



Thanks for checking out our sermon-based Study Guides! If you've never used our Study Guides before, you'll find some basic instructions beginning at the bottom of page 2.

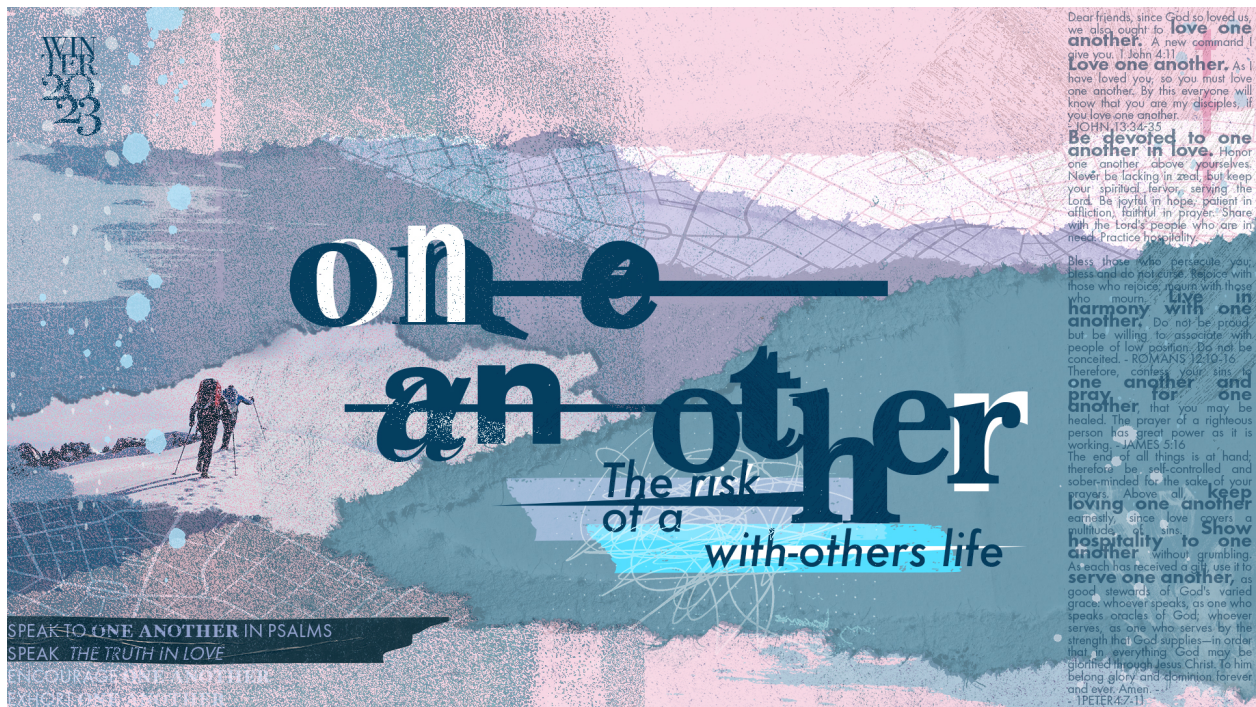
NEW this year: These study guides will be written by thoughtful and experienced Life Group Leaders. As always, use these guides as a head-start in your own preparation as the needs and culture is different from each group. And of course, please continue to give us feedback.

LIFE GROUP STUDY GUIDE

for the Sermon given on January 15, 2023

by Pastor Bryan Wilkerson

"DO YOU FEEL WHAT I FEEL?" - Romans 12:9-16



Question: How can **empathy** enrich our relationships with one another – as human beings, as citizens, and as members of the body of Christ?

Bottom Line: When we take the time to understand another person's experience, we, and they, become more open to God's work in our lives.

Welcome to week 2 of our new series, **One Another: The Risk of a With-Others Life**. This winter we are exploring the role that relationships play in every person's spiritual journey. Last week we talked about the journey from loneliness to love; when we dare to live a with-others life, we discover life as it was meant to be lived.

This week we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, a holiday commemorating the life of the civil rights leader who cast a vision of what racial equality might look like in our country. As it turns out, one of qualities that made Dr. King such a dynamic leader was his ability to empathize, to understand another person's experience. Today we are going to focus on **empathy**. *What exactly is empathy? Why is it such a powerful force in human relationships? What's God got to do with it?*

We are excited to try to something a little new this year, and that is utilize some of the gifting and passion of talented and experienced group leaders and so much of this study has been created by one of our seasoned Life Group Leaders. Thank you for being here today.

Let's begin in prayer before we begin reading and discussing our text.

Main Scripture Reading: Romans 12:9-16

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ **Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.** ¹⁶ **Live in harmony with one another.** Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Group Discussion Questions

1. Pastor Bryan began his message with a quote about Martin Luther King, Jr. from an activist named Joan Cole Duffel:

"(He) ...demonstrated a rare form of empathy at almost every turn of the road. He heard and saw people – all people – and understood how constituents on both sides of an issue – even the most divisive issue – actually *felt*. This allowed him to practice peaceful problem-solving in the name of racial justice."

