

The background is a solid brown color with several thick, white, wavy lines that meander across the page, creating a sense of movement and organic form. The lines are irregular and fluid, resembling brushstrokes or natural patterns.

# **TOOLS FOR HEALTHY CONFLICT**

**RESONATE CHURCH**

# Tools for Healthy Conflict

## Rules of Conflict and When to Have a Mediator

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.[b] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling[c] the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Conflict brings floods and tsunamis of emotions. God is not blind to this. He is not unaware that his people will fight amongst themselves. Even in conflict, we should honor God by the way we approach one another. We engage in complicated conversations and strive for reconciliation. Here are some helpful rules as you engage in conflict with a fellow brother or sister in Christ.

Don't use Always and Never. "You always use that tone of voice with me. You never look at me when I am talking to you." People just stop listening to what you are saying because all they can think about is that they didn't do that one time.

Don't Interrupt. Easier said than done, but this one is as simple as it sounds. Let the other person finish talking before you respond.

Control Negative Body Language. This means no eye-rolling, deep sighs, arms folded across your chest, avoiding eye contact.

Control Your Tone of Voice. Don't raise your voice, and please, try to keep the dripping sarcasm to a minimum.

Try to Find Truth. Even if you believe you are 99% right and the other person is wrong, try to find the 1% of wrong that you have done in the situation, own it, and apologize for it.

Stonewalling. Don't end the conversation just because you are done. This can mean physically getting up and leaving or just shutting down and refusing to talk.

"Okay, but it still went bad. What do I do now?" Thankfully, Jesus addresses this in the Bible.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17

Jesus is clear. If that person doesn't respond well or both parties are having a hard time communicating with one another, bring in a third party. Here are some helpful tips to bring in a third party.

Don't bring your spouse in the same gender context, especially if one person is single. That feels like bullying to a single person, and your spouse may be too close if they have only heard your side and are hurt because you are hurting.

Bring in someone willing to be objective and helpful, not to point out the other person's flaws. What is valuable is a mutual friend who can understand both sides well and help push for clarity and understanding.

What you should not do is talk about your conflict with other people. Honoring that person does not look like gossip. If someone comes to you with a conflict, give them a time limit (24-48 hours) to go and talk to that friend. Pray for them, offer to help seek clarity, and remind them we are people who fill the gap with trust.

## Preparing for Hard Conversations by Climbing the Ladder of Integrity

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.  
Proverbs 10:9

You are hurt. You are mad. How do you even begin to approach someone who has done these things to you? Maybe you should keep quiet. Perhaps you should cut them off; however, as Christians, that is not a life of integrity or leads to forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus came to forgive the very ones who nailed on a tree, then we as his followers should strive to do the same to those who hurt us. This tool is called the ladder of integrity. The purpose is to help you discover what is going on inside you and give you a format to communicate clearly with the other person.

Individual Activity Materials:

Pen and paper to write down your answers

Suggested Time:

15-30 minutes plus a night to let your thoughts and feelings have the opportunity to be filtered by space and time.

Answer the following:

The situation that is on my mind right now is...

I am worried about talking about this because...

The reason I am involved in this is because...

A need I have in this situation is...

I feel...

My feelings show me that I...

This situation is important to me because...

I am willing to...

I am not willing to...

I could make the situation better by...

I really want you to know that...

My sharing this with you will be helpful because...

For our relationship in the future, I hope that...

Once you have walked through this, take a day. Pray, leave it at the feet of Jesus, then come back after space to walk through it all again. The point of the ladder of integrity is to help you live out of your values, not your reactions. Proverbs tell us that our hearts are deceitful, and we are to live that emulates Jesus, not moment by moment, feeling by feeling. Engaging hard conversations helps to create depth and reconciliation that points back to the one Jesus has established through his death and resurrection for us to the Father. Once you have processed the ladder, talk to the person you hurt and seek clarity, trust, and forgiveness as you vulnerably share your hurt out of your values and not your reactions.

## Checking Assumptions

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6

Often, our conflicts, distrust, and negative feelings towards one another come from the wrong assumptions we make. When we do this, we are not trusting the Lord but our broken perception of what is going on. Sometimes that perception is incredibly wrong, and we then start to assume the worst instead of the best of others. We can easily avoid this by naming such assumptions and checking them with one another. By doing this, we bring clarity to our relationships. We choose to seek our understanding and seek our truth and build trust by engaging in what can seem to be a difficult conversation. The Lord asks us to be those who seek clarity rather than clinging to our assumptions and stories as truth. The following exercises help us check assumptions and help speak out the stories we often tell ourselves based on hurt feelings instead of the truth.

Materials:

None needed

Suggested Time: 30 seconds - 5 minutes, depending on the person's answer

Follow these steps:

Reflect on something you suspect the other person thinks or feels but hasn't told you.

