



THE BIG IDEA

Suffering draws us outside of ourselves to seek others.

WHY DO WE NEED TO KNOW IT?

God desires empathy, for us, with us, and through us.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Accept grace from God and extend that grace to others though compassionate listening.

START HERE

We want our entire church to be a part of the conversation. If you missed any of the messages from Sunday, you can catch up [here](#).

CONVERSATION GUIDE

This week, instead of just having a conversation, we want you to practice becoming more empathetic people. Do do so, we want you to engage in the exercise below.

COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION EXERCISE

When we introduce Compassionate Communication in a group setting, we ask participants to pair themselves up with a person they do not know. We specifically request that couples and spouses do not work together because, in a group situation, couples converse with greater defensiveness than when they practice Compassionate Communication with a stranger. At first this may sound counterintuitive, but many long-term studies have shown that the complex

demands of marriage increase the degree of stress between couples. An intimate conversation can easily bump up against unaddressed conflicts, so a natural reaction is to

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Book- *"Job and the Mystery of Suffering"* by **Richard Rohr**
- More resources posted on the Forefront blog- [READ](#)
- MidrashNYC.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 20th

- Baby Dedications

March 21, 23, 25

- Forefront Holy Week: Scatter at the office.

avoid those issues- and specifically, those conversations- that may threaten marital attachment. However, when you experiment with Compassionate Communication in a group situation, where there is less at stake, participants can take the positive experiences home with them, where they can practice with greater willingness and comfort.

Let's return to our workshop participants. After they paired up with a stranger, we gave them a modified version of the Miller Social Intimacy Scale- a well-established tool for measuring social friendship, closeness, and defensiveness- and asked them to respond to the questions as they related to the person they were sitting with. Then we guided them through a seven-minute exercise (which I'll introduce to you shortly).

Next, we asked them to hold a compassionate thought about the person with whom they were sitting. This turns out to be an important step, and it reflects the principles in the forgiveness meditation we discussed in the previous chapter. We instructed them to *imagine* an intimate conversation with the stranger they were sitting with because visualization enables the

brain to more easily put into practice whatever goal one wishes to accomplish. In this case, the goal was to stimulate the neural circuits involved with empathy, social awareness, and communication. Finally, we asked the participants to smile and make eye contact with their partners as they continued to imagine the possibility of an ensuing compassionate dialogue.

They were given seven minutes to talk to each other, but had to stay focused on their breathing and only speak briefly, taking turns talking about whatever came to mind, without censoring anything. They were specifically instructed *not* to make a conversation happen; instead, they were to simply allow a spontaneous dialogue to flow wherever it wanted to go. When we do this in workshop situations, it's not

surprising to see many pairs sharing personal stories they would normally reserve for a close friend. Participants were invited to share their experiences

with the group, and after the exchange, we asked them to pair themselves up with a new partner- again, with someone they did not know. They practiced Compassionate Communication for another five to ten minutes, and then we paired them with another person.