at the door? Where did you fail?"**

CREATING AN EMPATHY PRACTICE

Ongoing Disciplines (Days 6-7)

Facilitator Introduction:

"This week has been intensive empathy training. But empathy isn't a one-week project—it's a lifelong practice.

You're going to design ongoing empathy practices to integrate into your life."

Components of an Empathy Practice

Daily:

1. Morning intention: "See others as real as I see myself"
2. Empathy pauses throughout the day
3. Evening perspective-taking journal (at least 3x/week)

Weekly:

1. One deep empathetic conversation (like the Walk a Mile interview)
2. Serve in a capacity that requires empathy (hospice, crisis line, homeless ministry, etc.)
3. Read stories of people unlike you (memoirs, biographies)

Monthly:

1. Seek feedback: "Do I seem empathetic to you? Where do I need to grow?"
2. Practice empathy in difficult relationships (not just easy ones)
3. Review: Where did I grow in empathy? Where did I regress to self-focus?

Spiritual:

1. Pray for the capacity to feel with others
2. Meditate on Jesus's empathy
3. Ask God to break your heart for what breaks His

Personal Empathy Plan (Journaling Exercise)

Write answers to:

1. **"What empathy practices will I continue daily?"**
2. **"Who in my life needs my empathy most? How will I practice with them?"**
3. **"What makes empathy hard for me? What do I need to be aware of?"**
4. **"How will I know if I'm growing in empathy? What markers will I look for?"**
5. **"What support do I need to sustain empathy practices?"**

FACILITATOR SELF-CARE

This week can be emotionally draining for everyone.

Watch for:

- Participants performing empathy without feeling
- Empathy overwhelm (feeling flooded)
- Your own empathy fatigue as facilitator
- Conflating empathy with agreement

Remember:

- You're modeling empathy in sessions
- Don't rescue participants from discomfort
- Maintain your own boundaries
- Process your own feelings in supervision

Self-care:

- Practice empathy in your own life
- Notice when you're drained vs. energized
- Take breaks from others' emotions when needed
- Remember: Empathy requires boundaries to be sustainable

CLOSING THE WEEK (Day 7)

Final Reflection Questions

1. **"Complete this sentence: This week, I learned that empathy..."**
2. **"What was hardest about practicing empathy? What surprised you?"**

3. "**Where did you genuinely feel with someone this week?**"
4. "**How did people respond when you were empathetic with them?**"
5. "**What empathy practices are you committing to continue?**"

Facilitator Closing Words

"You've done profound work this week—learning to feel with others, to enter their worlds, to see them as real as you see yourself.

What you've practiced:

- Daily intention to see others as real
- Empathy pauses before responding
- Perspective-taking journaling
- Walk a Mile interviews
- Studying Jesus's empathy
- Role-playing empathetic responses

What you've learned:

- Empathy is more than understanding—it's feeling with
- You can't be empathetic and self-obsessed simultaneously
- Entering another's story requires leaving yours at the door (temporarily)
- People respond when they're genuinely felt-with
- Empathy is learnable, practiceable, sustainable

The challenge: Don't let this be a one-week exercise. Empathy is a daily practice—a way of being in the world.

Next week: We're applying humility and empathy to building authentic relationships. Moving from performance to presence, from using people to genuinely connecting.

You're ready.

Let's close:

'God, You entered our world to empathize with us. You became human to understand our experience. You wept with those who wept. You rejoiced with those who rejoiced. Teach us to love like You love—to feel with others, to carry their burdens, to see them as real as we see ourselves. Break our hearts for what breaks Yours. Give us the capacity to be moved by others' pain and joy. Make us people of genuine empathy. Amen.'"

END WEEK 8

RESOURCES FOR DEEPER STUDY

On Empathy:

- Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead* (Chapter on Empathy vs. Sympathy)
- Daniel Siegel, *Mindsight* (Neuroscience of empathy)
- Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* (Empathic listening)

Clinical:

- Leslie Greenberg, *Emotion-Focused Therapy* (Working with affect)
- Carl Rogers, *A Way of Being* (Empathic understanding)

Spiritual:

- Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (Ministry through shared pain)
- Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (L'Arche communities—empathy with the vulnerable)