



Post Conference Lesson:

The Power of Vulnerability and Empathy (Part 1)

OBJECTIVES

What do you want the youth to KNOW?

Being vulnerable is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of courage. There is power in vulnerability and empathy in healing shame. Youth will understand more deeply what empathy is and how to give it to others.

“Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path.” -Dr. Brene Brown

What do you want the youth to FEEL? Challenged and encouraged

What do you want the youth to DO?

-Be a part of creating a safe place for vulnerability and empathy to happen in their youth group, family and church family.

-Practice being vulnerable with safe people and practice expressing empathy to others.

MATERIALS

- Follow up scripture sheets for each youth (can be 2-sided)
- Handout of empathetic responses
- White board/chart paper and marker
- YouTube video on Embracing Vulnerability (5:58): Sounds True. (2013, January 7). *Brene Brown – Embracing Vulnerability* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/AO6n9HmG0qM>
- YouTube video on Empathy (2:53): The RSA. (2013, December 10). *Brene Brown on Empathy* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/1Ewvgu369Jw>
- (optional) YouTube video on Testimony of Kylie Burgher, EX Story (3:30): Explicit Movement. (2018, June 19). *EX Story: Kylie Burgher, Overcoming Our Sexual Struggle* [video file]. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/IXVUm4i428U>
- (optional) VIMEO video showing vulnerability among youth in a promo video for an Explicit Event: (<https://vimeo.com/183608900>)

BIBLE TRUTH FOCUS (Scripture)

Jesus can empathize with us:

(Hebrews 2:18, TPT) "He suffered and endured every test and temptation, so that He can help us every time we pass through the ordeals of life."

(Hebrews 4:15, TPT) "He understands humanity, for as a Man, our magnificent King-Priest was tempted in every way just as we are, and conquered sin."

We can be vulnerable with each other.

(Galatians 6:2, TPT) "*Love empowers us to fulfill the law of the Anointed One as we carry each other's troubles.*"

(James 5:16, TPT) "Confess and acknowledge how you have offended one another and then pray for one another to be instantly healed, for tremendous power is released through the passionate, heartfelt prayer of a godly believer!"

We can be vulnerable with God:

(Psalm 32: 3-11) "How blessed and relieved are those
Before I confessed my sins, I kept it all inside;
my dishonesty devastated my inner life,
causing my life to be filled with frustration,
irrepressible anguish, and misery.

The pain never let up, for your hand of conviction
was heavy on my heart.

My strength was sapped, my inner life dried up
like a spiritual drought within my soul.

Pause in his presence

Then I finally admitted to you all my sins,
refusing to hide them any longer.

I said, "My life-giving God,
I will openly acknowledge my evil actions."
And you forgave me!

All at once the guilt of my sin washed away
and all my pain disappeared!

Pause in his presence

This is what I've learned through it all:

All believers should confess their sins to God;
do it every time God has uncovered you
in the time of exposing.

For if you do this, when sudden storms of life overwhelm,
you'll be kept safe.

Lord, you are my secret hiding place,

protecting me from these troubles,
surrounding me with songs of gladness!

Your joyous shouts of rescue release my breakthrough.

Pause in his presence

I hear the Lord saying, "I will stay close to you,

instructing and guiding you along the pathway for your life.

I will advise you along the way
and lead you forth with my eyes as your guide.
So don't make it difficult; don't be stubborn
when I take you where you've not been before.
Don't make me tug you and pull you along.
Just come with me!"

So my conclusion is this:

Many are the sorrows and frustrations
of those who don't come clean with God.
But when you trust in the Lord for forgiveness,
his wrap-around love will surround you.

So celebrate the goodness of God!

He shows this kindness to everyone who is his.
Go ahead—shout for joy,
all you upright ones who want to please him!"

OPENER ACTIVITY

Choose one of the following icebreakers:

Circle of Chairs

Set up chairs in a circle and have participants sit in a chair. Ask one person to stand in the middle. Remove their chair so there is one less chair than group participants. Have a facilitator model the process by being the person in the middle. He/she then shares something about themselves that others could potentially relate to.

If the other participants agree with what was shared or have experienced the same thing, they also get up out of their seat and along with the person in the middle, they attempt to sit in a different chair than their original seat, while the person in the middle also tries to find a seat in the remaining chairs. The last person without a chair then becomes the next leader in the middle.

Example sharing statements may include: "My name is Michael, I have a pet fish." (all those with pet fish switch seats)... "My name is Lynn; I've been to the Disneyland." (all those who have been to Disneyland switch seats), etc. You could suggest a theme related to the topic, such as specific talent/skill (i.e. "My name is Jake and I can play the guitar").

