

L E A D E R ' S G U I D E

WHEN LOVE HURTS

10 principles
to Transform
D i f f i c u l t
Relationships

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To the leader:

People in your group have varying reasons for being in your study. Some are currently struggling in one or more difficult relationships. Others may have been in difficult relationships in the past and want a clearer understanding of what they experienced, while others may want to find out how they can help people in difficult relationships.

A hurtful or difficult relationship is any relationship in which someone finds himself or herself “struggling to force change, give advice, control, or fix problems” (p. 7). It can be with anyone they value: a son, daughter, stepson, stepdaughter, husband, wife, father, mother, step-parent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, grandparent, close friend, in-law, ex-spouse, ex-spouse’s partner, boyfriend, girlfriend, or any other close relationship.

This relationship can involve multiple issues, including addiction, mental illness, abuse, a trying personality, general dysfunction, irresponsibility, or anything else that interferes with having a healthy relationship.

People in difficult relationships are in a complicated and confusing place. They are experiencing intense emotions such as love, hate, anger, compassion, fear, guilt, sadness, loneliness, and frustration. They vacillate between passivity and control in an attempt to change their loved ones.

The specific circumstances of the people in your group involve endless possibilities, but the dilemmas are basically the same. The solutions involve understanding and applying the 10 Transforming Principles. Change is a process that occurs at a different rate for each person, and application of these principles requires growth. Because growth takes time, you may not see major changes during the short time you are in the study group, but you will see each person grow in understanding and begin to apply the principles.

You are not there to give advice, only to guide their study of the 10 Principles. Each person has to apply them to his or her life in an individual way. Some of the circumstances are complicated. If you are concerned about someone’s safety or if someone seems to be completely overwhelmed, you can refer him or her to professional counseling for additional support.

Because people may be sharing personal information, it is important that the group be a safe place. Things that are shared in the group should stay in the group. Stress confidentiality. Confidentiality means that group members do not talk about each other with group members or anyone outside the group. People can and should share their personal experiences but should not give each other advice about what to do in individual situations. Nor should they

criticize or comment directly about what other people are doing. Instead, they should empathize and support each other by being good listeners and by sharing their own experiences. People want to know they are not alone and that others understand.

Before answering the study questions, talk to your group about confidentiality, not giving advice, and being good listeners. Remind them they are there to share personal experiences and that each person has to be free to make his or her own decisions and grow at his or her own rate. Have the group members share what they need in order to feel safe enough to share openly. Also, remind them that each person can share many or few personal details, depending on what each individual is comfortable sharing.

The questions will have the corresponding page numbers listed so you can read or reference the accompanying material in the book. All scripture verses are taken from the NIV, but feel free to use other translations to enhance your discussions.

Transforming Principle 1

UNDERSTAND SCRIPTURAL TRUTHS

People in difficult relationships typically have some misunderstandings about what Scripture teaches about love. These misconceptions have to be corrected so they have a firm foundation on which to stand.

God “created us to have relationship with Him. When we became *difficult* by choosing again and again to sin, He cared enough to come after us, pursuing us with a love so great that He sacrificed His only Son. He also wants us to have good relationships with others. Much of the New Testament was written to individuals and local churches about how relationships should be conducted. The fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—are all qualities that enhance relationships (Gal. 5:22-23). The hardest place to live your faith is in the context of relationships with sinful, broken people, but that’s precisely what God wants [us] to do. [Our] love for God can best be measured by [our] love for others (1 John 4:7-21).” (pages 11-12)

Center your discussion on correctly understanding the multifaceted aspects of love.

1. Read Matt. 22:37-39, Luke 6:31, Rom. 13:10; 14:19, and Phil. 2:4. (pages 12-13)

How do those verses show that love includes caring not only for yourself but for others?

How do you maintain that balance in difficult relationships? Give examples of how you have difficulty doing that in your current difficult relationship(s).

2. Read John 15:12, Rom. 8:35-39, and 2 Cor. 6:12. (pages 13-14)

What has been your experience with unconditional love? Did you receive it as a child? Are you receiving it from others? Are you currently able to give it in your relationships?

How can you love others unconditionally but not approve of what they do? How does that parallel how God deals with us?