- What was it about Dr. King and/ or his life experiences that enabled him to relate to people on such a deep level?

2. Romans 12:15 states, *“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”*
 - Have you experienced someone who rejoiced with you in your joy? Or mourned with you in your sorrow? How did that impact you personally? How did that impact your relationship with that person?
 - What are the challenges you faced in your attempts to empathize with someone? Or someone trying to empathize with you?
3. Describe your inner monologue when someone is telling you about their personal trials and tribulations. What do you find yourself saying and doing?
 - How do you empathize with someone if you have not lived through a similar encounter of pain, grief, suffering or loss?
4. Do you have a close friend or family member that you usually seek when you are stressed out or need a listening ear? What brings you comfort and hope?
5. At the end of the sermon, Pastor Bryan mentioned several actionable steps that you could take to grow in empathy. They are 1) get curious, 2) take risks, 3) admit bias.
 - Is there someone in your life whom God is putting in your heart who could use some emotional support and empathy?

Take Home Message:

Empathy not only draws us closer to one another, *it draws us closer to God. It holds space for the Spirit to do the work of healing and transformation in our individual lives, and in our community.*

Homework Until Next Time:

Ask the members of your LG to complete the Discipleship Planning Tool and the GPS Assessment Tool before your next meeting. Here is some fresh language:

We're all on a journey; where is yours taking you?

The beauty of the way of Jesus is that it's not just good for us, it's good for the world around us. But that kind of beautiful life doesn't come from just hearing the words of Jesus; it comes from putting them into practice. Three kinds of practice, actually:

- The with-God life of our personal habits and routines;
- The with-others life of our genuine and life-changing relationships; and
- The for-the-world life that makes an impact beyond our immediate homes and families, into our communities and beyond.

Growing as disciples of Jesus will make a Kingdom difference in our world and a transformative difference in our lives as believers and as a group. And these resources are helpful in identifying the next steps for our journeys.

Let's Pray

Support for the Leader (These Teaching Points are provided to help the group leader make connections from the message to their group with both insights from the Biblical text and also opportunities in the life of our church).

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Teaching Points:

- Empathy is the capacity to recognize, understand, and share the thoughts and feelings of another person. Empathy is similar to sympathy, but stronger, closer and more proactive
 - Empathy begins by *recognizing* that everyone is not having the same experience
 - Empathy then *seeks to understand* the other person's experience. Empathy investigates and observes. It asks questions, then listens carefully enough to understand
 - Empathy finds a way to *share the thoughts and feelings* of that other person
- Brené Brown describes empathy as “holding space, withholding judgement, emotionally connecting, and communicating that incredibly healing message: *You are not alone*”.
- Empathy is physical, emotional and spiritual with-ness
- A few simple steps to grow in empathy:
 - **Get curious:** Get curious about other people's life experiences and ask questions. Then listen without offering your own opinion or solutions
 - **Take risks:** Step out of your relational comfort zone. Find someone you don't know and start a conversation
 - **Admit bias:** We are all prejudiced in some way, shape or form. Admit it to yourself

For Further Biblical Study: Although the specific words empathy/ empathize is hardly found in Scripture, SYMPATHY, COMFORT and COMPASSION is found.

Job 2:11-13

¹¹ When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and **sympathize with him and comfort him**. ¹² When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. ¹³ Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

Isaiah 49:13

Shout for joy, you heavens;
rejoice, you earth;
burst into song, you mountains!

**For the LORD comforts his people
and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.**

Matthew 9:36-37

³⁶ When he saw the crowds, **he had compassion on them**, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

Galatians 6:2

² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

1Corinthians 12:25-26

²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, **but that its parts should have equal concern for each other**. ²⁶ **If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.**

2Corinthians 1:3-4

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort**, ⁴ **who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.**

Hebrews 4:14-15

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,^[a] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to **empathize** with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

Colossians 3:12

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, **clothe yourselves with compassion**, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Philippians 2:1-4

2 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any **comfort** from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and **compassion**, ² then make my joy complete by **being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind**. ³ Do nothing out of

selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ **not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.**

1Peter 3:8

⁸ Finally, all of you, **be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.**

How to Use These Study Guides:

- Consider sending out the Scripture passage to your group members ahead of time.
- Begin each meeting with a short time of checking in with one another.
- You may want to begin the discussion by reading the Scripture passage together out loud, or by summarizing the passage if everyone has read it ahead of time.
- Don't feel like you need to discuss every question included in the Study Guide. Pick one or two to start with, and see how the conversation flows.
- If your group meets over Zoom:
 - You may need to do more overt facilitating over Zoom than you would in person. Feel free to call on people to invite them to share.
 - Try to be sensitive to attention spans over Zoom—keep the meetings shorter than they would be in person.
- Be sure to set aside time for sharing prayer requests and praying together.

Group Leader Support: Please reach out to your Campus Pastor or your Coach if you have any questions about leading your group or concerns about your group dynamic. If you have questions about or feedback on the Study Guides, please reach out to Pastor Tim or Grace Lee from the Group Life team.