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BUILDING HEALTHY  
RELATIONSHIPS

# *Loving Others Well*

Building Relationship Skills for Supportive Friendships

## **MODULE A**

### **Building Healthy Relationships**

*My Neighbor to Love Coalition* & *Lighthouse Beginnings*

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## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

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# 1.1

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## TEMPERAMENTS

You can improve your relationships  
once you better understand  
yourself and others.

# TEMPERAMENTS

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In this lesson you will:

- Learn the differences between temperament and personality
- Discover how to identify your own temperament and the temperament of others
- Recognize strengths and weaknesses in each temperament type
- Find ways to improve your relationships and reduce conflict

## TEMPERAMENTS

### Who am I? Who are You?

None of us were meant to live alone and be isolated. We were designed for relationship. Whether our relationships are a source of joy and comfort, or cause us pain and stress is largely up to us. We can all learn the skills for healthier, happier and more satisfying relationships. Our ability to learn relationship skills will be enhanced by understanding the difference between temperament and personality, and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of our own temperament. The following story of Taylor and Jamie illustrates the impact of temperament and personality on relationships.

### The Story of Taylor and Jamie

Taylor and Jamie met through their friends who thought they would get along. Taylor was immediately impressed by Jamie's calm and peaceful nature. She was the kind of person who was easy to be around. Jamie liked that Taylor was confident and accomplished. They got married and everything felt perfect for a while, but soon Taylor noticed Jamie seemed lazy and unmotivated. Jamie, on the other hand, became annoyed by Taylor's demands and bossiness. The qualities that brought them together now seemed like annoying weaknesses. Their relationship followed the pattern of "opposites attract, then attack." At first they appreciated one another, and then they became more frustrated with each other and both wondered . . .

**“What’s wrong with you? Why can’t you be more like me?”**

This kind of situation happens frequently in relationships because we are more comfortable in our own style. At first, we appreciate the differences in others, but eventually we start wishing they were more like us. We may even try to change the other person. We might point out what we think are their "flaws," criticize or nag them, or make them feel ashamed, hoping they will change. But it doesn't work. Each of us has a motivational style that many people believe is given at birth. These traits are known as our temperament. When we understand these traits and how they affect us and our approach to life, we can learn to manage them. More importantly, when we understand ourselves and the other person, we have a better chance of bringing out the best in both of us instead of the worst.

### What is the Difference Between Temperament and Personality?

Temperament and personality are often used interchangeably, as if they are the same thing. **Temperament** refers to the traits you are born with and, for the most part, it is not something you change. These traits are natural to you and they influence how you see the world and what motivates you. While you can develop traits from other temperaments - it's good to have a balance- generally you feel most comfortable with your own type.

On the other hand, personality refers to your consistent behavior - how you generally are. Your behavior, which is an expression of your character, can change. The natural sequence looks like this:

### **Belief -Attitude -Behavior -Character**

What you believe about your experiences will affect your thoughts and attitudes. Your thoughts, attitudes, and feelings will, in turn, affect how you behave. When your responses to situations happen over and over again, it creates your character or personality. All of that can change by being willing to examine what you believe about your circumstances and the people involved, and reconsider your conclusions. Our perceptions aren't always accurate and what we believe may not always be true. Our behavior will reflect that. Being curious and getting more information can affect your attitude, your emotions and can change your behavior. Although temperament has an impact on your personality; your experiences, good or bad, and your values affect your personality and create the potential for change.

### **A Closer Look at Temperament**

Over 2000 years ago, there was a Greek doctor named Hippocrates who is known as the Father of Medicine. He noticed people had certain traits he put into 4 categories. He saw that people usually had one main motivational style and another secondary style. Since people were a mix of two styles, this was called "temperament," which means "to mix" in

Latin. After that, many tests were made to help people understand themselves better. Some of these tests are DISC, Myers-Briggs, Kiersey-Bates, and others. The results of these tests usually divide people into the same four groups. Some groups are identified by letters, while others use numbers or colors.

In the 90's, Larry Bilotta changed the original names of Hippocrates temperament types into more modernized terms and described them as countries. Just like people from different countries have different languages and cultures, each of these "countries" - Control, Fun, Perfect, and Peace - has its own language and ways of doing things. Based on those terms, Bilotta developed his own temperament test called the Flag Page. Each person will have a favorite preferred country and a secondary country so let's dive in and get to know these countries. See if you can identify yourself in any of these descriptions - both the strengths and the weaknesses.

### **Welcome to Control Country**

People from Control Country love to be in charge and take the lead. They want to accomplish tasks and goals. They are good at being leaders, taking action, setting goals, and being confident and independent. Sometimes, they focus so much on their goals that they don't think about how they treat others. They might interrupt others or talk too much without listening. They can also be abrupt and intense. Even though they seem like they don't need anything, they actually need to

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: TEMPERAMENTS

be appreciated. If they don't feel appreciated, they can become sad. They might try to find appreciation from others if they don't get it from the people closest to them.



When they are at their best, they can be born leaders, quick to take action and set goals, having confidence and being bold and independent. If people from Control Country don't feel appreciated, they can act bossy, impatient, angered, demanding, and like they know everything.

### Let's Visit Fun Country

People from Fun Country love to smile and laugh. They can find humor in almost anything and even laugh at themselves. They like to get noticed and receive attention, but they mostly just love to have fun. They'll have an embarrassing moment and share it with anybody because it's a funny story, while other temperaments wouldn't want to reveal their embarrassment to other people. They love adventure and they enjoy being around people. They're usually very friendly and very faithful.

People may see them as unstable because fun country people can have extreme emotions. But overall, if you value and respect them for who they are, and give them the attention that they need, they

will be inspiring, optimistic, sincere and the life of the party. When their need to be noticed, understood and validated is not met, they can be at their worst - irresponsible, impulsive; getting easily distracted and talking too much.



### On to Perfect Country

What's most important for people from Perfect Country is "getting it right." They are good at paying attention to details and they want things to be perfect and exact. They like things to be organized and structured, and sometimes they use a lot of words to say very little.

People often mistake them for being from Control Country, which can upset a Perfect Country person. They don't want to control things - they just want things to be done a certain way. They want to make sure things are done "correctly."

They have a desire to make things better and as perfect as possible, even when it comes to people. If a Perfect Country person loves you, they are going to want to improve you. They might point out things that you can do better or call attention to some of your flaws. For the person on the receiving end, it can feel like they're being criticized when the intent of the Perfect Country person is actually caring.



Because others may think a Perfect Country person is being critical or mean, they may respond in kind by being mean back or treating the Perfect Country person roughly. However, Perfect Country is the most creative and sensitive personality type. They are the people that can get deeply hurt and have a hard time letting go of those hurts. Forgiving others can be difficult for them because their hearts are so open and sensitive. They take things to heart, and when they get hurt too much, they start thinking that they will never be good enough.

They often are very self-sacrificing and faithful friends. When people from Perfect Country feel understood and valued, they are creative, organized, thoughtful, idealistic, loyal, determined, and caring. When they are at their worst or misunderstood, they can set standards way too high, spend too much time planning, become moody and sad remembering the bad things, and feel unsure of themselves. One of the challenges unique to people from Perfect Country is a tendency to turn their desire for perfection onto themselves when they are wounded and have a lot of hurt. They become “damaged perfect” with unrealistic expectations for themselves that can be self-abusive.

### Final Stop: Peace Country

People from Peace Country just want everyone to get along so that they can have a peaceful life without conflicts. They are relaxed and calm, and they are okay with having moments of silence in conversations. Peace Country people also like to cooperate and follow the rules, which can sometimes make them get pushed around by people from other countries. Control Country people want them to be more productive, Fun Country people want them to be more excited about life, and Perfect Country people want to show them how to be better.

People in Peace Country will go along with things as long as they are not pushed too far. If they feel insulted or not respected for who they are, they will back away.

Peace Country people understand the idea of working smarter, not harder because they like to be efficient and use as little energy as possible to get things done. They can surprise people with a witty sense of humor but they can also use that same humor to be cutting and sarcastic to other people.

Peace Country people are usually calm and easy to get along with, but it can be difficult for them to achieve peace because they try to avoid conflict at all costs. Sometimes, people need to resolve conflicts in order to find peace, and this can be challenging for Peace Country people.

When they are at their best, they are

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: TEMPERAMENTS

good listeners, patient, funny, capable, patient, and easygoing. However, if they are not respected, they can become unmotivated, stubborn, fearful, shy, worried, and indecisive.



Each of these temperament styles has its own strengths and weaknesses. Understanding them enables us to be better at speaking the other person's language and working with them. This improves our relationships and reduces conflict.

### Resolving Conflicts

If we don't try to understand where somebody is coming from, conflicts can easily start. Consider the example of a fight between Taylor and Jamie that happens every weekend when they are not working.

On the surface, it appears they are fighting because Jamie doesn't help out enough around the house. Jamie is from Peace Country. She's thinking, "I've worked all week; I just wanna chill. Just gonna watch some TV and relax." Taylor, on the other hand, is from Control Country.

Taylor's thinking, "It's the weekend; we've worked all week at our jobs and now it's time to get some projects done. Let's get some things done at home."

Do you see how this can become a constant fight? Taylor's perspective is, "I'm doing everything around here. Jamie is so lazy not pitching in. This is really unfair." This leads to feelings of anger and rejection.