3. Read Exod. 2:24; 3:7-8, 2 Cor. 2:4-8, Luke 7:29-30, and John 4:4-26; 8:2-11. (pages 14-15)

How did God feel about the Israelites even when they did things that caused Him to be distressed?

What is “compassionate toughness”?

How did Paul demonstrate “compassionate toughness” in his relationships?

How did Jesus demonstrate “compassionate toughness” in His relationships?

How can you demonstrate “compassionate toughness” in your difficult relationships?

4. Read 2 Thess. 3:13-15, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, John 7:30, Luke 4:30, and Rom. 12:18. (pages 15-16)

What are some of the conditions in which you might have to end a relationship with someone close to you? How can ending a relationship be loving? Under what conditions would doing so not be loving?

5. Read Eph. 5:21-22, 25-29; 6:1, Rom. 13:1-7, Acts 5:29, Exod. 1:15-21, Esther 5, and 1 Sam. 25. (pages 16-18)

What does submission mean in marriage and other relationships?

When is it right and when is it wrong to submit to others?

Why do you think we get confused about submission?

6. Read Eph. 5:8-11, Gal. 5:19-23; 6:7-9, Heb. 12:5-11, and 1 Pet. 3:17. (pages 19-20)

How can you fulfill your responsibility to live in a way in which you bring light rather than darkness into your relationships?

What fruit is being produced in your difficult relationships? What part do you play in bearing that fruit?

How are you suffering in your difficult relationships? Is it suffering for good or for evil?

7. Read Lev. 19:3, 32, Eph. 5:33; 6:5, 1 Pet. 3:7, 1 Thess. 5:12, and Matt. 5:38-39. (pages 20-21)

How is respect or honor shown in relationships?

Why do you think God wants respect in all our relationships?

What things have you heard that might have led you to conclude that God does not value respect in your difficult relationship?

How can it be loving to ask for respect from your difficult loved one?

8. Read Col. 3:3-5 and Acts 16:37; 22:25. (pages 21-22)

What have you believed about “rights” in your relationships? How has that belief affected how you have acted in your difficult relationship? Do you feel any differently now?

9. Read 1 Cor. 13. (pages 22-24)

How has a misunderstanding of God’s agape love in 1 Cor. 13 hurt your difficult relationships?

Which parts of 1 Cor. 13 are difficult for you to reconcile with a “compassionate toughness” approach to difficult relationships?

Transforming Principle 2

REACH OUT

Many people struggle in isolation in their difficult relationships. Some have never told anyone about their problems. Others have told only close relatives. Others have told outside people and been discouraged or hurt by their responses.

The church tends to give “pat answers” or quick spiritual fixes that discount the complex feelings and issues of difficult relationships. Sometimes, the answers cause guilt by inferring that if the person could just trust, believe, pray, and submit, everything would be fine. People in difficult relationships have tried these things, and they haven’t worked. Although these actions are valid, people in difficult relationships need more. One of the most important things they need is to share with others who have experienced similar problems.

Because we are emotionally wounded in relationships, we need emotional bonding in relationships to be healed. God wants us to be connected to others. Your study group may be the first time your members have reached out and been open about their problems in a group or church setting. This step can be a powerful part of healing.

1. Look on page 25 at the list of reasons people isolate. How and why have you been isolated in your difficult relationship?
2. Read James 5:13-16. Why and how do you think God uses our sharing with others to heal us? (pages 25-26)
3. Who had you reached out to prior to this study group? Family? Friends? People in the church? Counselors? Support groups? What has been your experience? (pages 26-31)
4. What is the impact on your life of reaching out to this study group?
5. Second Cor. 5:17 talks about how we are a “new creation” when we are saved. Does this mean that we are instantly healed emotionally, spiritually, and physically? Why or why not? (page 30)
6. Read the description of “Unhealthy and Healthy Relationship Differences.” What describes your difficult relationship? (page 31-33)
7. Dysfunctional families have five common rules: Don’t talk. Don’t feel. Don’t trust. Don’t be selfish. Don’t make mistakes. Which ones operate in your difficult relationship? (pages 33-35)

8. Exodus 20:5 describes how the sins of the fathers are passed down onto other generations. This passing on results from the effects of the sins of others rather than punishment from God. How have the sins of your father/mother affected your life? How have your spouse's and your sins affected your children's lives? (page 35)
9. There are many common relationship difficulties: general dysfunction, mental disorders, addictions, abuse, anger, and some physical problems. If you haven't already shared about this, explain which of those difficulties affect your current dysfunctional relationship. (pages 35-43).

