

HAVING HARD CONVERSATIONS

Confrontation is the least pleasant aspect of a healthy community....

There are few things in this world that can fill us with anxiety like a tough conversation. Sometimes, even days out, our minds begin traffic-jamming with worried thoughts of the difficult interaction that imminently lies ahead. It could be a conversation where someone needs to say "I'm sorry." It could be a conversation where we need to quit a responsibility (we hate having to say "no" to things, don't we?). It could be a conversation that is going to be just. plain. awkward. Most often, we greet these conversations by sprinting as fast and as far as we can in the opposite direction. No one likes those difficult conversations.

But oh, are they ever so important.

Whether we care to admit it or not, tough conversations are part of living a healthy, fulfilling life. We all make mistakes. We all scrape our rough edges from time to time. We all need the voices of our community to set us straight, and sometimes we have to be that voice for others.

Our lives are going to be marked with tough conversations, but they don't have to be bad for us. *When laced with love and grace, tough conversations can bring growth and even build trust between one another.* When you have those tough conversations, keep these principles in mind:

People don't just need to hear what you say— they need to see what you say too. In the world of difficult conversations--texts, emails, and instant messages are dangerous. The chance of what you are saying being misunderstood is very high. **93% of human-to-human conversation is non-verbal, and we lose all of that connection when we hide behind a screen.** So albeit awkward, or difficult, even painful, let them see you. They need to see the look in your eyes when you confront them. They need to see you leaning in, rather than pulling away. Instead of focusing so much on what you're going to say— prepare yourself for how you're going to say it. Lean in. Show empathy with your eyes. Smile, even! Your body language will make all the difference in the world.

GRACE AND TRUTH ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN— **ALWAYS BRING BOTH.**

In the opening of John's Gospel, the author paints a beautiful picture with his words. Jesus coming to earth meant that there was life for all of us. Not a biological life — a spiritual, eternal life. It says that "*...the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*"

BE TRUTHFUL. Albeit painful at times, everyone deep-down wants to know the truth. Be clear and honest with what you say. In the long run, it will create less mess, and they will thank you for it.

BE GRACEFUL. Grace is the glimmer of hope at the end of the day. It's the belief that because of Jesus, anyone can grow—anyone can heal. Extending grace is extending a shoulder to cry on, a friend to talk to, and creates a safe place in your relationships. **When difficult conversations arise, grace and truth are essential.** Using your ears will often bring more understanding than using your mouth. Difficult conversations are just that— conversations. They are not a monologue. They are not a speech. They are a two-way conversation, with both give and take from both sides. Just like them, you may not like what they have to say. They may be angry with you. They may start crying. They might be irrational—that's all ok.

Always create space for the other side to speak in difficult conversations. Take a breath, look them in the eye, and listen. Open your heart to what they are saying. Put yourself in their shoes. You are giving them more than just the chance to speak. It's the chance to be heard. Giving them a voice validates them as a person, with thoughts and dreams and feelings. **Your listening ear empowers them to grow.** Your grace and truth open the door for Jesus to come into their circumstance, and do what only He can do.

All that being said— sometimes the difficult conversation to be had is one that goes beyond where you could go alone. If you feel like a difficult conversation requires additional guidance, professional help, or you feel unsafe, please call the church and

ask to speak to a pastor. **We are always here, and more than willing to walk with you in any difficult conversation.**