Jamie is looking at Taylor and thinking, "Can't you just chill out? Why do we always have to be working? Can't we just relax once in a while?" To solve the fight, they each need to understand their own temperament and respect the differences between their motivational styles. For example, Taylor (Control Country) could acknowledge liking to get things done and recognize that's not the only way. Seeing from Jamie's viewpoint, Taylor could go to Jamie and say, "You know, I understand that you work hard and you want some time off on the weekends just to relax, and I get that. I love that about you - that you're a calm and peaceful person. But I'm also feeling like I'm carrying the weight of getting everything done so let's compromise. Let's work half the day and take the other half to relax."

Jamie could understand Taylor, as a Control Country person, really needs to be appreciated. Jamie could go to Taylor and say, "I really appreciate all the things that you do around here. You work so hard and keep things going for us but sometimes it's too much for me. Projects and working all the time is a lot and I need some time to relax. How about we divide the weekend? Maybe work one day or the mornings, and then relax the rest of the time." Letting your approach be guided by an understanding of how each other is wired and accepting those

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: TEMPERAMENTS

differences will reduce conflict. You will be able to get along better and enjoy the other person so much more.

A good way to handle any fight is to first stop and try to see things from the other person's point of view. Really listen and try to understand what might be going on underneath. Second, acknowledge what the other person is saying; validate their feelings. This doesn't mean you agree, but it means you can understand why they might think that way. When the other person feels understood, they are going to be more open to hearing your side and how you view things.

### Practicing the Languages

It's important to know what motivates other people so we can relate to them better. Let's be honest: We all like our own ways of doing things and can sometimes judge others who are different from us. Understanding and appreciating our differences will make for happier and

person will work to develop the strengths from all of the types and not make excuses like, "This is just how I am." At our core, what we all want is to be fully known, loved, and accepted.



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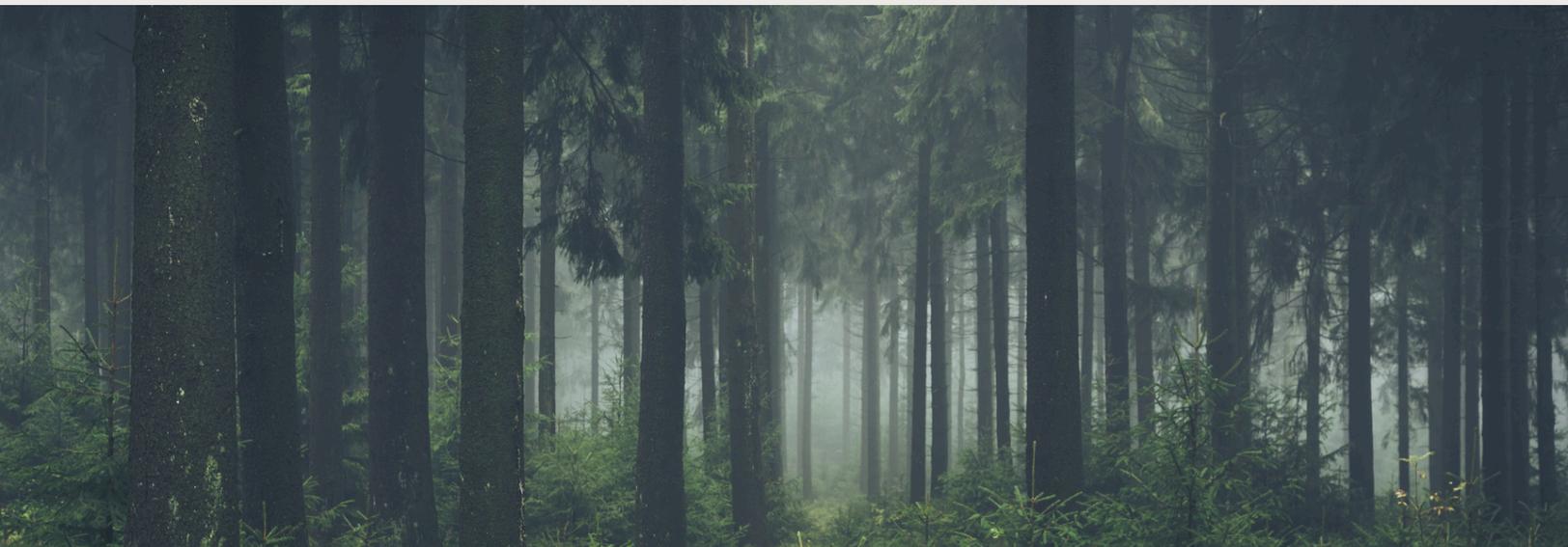
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To be loved but not known is comforting  
but superficial.

To be known and not loved is our greatest fear.  
But to be fully known and truly loved is, well,  
a lot like being loved by God.

— *TIMOTHY KELLER* —

## DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Which two temperament types best describe you?
2. What “country” traits do you recognize in people you know?
3. What traits from each country do you most appreciate and what traits are more difficult for you?
4. Will understanding temperament differences change the way you treat others?
5. What do people tend to misunderstand about you?
6. Are there areas of your personality you would like to change? What beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors would need to be different?
7. What experiences can you identify that have influenced your beliefs, attitudes or feelings, and your behavior?
8. If you want to convince some friends to take a trip with you, depending on what temperament style they have, what words would you use?

## PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, OR MORE TO CONSIDER

1. Think of a situation where people with differing temperaments need to work together (a job, project, etc.).  
*In what ways might each one be helpful and contribute?*  
*What could be some potential challenges?*
  
2. Think about a conflict you have had with someone. Discuss or act out how the conflict might have gone if you had used some of the skills presented, such as:
  - First listen and listen more, instead of trying to get the other person to hear your point of view
  - Look for other hidden hurts or misunderstandings that may be fueling the conflict
  - Try to understand the other person's viewpoint
  - Validate them - even if you don't necessarily agree
  - Express your viewpoint or needs

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: TEMPERAMENTS

### WHAT IS YOUR TEMPERAMENT TYPE COMBINATION?

Below are columns with descriptive words. Decide if that word describes you and put a scoring number by it. Be completely honest and don't answer how you **want** to be. Think about what comes naturally to you. Even though some words are flattering and some are unflattering - be as honest as you can.

Cross out or put a 0 by words that are **not at all like me** or **usually not like me**.  
3 = **That is usually me**      4 = **That is mostly me**      5 = **That is definitely me**

#### Column 1

- \_\_\_ Determined
- \_\_\_ Goal-oriented
- \_\_\_ Decisive
- \_\_\_ Outgoing
- \_\_\_ Domineering
- \_\_\_ Competitive
- \_\_\_ Likes to get the job done
- \_\_\_ Strong-willed
- \_\_\_ Persuasive
- \_\_\_ Outspoken
- \_\_\_ Practical
- \_\_\_ Bossy
- \_\_\_ Resourceful
- \_\_\_ Bold
- \_\_\_ Leader
- \_\_\_ Hot-tempered
- \_\_\_ Self-confident
- \_\_\_ Workaholic
- \_\_\_ Daring
- \_\_\_ Adventurous
- \_\_\_ Domineering
- \_\_\_ Productive
- \_\_\_ Persevering
- \_\_\_ Self-sufficient
- \_\_\_ Insensitive
- \_\_\_ Quick to act
- \_\_\_ **TOTAL**

#### Column 2

- \_\_\_ Funny
- \_\_\_ Emotional
- \_\_\_ Impulsive
- \_\_\_ Outgoing
- \_\_\_ Spontaneous
- \_\_\_ Talkative
- \_\_\_ Forgetful
- \_\_\_ Popular
- \_\_\_ Disorganized
- \_\_\_ Lives in the present
- \_\_\_ Has difficulty with appointments
- \_\_\_ Impractical
- \_\_\_ Easily angered
- \_\_\_ Cheerful
- \_\_\_ Undisciplined
- \_\_\_ Friendly/sociable
- \_\_\_ Interrupts others
- \_\_\_ Compassionate
- \_\_\_ Easily discouraged
- \_\_\_ Likes to play / have fun
- \_\_\_ Restless
- \_\_\_ Sincere
- \_\_\_ Weak-willed
- \_\_\_ Extroverted
- \_\_\_ Very positive
- \_\_\_ Inspirational
- \_\_\_ **TOTAL**

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: TEMPERAMENTS

### Column 3

- Idealist
- Deep-feeling
- Pessimistic
- Loner
- Self-sacrificing
- Introspective
- Planner
- Perfectionist
- Analytical
- Faithful
- Suspicious
- Scheduled
- Creative
- Orderly
- Moody
- Detailed
- Gifted
- Considerate
- Hard to please
- Sensitive
- Indecisive
- Insecure
- Has high standards
- Critical
- Persistent
- Caring
- TOTAL**

### Column 4

- Adaptable
- Easygoing
- Selfish
- Efficient
- Spectator of life
- Calm
- Unenthusiastic
- Good listener
- Worrier
- Patient
- Competent
- Consistent
- Lazy
- Teases others
- Content
- Stubborn
- Non-aggressive
- Has regular daily habits
- Indecisive
- Stingy
- Witty / dry humor
- Pleasant
- Shy
- Negative
- Submissive
- Resists change
- TOTAL**

Add up each column. The column with the highest score is your primary temperament and the column with the next highest score is your secondary temperament. Everyone is a blend of the temperaments, but people usually have two that are most like themselves.

