

Background - Vox's Values

<Provide some context on why we're talking about Vox's Values.>

We are in the middle of a sermon series exploring the values of Vox. These values are meant to describe who we are in this season and who we hope to be as a community and individuals. They have risen to the surface over the course of our journey as a church. It is from these values of who we are, that should shape what we do and how we live. Vox's values include: Artistry, Posture, Empathy, Participation, Peculiarity and Mystery.

Empathy: Session 3 Objectives

Send out the link to the sermon podcast to your group ahead of time so everyone can get a chance to listen to the sermon on Empathy.

- <http://voxveniae.com/empathy-2/>

These objectives might be helpful in shaping and guiding the discussion to a healthy landing spot by the end of the night.

- Develop a practice of listening to another's story
- Reflect on privilege and how it impacts our ability to empathize
- Understand the importance of diversity in our community

Value of Empathy

Introduce the value statement of Empathy and if it's helpful for your group, reflect on the Scripture passage in 1 Corinthians 8.

Read/Reflect on 1 Corinthians 8:1-4, 7-13

1 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. 2 Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. 3 But whoever loves God is known by God.

4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one."

7 But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. 8 But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? 11 So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12 When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

Reflection on Empathy

Spend some time reflecting the value of Empathy. This can be a time to reflect on the value statement, the Scripture passage and the sermon podcast.

1. How does the value of Empathy connect or not connect with you?
2. How have you experienced or seen this value demonstrated in the Vox community? If not, where have you experience it?
3. Was there anything that stood out for you in the sermon?

Read the value statement for Empathy to the group.

Empathy. Theologians use "incarnation" to refer to God's radical act of empathy: God became like us, in order to be with us and experience what we feel. We strive to reciprocate that in our relationships. This means creating space to listen, feel, and be with people who are different than us. We try to be an intentionally diverse community including background, life stage socioeconomics, sexual orientation, and orthodoxy. Sometimes we do that well, and sometimes we fail. However, we try to practice empathy for both the marginalized and the marginalizers, and allow that empathy to guide us in our responsiveness to injustice. Through authentic spiritual community we learn to be transformed through grace and Christ's spirit. You will find people here who will embrace and bless you. You will also find people here who will disagree with and challenge you. All of that is a good thing, necessary for healing and wholeness. (1 Cor 8; 1 Cor 12).

The Art of Listening

Listening to someone puts us in a posture of seeking understanding rather than making assumptions. It has the potential to be healing to both the speaker and the listener.

4. What have been some positive experiences of listening in the past and what made them meaningful or healing? What were some painful experiences?

This is an opportunity for people to reflect on the practice of listening and what made the experience meaningful, positive or even hurtful and unproductive. This could be from either perspective of being the one listening or being the one listened to.

5. EXERCISE: Sharing Your Story

This is an opportunity for each person to communicate who they are and for each person in the group to practice listening and empathy when presented with the story of another person.

Tell your own story using the prompt of one of the empathy practices:

a. What do you wish we understood about you better?

b. Where does it hurt?

c. How has your voice not been heard or been missing?

Each person can share their story by focusing on one of those three prompts. If necessary, you can set some guidelines up front to establish a safe space for people to share and be vulnerable.

Privilege

Typically those who are in a position of power or privilege are asked to provide empathy while those who lack privilege are the ones needing empathy. Our own experience might tell us that we are always the ones needing empathy (this may be our default expectation). However, at some level, each of us has privilege in some capacity and we're invited to practice empathy through those areas of privilege.

6. How does privilege affect and impact our ability to listen and practice empathy? What are your areas of privilege?

Feel free to reference some of the quotes about privilege in the Appendix and use them to guide the group's reflection.

Practice (Application)

Spend the remaining time reflecting on personal practice and what it means to be, feel and walk with others in Empathy.

7. What is an area or opportunity where you can practice and express the value of Empathy? (How does your Enneagram type impact your ability to practice Empathy?)

For example, as a nine (peacemaker), empathy serves as a reminder that consensus is not the ultimate goal. Disagreements are not necessarily a problem to be solved. Instead, love in the context of diversity and difference must be the goal and practice.

8. In what ways can Vox continue to foster and facilitate this value?

Prayer

Close your time in prayer for any reflections that came from this time of dialogue and also allow space for any personal areas that require care.

Appendix - Other Resources

Vox Sermon Podcast

- Vox Podcast - Values: Empathy (Gena Minnix)
 - <http://voxveniae.com/empathy-2/>
- Sermon notes
 - 1. Empathy is "who am I known by?" rather than "what do I know?"
 - Not what we know, but who we know and who we are known by
 - Practicing empathy allows us to stay in loving relationships with those who are different from us
 - Ruby Sales: Empathy makes our theology relational - speaking love to the marginalize
 - 2. Empathy leads us to support one another's growth & maturity
 - We don't all come to the same conclusion (Scripture, theology)
 - We are to love each other and not get hung up on who's right and wrong
 - 3. Empathy invites us to modify our behavior accordingly
 - Those with more power drown out those with less - request the voices of those who are not empowered to speak
 - We may see our disagreements as a problem to be solved -- however, goal is not consensus but love
 - Empathy Practices
 - What do you wish I understood about you better?
 - Where does it hurt?
 - Whose voice are we missing?
 - Reflection Questions
 - Where in my life have I experienced God's empathy?
 - Do I tend to listen more closely to what someone knows, or how someone feels?
 - With whom do I find it easy to empathize? With whom do I find it difficult?
 - Resources
 - Movie - [Inside Out](#) (Joy & Sadness)
 - Podcast - [On Being](#) (Ruby Sales)
 - Empathy makes our theology relational

Listening to the "Other's" Story

- How listening to someone's story can change your mind
 - <http://www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-transgender-canvassing-20160407-story.html>

Brene Brown on Empathy (Video)

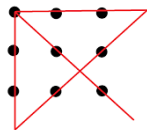
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

Privilege Quotes (provided from iACT Red Bench Conversation)

- "A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both." — President Dwight D. Eisenhower
- "Privilege is when you think something is not a problem because it's not a problem to you personally." — David Gaider
- "Life is a gift, and it offers us the privilege, opportunity, and responsibility to give something back by becoming more." — Tony Robbins
- "Understand that the right to choose your own path is a sacred privilege. Use it. Dwell in possibility." — Oprah Winfrey
- "When you arise in the morning, think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive - to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love." — Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor from 161 to 180
- "Human rights are not a privilege granted by the few, they are a liberty entitled to all, and human rights, by definition, include the rights of all humans, those in the dawn of life, the dusk of life, or the shadows of life." — Kay Granger
- "Rank does not confer privilege or give power. It imposes responsibility." — Peter Drucker
- "Education is necessary to unlearn privilege, unlearn exclusion, unlearn discrimination, unlearn prejudice, unlearn war." — Alfred De Sayas
- "When we lose the right to be different, we lose the privilege to be free." — Charles Evans Hughes
- "The ability to have a choice in what you do is a privilege." — Anfon Yelchirm
- "I just think the most difficult thing to displace is privilege." — Sean Connery

Optional Exercises/Activities

- Exercise: 9 Dots Exercise
 - Present a drawing of 9 dots (in a square shape - 3 across, 3 down)
 - Draw 4 lines (without picking up your pen) to get through all the dots (this requires you to draw outside the imaginary square)



- Reflection: Who defined this as a box? Why are we constrained to it?
 - This exercise helps us to remove our assumptions and preconceived notions about others in order to practice empathy towards those who are different from us