

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Having a difficult conversation may be scarier than facing a giant. Look at the life of David the King. While he was “a man after God’s own heart” and fearless in battle, he dropped the ball when it came to addressing problems in relationship.

Speaking up helps us grow up:

“...speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.” - Ephesians 4:15,16,25

God is clear:

“Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” - Leviticus 19:17,18

When you know you need to have a difficult conversation, these steps will help:

- **Pray** (out loud if possible). Tell God what is up for you.
- **Write out your feelings** in a letter to God or to the person(s) involved. This first, unedited letter is only for your eyes, to get everything out where you can see it. Be sure you process your fears, frustrations and other negative feelings (sadness, anger, hurt, disappointment, regret, shame, embarrassment, anxiety, confusion, loneliness, abandonment, betrayal, remorse).
- Identify why you care about the persons involved or the situation. This helps you and others understand the depth of your feelings. Write down why you care. This may also help **clarify what is at stake**. How would you feel if you lost the relationship or the issues were never resolved?
- Now write a letter to the person(s) involved. If you wrote one previously, go back and edit it, as it may be raw or rough. Try to be clear and concise. Stick with “I” statements. Avoid judgments. What do you need for them to hear from you?
- **Write down the outcome you wish for** as a result of the conversation. What do you need from the other person?

Sometimes we just need to be heard. Telling the person up front what you need can sometimes make them far less defensive.

- Try to **imagine the best** outcome to the conversation. Imagine yourself being calm and clear. See the other person responding to you with openness and compassion. If you can't imagine it, you can't really pray for it!
- If you really wish to be prepared, write out how you would want the conversation to go. Write a script. This will help clarify what you will say and what you wish to hear.
- Now **prepare for the worst**-case scenario. How bad could it get? In many cases, the stakes are high. It could go very badly, and you must consider the risk. In some cases, the relationship could end.

As you would if contemplating a surgery, you must face the fact that you could die, no matter how small the risk. When we face our biggest fears, other things come into perspective. Esther did this when contemplating a difficult conversation with the king. After agonizing about it, she said, "If I perish, I perish." She knew what she had to do.

If we cannot bear to face our fears, we will back away from difficult conversations. I often say, "If you won't risk it, you can't right it."
- Remember that having the conversation means dying to your fears and your pride. Death to self is what the life of faith is all about.
- Be sure you **write down the one or two things that you most want to communicate**. This will help you stay focused on your purpose and not get derailed by unanticipated rebuttals.
- Ask someone to review the letter you wrote and give you feedback about its content and tone. Does it have the impact you desire?
- Finally, **pray for discernment about your approach**. Should it be by letter or in person? You may decide to send the letter you wrote, or you may simply use it as a springboard for a conversation. Also **pray about timing**. Don't do anything until you have some peace or assurance about your course of action. Godly counsel is always a plus.

Some of us balk at the preparation time and energy required for having a difficult conversation well, but many will invest countless hours preparing for something of far lesser import, like running a marathon. Relationships are made or broken, and eternal destinies are altered on the basis of some difficult conversations. Your battle is not against flesh and blood. These conversations are spiritual battles and deserve adequate preparation!

God bless you in all your difficult conversations!

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

- I John 1:7