Read on to learn more about each pair.

## WHICH “COUNTRY” AM I FROM?

Column 1 - Control Country

Column 3 - Perfect Country

Column 2 - Fun Country

Column 4 - Peace Country

### Temperament combinations and descriptions:

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**Control - Fun:** These people love to stay active. They are productive and purposeful. They are also good at selling things and promoting them. Control-Fun people can motivate others and they enjoy a challenge. Sometimes they seem fearless. They can make even the toughest people like them and they are very good at talking to others. People always notice them when they are around. They are good at leading and getting things done, and other people like to follow them.

Sometimes they can be mean and have a quick temper. They often ask other people to finish something they started because they have a hard time focusing on one thing for a long time. They can also use or take advantage of other people to achieve their goals.

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**Control - Perfect:** This combination makes for leaders you can count on to do a great job. They are very focused on their goals, hardworking, and capable. They can be competitive and forceful in what they do. They often succeed in any kind of business they try. They have a quick and smart mind, are great at researching, and can make decisions easily.

Weaknesses can include a tendency to act bossy. This type is the most determined and their quick thinking and sarcasm can really hurt others. They may have irregular and long work habits. They can hold onto anger and unfriendliness and may have trouble getting along with others. As a parent, this type can be very strict and hard to make happy.

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**Control - Peace:** This type of person is quick and active, but also calm and cool. They take their time and don't rush into things. People like working for them because they are organized and know where they are going. They can help others use their skills without making them feel used. They rarely offend others. They are often great administrators in any job.

However, they have weaknesses too. They tend to hold onto resentment and bitterness. They may say mean things disguised as jokes, so it's hard to tell if they are making fun of someone or not. They can be very stubborn and once they make up their mind, it's hard to change it.

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: TEMPERAMENTS

They also have a hard time admitting their mistakes. Sometimes, their worrying side stops them from taking risks and reaching their full potential.

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**Fun - Control:** This type of temperament is very outgoing. They are happy, like being around people, and are enthusiastic. They are also organized and get things done. This type of person will do well in jobs that involve working with people, as long as the job is exciting, has variety, and involves activity. They have leadership skills that make people enjoy working for them.

People with a Fun-Control temperament are often talkative and have strong opinions. They say what they think without knowing all the facts, which can sometimes get them into trouble. They are the fun and popular person at parties, but when they feel threatened, they can become insecure and annoying. Other weaknesses include getting angry easily and trying to find reasons to justify their actions.

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**Fun - Perfect:** This type of person experiences a wide range of emotions. They can go from laughing one moment to crying the next. They genuinely feel the happiness and sadness of others. They are good with people and can make a positive impact on their lives. They can succeed in many different fields, especially public speaking, acting, music, and fine arts. They are dreamers, but they need to be careful not to let negative thoughts stop them from reaching their full potential.

One weakness of Fun-Perfect people is that they tend to be fearful and get angry easily. They can be hard on themselves if they don't meet their high standards. They want others to admire them, which motivates them to keep doing well, but it can also make them feel insecure and afraid. They need to be careful about criticizing others, as it can push people away. They also struggle internally as their two sides compete against each other.

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**Fun - Peace:** These people are very easy to get along with and are very lovable. They are generally happy, have a good sense of humor, and are carefree. They rarely get upset and always see the positive side of things. Fun-Peace people love to tell jokes and stories. They enjoy helping others and are great at sales. They are naturally family-oriented and are loved by their children and others. They would never intentionally hurt someone.

The weaknesses of Fun-Peace people are that they lack motivation and discipline. They would rather socialize than work. They also tend to not take serious situations seriously and make jokes about them.

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## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: TEMPERAMENTS

**Perfect - Control:** This combination of temperaments combines the mood swings of the "Perfect" side with the determination and self-will of the "Control" side. People with this temperament have strong leadership skills and strive for perfection in everything they do. They are capable of excelling in any job and can efficiently run their own business.

However, Perfect-Control individuals need to be careful not to let negativity affect them. Although they don't stay in a negative or depressed mood for long, they can easily slip into one and become difficult to be around. Their mood is influenced by their thoughts. They can be hard to please and rarely feel satisfied themselves. They may exhibit behaviors such as self-persecution, hostility, nit-picking, and criticism. They are known for getting angry and verbally criticizing others for their failures or mistakes.

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**Perfect - Fun:** This combination often produces individuals who are gifted and capable. They may have an inclination towards music or art and are usually good students. They can also make excellent teachers. The Perfect side of their temperament allows them to notice small details, while the Fun side makes them great communicators. They are very emotional and have a deep capacity to connect with God. They are willing to sacrifice themselves to help others.

However, if they feel hurt or misunderstood, they can become unreasonably critical of themselves and others. The Perfect-Fun combination is the most conflicted of all the types, as the two sides don't always blend well. When the Fun side dominates, the Perfect side wants to tone it down, and vice versa. They struggle to cooperate if they don't believe something is right and can be too idealistic and impractical.

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**Perfect - Peace:** These individuals are often great scholars and hard workers. They get along well with others and have a kind and caring nature. They prefer a quiet and solitary life. They excel in analytical thinking and strive for perfection in an organized manner. Their families love them for their discipline and dedication.

However, this combination is susceptible to anxiety, fear, and negative self-image. Because they are conscientious and agreeable, they can be easily influenced by others to take on commitments that drain their energy and creativity. If they get caught up in these pressures, they may lose sight of their own well-being. If someone focuses too much on helping others, they might forget about their own family. Even though they are usually calm and peaceful, they can sometimes seek revenge.

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## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: TEMPERAMENTS

**Peace - Control:** This type of temperament is the most active among all the Peace Country combinations, but they are not overly energetic. They could become skilled counselors because they are good listeners, they don't interrupt, and they are interested in people. Although they don't usually offer their help to others, they act very professionally when people come to their organized space. Their advice is usually practical and helpful, and they make people feel comfortable and safe with their gentle manner.

Their weaknesses are not very obvious, but they become apparent in their lack of motivation and tendency to be afraid. This type can be very stubborn and inflexible. Instead of getting angry at others, they choose not to cooperate. This type is at risk of becoming more self-indulgent and passive, which can lead to a boring life for themselves and their families.

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**Peace - Fun:** This group of people is very easy to get along with. They are happy, cooperative, thoughtful, and like being around others. They are also dependable, like to have fun, and have a good sense of humor. This type of person rarely acts in a mean or aggressive way. They usually feel satisfied with their families, love their spouse and children, and enjoy a calm and peaceful life.

The weaknesses of Peace-Fun people may not be obvious unless you live with them. They can struggle with discipline and not reach their full potential. They might pass up opportunities or give up on things that require "too much effort". This type of person can become afraid, insecure, and shy. They might put up a wall to protect themselves and avoid getting involved in activities that demand a lot from them.

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**Peace - Perfect:** These are calm, kind, and polite individuals who rarely, if ever, become angry or unfriendly. They are reliable and do not cause embarrassment for themselves or others. They behave appropriately and dress modestly. They are usually tidy and organized in their work and are generally nice and helpful. They can handle pressure well, but they need external motivation to do so (they are usually not motivated from within).

Peace-Perfect people avoid getting too involved in anything. They are not motivated from within and resist taking on more responsibility than they believe they can handle. They can become afraid, selfish, and have a negative view of themselves. As parents, they may lack the discipline needed to teach and prepare their children for life.

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## REFERENCES

Larry Bilotta is an author and speaker, specializing in relationships and marriages. He developed the Flag Page temperament test.  
<https://larrybilotta.com> <https://youcansavethismarriage.com/>

Mark Gungor developed his "Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage" seminar in the early 2000s. His innovative program challenged traditional approaches to relationship counseling by incorporating humor and lightheartedness into discussions about serious topics.  
<https://markgungor.com>

Timothy LaHaye graduated with a Doctor of Ministry degree and a Doctor of Literature degree. He served a congregation in Minneapolis until 1956, then became the pastor of the Scott Memorial Baptist Church in El Cajon, California for 25 years. He wrote over 50 non-fiction books and co-authored 25 fiction books on subjects such as family life, temperaments, and Bible prophecy. He died days after he had a stroke on July 25, 2016, at the age of 90.

# Christ-Centered Corner

## *Encouragement From a Christian Perspective*

Christians believe God made each person special and unique. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship (a work of art), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” God also gave us specific traits that affect how we act and get along with others.

*Psalm 139: 13 - 14: “For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works.”*

The Bible talks about human nature and how His people should try to act. We should grow in qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23) These traits are gifts from God.

We should understand and use our temperament traits to help others and please God. Some traits are easier or harder to show, depending on your temperament. We all have weaknesses, and God wants us to allow the Holy Spirit to change us to become more like Christ. In Romans 12:2 it says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

When we accept Jesus Christ’s sacrifice for us and become a Christian, that doesn’t mean we behave perfectly, though some people think we should. We still have struggles and people mature at different speeds. Some Christians represent Jesus very badly by the way they act. The important thing is to keep growing and allow yourself to be changed.

We also learn from the Bible to be humble and have empathy. We need to learn how to understand and get along with people who have different temperament styles. Instead of judging or trying to change someone, focus on accepting, appreciating, and understanding the different ways God made people.

