

# Lesson 2: Empathy — Why Good Intentions

## Often Create Distance

### When I Missed the Mark

My wife is usually in a good mood & fun to be around. As I sometimes say, "It seems like every minute of being married is full of love and peace." After all, we've had 53 years to figure it out.

Recently she said that she was depressed & couldn't figure out why. I couldn't figure out why either. I just gave her some cliches trying to help her get over it. They didn't help.

Then she got a revelation. There were a number of things she wanted to get done & didn't have the energy to do so.

So, without her asking, I did a couple of the jobs to help her out. Her bad mood disappeared. Why I say I missed the mark: I was not able to sense what she was feeling.

Until she got her revelation, I was unable to empathize.

### What Empathy Really Means (in Simple Words)

**Empathy** means understanding how someone else feels inside — not just what they say. It's like putting yourself in their shoes and seeing the world from their point of view.

Many people think being loving or helpful is the same as being empathic, but that's not true. Sometimes trying to "fix" someone's problem or jump in to help without first understanding how they feel actually pushes them away instead of bringing you closer.

### Why Good Intentions Don't Always Work

A person might want to help because they care. But if they don't first notice what the other person is truly feeling, their efforts can feel empty or even annoying.

Real empathy is about sensing another person's emotions — even when they don't say them out loud.

## **Empathy vs. Just Helping**

Helping someone without understanding their feelings is not empathy. Empathy means you notice their inner feelings, not just their words. You can help someone and still not be empathic if you never took time to understand how they feel first.

## **Being Present Matters**

Real empathy does **not** mean:

- Giving up what you feel
- Sacrificing yourself
- Just trying to make someone feel better

Instead, it means you join their experience by paying attention, being curious, and trying to see things through their eyes.

## **A Simple Example**

If your partner talks about something that interests them — even if it seems small — empathy means noticing their reaction and entering their world.

You might watch that TV show with them or talk about it together. That builds connection because you are being present, not just performing “nice” actions.

## **Empathy Grows When You Choose It**

Empathy is not something you do perfectly all the time. It grows when you choose again and again to understand before you try to fix.

