# Brené Brown on Empathy Video Transcript

RSA

Last updated: December 12, 2022

(GASPS)

So, what is empathy and why is it very different than sympathy?

Empathy fuels connection. Sympathy drives disconnection.

It's very interesting. Theresa Wiseman is a nursing scholar who studied very diverse professions where empathy is relevant and came up with four qualities of empathy.

Perspective taking - ability to take the perspective of another person or recognize their perspective as their truth.

Staying out of judgment - not easy when you enjoy it as much as most of us do.

(AUDIENCE CHUCKLES)

Recognizing emotion in other people, then communicating that.

Empathy is feeling WITH people.

I always think of empathy as this kind of sacred space. When someone's in a deep hole and they shout from the bottom.... And we look and we say, "Hey!" And climb down...Sympathy is, "Ooh!" (LAUGHTER)

"It's bad, uh-huh?"

(LAUGHTER)

"Uh... No. You want a sandwich?"

Empathy is a choice and it's a vulnerable choice. In order to connect with you, I have to connect with something in myself that knows that feeling. Rarely, if ever, does an empathic response begin with, "At least..."

(LAUGHTER)

Yeah. And we do it all the time because, you know what? Someone shared something with us that's incredibly painful and we're trying to "silver lining" it. I don't think that's a verb, but I'm using it as one. We're trying to put a silver lining around it.

So, "I had a miscarriage."

"At least you know you can get pregnant."

"I think my marriage is falling apart."

"At least you have a marriage."

(LAUGHTER)

"John's getting kicked out of school."

"At least Sarah is an A-student."

One of the things we do sometimes in the face of very difficult conversations is we try to make things better.

"I don't even know what to say. I'm just so glad you told me."

Because the truth is, rarely can a response make something better. What makes something better is connection.