# 1.2

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## COMPASSION

Compassion is love in action.  
It comes in a variety of forms and holds  
the capacity to truly change the world.

# COMPASSION

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In this lesson you will:

- Learn the difference between compassion and empathy
- Identify and explore the three basic components of compassion
- Learn to recognize compassion fatigue

# COMPASSION

## Compassion is Love in Action

You may have experienced love in action when someone showed up with a delicious meal after the death of a loved one. Or maybe it was during a time you were hospitalized and someone cleaned your house. Perhaps someone simply came and was present for you without judgment or advice when you were feeling lonely and isolated.

*Reflect on a time when someone extended compassion to you.*

*How did that experience make you feel?*

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*(Group work: Share experiences and the feelings evoked)*

Compassion comes in a variety of forms. When we experience compassion, we may not recall the exact action of another person, but we will rarely forget how it made us feel.

## Compassion Has the Capacity to Change the World

Years ago, anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture.

Mead's answer was a femur (thigh bone) that had been broken and then healed. She went on to explain that in the animal kingdom if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink, or hunt for food. You are meat for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal. "A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery. "

**"Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts."**

- Mead

## Compassion vs. Empathy

The words compassion and empathy are often used interchangeably. Empathy and compassion arise from a similar desire - to understand what another person is experiencing. Both are valuable traits to possess. Yet, empathy and compassion have slightly different connotations. It is valuable to recognize the difference between the two.

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: COMPASSION

Compassion is an empathic understanding of a person's feelings, accompanied by altruism, or a desire to act on that person's behalf (Psychology Today). Dr. Jacinta Jimenez clarifies, "Compassion is when you relate to someone's situation, and you want to help them. You see someone in trouble and you feel like pitching in."

Compassion always includes an action - the attempt to alleviate one's suffering - and it requires engagement. A person choosing compassion takes thoughtful and carefully chosen actions in the situation.

**"Wisdom without compassion is ruthless and compassion without wisdom is folly."**

- Kofman

Empathy, in contrast, is defined as, "Our feeling of awareness toward other people's emotions and an attempt to understand how they feel."

Barbara Kingsolver defines empathy as "The capacity to understand that every war is both won and lost," and that "someone else's pain is as meaningful as your own." An empathetic person understands that it hurts to be made fun of, to be rejected, or to be ignored.

Empathy means that you are able to see what you and the other person hold in common. You are fellow companions on life's journey.

Empathy does not require that you engage with the person. You can be

physically distant from a person who is grieving and attempt to understand how he or she feels. You can sense that this is a difficult or painful experience. You can have an awareness of the situation but you don't involve yourself with the individual. You don't seek to offer anything to lessen his or her pain.

Example:

*You see an individual leaving the grocery store and her bag breaks. Groceries litter the ground.*

Empathetic response:

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Compassionate response:

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How was the person whose bag broke impacted by each response?

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Both individuals acknowledge the situation, but their responses are entirely different. The compassionate person instinctively desires to make the situation better for the person.

Neither the empathetic person nor the compassionate person's day is significantly transformed by the experience, but the woman whose bag broke was positively impacted by the

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: COMPASSION

compassionate person. More than likely, she was completely unaware of the empathetic person.

Empathy has its place. It is helpful to cultivate empathy, but it is compassion that will lead you to deeper engagement with others.

### Showing Compassion

Exhibiting compassion is not natural for everyone, and some individuals may find extending compassion challenging. It is a quality that can be cultivated in the same way we learn other skills.

Three basic components are critical to compassion:

#### 1. You need to show up for those who are hurting.

To extend genuine compassion, you must be willing to engage in the messes and muck of life. Compassion shows up when the wheels of life have fallen off.

It requires being observant and recognizing when a person needs help. Do you know someone who is in a challenging situation that he or she is unable to change by him or herself? Compassion says, "I care enough about you to be present in this situation." All too often when someone is suffering, people stay away. It is easy to say, "I didn't know what to do," or "I didn't want to say the wrong thing." And so we do absolutely nothing. Compassion says, "I'm willing to get in there."

Who do you know that is hurting? Who do you know that may need some encouragement? Who do you know that could use a helping hand? In other words, go where the hurt is.

A word of caution:

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"Today was a Difficult Day," said Pooh. There was a pause.

"Do you want to talk about it?" asked Piglet.

"No," said Pooh after a bit. "No, I don't think I do."

"That's okay," said Piglet, and he came and sat beside his friend.

"What are you doing?" asked Pooh.

"Nothing, really," said Piglet. "Only, I know what Difficult Days are like. I quite often don't feel like talking about it on my Difficult Days either. But goodness," continued Piglet, "Difficult Days are so much easier when you know you've got someone there for you. And I'll always be here for you, Pooh."

And as Pooh sat there, working through in his head his Difficult Day, while the solid, reliable Piglet sat next to him quietly, swinging his little legs... he thought that his best friend had never been more right.

**2. The second key ingredient of compassion is listening.**

Let your motto be, “To love is to listen.” To listen means you don’t simply hear the words another person speaks; you genuinely listen to his or her heart. You read their body language and pay attention to their tone of voice. You squelch your desire to speak and instead honor what is being shared with you. You must be willing to be fully present for others. Compassion requires allowing silence and space so that the other person’s heart might be fully expressed and they feel heard and validated. You may want to alleviate their pain so much that you immediately go into advice mode in order to “fix it” and make things better. You are not honoring the other person when you do so. Instead be willing to validate a person’s pain and help them to strategize what can be done. Many times, the most helpful thing to do is to ask what the other person needs or wants.



**3. The third element of compassion is investment.**

Compassion requires engagement rather than simple observation. To extend compassion is costly, especially emotionally. If you want to genuinely help another human being, you must be willing to be all in. You must be willing to go a mile even if you only wanted to go a block. You must do some heavy lifting.

Compassion takes a lot of energy. When extending compassion seems like too high of an investment, you may have mixed feelings about the situation. Don’t dismiss your feelings. Explore the root of those feelings.

*Do you consider yourself a good listener?*

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*Give a personal example of good listening or describe what keeps you from listening well.*

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Ask yourself:

*What is making me reluctant to show compassion? Why am I hesitant to extend love to this person?*

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## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: COMPASSION

Maintain a spirit of curiosity and freedom from judgment but be open and honest about your feelings in a particular situation. It is okay to have mixed feelings and recognize why you are reluctant to move forward. You can display compassion without having warm feelings. Being compassionate doesn't mean you aren't disappointed, discouraged, or distraught at times.

### Compassion Fatigue

If you are on your own supporting others in need and do not have individuals with whom you can appropriately share your joys and frustrations, you may experience compassion fatigue.

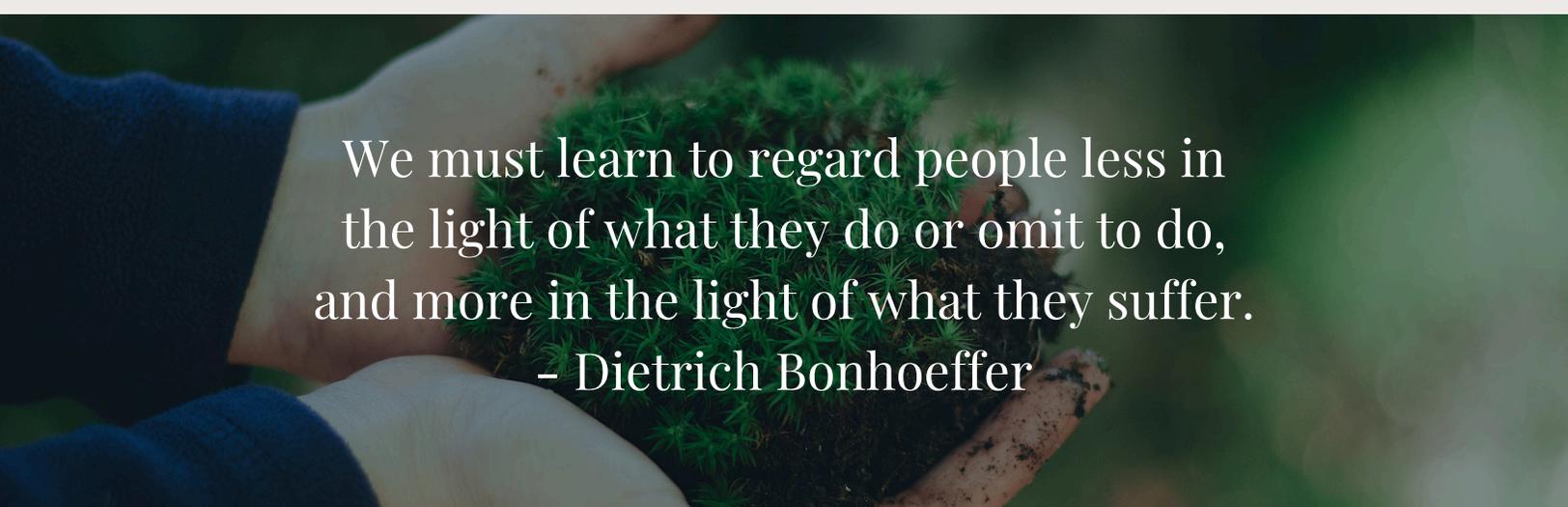
Find others who are also committed to being compassionate and supportive friends and speak honestly about your feelings to them. Remember the importance of maintaining confidentiality about those you are supporting and do not share specific details about them.