Transforming Principle 3

CHANGE YOURSELF, NOT YOUR LOVED ONE

People in difficult relationships have something in common: they focus more on changing the other person than on themselves. They try to force change by “nagging, pleading, threatening, screaming, covering up for mistakes, taking over responsibilities, cutting off the relationship, talking to others about the situation, trying to get others involved, overlooking wrongs, giving in, sacrificing, placating, keeping quiet, or talking too much” (page 45). They worry and obsess about their loved one and the situation; this obsession keeps them from changing their own lives. They may even ignore things they are doing that are damaging to themselves and others.

1. Read 2 Cor. 5:10, Luke 12:48, and Matt. 7:3-5; 12:36; 25:14-30. How does the statement, “You will stand before the Lord and give an account of your life, not the life of your difficult loved one,” affect you? Do your actions support that truth? Why or why not? (pages 46-47)
2. Even though you are negatively affected by the wrong choices and behavior of others, you still have choices. When you look at yourself as being a victim or martyr, you give away your power to make changes in your life. How have you given away your power to change yourself to other people or circumstances? (pages 47-48)
3. Read 2 Pet. 2:19, 1 Cor. 6:12, Phil. 4:8-9, and 2 Cor. 10:5. People in difficult relationships obsess about their loved ones. The obsession often prevents people from taking care of their own responsibilities. How do you obsess about your difficult loved one? How does that obsession affect your life? How can you stop obsessing? (pages 48-49)
4. What does it mean to you when you read, “You are 100 percent powerless concerning your loved one’s choices?” How do you try to exert power over him or her? (pages 49-50)
5. Regardless of your loved one’s problems, you have a part in the relationship difficulties. You need to look at your personality, your childhood, and your past and current relationships to identify patterns in how you react. What parts of your personality affect your difficult relationship? What roles did you play in your childhood that you are replicating in your current relationship? What patterns existed in your prior relationships that you are repeating in your current relationship? (pages 50-52)

6. Once you become aware of your feelings, you have to own them rather than blame them on others. How do you blame others for your feelings, actions, and reactions? How can you begin to take ownership for your feelings, actions, and reactions? (pages 52-55)
7. God cares about what we do *and* why we do it. Read through the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5-7 and identify the number of times Jesus refers to the inner heart or motives. Review the list of “right motives” and “wrong motives” on pages 56-57. Which ones of those guide most of your actions? (pages 55-57)
8. Read Prov. 13:12 and Phil. 4:11-12. How do unrealistic expectations affect you? How does accepting circumstances as they are, realizing that you cannot force change, bring you peace? (pages 57-59)
9. Read Prov. 18:16. Everyone needs to be loved, appreciated, and acknowledged—even your difficult loved one. Name something positive that you could acknowledge your loved one for. How would it help for you to tell him or her? (page 59)

Transforming Principle 4

DETACH WITH LOVE

People in difficult relationships are entangled with their difficult loved ones. Instead of living their own lives and allowing their loved ones to live their own lives, they feel responsible for their loved ones' choices and "enable" them to continue their destructive behavior by covering up for them, fixing their mistakes, and keeping them from suffering the consequences of their choices. They find themselves constantly reacting to their loved ones rather than acting according to their own consciences.

Detachment is about individuals separating themselves physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally from situations that have a negative effect on them. Loving detachment allows them to understand their loved ones' struggles and pain and treat them with compassion and respect. In addition, individuals can then take responsibility for themselves and can let their difficult loved ones be responsible for their own choices.

