

Healing Empathy and Discernment

During the course of my personal healing journey, and while working with others, I have become aware of a rather common phenomenon. The behavior appears to result when a child is surrounded by danger such as chaos and abuse in the home. I call this behavior "Inordinate Empathy."

Inordinate Empathy

Our ability to sense the well-being or distress of those around us as well as our ability to monitor the health of the spiritual atmosphere are God-given and built into our design.

... We naturally sense the well-being or distress of those around us.

... We naturally monitor the health of the spiritual atmosphere.

These are good abilities in themselves. My guess is that, as we mature, we learn to use our empathy to become one with others and our discernment to counter the enemy. But because of atmospheric sin and the presence of the evil one, what is good becomes twisted.

Here is how it works: the child is aware that he is at risk in his environment and, thus, he uses his empathic and discernment abilities to monitor how everyone is doing. In my childhood home, there was chaos and abuse. Imminent danger loomed. I automatically used my empathy and discernment to constantly scan the situation in order to plan how I was going to keep myself safe.

Here's what I tried to figure out: Who was unhappy? Who was angry? What was lurking in the atmosphere that wanted to get me? How should I respond? Should I hide? Run away? Disappear inside myself? Intervene in a fight? Cheer someone up? Resign myself to the inevitable?

My discernment and empathy circuits remained on high alert and that became normal to me. Only it is not normal to be anxiously scanning and planning for fear that something bad is about to happen.

... It became normal to constantly and anxiously scan and plan.

... Anxious monitoring is an attempt to keep yourself safe.

As an adult I found myself continuing this learned behavior even in safe environments. I honestly and deeply believed that I had to keep everyone happy in order to be safe. This made me a very anxious and controlling person. Of course, I had no idea why I acted the way I did. The reason was buried in my heart.

Now that is one response a child makes to a chaotic and dangerous environment. The child's empathy and discernment becomes seriously overdeveloped. The child cannot rest or mature because all of her energies are directed to maintaining her safety. This problem is one that I often see in prayer ministry.

There is another response that I rarely see in prayer ministry because people who respond in the following way are not as likely to seek prayer ministry or, if they do, they are more likely to give up quickly. These are the children who either turn off their discernment and empathy or turn the volume very low. It hurts too much to feel what other people feel; it is too frightening to discern atmospheric evil, so they just won't. As adults these people may become Christians but they cannot, will not, become corporate. They will not share another person's pain and burden. They cannot believe that spiritual realities may be discerned with the senses.

- ... Some children become overly empathic and discerning.
- ... Some children turn off their empathic and discernment abilities.

Either response is very satisfying to the enemy as it renders the person either vulnerable to being overwhelmed by spiritual realities and the need to manage the emotional well-being of other people or essentially deaf and blind to the same.

Prayer: Lord God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, forgive me for misusing the ability to empathize and discern. I ask You to restore that which has been broken and defiled. Forgive me for turning off these abilities in an effort to stop the hurting or turning them on high to protect myself. Please show me if I really do need to be spiritually and emotionally deaf and blind or on constant high alert to be safe.

Forgive me for believing that I have the power and the responsibility to manage myself, others and the environment at a time when I was so young and vulnerable. I break the promise I made to use these means to keep myself safe, and I send all evil helpers to the feet of Jesus for judgment.

Lord, if I have turned the volume of my empathy and discernment to maximum, please turn it down to the correct level. If I have turned it off or to low, please adjust the volume for me. Thank You. I praise You and I praise Your wonderful Son, Jesus Christ.