Compassion fatigue is a serious condition.

It is possible to become so overly empathic that you find yourself growing numb to others' suffering. One of the best ways to avoid compassion fatigue is to practice self-compassion. Self-compassion simply means extending compassion to yourself as you would to a friend. If a friend came to you feeling exhausted, what advice would you offer him or her? How would you want your friend to care for him or herself?

If you are feeling burnt out, please seek support. Compassionate individuals tend to think they shouldn't need assistance. You may be the giver, but you too need to take time to attend to your emotional, physical, social, and spiritual needs. If your well runs dry, you will have nothing to offer to others.

Compassion is a wonderful gift we can extend to others. John Connolly says, "The nature of humanity, its essence, is to feel another's pain as one's own, and to act to take that pain away. There is nobility in compassion, a beauty in empathy, a grace in forgiveness."

A pair of hands, one in a blue sleeve and one in a white sleeve, are gently holding a small green plant in a dark pot. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer.  
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## REACH OUT AND TOUCH



### Reach Out and Touch Song by the Imperials

Reach out and touch a soul that is hungry;  
Reach out and touch a spirit in despair;  
Reach out and touch a life torn and dirty,  
A man who is lonely, if you care!

Reach out and touch that neighbor  
who hates you;  
Reach out and touch a stranger  
who meets you;  
Reach out and touch the brother/sister  
who needs you.  
Reach out and let the smile of God touch  
through you.

Reach out and touch a friend who is weary;  
Reach out and touch a seeker unaware;  
Reach out and touch though touching  
means losing  
A part of your own self, if you dare!

Reach out and give your love to the  
loveless;  
Reach out and make a home for the  
homeless;  
Reach out and shed God's light in the  
darkness;  
Reach out and let the smile of God touch  
through you.

## DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Who is one of the most compassionate people you know and why do you think so?
2. When you have been suffering, what compassionate act was helpful to you?
3. Have you ever done something compassionate for another person and been misunderstood or judged for your actions?
4. Which of the three components of compassion is the most challenging for you?
5. What typically gets in your way of taking compassionate action, and what can you do to minimize those barriers?

## PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, OR MORE TO CONSIDER

### **Scenario One:**

As you approach the entrance to your local supermarket, you notice a single parent struggling to open the door with a baby in their arms and an uncooperative toddler in hand. You are surprised by how many people have entered the store without seeming to notice.

*What would you think/feel in that situation? What would be the best action in that situation?*

### **Scenario Two:**

A newcomer has joined the community organization in which you've been involved for the last few years. You don't see yourself as having much in common with this newbie, but you notice they are standing by themselves during the social time before the business meeting while you're having fun and laughing with your friends.

*What would you think/feel in that situation? Describe compassion in action for those circumstances.*

### **Scenario Three:**

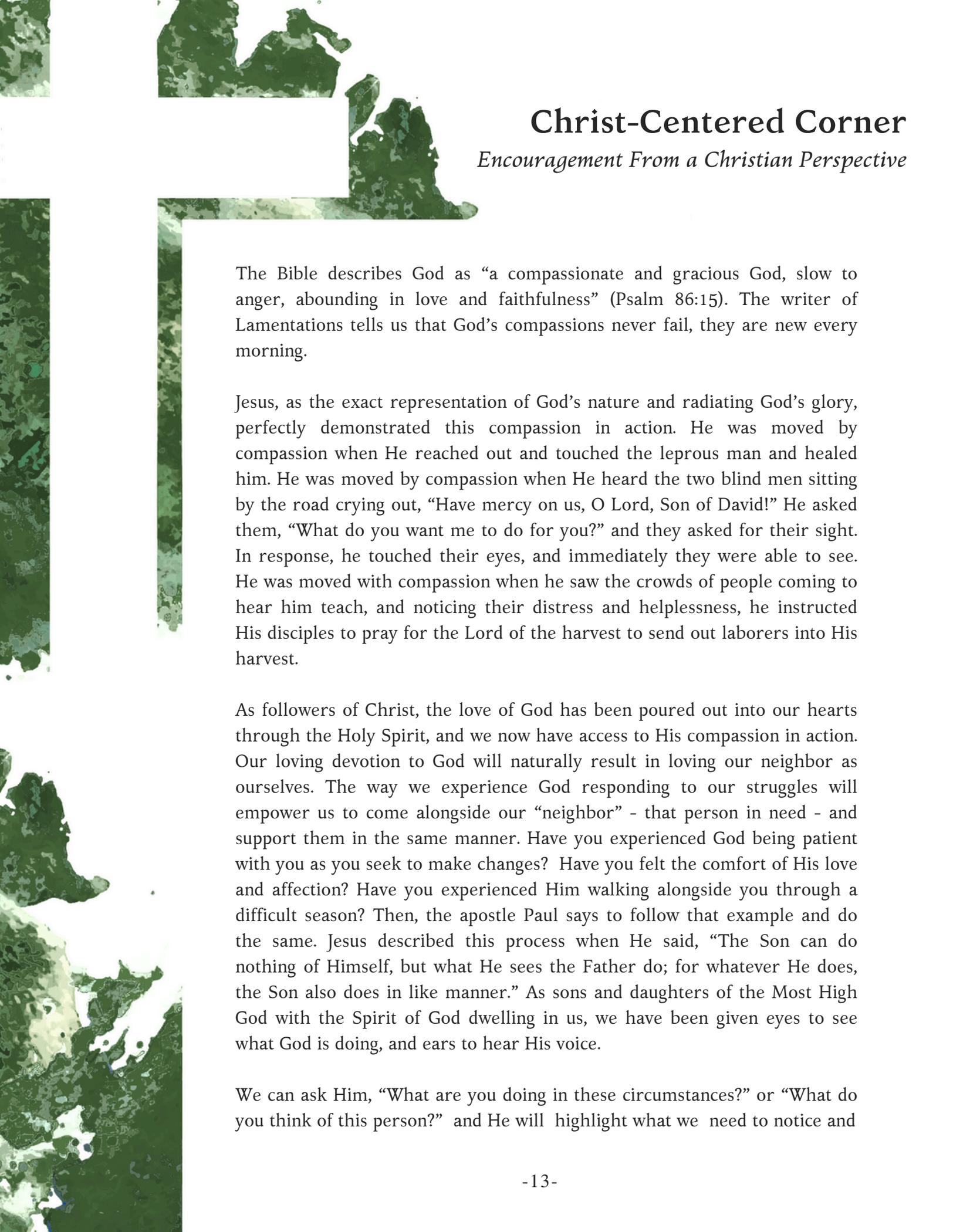
John was someone whom others could always count on to extend compassion. He was generous with his time and resources. Recently, he assisted Martha with securing housing. Martha was thrilled with her new place. She was delighted to finally have a place to call home. She was excited to share her new home with others. This resulted in her having numerous overnight guests, which was a violation of her lease agreement. After several warnings from her landlord, Martha received an eviction notice. Martha called John and told him the news. John was quiet as he listened to Martha. He was flooded with a host of emotions. He couldn't believe that after all he had done to help Martha find a place to live, she was being evicted.

*How might John respond? What would compassion look like in that situation?*

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# Christ-Centered Corner

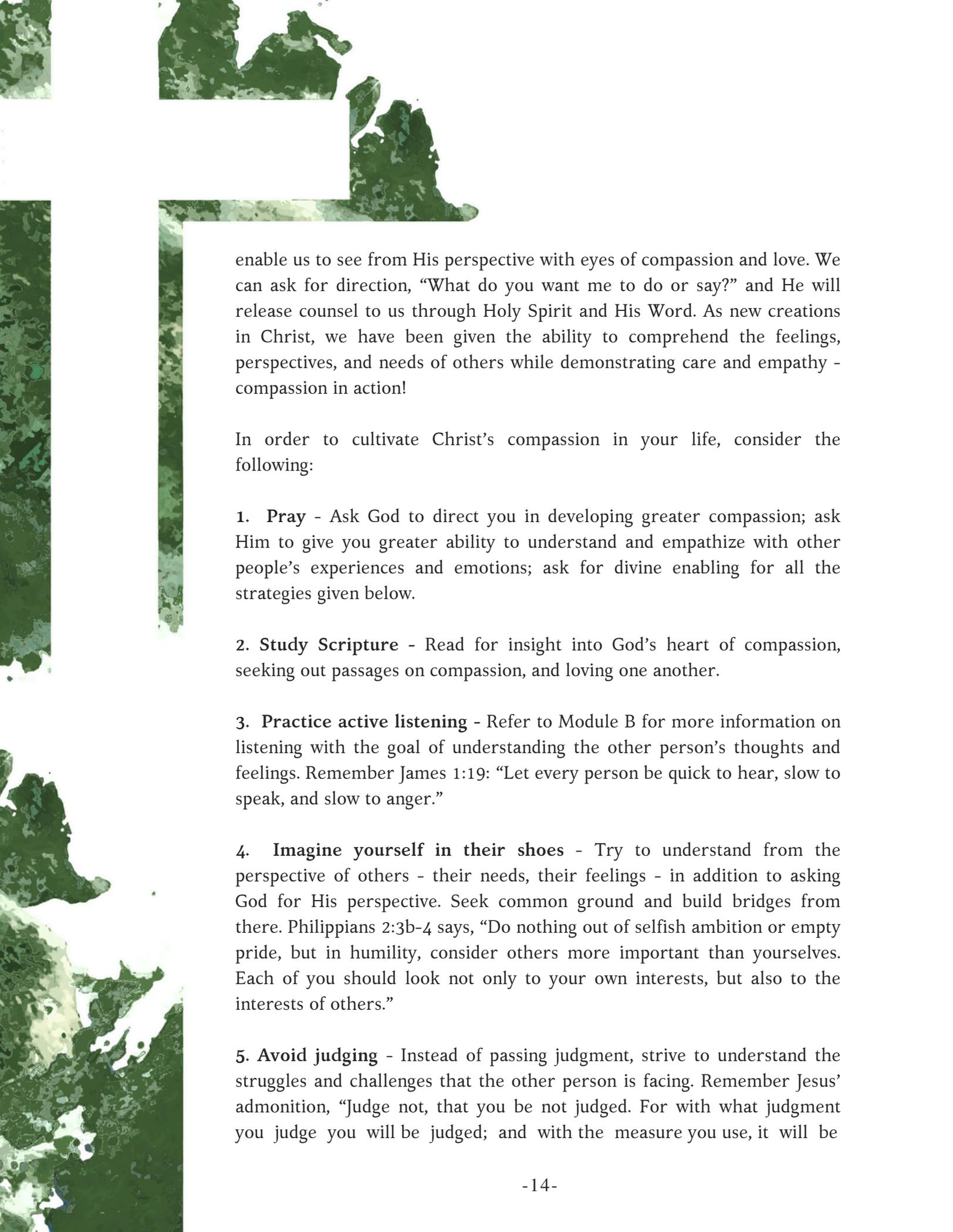
## *Encouragement From a Christian Perspective*

