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Transcript:

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

Empathy fuels connection. Sympathy drives disconnection. Empathy... it's very interesting. Theresa Wiseman is a nursing scholar who studied professions, very diverse professions where empathy is relevant, and came up with four qualities of empathy. Perspective taking, the 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.

Recognizing emotion in other people, and then communicating that.

Empathy... is feeling with people. And to me, I always think of empathy as this kind of sacred space... when someone's in a deep hole, and they shout out from the bottom... and we look, and we say: "I'm stuck". "It's dark". "I am overwhelmed", and then, we look, and we say: "Hey!" and climb down... "I know what it's like down here and you are not alone."

Sympathy is, "Ooh!" (laughter)

"It's bad, uh-huh?" (laughter)

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

Empathy is a choice and it's a vulnerable choice because 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)

I had a... yeah! and we do it all the time because, you know what? Someone just 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..." "Oh. At least you know you can get pregnant." "I think my marriage is falling apart..." "At least you have a marriage." "John's getting kicked out of school..." "At least Sarah is an A-student."

But one of the things we do sometimes in the face of very difficult conversations is we try to make things better. If I share something with you that's very difficult, I'd rather you say, [Sighs] "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.