Ask: "Can I check an assumption I am making about you?"

Say: "I assume you are thinking...(fill in the blank). Am I right?"

Give the other person an opportunity to respond.

The Story I'm Making Up is...

Suggested Time:

30 seconds - 5 minutes, depending on the person's answer

Procedure:

Try this phrase in your relationships. When you find that you're having a line of thoughts that may or may not be accurate and you want to confront this in an unaggressive way, do the following:

Take a deep breath and find 10 seconds of kindness.

Say: "The story I'm making up..." and finish with a worry or a fear.

Then, say nothing. Wait for the person to respond. And have a (hopefully productive) dialogue.

## Circles of Responsibility

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and with the measure, you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Matthew 7:1-5

When we find ourselves to be in challenging situations that fuel conflict and negative feelings towards one another, it's much easier to blame another person, assume the worst of them, and shirk off our fault in the responsibility. However, God calls us to those who press into the Spirit, bearing the fruit of faithfulness. To be faithful means to trust in God that he will not be lazy on His part and that he is moving others to step up to be those who live with integrity. This exercise helps you figure out where there was a failing in you and the other person, help you surrender in the trust where you haven't yet, and bring clarity to where you need to step in to have a challenging conversation.

Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

5-10 minutes

Procedure:

Draw out the three circles of responsibility onto a piece of paper. Inside one circle, write "ME," inside the second write "THEM," and inside the third write "GOD." Take a few minutes to reflect on the situation that is bothering you.

Consider the following questions as you do that:

- What are you responsible for in this situation?
- What are you not responsible for in the situation?
- What are you trying to put in your circle that should not be there?
- Is there anything that the other person is trying to put in your circle that should not be there?
- Can you trust that God will bring the other person to conviction and change?
- If you are struggling to trust that God will do that, what can you do to change that?

## Boundaries

**\*\*If you are in a physically abusive relationship, this exercise is not intended for you. Please reach out to someone in your life immediately who can walk with you through your situation.**

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. John 16:7-11

Boundaries are vital to healthy living. John helps us see that boundaries come from the Lord by explaining the reality that Jesus and the Holy Spirit both fully God but live within the boundaries of who they are. The Holy Spirit can only come if Jesus returns to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is who convicts the world. Jesus saves the world. Both live perfectly within the boundaries of the Trinity, moving in sync with one another, fulfilling their part perfectly and fully. We should look to this and feel at peace about creating healthy boundaries. However, more often than not, we allow others to violate our boundaries, shrugging off anger, hurt or uncomfortable feelings when this happens. However, those feelings are warnings that someone has overstepped, causing damage. God has helped us by building us with such internal warning signs that help create such boundaries. Dr.'s Henry Cloud and Henry Townsend, in their book *Boundaries*, write this:

The concept of boundaries comes from the very nature of God. God defines himself as a distinct, separate being, and he is responsible for himself. He defines and takes responsibility for his personality by telling us what he thinks, feels, plans, allows, will not allow, likes, and dislikes...In addition, he has boundaries within the Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one, but at the same time, they are distinct people with their own boundaries. Each one has his own personhood and responsibilities, as well as a connection and love for one another (John 17:24, *Boundaries*, pg 35).

Boundaries are biblical, and God has made us be people who feel and think in specific ways to help us acknowledge when those boundaries have been crossed. It is okay to set healthy boundaries. The following exercise is for people to have the opportunity to reflect on unhealthy relationships in their life, and to consider how those relationships might change if boundaries were to be put in place. As a group, it allows others to speak into the situation and affirm whether boundaries are being crossed.



Materials:

A piece of paper and pen

Suggested Time:

20-30 minutes for individuals

Procedure:

Think about the relationships in your life and focus on 1-2 that you are currently unsatisfied with because you feel you cannot stand up for yourself to that person. Reflect on the following questions and write down your answers:

Do you feel like part of your real identity is lost in your relationship with this person?  
How so?

Do you feel like you can't say no to this person or that if you do, it is ignored? Write a specific example of this.

Do you feel like your thoughts and opinions are not respected by this person? Write a specific example of this.

Do you often feel defeated after interacting with this person? Write a specific example of this.

What would/do other people think if they were to watch your interactions with this person?

Imagine you had a 3-minute surge of courage. You can say whatever you want to this person, and there will be no consequences. Write down what you would say.

Write a list of the specific things that this person does that violates or disrespects you as a person. Leave a few blank lines of space after you write each item.

Think of one thing that you could do or say in response to each item you just wrote that could demonstrate that you are not okay with how the person is treating you. These are potential boundaries.

Commit to setting some of these boundaries in your subsequent interactions with the person.

\* These exercises were taken from a compilation of different resources. Here is a list of the books referenced:

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality by Peter Scazzero

Rising Strong by Brené Brown

Boundaries by Henry Cloud and John Sims Townsend

