



# Malvern Mashal 139



## Malvern Mashal 139 Attentive listening Growing in Empathy & Venting our Pain

There are two principal items in this week's sendout: the next section in our Patmos series, which I have entitled 'Venting our pain.' You can [Click here](#) to listen to it.

I have also explored a few thoughts about whether we respond empathetically, prophetically, or 'reactively' when people share particular needs with us. I have included a questionnaire as a tool to help us get some idea of how empathetic we are, and perhaps to kick start further thoughts on how we can grow in this important aspect of emotional intelligence.

It may lead to revisiting areas that will take courage to face, but which will make relationships and ministry both sweeter and more effective!

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### Reactive or Prophetic?

Have there been occasions when you have plucked up your courage to share something painful or personal with someone, only to find yourself obliged to listen to your companion reeling off all *their* experiences on that issue? How did this make you feel? Comforted by the comfort they have to share – or overwhelmed by them saying too much?

The Lord is very good at finding the right people for us to share with, and we have a responsibility as we share to listen to what they have

to say. However we need to 'sift' other people's stories to try to discern whether they are speaking 'prophetically' (in which case the parallels that we draw may well be just the thing we need to stir up our courage) or 'reactively,' as the result of our story triggering some association in their minds.

If they proceed to speak out the first thing that comes into their heads, it may actually be an indication that they are fundamentally self-centred and lacking in compassion. The real thing we are wanting is for them to listen attentively to what we are going through. Are they merely trying to fix our problem, or, worse, are they simply fixated on their own problems?

Compassion, attentive listening, and an ability to rise above our own concerns to show real empathy – these are the issues at stake here. After all, many claim that emotional intelligence and empathy rather than a high IQ are the vital qualities for success in life. There is growing evidence that increased social networking is making people more narcissistic rather than more caring.<sup>1</sup>

### A simple Questionnaire

As I prepared this message, several friends tried this **Empathy Quotient test** that came

<sup>1</sup> The following are not specifically Christian but provide useful background thoughts. [mindtools.com](http://mindtools.com) Cf [childparenting.about.com](http://childparenting.about.com) and [childparenting.about.com/socialdevelopment](http://childparenting.about.com/socialdevelopment)

across which helps us to determine how empathetic we are. It only takes a few minutes.

Since this can only give *our* assessment of ourselves, why not ask your a friend to complete it *for* you, and see if their opinion of you more or less tallies with your own!

Because the questionnaire only provides a composite score rather than a detailed breakdown, you might like to ask them then what you can do to become more empathetic.

When it comes to interjecting a snippet of our own experience into conversations with others, pray to select just the right one from our 'testimony pool' – not forgetting to think twice about the best time to introduce it.

The most important thing is that the person is trusting us enough to share their pain: our first call is to be good listeners and to stand with them in prayer, rather than leaping to come up with perfect solutions.

### **Venting our Pain**

All of us need a safe place to 'vent' our pain. Many people have come to us over the years because they do not want to run the risk of something being noised around their home town. Some matters are best dealt with locally (home matches) and others at a safe distance. Ros and I have often been there to help people play their away matches!

This week's sendout contains some starter thoughts on safely venting our emotions during difficult 'Patmos' times, and on how we can minister the Lord's compassion when someone comes to us in pain.

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)*

Once again, **the music is lovely**: a nocturne by Chopin, played for us by Jo Foot, and a Sicilienne played by Corinne, who is getting married again shortly, following her husband's

death many years ago. [Click here to listen to the music and the talk](#)

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