The Bible describes God as “a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Psalm 86:15). The writer of Lamentations tells us that God’s compassions never fail, they are new every morning.

Jesus, as the exact representation of God’s nature and radiating God’s glory, perfectly demonstrated this compassion in action. He was moved by compassion when He reached out and touched the leprous man and healed him. He was moved by compassion when He heard the two blind men sitting by the road crying out, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!” He asked them, “What do you want me to do for you?” and they asked for their sight. In response, he touched their eyes, and immediately they were able to see. He was moved with compassion when he saw the crowds of people coming to hear him teach, and noticing their distress and helplessness, he instructed His disciples to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.

As followers of Christ, the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, and we now have access to His compassion in action. Our loving devotion to God will naturally result in loving our neighbor as ourselves. The way we experience God responding to our struggles will empower us to come alongside our “neighbor” - that person in need - and support them in the same manner. Have you experienced God being patient with you as you seek to make changes? Have you felt the comfort of His love and affection? Have you experienced Him walking alongside you through a difficult season? Then, the apostle Paul says to follow that example and do the same. Jesus described this process when He said, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.” As sons and daughters of the Most High God with the Spirit of God dwelling in us, we have been given eyes to see what God is doing, and ears to hear His voice.

We can ask Him, “What are you doing in these circumstances?” or “What do you think of this person?” and He will highlight what we need to notice and



enable us to see from His perspective with eyes of compassion and love. We can ask for direction, “What do you want me to do or say?” and He will release counsel to us through Holy Spirit and His Word. As new creations in Christ, we have been given the ability to comprehend the feelings, perspectives, and needs of others while demonstrating care and empathy - compassion in action!

In order to cultivate Christ’s compassion in your life, consider the following:

1. **Pray** - Ask God to direct you in developing greater compassion; ask Him to give you greater ability to understand and empathize with other people’s experiences and emotions; ask for divine enabling for all the strategies given below.
2. **Study Scripture** - Read for insight into God’s heart of compassion, seeking out passages on compassion, and loving one another.
3. **Practice active listening** - Refer to Module B for more information on listening with the goal of understanding the other person’s thoughts and feelings. Remember James 1:19: “Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.”
4. **Imagine yourself in their shoes** - Try to understand from the perspective of others - their needs, their feelings - in addition to asking God for His perspective. Seek common ground and build bridges from there. Philippians 2:3b-4 says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty pride, but in humility, consider others more important than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
5. **Avoid judging** - Instead of passing judgment, strive to understand the struggles and challenges that the other person is facing. Remember Jesus’ admonition, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be

measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?" (Matt 7: 1-3)

**6. Practice forgiveness** - Unforgiveness is a sin and creates a dividing wall in our relationships. "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you." (Eph 4:32)

**7. Choose patience** - To gain understanding of another person often requires patience.

*Colossians 3:12-14 - Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with hearts of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with one another and forgive any complaint you may have against someone else. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Above all these things put on love which is the bond of perfection.*

# 1.3

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## BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are critical to the success of being a supportive friend. Without healthy boundaries, your compassion will be unsustainable and ineffective.

# BOUNDARIES

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In this lesson you will:

- Consider the nature of boundaries and why boundaries are essential
- Identify the differences between healthy and unhealthy boundaries
- Learn how to set a boundary
- Explore the benefits of maintaining healthy boundaries in friendships

## BOUNDARIES

### Boundaries and Compassion

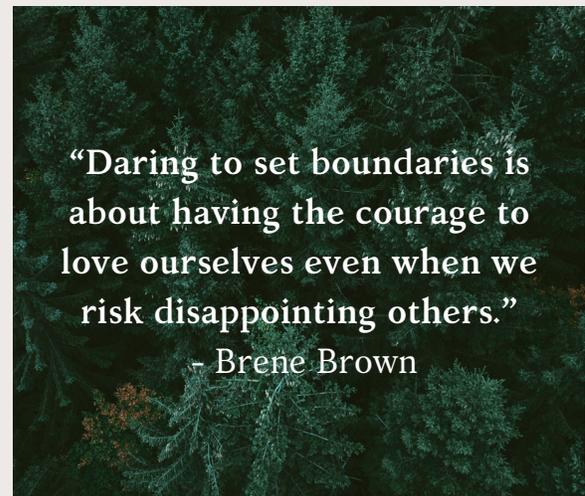
What do you think of when you hear the word “boundaries?” Does the word “boundaries” hold negative connotations for you? Perhaps a section on boundaries seems out of place in training on mentoring and supportive friendships. The purpose of this section is to help you see boundaries in a positive light and recognize their importance to your success as a supportive friend. You will be encouraged to show up for others as your authentic self in ways that are lifegiving for you as a supportive friend. This lesson has the potential to be life-transformational!

Brene Brown is a renowned research professor who speaks honestly about boundaries. Her research on the link between compassion and boundaries can be profoundly impactful. She theorized that compassion would be connected to a person’s spirituality and faith. Instead, her research showed that individuals who are most compassionate have one thing in common: good boundaries. Those who were deemed most compassionate by others were also individuals with good boundaries.

Boundaries and compassion may seem to have nothing in common, but on further study, it becomes apparent - they have everything in common.

### The Nature of Boundaries

Brown describes a boundary as knowing what is okay for us and what is not okay for us. You don’t want to show up wearing a mask and being whoever the other person wants you to be. You ought to be real and genuine, giving the very gift of yourself.



Setting boundaries should not be viewed as selfish; boundaries are not selfishness. They are a gift for both the giver and the receiver. They are healthy and necessary, and they are a blessing.

### Why Boundaries are Essential

Brown challenges us to think of the acronym BIG - Boundaries, Integrity, and Generosity.

**B I G**

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

“What **boundaries** need to be in place for me to stay in my **integrity** and make the most **generous** assumptions about you?”

She contends that we cannot have a generous spirit without boundaries. Desiring to be liked and not wanting to disappoint others can make setting boundaries difficult. You may be uncomfortable setting boundaries because you care about what others will think. You desire to be liked and don't want to disappoint anyone. But according to Brown, although boundaries may not be easy, they are the key to loving yourself and treating others with love and kindness.

Generosity, from Brown's perspective, refers to how you view others. She asked her husband: “What if the other person was doing the best that he or she could?” Her husband's response reoriented her view of generosity: “I will never know if people are doing the best that they can or not, but when I assume that they are, it makes my life better.”

Generosity makes it possible for us to assume the best about people. The life you will change first is your own as you start to see the other person not as if he or she were intentionally trying to NOT succeed, but rather as someone doing the best he or she can.

Dr. Henry Cloud has also written extensively on the issue of boundaries. He recognizes that the difficulty setting boundaries for many people stems from holding inappropriate beliefs. He writes, “Some people think they're going to be

trusted because they're nice, loving, and compassionate. Those things certainly help, but if we say 'yes' to everything, and we don't have our boundaries in place, our 'yes' begins to be untrustworthy. The most trusted people have clear boundaries because their yes means yes, and their no means no. Others always know where they stand.”

As a supportive friend, your role is not to be all things to all people. While you strive to do your best to assist those whom you come alongside, remember it is not your responsibility to live their lives. We harm another person when we over-function in his or her life. It is unkind for us to do more for the person than is truly life-giving. This communicates to them that they are incapable of doing for him or herself. Healthy boundaries will make it possible to offer support that strengthens the other person.

