

How to Know A Person: The Art of Seeing others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen

by David Brooks

In the Spirit of cultivating understanding, compassion, healing, and reconciliation in our community life, I'd like to introduce you to a book by David Brooks called *How to Know A Person: The Art of Seeing others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen*. This book would be great for a congregational book study and would enhance your personal devotional time. Drawing from his own experience as well from the experiences of many other thinkers and writers, Brooks weaves together a collection of helpful insights into why it is so hard to get to know others and be known by others and offers some much-needed medicine for the divided and polarized nature of our community life.

Throughout the book, Brooks doesn't write as an expert on relationships or social skills. Instead, he writes as someone who has personally struggled with forming relationships and communicating with others and as one who has benefitted from working on these. The book takes on a tone of curiosity as it guides us through a conversation meant to help us all get better at the skills that make meaningful relationships and healthy communities.

One helpful framing that Brooks uses is that of *Illuminators* and *Diminishers*. As he describes, Illuminators care for others and help them feel "bigger, deeper, respected, and lit up." Diminishers, instead, make people feel small, ignored, and used. Throughout the book, I found myself reflecting on how I have been both an Illuminator and a Diminisher at times and felt encouraged to become more of an Illuminator for my friends, family, and community. We all want to feel known and respected, understood and valued. Maybe especially these days, we need more Illuminators in our shared life.

Another part of this conversation I found particularly interesting was an exploration on how our ancestors show up in our daily lives. That is, chapter 12 explores how the habits, cultures, and life experiences we inherit from those who lived before us influence our world views and everyday choices, often in unnoticed ways. I found this helpful for the way it invited a broader conversation around the issues of our time. Rather than polarize to our own camps, we are invited to explore why we believe what we do, who and what has been influential to us, and from where our values and worldview come. We are all a part of a much larger narrative than we realize. By framing a conversation in this way, exploring our differences could even be (dare I say it?!) FUN!

This book is good medicine for our time and easily ties in with Jesus's ministry. I think you and your congregation will enjoy working through it as you learn more about yourself and others.

Peace be with you.

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