Common Ground

Divide the participants into small groups and have them discuss things they have in common, such as gender or hair color. They must also seek unusual things they have in common for example; being a twin or having an unusual pet, like a chicken. Explain to participants they have 15 minutes to find as many common facts as they can. The team who comes up with the most items in common wins the game.

Tower of Trust

Divide participants into groups. Give each group two newspaper sheets, one foot of tape, five paper clips, one foot of string and a pair of scissors. You could also modify this activity with 50-100 plastic cups or 10-25 pipe cleaners. Challenges can also be added, such as completing it with one hand or without

speaking. Give each group 15 minutes to build the tallest tower before measuring each tower to determine who built the tallest one. Later, have the the groups share their approach to building their tower, challenges they faced, and what they learned about working together as a trusting team.

Fear in a Bowl

This activity builds empathy and can be performed when one feels a safe in a trusting environment. Supplies needed are a bucket/bowl, pieces of paper, and pens/pencils. Ask each participant to write down their personal fears anonymously on the pieces of paper before placing them into a hat. Circulate the hat and have each participant take out a piece of paper. The participants in turn read the fear aloud to the group and explain how the person may feel. Reflective discussion can follow on how feeling empathetic and having common fears may build trust within a team.

LEADER'S TALK POINTS

- 1) Everybody has a story - a story that may include struggles of all sorts - maybe secrets, shame, guilt, abuse we have committed or abuse done to us. But our story also contains victories and hilltop experiences or accomplishments and treasured, meaningful moments. God values it all. We want to become a community where each person's story is honored, valued, respected, and loved.

In order to build and cultivate a safe community, knowing we are all imperfect people still in process of learning what is healthy and godly ways of relating to each other, we must value important ingredients. What is important that we all need to grow in, including me, is expressing vulnerability and empathy with one another. If we can grow in these two areas for starters, we are building a place where people will experience healing, miracles of the heart, and breakthrough in our midst!

- 2) Defining vulnerability: Ask, "What is your understanding vulnerability? What does it mean to be vulnerable?"

Is vulnerability a sign of weakness or strength? Why do you say that?

3) Introduce Brene Brown's YouTube video on Embracing Vulnerability and show video.

After video, highlight take aways and share Brene Brown quote: "*Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path.*" -Dr. Brene Brown

- 4) But when a person shares vulnerably, how we respond is super important. How we respond can make them feel loved, validated and safe, or can make them never want to share again and never want to come back.

Ask, "Can anyone define what is empathy?"

The definition of empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. Synonyms are compassion, tenderheartedness, kindness. Empathy involves validating someone's feelings, as opposed to trying to quickly encourage them to make them feel better fast.

- 5) Introduce the video on empathy: Ask, "Is there a difference between empathy and sympathy?"
Observe the youth's understanding.

Share, "Let's watch this short video that explains what empathy is.
View the video on empathy by Brene Brown.

Discuss take-aways.

- 6) **Discuss how Jesus can empathize with us because he became human:**

The Lord Jesus came to earth and therefore HE could better understand and empathize with human experiences.

(Hebrews 2:18, TPT) "He suffered and endured every test and temptation, so that he can help us every time we pass through the ordeals of life."

(Hebrews 4:15, TPT) "He understands humanity, for as a Man, our magnificent King-Priest was tempted in every way just as we are, and conquered sin."

- 7) **Discuss how we can be vulnerable with God!**

The book of Psalms shows clearly that David was very real with God in expressing his emotion whether anger, hatred, joy, remorse, guilt, or extreme sorrow. View passage Psalm 32:3-7, 10, TPT

"How blessed and relieved are those
Before I confessed my sins, I kept it all inside;
my dishonesty devastated my inner life,
causing my life to be filled with frustration,
irrepressible anguish, and misery.

The pain never let up, for your hand of conviction
was heavy on my heart.

My strength was sapped, my inner life dried up
like a spiritual drought within my soul.

Pause in his presence

Then I finally admitted to you all my sins,
refusing to hide them any longer.

I said, "My life-giving God,
I will openly acknowledge my evil actions."

And you forgave me!

All at once the guilt of my sin washed away
and all my pain disappeared!

Pause in his presence

This is what I've learned through it all:

All believers should confess their sins to God;
do it every time God has uncovered you
in the time of exposing.

For if you do this, when sudden storms of life overwhelm,
you'll be kept safe.

Lord, you are my secret hiding place,

protecting me from these troubles,
surrounding me with songs of gladness!
Your joyous shouts of rescue release my breakthrough.