Being a supportive friend does not mean that the other person will be happy with all of our responses. And many times, the most helpful thing that you can offer is a stimulating question - the type of question that encourages a person to think deeply about his or her circumstances. Helpful questions signify to the other person that he or she is the author of his or her life. They possess the ability to choose the next steps. Also important is recognizing that the other person may not always have an immediate answer. It could be that he or she has not had the space or permission to reflect on his or her life. We must be willing to sit with him or her and allow

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

the other person to wrestle with the reality that he or she faces. A supportive friend sees the other person as possessing the ability to make choices.

Having boundaries is not saying “no” to every request. This is a misunderstanding of boundaries. Rather, boundaries enable us to have the freedom to choose what is and isn’t permissible to us.

Example:

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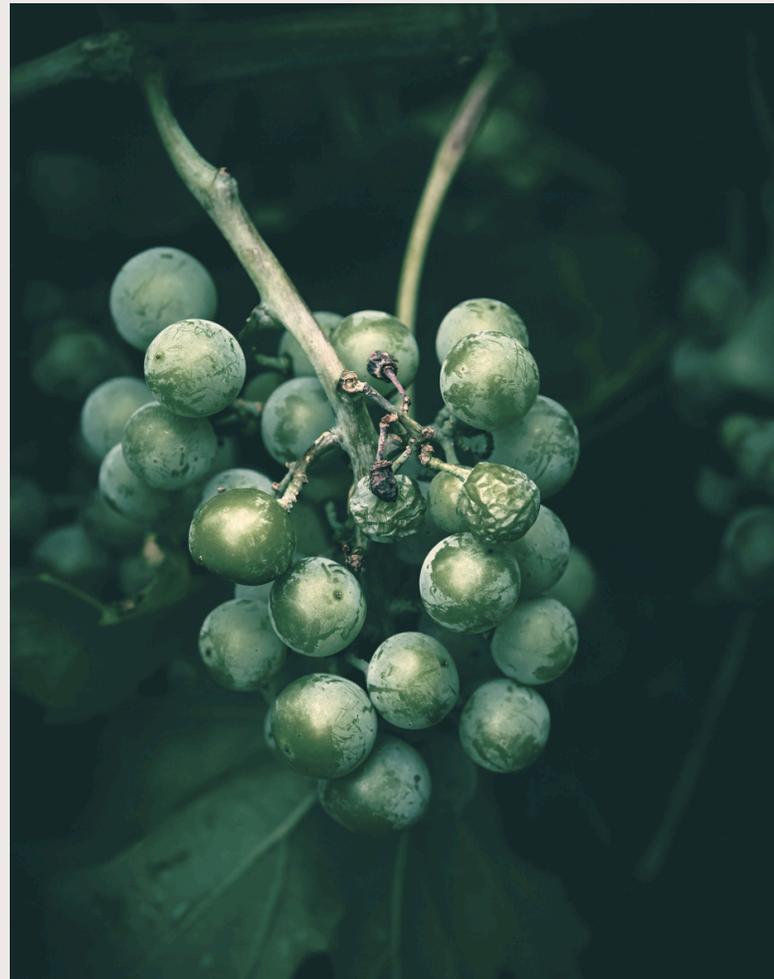
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### The Difference Between Healthy and Unhealthy Boundaries

Let’s consider the issue of healthy and unhealthy boundaries. Healthy boundaries are rooted in freedom, and they allow us to make decisions that align with our core values. Don’t make decisions based solely on whether you will be liked. Make decisions based on what promotes a healthy relationship. If you are motivated by a sense of obligation, this can foster feelings of resentment. You may feel used which ultimately harms your relationship.

Kristin Minto Snowden, a marriage and family therapist, provides a helpful

overview of healthy and unhealthy boundaries in the chart on the next page.



You can assess your boundaries by examining your conversations. When having a conversation with someone, ask yourself, “Do I really believe what I am saying, or am I simply saying what I think the other person wants to hear?”

If you struggle to maintain healthy and appropriate boundaries, it is important to talk to someone about these issues. If you want to be a supportive friend, start by setting up a relationship that is based on healthy boundaries and clear expectations of the relationship from the onset.



# BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

## Setting Boundaries

The following guidelines are suggested by counselor, Emma Cebador, for setting boundaries:

1. Identify what you want and examine your motivation for setting the boundary. Trust your intuition in this process.
2. Start small by choosing just one or two boundaries to set, especially if this is new territory for you.
3. When you communicate your boundary, stay calm and use assertive language that is direct, honest, and respectful. Use “I” statements instead of “you” statements. State your feelings and needs clearly. Be factual and consistent in what you say, and avoid judgment.
4. Do not apologize or justify yourself. Be ready to extend “no” as an answer and recognize this may disappoint others.
5. Have a support system that will encourage you to maintain your boundaries.

If we truly desire to be kind to others, we must be clear about our expectations. To be unclear is to be unkind.

Example:

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## Boundaries for Communication

What are your expectations around communication? Establishing clear expectations around communication is very

important. It may feel wrong to limit communication, but your well-being is important. For example, you and a supportive friend could come up with a covenant where you agree to check in with one another x number of times throughout the week. This way, you both know what is expected.

Setting a boundary doesn't prevent it from being broken, however. Boundaries will inevitably be tested and broken. How do you handle a situation in which one of your boundaries has been broken? This can be particularly difficult in a new relationship, but allowing a broken boundary to go unaddressed will create more difficulty in the long term. It may impede a healthy relationship from ever occurring. It is essential that you discuss a boundary breach when it happens so that it can be avoided in the future.

Example:

*Someone calls you after midnight to tell you about the TV show they just watched. How would you respond?*

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If this seems harsh and lacking in compassion, remember that compassion is love in action. It is not compassionate to support a person to be less than their best self in a relationship. Remember, the goal is for each person to show up as his

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

or her best self.

Boundaries lead to healthy and fruitful relationships. There is integrity in a relationship where the needs of both parties are honored. Integrity means...

- You are willing to address tough topics.
- You don't back away from conversations that are necessary for a person's well-being and growth.
- You serve another person well by speaking honestly to him or her about a situation.
- You care enough about the relationship that you won't let it deteriorate to the point that the relationship is no longer viable.
- You address an issue so that you don't grow resentful or burn out.
- You work for the betterment of everyone, including yourself.

### **Making Progress with Boundaries**

You will not get boundaries right 100 percent of the time; there will be times when you struggle to maintain a healthy boundary. Taking time to reflect on your experience with boundaries may be helpful.

Dr. Cloud offers the following questions to ask ourselves

1. Was there a time you said yes when you wanted to say no? What happened?
2. What made you feel like you couldn't say no?
3. Was the other person someone you would consider a safe person?
4. What would you like to have said?
5. What feelings come up as you imagine yourself saying what you really meant? Are you feeling relieved, or do you notice discomfort?
6. Consider a time when someone was honest with you in a loving way. How did it make you feel?

Boundaries lead to healthy and fruitful relationships. There is integrity in a relationship where the needs of both parties are honored.

Boundaries are put in place for the well-being of the relationship and the support of both parties. They are necessary and will aid your relationships. Be intentional about establishing boundaries that honor and protect the joy of being in a relationship, and watch your relationships flourish!

I'm going to be generous in my assumptions and intentions while standing solidly in my integrity and being very clear about what's acceptable and what's not acceptable.

- Brene Brown

## DISCUSSION OR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What was your understanding of boundaries prior to the video?  
How has your understanding of boundaries changed as a result of this content?
2. What concept from the video will be most helpful to you in setting healthy boundaries and experiencing their benefits?
3. Who is a role model in your life who sets and keeps good boundaries?
4. Discuss the process of setting a healthy boundary.
5. Share any experience you've had with establishing and communicating a healthy boundary. What happened? How did people react? What benefits resulted from the boundary you established?
6. Personal boundaries tell you what is and is not okay and in a relationship. Think about two people in your life, and describe the boundaries you have with each one. How are they similar, and how are they different?
7. In your experience, what are the signs of a healthy relationship? What sort of boundaries might you see in a healthy relationship?

## PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY, OR MORE TO CONSIDER

1. Values are the things that are most important to you. Ideally, your boundaries will reflect your values. For example, if you value family, you might set boundaries at work that will protect your family time.
  - Take time to consider what your most important values are and make note of them.
  - Next, evaluate what boundaries are in place or might be needed in your relationships to reflect these values.
  - Try defining a boundary you need to set, using “I need,” “I expect,” or “I want to” to clarify your needs and expectations. For example:  
*I want to keep my personal life separate from my connections at work. When conversations turn personal, I will politely steer them back to work-related subjects or not get involved. I expect my colleagues to respect my privacy.*

2. Discuss setting and implementing healthy boundaries in the following scenarios:

**Scenario One:** You’ve planned an outdoor lunch with your family. The restaurant has a strict ten-minute window for holding reservations, and a family member is known for their lateness.

**Possible response:** *Before the day of the lunch, you might say, “I want to remind everyone that the restaurant will only hold our reservation for ten minutes. It’s important we are all on time to enjoy our meal together. If anyone thinks they’ll be late, please let me know in advance so we can tell the restaurant.”*

**Your preferred response:**

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**Scenario Two:** A person you are coming alongside as a supportive friend frequently asks for your advice on personal matters, such as their marriage. During a conversation, they mention considering separation from their partner.

