

BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

3 – Trade Places

"Be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep. Have the same concern for everyone."
- Romans 12:15-16, GOOD NEWS

"The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out."
- Proverbs 20:5

Great relationships don't just happen. They're the result of seeking the best for others, rather than only focusing on one's self. Becoming *proactive* rather than simply *reactive*. In turn, this perspective causes us to be careful with our words, realizing that talk isn't cheap. When it comes to relationships, our words can either make them or break them. Seeking the best for others also involves learning to empathize—the ability to put ourselves in their place and respond accordingly.

Welcome

How many Hollywood movies can you think of in which a main character puts himself or herself in another's place, only to gain a deeper appreciation for that person?

Word

Read Romans 12:15-16

1. In his book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey says "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Why is this so important? What are the potential benefits?
2. Do you find it easy or difficult to empathize with those different from you?
3. In what situations are you most likely to feel an opposite emotion such as the older brother in the story of the Prodigal Son? What causes these "backward" emotions?
4. What insights do passages such as **1 Peter 3:8** and **Philippians 2:1-4** provide in terms of learning to be more empathic with others, especially with difficult people?
5. Does *acknowledging* someone's thought process or emotions necessarily mean that you *endorse* them? Explain. How might honing this skill improve a specific relationship at the moment?
6. If you want to build better relationships, you must change your focus from just looking at your hurts, your wants, your doubts, your fears. When you think about taking your relationships to the next level, what do you need most—greater *consideration* or *courage*?

Works

Jesus traded places with you so that you can enjoy a right relationship with God (2 Corinthians 5:21). What did this require of *Him*? What will it require of *you*... to better identify and build redemptive relationships with others? This is an essential part of what it means to follow Jesus, and to settle for less is not to walk worthy of our calling (notice passages like 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and Hebrews 13:3).

Worship

Focus your time of worship and prayer around the Christological hymn found in Philippians 2.