1. Detachment is a powerful and necessary tool when dealing with difficult relationships. Does the statement, "It is possible for you to have a good life regardless of what your loved one does," seem impossible? (pages 61-62)
2. How does God detach from us? How did Jesus demonstrate detachment when He interacted with the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11? (page 62)
3. Understanding that your loved one has a problem that is difficult for him or her to overcome is important, but what does the concept "A reason is not an excuse" mean to you? (pages 62-64)
4. Read Gal. 6:7-8, Lam. 3:33, and Prov. 26:27. Enablers prevent others from suffering the consequences of their actions. Does God enable us? How do you enable your loved one? How can you stop? (pages 64-65)
5. Difficult people typically blame others for their choices. Read Prov. 19:3. Does your difficult loved one blame you? How do you respond to that blame? How can you detach yourself from it? (pages 65-67)
6. How do you respond to anger, bad moods, and threats from your difficult loved one? How do Prov. 15:1; 17:12; 20:3; 22:24-25 support the concept of detachment? (pages 67-69, 72-75)

7. Crises happen in difficult relationships because consequences eventually result from wrong choices. While we don't purposefully cause a crisis to happen, we should not intervene and stop it from happening. What are some of the crises you have gone through? What are some of the things you fear happening? How could the concept of loving detachment help you manage in the next crisis? (page 70)
8. It takes time to learn detachment. Read 1 Cor. 9:24-27. Paul talks about choosing to make his body do what he knows is right. How does this idea correlate with the concept of "acting as if." How would these concepts help you in dealing with your difficult loved one? (pages 75-76)
9. Detachment is not abandonment. Read 1 Pet. 3:9 and Rom. 12:17-21. How can you treat your difficult loved one with love and still allow him or her to bear the consequences of his or her choices? (pages 76-77)

Transforming Principle 5

NURTURE YOURSELF

People in difficult relationships ignore their own needs because they focus so intently on the difficult person. Through learning to take care of themselves, however, these individuals gain strength to meet the many additional demands and stresses of a difficult relationship. They also learn to live their lives fully, developing and utilizing their talents and enjoying the good things so that their lives are not on hold while they wait for their loved ones to change.

Others, especially their difficult loved ones, may accuse them of being selfish when they begin to take care of themselves, but it is not selfish; it is essential. Many practical ways exist in which individuals can take responsibility for themselves, including taking care of their emotional, physical, relational, spiritual, and mental needs, learning to say yes and no, making good decisions, watching priorities, respecting themselves, keeping journals, and keeping their lives as simple as possible.

1. Has anyone ever accused you of being selfish when you do something for yourself? Do you feel guilty when you do things for yourself? How do Eph. 5:29 and Phil. 2:4 support the premise that you should take care of yourself? (pages 80-81)
2. What emotional needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your emotional needs? (pages 81-82)
3. What physical needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your physical needs? (pages 82-84)
4. What relational needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your relational needs? (pages 84-86)
5. What spiritual needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your spiritual needs? (pages 86-87)
6. What mental needs have you neglected? What can you do to take care of your mental needs? (pages 88-89)
7. People in difficult relationships often put their lives on hold until these relationships are fixed. Matthew 25:14-30 is the Parable of the Talents. This parable is about money but can also figuratively include our lives, time, money, abilities, experiences, relationships, gifts, knowledge, and opportunities. Even though you may feel overwhelmed, developing your talents is good for you. What can you do today to use your talents? (pages 89-90)

8. One of the ways you take care of yourself is to “simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’” (Matt. 5:37). How is allowing yourself to say yes and no when you really mean it taking care of yourself? Do you have difficulty with this concept? How can you begin to make changes in this area? (pages 90-91)
9. Even without difficult relationships, life can easily become overwhelming. How can you simplify your life and keep your priorities straight? (pages 91-94)

Transforming Principle 6

FACE YOUR FEARS

People in difficult relationships have many fears, some real and some projected. These fears can keep them paralyzed from making changes, speaking the truth, taking care of themselves, and setting boundaries. It is important that they identify and talk about the fears they have, do whatever they can to appropriately take care of the situation, and then let the rest go by trusting in God.

