

Follow Practices: Love your neighbour

Love for our neighbour is one of the primary indicators of our spiritual health. The scriptures are clear that love for God and love for neighbour go hand in hand. As we seek to grow in doing what Jesus did, love for God and neighbour need to be at the centre, the driving force behind all our works. This Practice Sheet outlines a couple of keys ways we can grow in loving people. The key to each practice is the ability to be *fully present* with people.

PRACTICE 1 – MOVING FROM ‘I-IT’ TO ‘I-THOU’ RELATIONSHIPS¹

German Jewish theologian Martin Buber proposed that there are two distinct ways of being with a person:

- ‘I – it’ – where we view a person as an object or a means to an end
- ‘I-thou’ – where we view the person as a person, sacred and precious in God’s sight.

1. Example of ‘I-It’ relationship

Below is a list of five characteristics present in an ‘I-it’ relationship. Are any of these ever present in your dealings with people? Tick as appropriate. Think about, or share with others, examples where you recognise you have done this.

	<p>Distracted E.g. I maintain eye contact with someone when listening to them, but my mind is focused on what to say next or who else I need to talk to.</p>
	<p>Objectify E.g. I keep my headphones in when at the supermarket checkout, barely acknowledging the person serving me</p>
	<p>Judge E.g. I size up people based upon where they live, their level of education, what they do for a living, how they look.</p>
	<p>Monologue E.g. In a conversation I am much more interested and focused on what I want to say than what the person I’m in conversation with is saying. I tend to interrupt a lot or find a way of making the conversation about me.</p>
	<p>Guarded E.g. I am very careful about what I say or share with people which limits how well people can get to know me and how well I can get to know them. If I have a negative emotion in response to what someone has said to me, I will work very hard to hide it.</p>
	<p>Closed E.g. As soon as someone says something I disagree with, I close myself off or shut down the conversation. The idea that I might be wrong or have something to learn or need to change doesn’t even occur to me.</p>

2. Example of ‘I-Thou’ relationship

Below is a list of five characteristics present in an ‘I-Thou’ relationship. Which of these are present in your dealings with people? Tick as appropriate and ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow in these qualities.

	<p>Fully attentive E.g. I take care to really listen to what someone is saying to me, without interrupting or focusing on my response. I don’t look past them or around to see who else I need to talk to next.</p>
	<p>Value E.g. I make a point of saying hello to everyone I come across, no matter who they are or what they are doing.</p>
	<p>Accept E.g. I accept and welcome people as image bearers of God, even if they disagree or have different values than me. I take time to listen to their perspectives rather than just jumping in and telling them that they are wrong. (Note: Acceptance is not the same as affirmation – you can accept someone as an image bearer of God without affirming their beliefs, values or lifestyle).</p>
	<p>Dialogue</p>

¹ Adapted from Make Love the Measure of Maturity in Emotionally Healthy Discipleship, Peter Scazzero.

	E.g. I don't just speak at people, I speak with them, asking questions to find out more, exploring their experiences and perspectives, showing a curiosity that communicates value
	Vulnerable E.g. I offer insights or information about myself that is real and allow people to know things about me that don't always paint me in the best light. I allow myself to express real emotion in front of others.
	Open E.g. I am ok with difference of opinion. I don't assume I am always right but am open to listen and learn from others. If a conversation is making me uncomfortable or challenging my views, I acknowledge it and vocalise it, but don't run away from it.

PRACTICE 2 - INCARNATIONAL LISTENING	
	<p>Jesus entered our world through the incarnation. One of the ways we can love our neighbour is to grow in what is called 'incarnational listening.' To love our neighbour through listening we need to leave our 'world' and enter into theirs.</p> <p>Below is a simple practice to help you grow in incarnational listening.</p>
	<p>Step 1: In your small group or discipleship group, break off into pairs.</p> <p>Step 2: Decide who will speak first and who will listen first.</p> <p>Step 3: The listener asks: 'What is the biggest thing impacting you and how are you feeling about it?'</p> <p>Step 4: Allow 8-10 minutes for the speaker to respond.</p> <p>When you are the speaker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak using 'I' statements (talk about your thoughts, feelings, desires) • Keep your statements brief • Stop occasionally to let the listener paraphrase what you have said • Include feelings in your statements • Be respectful, honest and clear. <p>When you are the listener:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give the speaker your full attention (don't be thinking about what you will say when it is your turn) • Step into the speaker's shoes and try and feel what they are feeling • Pay attention to what is said verbally and non-verbally • Avoid judging or interpreting or interrupting • At key moments, reflect back or paraphrase as accurately as you can, what you have heard them say. • When you think they may be done, ask 'Is there more?' • When they are done, ask 'Of everything you have shared, what is the most important thing you want me to remember?' <p>Step 5: Swap roles and repeat</p> <p>Step 6: Discuss how you experienced being speaker and listener</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you find easier? • What was challenging? • How did you feel as speaker? Did you feel listened to?