



Strengthening Your Soul

facing life with courage from the inside out

new series begins April 24

WEEK 2. PRACTICING EMPATHY

Recapping last week: Last week we focused on growing in courage. In looking at Joshua 1:7-9, we saw how God desires for us to be filled with courage and how the way to be courageous in the face of difficulty is to meditate on God's word and to know that God is with us wherever we go.

For those that were here last week, how have you been able to be courageous since last week's lesson?

Framing this week's lesson: We want to be a lifegroup that not only supports each other when we are going through difficult situations, but also fosters a space where we can be vulnerable with each other about the areas in our lives where we might be lacking in courage or feel insecure. To help foster such a space, though, one of the key qualities in creating that kind of safe space is **empathy**. While sympathy focuses on feeling sorry, empathy is focused on connection with the person that shared.

• *Sympathy* says "oh, I'm so sorry that happened", but it is something that can make a person who is hearing it feel judged because it can have a "Oh, I feel so sorry for you" attitude behind it.

• *Empathy has four components:*

- being able to see the world from someone else's point of view
- being nonjudgmental
- understanding their feelings
- communicating your understand of their feelings

This week's lesson, then, focuses on empathy and asks us to consider how we can become more empathetic people.

Introduction Question: Where have you observed empathy this week?

Scripture Study: As we read our Bible passage tonight, pay attention to what you learn about empathy and what it might look like for us to practice empathy towards others.

John 8:2-11: ² At dawn [Jesus] appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Possible Discussion Questions:

- What might the teachers of the law and the Pharisees be hoping Jesus will do when they bring a woman caught in adultery to him?
- What might the woman caught in adultery be thinking/feeling?
- How does Jesus respond to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees?
- How does Jesus respond to the woman caught in adultery? What does Jesus’ response show about his understanding of what it might have been like to be dragged in front of these people and accused like this?
- How might Jesus’ response affect the woman caught in adultery?
- A key aspect of empathy is helping someone to feel like they are not alone. How does Jesus accomplish this by his words and actions?

Reflection Questions:

- If a friend confessed to me about doing something like committing adultery, how might I respond? How might Jesus want me to respond?
- How can I intentionally practice empathy so that others in this lifegroup can find a safe place where they can be honest with their struggles, insecurities, and fears?

It can be difficult to practice compassion and empathy because our response to pain—ours or someone else’s—is to self-protect. We are scared to feel pain so we look for ways to deflect. This causes many of us to immediately start trying to fix the issue, judge others, or even change the subject. As we move forward in lifegroup, let’s commit to practicing empathy and creating a safe space for all.

Small Groups:

- Where in our life recently have I recently received empathy from someone else?
Demonstrated it?
- Share on the two reflection questions from the John 8 passage, focusing particularly on how I can intentionally practice empathy here in this lifegroup?
- What would it look like for us to become a more empathetic lifegroup?
- Pray for each other and this lifegroup to grow in empathy.