1. Fear is an emotion. Some mistakenly believe that feeling fear is a sin; it is not. Read the following verses: Matt. 14:22-32, John 6:16-21, Luke 8:22-25, and Phil. 4:6. How do these verses help you see that having fear is not wrong but that you have a choice to turn that fear into worry and anxiety or into faith by trusting God? What do you typically do with your fear? (pages 95-96)
2. Read Isa. 51:7, Prov. 29:25, and 1 John 4:18. How are you afraid of your loved one's reaction? What about the reactions of others? How does this fear affect your choices? (pages 96-97, 104-105)
3. Read Matt. 10:14 and 2 Tim. 4:16-17. What do you think Jesus meant when He told the disciples to "shake the dust off your feet" when people rejected them? How are you affected by rejection? How does Jesus' message apply to you? (pages 97-98)
4. Read Ps. 112:7, Prov. 3:25-26, and James 4:13-16. What changes are you afraid of? How does God want you to view change and the unknown? (pages 98-99, 105)
5. Which losses do you fear most: financial, relational, material, physical, or spiritual? Read Prov. 15:16-17, Matt. 6:25-34, and Phil. 3:8. How does God want you to view loss? If it is necessary to allow your loved one to hit bottom, can you view doing so in a different way? (pages 99-100, 102-103)
6. Fear of abandonment is common in difficult relationships and can also result from childhood wounds if dysfunction existed in your home and you didn't feel nurtured or protected. Fear of abandonment can make you even more afraid of loss. When you read the description of this on page 100, can you relate? How does this fear affect you in your difficult relationship? (page 100)

7. It is important to identify, evaluate, and analyze your fears so you can see how they affect your decisions. Second Timothy 1:7 tells us that God has not given “us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline” or a “sound mind” (KJV). Read the questions on page 106 that help you evaluate your fears. How will that process help you say, “So what?” to your fear and allow you to do the right thing anyway? (pages 106-109)

Transforming Principle 7

SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Poor communication is a part of all difficult relationships. It is important that the truth be spoken in love because doing so changes the dynamics of the relationship.

In addition, denial is a common part of dysfunctional relationships because it keeps people from dealing with things until they are ready to face them. Denial is harmful in these relationships since it prevents the truth from being spoken. People dealing with difficult loved ones come to doubt their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings because their difficult loved ones have lied, denied, twisted, or manipulated things so much that they are confused. They need validation of their feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. Being in a group with other people that have had similar experiences helps them see things more clearly.

Once they know the truth, they can begin to speak the truth in love by being honest, direct, accurate, respectful, humble, persistent, open-minded, reasonable, and discerning.

1. Denial is common in difficult relationships. How have you been in denial about yourself, your loved one, and the relationship? How has your loved one's denial affected you? Jesus said that truth produces freedom (John 8:32). How would letting go of denial set you free? (pages 111-113)
2. Self-doubt is another common characteristic of a difficult relationship. When your loved one disagrees or denies much of what you believe, feel, and see, you begin to doubt yourself. It is essential that you begin to trust yourself to know your truth, not looking to your difficult loved one to tell you what it is. How have you let your loved one make you doubt yourself? How can you learn to trust yourself more? What does James 1:5-8 say about doubt? (pages 113-115)
3. It is essential that you are willing to confront when it is necessary. Read the examples on page 115 of things Jesus said to the scribes, Pharisees, and disciples. What do Jesus' words teach you about confronting? "Tough love says, 'I love you enough to be willing to cause you discomfort or pain, in the hopes of helping you better your life and mine by not continuing to do those destructive things'" (pages 115-116). Are there times that you are willing to use tough love? Why or why not? (pages 115-116)
4. Dysfunctional relationships have dysfunctional communication such as indirect communication, which causes the other person to guess at what is meant. Does your relationship

have indirect communication? How can you begin to communicate in short, factual, and direct statements? What would be difficult about that? How would it change things? (pages 117-119)

5. Speaking the truth in love involves speaking to your loved one respectfully, courteously, and kindly. Do you currently do this? What do your body language and tone of voice communicate to your loved one? Read Col. 3:12, Titus 3:4-5, and 2 Pet. 1:5-7. How can you speak truth that has those components? (pages 119-120)
6. Read Gal. 6:1 and Matt. 7:1-2. How do these verses remind you to speak your truth from a humble heart? Do you do that now, or do you feel that your loved one is “worse” than you and therefore deserves harsher judgment? (pages 120-121)
7. Sometimes, truth has to be spoken more than once. You may have to say it, let your loved one react, walk away, and then say it again—and again. You shouldn’t nag; just don’t back down from your truth if it isn’t accepted right away. Can you state your truth and then let it go, or do you need your loved one to agree with you? How does detachment help you with this principle of persistence? (page 121)
8. Your difficult loved one has a different perspective and some of his or her “truth” also. Can you be open-minded enough to let him or her speak, or is it difficult for you to hear what is said? How would your being a better listener change your relationship? (pages 121-122)
9. It is important to be reasonable. Some of the things that bother you are small and don’t need to be brought up. Read the questions in italics on the top of page 123 and discuss how asking yourself those questions would help you get a different perspective about the many irritations you feel. (pages 122-123)
10. Proverbs 17:28 says, “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.” Proverbs 26:4 says, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.” When do you need to be silent? (pages 123-124)