Pause in his presence

So my conclusion is this:

Many are the sorrows and frustrations
of those who don't come clean with God.
But when you trust in the Lord for forgiveness,
his wrap-around love will surround you."

8) Discuss how we can be vulnerable with each other.

As we share more vulnerably with each other, we are called to love deeply without judgment (read passage):

(Galatians 6:2, TPT) *"Love empowers us to fulfill the law of the Anointed One as we carry each other's troubles."*

On a white board or chart paper, solicit answers from the group, on what would be the characteristics a group would need to have in order for you to risk being vulnerable with everyone?

After brainstorming, you can share:

Imagine a place where people knew everything about you –
everything you did sinful in secret,
every incident in which you were a victim of someone else's sin against you,
every hurt,
every achievement and every celebration,
every failure, mistake, and disappointment,
every embarrassing moment,
every handicap, talent and skill,
anything shameful in your past or in your family,
every quirky thing about you and every thing that makes you magnificent as a person... everything.

And yet, every person had no judgment for you, but instead people had deep love, respect, unshakable honor, and appreciation for you. Imagine if people in your community believed the best of you, believed in the powerful call and destiny upon your life and committed to support you, be there for you, and cheer you on....how would you feel?

Though it seems like such a perfect place...we all can grow as the family of God towards this goal - to be there for each other in such unity.

But in order to grow in deep unity and love, we need to know more of each other's stories and love each other in the increasingly deeper ways.

- 9) Briefly discuss the importance of confidentiality and the damaging effects of gossip (also prayer gossip where you share with others to pray for someone about a sensitive matter **without** getting the person's permission to share with others.)

10) (Optional): Share testimony Video(s) (about Kylie or Explicit promo video) to inspire the group about the power of vulnerability in ministering to others. Discuss take aways.

11) Responding to vulnerability with genuine empathy is powerful.

Explain how we respond to vulnerability is VERY Important. If we respond with understanding and sensitivity, and EMPATHY, then we create safe places for people to experience God's heart through us. If we are insensitive or judgmental, that may cause the person to never share again and leave the group permanently.

We are all in the process of learning how to sensitive, so let's have grace and patience with each other as we learn how to respond with EMPATHY!

Ask, "What is empathy?" (field answers)

The common definition of empathy is to understand and share the feelings of another.

12) Show video on empathy by Brene Brown.

13) Growing in vulnerability and showing empathy takes practice and courage!

Showing empathy is a new skill to learn - and we may stumble through the process of growing in this, but let's have patience and grace with each other as we try!

14) Go over the handout of Empathetic responses that express empathy and promote trust within a friendship and group.

It is not always easy to know what to say when someone tells you something very vulnerable and personal. There is power in words which can encourage and uplift, or hurt and condemn. Careless words keep people isolated and silent for years. Supportive words bring healing, restoration, and courage to talk about their burden or their experiences. What do you say when someone risks in sharing what they struggle with secretly? What do you say when someone shares they have been abused or struggle with depression or suicidal thoughts? What do you say when someone shares a heavy burden they are carrying?

Note: After someone shares something heavy, it can very hurtful to not say anything and quickly change the subject or make a joke/comment to lighten to mood. When appropriate, a hand on shoulder, a hand squeeze or a hug also can communicate comfort.

Don't start immediately sharing *your* experience that is similar. This time is not about you - it's about listening to them.

This list of helpful phrases can be of help to you. This list will help you to know what you can say that will help the person.

15) Break up into teams of two and have each partner share a sad or hurtful story or a really joyous and exciting story that happened to them in the past (could even be when they were a child) and have

their partner practice responding with an empathetic phrase or two. Take a moment before the sharing for the partner who is listening, to look over the list and have a few options in mind.

Encourage the listeners to practice active listening (good eye contact, no fidgeting or looking at watch etc.).

After a partner shares their story, share how they felt when they heard their partner's response.

Now switch roles and repeat activity.

- 16) Share that regarding issues of sex and sexuality, topics that we are often silent about, we want to create a place and space here in the group and among friends, where issues can be shared and processed through without shame or judgment.

Share the vision of everyone growing in becoming a safer person, a trusted friend, and someone who expresses the heart of Jesus to a hurting world! Explain that to love well requires us to be empathetic, compassionate people.

End in prayer regarding this subject.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Share an experience when you were vulnerable with someone and it did not go so well - it left you feeling awkward and regretful that you shared. What was said or done that contributed to those feelings?

Share an experience when you were vulnerable with someone and afterwards you felt comforted by the person. What did that person do or say that encouraged you?