**Possible response:** *“I care about you and want to support you, but I feel uncomfortable giving advice on such personal matters. It might be more helpful to talk to a professional who can provide the guidance you’re looking for.”*

**Your preferred response:**

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## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

**Situation Three:** You discover a friend is sharing your personal information with their family or friends.

**Possible response:** *"I've heard that you have been sharing some of my personal information with others. I want to keep certain things private, and it's important to me that my privacy is respected. Let's agree to keep our conversations between us, or please ask me if you think you should share something."*

**Your preferred response:**

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Work through several commonly occurring examples with your own family or relationships you have.

**Situation:**

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**Your preferred response:**

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**Situation:**

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**Your preferred response:**

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### 3. Group Boundary Setting Exercise (Positive Psychology.com)

This exercise provides an opportunity to practice using body language and speech to set boundaries with others in a group setting.

You need a space big enough for participants to move freely and two facilitators (one to lead and one to support). Allow 10-12 minutes for the exercise and 3-5 minutes to debrief.

#### **Instructions:**

Ask the participants to line up in two rows about five meters apart, facing each other. Ensure everyone is paired with someone from the opposite row. Each row will take turns advancing towards the other, and then being stopped.

#### **Step One: Setting a boundary using body language**

Instruct row one as follows:

*“Everyone in row 1, pick a spot on the floor that you do not want to be crossed. Keep the location to yourself. When I say, ‘go,’ the people in row 2 will walk toward you. When that person reaches the spot you’ve picked, use your body language to indicate you don’t want them to come any closer. Here are some examples of how to do this.”*

Demonstrate body language examples such as raising one hand, turning your back, or walking away.

Instruct row two as follows:

*“When you see your counterpart in row one has set their boundary with you, you will respect the boundary and stop walking.”*

Allow each group to take a turn practicing this skill.

#### **Step Two: Setting a boundary using voice and body language**

This time, participants will use their voice in addition to their body language to indicate to their counterparts to stop coming closer.

Demonstrate some examples of things to say, including *“stop,” “back off,”* or *“you’re too close.”*

Some participants will be louder or quieter than others, so this round can be repeated to encourage participants who are quieter to practice being louder, and participants who are louder to practice being quiet yet firm.

### 3. Group Boundary Setting Exercise (cont.)

#### Step Three: Reinforcing a boundary that has been crossed using voice and body language

This time, participants walking toward the boundary-setter will continue past the designated stopping point, and the boundary-setter practices resetting their boundary using a combination of body language.

Demonstrate a combination of raising a hand and saying “*Back off,*” turning their back and saying “*Stop,*” or walking away and saying “*You’re too close.*”

#### Debrief Questions

When both groups have practiced all three rounds, ask participants to thank their partners. Ask the group:

- What was hard?
- What was easy?
- How did it make you feel?

*Adapted from Dr. Jo Nash. (2022). Home Alive.*

<http://www.teachhomealive.org/curriculum/iv-boundary-setting/across-the-room/>

#### 4. Recognizing Unhealthy Boundaries

Recognizing the signs that appropriate boundaries are not in place is essential. Potential indicators include:

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling resentful of people asking for our help
- Avoiding calls and interactions with others in case they ask for something
- Making comments about helping people and not receiving anything in return
- Feeling burned out
- Regularly daydreaming about dropping everything and running away
- Having no time for ourselves

Typically, unhealthy boundaries create opportunities and conditions for frustration, anger, mistrust, and resentment. They usually take one of the following forms:

1. **Nonexistent boundaries:** For example, sharing personal or intimate details with anyone who will listen, letting others make decisions for you, or accepting disrespectful or abusive behavior.
2. **Weak or poorly expressed boundaries:** For example, spending no time apart from a partner, being unable to say no, or supporting unhealthy habits that keep people codependent.
3. **Rigid boundaries:** For example, putting walls up to protect ourselves from others, keeping our distance to avoid getting hurt, or believing we don't need anyone.

From *Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself*. Nedra Glover Tawwab, 2021:

#### 5. 5 questions to ask yourself to help clarify what you need when setting boundaries:

##### 1. **What's happening?**

Take a moment to observe what is actually happening in the situation. What is the sequence of events, and what are your senses picking up? There is no judgment or analysis in this stage, it's meant to help you observe what is occurring objectively. Once you establish the facts about what's going on, you move to the next question.

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

### 2. **Am I comfortable with this interaction?**

This is where you determine your feelings about what's happening. This may differ based on who you are and who you're encountering. We often have different boundaries based on our familiarity and relationships with people. Perhaps you don't mind if Person A calls you a nickname, but you don't like it when Person B does. That's valid! Is your intuition sparked? You don't have to stay in a conversation or interaction with anyone if you're feeling uncomfortable. Determining your comfort level may give you the space to evaluate how to respond to the person or have a longer conversation with this person about it later.

### 3. **How close is this person? (Distance and relationship)**

Someone's physical proximity to you is important to identify from a personal safety point of view. If the person is within enough distance to touch you (about 3 ft) and you're feeling uncomfortable, one of your boundaries (and safety measures) may be to create more space between you. Part of this question also refers to your relationship with this person because, as mentioned above, our response often varies based on who they are. Identifying the relationship can help you decide the best course of action for your situation.

### 4. **What outcome do I want to see?**

This is an honest check-in with yourself about your best-case scenario for the interaction. Once you can determine what outcome you want to see, you can start evaluating your options that can help you get there. Which brings us to the last question.

### 5. **What can I do?**

With all the information you gathered about your situation, you now get to determine how to respond. These can range from setting a boundary to removing yourself from the situation entirely (if possible). Your choices will vary because our world and relationships are dynamic. You are the best person to decide what is right for you based on your assessment of the events, just as if you were assessing a trail or waterway for safety before continuing. Options allow us to interact with the world from a place of confidence instead of fear.

## BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: BOUNDARIES

Boundary setting is a lifelong journey. Unlike outdoor adventures or trips, which often have a clear beginning and ending, boundary setting is more like interacting with nature itself. Nature is in a constant state of change, and we may be faced with circumstances we weren't expecting, e.g., encountering wildlife, equipment failure, or inclement weather. As such, some days you may have an easy time determining how to respond to a boundary violation, and other days it may be difficult. No matter where you are on this confidence journey, you're on the right path. Boundary setting takes practice, and it's possible to reach a point where you can identify your boundaries and take action with greater ease. When those days come, I hope you'll look in the mirror with confidence and say to yourself, "I'm worth speaking up for and my voice matters!"

**From "5 Questions To Ask When Setting Boundaries," Nicole Snell, CEO, Girls Fight Back.** Nicole Snell is an award-winning international speaker, facilitator, and self-defense expert specializing in sexual assault and violence prevention education, gender-based violence prevention, and boundary setting. She is the CEO of Girls Fight Back, Founder of Outdoor Defense, and Lead Instructor with both IMPACT Personal Safety and IMPACT Global. She is also an NACP Credentialed Victim Advocate and a credentialed Empowerment Self-Defense Professional.

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# Christ-Centered Corner

## *Encouragement From a Christian Perspective*

You have been created by God and uniquely fashioned and equipped for the good works He has prepared in advance for you. In order for you to fully step into all He created you to be, God will direct your priorities through His Word and Holy Spirit. Jesus, as our model, said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”

In order to protect your God-given priorities, you must have healthy boundaries in place. Without that protection, other people’s needs will dictate what gets done, rather than the leading of Holy Spirit. Consider Acts 6:2-4, where the Twelve summoned the large group of disciples and asked them to seek out “seven men of good reputation, full of Holy Spirit and wisdom” to appoint over the serving of tables so that the apostles could continue to focus on their priority of prayer and preaching the Gospel. We are not called to help everybody with everything. The Greek word seen throughout the NT and translated as “salvation” or “saved” means, “to save, heal, deliver; to be made whole.” Healthy boundaries will help you remain the whole, healthy, and unique individual God intended you to be.

The boundaries you set as a believer must be based on your identity in Christ and the roles into which He has called you. They will take into consideration the levels of intimacy that are wise for the relationship you have with the other person. Access to Jesus’ heart requires that we lay down our lives and follow Him - taking time to listen to Him and be surrendered to His Word. He is our highest priority and occupies our core - the circle of greatest intimacy. The next level would be your most intimate earthly relationship, such as your spouse, or if unmarried, a parent, sibling, or life-long friend. As you move out to relationships with decreasing levels of intimacy, your boundaries should reflect the level of relationship and intimacy with different levels of access to your heart, your time, and your resources. This will communicate to the people closest to you the value you have for them, it will protect your priorities, and it will protect your ability to love well.



As a believer, you are a doer of the Word and not just a hearer (James 1:22-26). In the process of establishing and respecting boundaries - both your own and others - your actions and your words must be consistent with truth and love. Be willing to have hard conversations. When you choose to respectfully tell others what you are going to do rather than trying to control them, and you do what you say you are going to do; you are partnering with the reality that “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (II Tim 1:7). According to Danny Silk, when you put away fear and put on love and tell the truth - how you feel; what’s going on with you - your freedom is restored and trust is built in the relationship. Getting hurt and choosing to remain offended may cause you to hide from the other person and be robbed of your freedom.

Like Jesus, we can operate in God’s love in every moment. Even while setting or changing a boundary in order to protect your priorities, you can keep in mind the needs of the other person and recognize their value. Rather than anger, give love and respect, and always hold out hope for restoration and reconciliation to the other person as they choose to respond to your boundary.