Transforming Principle 8

FORGIVE

Difficult relationships are filled with anger, resentment, and unforgiveness. At the same time, the person with a difficult loved one confuses forgiveness with tolerance and acceptance of mistreatment and sin. It is important that the principle of forgiveness be clearly understood.

Resentments may be held toward other people—not just the difficult loved one. Families are often torn by differing opinions about how to deal with the difficult loved one. They may blame others or themselves for their loved ones' problems.

1. What do you blame yourself for? What do you blame your difficult loved one for? What do you blame others for? How do blame and unforgiveness affect your relationships with your difficult loved one and others? (pages 125-127)
2. How does forgiveness differ from forgetting and denial? Some mistakenly think that Paul is saying in Phil. 3:12-14 that we should forget everything; yet, the ability to remember is God-given, and we cannot force ourselves to forget. What are some of the things you cannot or should not forget? Even though you cannot forget, how can you keep yourself from being resentful and bitter? (pages 127-128, 130-131)
3. Read 2 Sam. 12:1-18. King David sinned. God forgave him but followed through with consequences. How can you forgive your loved ones but still hold them accountable for their choices? (page 128)
4. Read Luke 23:34-41. Does the offender have to repent in order for us to forgive? How do you forgive when your difficult loved one and others don't realize how they have wronged you? Read Matt. 5:23-24 and 1 Cor. 5:1-5. How does forgiveness differ from reconciliation? (pages 128-129)
5. Is it harder or easier for you to forgive than it is to stay angry and resentful? Why? When you forgive others, do you hold it against them or keep track of how much you are forgiving? (page 131)
6. Read Matt. 18:21-35. Forgiveness is granting the offender a release from the obligation to repay a debt. How have you held your loved ones responsible for payment to you? What would it mean to let go of that debt? On the other hand, unforgiveness is linked with a desire to take revenge. Read Matt. 5:43-44. How do you seek your own revenge toward your loved one? Include your thoughts and actions. (page 132)

7. Forgiveness doesn't come easy, especially for big issues. The process requires identifying the offense and the effect of the offense because if you don't know what was done, you can't forgive it. How can you forgive too soon or only superficially? When you have done that, how do you realize that you haven't really forgiven? (page 133)
8. Forgiveness requires understanding why the offender committed the offense. How can understanding your loved one's struggles help you forgive? How can you empathize but still maintain appropriate self-protection so it doesn't happen again? (page 133)
9. Finally, forgiving yourself is often harder than forgiving others. Look at the steps on page 135 and discuss which parts are the easiest and most difficult for you. (pages 133-135)

Transforming Principle 9

SET BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are not about controlling another person; they are limits on what each of us will and will not do. As was already discussed, we are powerless to make someone else change. The only power we have is over our own lives. Therefore, boundaries utilize the power we have to decide how we will live. Our boundaries also set a standard for others, as we define what is acceptable for us.

“Jesus demonstrated boundaries in His interactions with people. He chose when and how to respond, always in full control of himself and what He allowed others to do to Him. He willingly went to the Cross at the appointed time, but withdrew himself from dangerous situations before that. He held people responsible for their actions while consistently demonstrating authority and integrity (Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32), all the while demonstrating a love that enabled Him to die on the Cross” (page 137).

Difficult people don't necessarily welcome their loved ones setting boundaries. Their boundaries may not coincide with their loved ones' preferences, choices, and wants; they may even cause conflict and division. It isn't God's first choice that any relationship have a breach, but one may result from making a stand for the higher good of following Christ and standing for righteousness.