If you ever start sharing a vulnerable story with someone and they immediately try to give you advice and 'fix the problem' without validating your feelings, what can you say (in a nice way) to that person to express your need for them to just listen to you right now? (ex:, "I so appreciate your great advice, but what I need from you right now is to listen.")

PRAYER POINTS

Have the youth pray for one another for increased courage and wisdom to share vulnerably as the Lord would lead them and to grow in being more empathetic ministers to others.

FOLLOW UP

Have the youth take home the scripture sheet as a reference for meditation throughout the week. Encourage them to journal their personal reflections each day.

Practice empathy when people share with you're their burdens.

Empathetic Responses

It is not always easy to know what to say when someone tells you something very vulnerable and personal. There is power in words which can encourage and uplift, or hurt and condemn. Careless words keep people isolated and silent for years. Supportive words bring healing, restoration, and courage to talk about their burden or their experiences. Here are some tips to say vs what not to say through a person's healing process.

Note: After someone shares something heavy, it can be very hurtful to not say anything and quickly change the subject or make a joke/comment to lighten the mood. When appropriate, a hand on shoulder, a hand squeeze or a hug also can communicate comfort and empathy. Don't start immediately sharing *your* experience that is similar. This time is not about you - it's about listening to them.

WHAT NOT TO SAY:

You just need to let go and move on.
Other people have it worse than you.
You're making too much of a big deal of this.
You just need to trust God and pray harder.
Are you just trying to get attention?
I can't believe this really happened.
Tell me every detail and don't leave anything out.
How come you just can't forgive?
You are sinning if you just can't forgive and forget!
Did you enjoy it? (the abuse)
What are you going to do about it now?
At least.... (minimizing issue)

WHAT TO SAY:

Sounds like you are feeling really (angry, sad, excited, shocked etc.) by what happened.
I don't know exactly what to say right now except that I'm here for you.
I'm so sorry that happened to you.
This must be so tough for you.
You are very brave and courageous to talk about what happened.
It took a lot of courage to talk about this, and I'm proud of you.
I am here to help you through your sadness.
I care about you. I am here to listen and help you in any way.
I am so glad you are sharing this with me.
You are not alone.
I believe in you!
I'm so sorry that awful thing happened to you.
You didn't deserve this (abuse, hurtful situation)
You are not to blame. This is not your fault. (if they were a victim of abuse)
Healing is possible!
You can be whole again.
Forgiveness for such a deep hurt is a process and will happen over time.

Vulnerability and Empathy

MONDAY | (Psalm 32:3-6, 10, TPT) Being vulnerable with God:

“How blessed and relieved are those
Before I confessed my sins, I kept it all inside;
my dishonesty devastated my inner life,
causing my life to be filled with frustration,
irrepressible anguish, and misery.
The pain never let up, for your hand of conviction
was heavy on my heart.
My strength was sapped, my inner life dried up
like a spiritual drought within my soul.

Pause in his presence

Then I finally admitted to you all my sins,
refusing to hide them any longer.
I said, “My life-giving God,
I will openly acknowledge my evil actions.”
And you forgave me!
All at once the guilt of my sin washed away
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This is what I’ve learned through it all:
All believers should confess their sins to God;
do it every time God has uncovered you
in the time of exposing.
For if you do this, when sudden storms of life overwhelm,
you’ll be kept safe.

So my conclusion is this:

Many are the sorrows and frustrations
of those who don’t come clean with God.
But when you trust in the Lord for forgiveness,
his wrap-around love will surround you.”

TUESDAY | (Hebrews 2:18, TPT)

“He suffered and endured every test and temptation, so that he can help us every time we pass through the ordeals of life.”

WEDNESDAY | (Galatians 6:2, TPT)

“Love empowers us to fulfill the law of the Anointed One as we carry each other’s troubles.”

THURSDAY | (James 5:16, TPT)

“Confess and acknowledge how you have offended one another and then pray for one another to be instantly healed, for tremendous power is released through the passionate, heartfelt prayer of a godly believer!”

FRIDAY | (Romans 12:15-17, TPT)

“Celebrate with those who celebrate, and weep with those who grieve. Live happily together in a spirit of harmony, and be as mindful of another’s worth as you are your own. Don’t live with a lofty mind-set, thinking you are too important to serve others, but be willing to do menial tasks and identify with those who are humble minded. Don’t be smug or even think for a moment that you know it all.”

SATURDAY |(1 Peter 3:8, TPT)

“Now, this is the goal: to live in harmony with one another and demonstrate affectionate love, sympathy and kindness toward other believers. Let humility describe who you are as you dearly love one another.”