

# Session 2: Tools for Difficult Conversations

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**Healthy churches are built on healthy conversations. Avoidance may feel spiritual, but love speaks. Leadership requires courage, clarity, and compassion - especially when conversations are uncomfortable.**

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**Most church conflict doesn't  
start with bad intentions, it  
starts with unspoken  
conversations.**

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**Every leader will either:  
Lead conversations or be led by the  
consequences of avoiding them**

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## What Avoidance Produces:

- Passive-aggressive behavior
- Gossip framed as “prayer requests”
- Burnout in leaders
- Confusion among teams
- Silent resentment that poisons culture



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**“If you avoid the conversation, you choose the outcome and silence is still a decision”**

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### **3 Lies Leaders Believe:**

**“If I bring this up, I’ll damage the relationship.”**

**“If I’m loving, it will just resolve itself.”**

**“If it’s God’s will, it won’t be this uncomfortable.”**

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**Ephesians 4:15 – “Speak the truth in love.”**

**Proverbs 27:6 – “Wounds from a friend can be trusted.”**

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**Reframing the Conversation:** A difficult conversation is not an attack – It's an invitation to alignment, growth, and clarity. The goal isn't to win the conversation. The goal is to win the relationship.

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**Make it awkward.**

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# Having those **Hard Conversations** (in a Healthy Way)



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**Nate Hellman**

# Hard Conversations

Emotions are high

Stakes are high

Differences of opinions  
and/or values



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# Hard Conversations

what **NOT** to do

- Preach instead of converse
- Delay until the “right time”
- Triangulate
- Send an anonymous letter
- Hide behind spiritual quotes



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# 5 Step Framework for Hard Conversations (in a Healthy Way)



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# 5 Step Framework for Hard Conversations

(in a Healthy Way)

1. **Check your motive**
2. **Clarify the issue**
3. **Create safety**
4. **Speak the truth in love**
5. **Invite ownership and next steps**



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# 1. Check your motive

Check before the conversation

Am I trying to help or prove?



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# 1. Check your motive

## Psalm 139:23–24

“Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.”



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5 Step Framework for  
**Hard Conversations**  
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# 1. Check your motive



Pray first, not last

Humility before authority



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**5 Step Framework for  
Hard Conversations**  
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# 1. Check your motive



How do I feel going into this?



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## **2. Clarify the issue**

Clarify before and during conversation

**Stick to behaviors not character**

**Stick to the issues, not the person**



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## **2. Clarify the issue**

**Be specific, not emotional**

**Avoid exaggeration**

**Always/Never etc.**



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## **2. Clarify the issue**

**“I tell it like it is.”**

**“I shoot from the hip.”**

**“I speak my mind.”**

**“I don’t sugarcoat things.”**

**“I don’t mince words.”**

**“I call it as I see it.”**

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Concept by Pastor Seth Pierce



## **2. Clarify the issue**

**“Don’t confuse a lack of filter  
for clarity.”**

Pastor Seth Pierce



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## **2. Clarify the issue**

The goal isn't to win the conversation,  
it's to win the relationship.



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## 3. Create safety

Affirm first

Honor before addressing

Lower defenses



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# 4. **Speak the truth in love**

## **Ephesians 4:29**

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”



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# 4. **Speak the truth in love**

## “I” statements

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

When \_\_\_\_\_

And I need \_\_\_\_\_



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# 4. Speak the truth in love

## “I” statements

I notice \_\_\_\_\_

When \_\_\_\_\_

I need us to \_\_\_\_\_



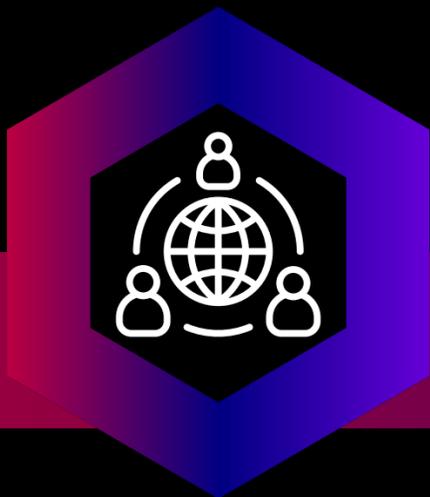
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# 4. **Speak the truth in love**

**Name impact, not intent**

**Say the hard thing  
plainly, and respectfully**



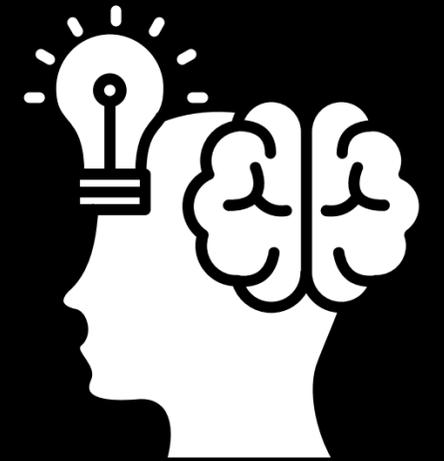
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## 4. **Speak the truth in love**

What do you think about that?

How do you feel about that?



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**5 Step Framework for  
Hard Conversations**  
(in a Healthy Way)



# 5. Invite ownership and next steps

**Ask, don't instruct or accuse**

Would you join me in working this out?

Could we find a way forward in a healthy way?

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**5 Step Framework for  
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# 5. Invite ownership and next steps



## Collaborate

What might be the pathway  
here?



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# 5. Invite ownership and next steps

## End with clarity



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# 5 Step Framework for Hard Conversations

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# Having those **Hard Conversations** (in a Healthy Way)



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# Laboratory Learning and Engagement

Describe a case study in which  
you had to engage in a hard  
conversation.



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