1. Difficult relationships weaken and challenge boundaries. Are your boundaries weaker than you would like them to be? Look at the list on the bottom of pages 138-139 and share about the reasons that apply to you. (pages 138-140)
2. Read the list in the middle of page 140 that says, “The following are examples of boundaries to consider.” Think about Christ's life. How did He demonstrate boundaries?
3. Next read the bulleted list of why you need strong boundaries. Which ones strike you as reasons you should work on strengthening your boundaries? (page 140)
4. Think of an area in which you need stronger boundaries. Look at the bulleted questions at the bottom of page 140 and the top of 141 and answer them, as they pertain to that area.
5. Do any family members disagree with the boundaries you want to set regarding your difficult loved one? How do you have to set boundaries with them regarding your disagreements? For example, if your husband continues to pay for things for your irresponsible adult son and you don't agree, how would you set boundaries on how you interact with your husband regarding the issue?

6. What are your past and present experiences with abuse? Have you been in a verbally, emotionally, or physically abusive relationship? How can you set boundaries with abuse? (pages 145-148)
7. Read the bulleted questions under “General Relationship Boundaries” on page 148. Answer several of the questions posed. (pages 148-149)
8. Setting boundaries is a process that takes time. It often comes after you have worked the other principles because it takes clarity of mind, a willingness to face your fears and speak the truth, the ability to nurture and focus on yourself, and the ability to detach so you know what is clearly your responsibility. When you set your boundaries, you have to do so in a clear and calm way. When your difficult loved one doesn't like your boundaries, you have to be prepared to stand firm. What has been your experience with setting boundaries? Have you backed down, argued, explained, begged, threatened, gotten angry, cried, or negotiated? What has and hasn't worked for you in the past? What can you change today? (pages 149-150)

Transforming Principle 10

ENTER GOD'S REST

After doing everything they can for now by working the previous nine principles to the best of their abilities, it is time for the group members to turn their loved ones, themselves, and their circumstances over to God. They will not work the 10 Principles perfectly and may even find themselves occasionally slipping back into old habits. That is okay. Change takes time and occurs in increments. God works through all circumstances.

1. Read Matt. 11:28-30. Discuss what it would mean to truly enter God's rest in the situation you are in.
2. It is natural to ask why things happen. Assuming a reason either allows us to blame, avoid guilt, or find meaning through discovering a purpose. Read these verses and reflect on how they shed light on the "whys" of your difficult situation: John 9:3, Rom. 9:6-23, 2 Cor. 12:9, & 1 Cor. 1:27. (pages 151-152)
3. What do you think God feels about you and your loved one at this moment? Search your heart to find what your emotions really reveal. Now, read these verses and tell about how they relate to your situation: Heb. 12:11, 1 Tim. 1:12-17, and Ps. 34:18. (page 152)
4. Restitution refers to the process of repairing the damage you've done. Regardless of what your loved one has done or is doing, you're responsible for the ways you've hurt him or her. How have you hurt your loved one? Which of these ways represents a reasonable method of making amends or restitution: acknowledging and apologizing directly, repaying debts, doing nice things, or making "living amends" by changing yourself and acting differently now and in the future? (pages 152-153)
5. When you think of making all the changes you are contemplating, what is most frightening? (page 153)
6. One of the hardest things to do is to truly surrender all your hopes and desires to God. If you are struggling with acceptance, it could be that your dreams have not been realized. Read Phil. 4:11-13. What would it mean if you accepted the facts of your life, just as they are? How would that help you enter God's rest? (page 154)
7. Read Matt. 6:34. Living with a difficult loved one results in regrets over the past and fears about the future. How would letting go of the mistakes of the past and the fears about the future change your life? (pages 154-155)

8. Trust is an essential part of healthy relationships and is often destroyed in difficult relationships. How has your trust been taken advantage of? What would it take to rebuild your trust, and why should you offer trust carefully in the future? Does your difficult loved one trust you? Why or why not? (pages 155-156)
9. Even if your loved one begins to change, he or she may not be everything you want, and problems will still occur. How can you deal with disappointment when it comes? (pages 155-158)
10. Read 2 Cor. 1:3-4 and 1 Thess. 5:11. How has God used others to comfort you through your difficult circumstances? How can He use you to comfort others? (page 158)
11. Read Prov. 16:4, Rom. 8:28, Eph. 3:20, and Jer. 29:11. How do those verses change your perspective on your loved one's future and yours? (pages 159-160)
12. Describe the differences in you and your life today as a result of this study.