



A Model For Reconciliation Across Our Deepest Divides

God moved into our neighborhood and befriended us while we were still God's enemies (Romans 5:6-11). In an attempt to model God's self-sacrificial love, demonstrated in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we dedicate ourselves towards living the following values.

1. **Offensive Sanctuary:** We will not exclude anyone from the table or from the conversation, no matter how inglorious their presence may be.
2. **Treasonous Friendship:** We will not permit personal or communal loyalties to ideology, labels, or tribes to prevent us from befriending each other.
3. **Conflicted Conviction:** We will not trample over or ridicule each other's beliefs, even though they make us wildly uncomfortable.
4. **Subversive Listening:** We will not ignore or invalidate each other's stories, knowing that to listen is to invite change in the world's systems and in ourselves.
5. **Narrative Honesty:** We will not shy away from honoring truth wherever it is found.
6. **Insolent Kindness:** We will not fail to be good to each other, always honoring the dignity and inherent worth of every human being.
7. **Obstinate Loyalty:** We will not give up on or dismiss each other, no matter how angry a conversation makes us.

LOVEboldly

What are the Practical Steps Toward Reconciling Across Deep Divides?

We often attempt to enter attempts at reconciliation with the wrong motives and in the wrong order. We ought to love others not to change them but rather, because God's love changed us. Embracing each of these steps, starting carefully and intentionally with step one and two, will help us to move forward.

"Grace comes free of charge to people who do not deserve it, and I am one of those people." – Philip Yancey

1. Attend to the 'other' – honoring worth and dignity

Part of this process is listening and learning, from the 'other' what the wrongs have been and what might be done to set things right again. In this step, we also attend to needs that dignify, including giving/receiving hospitality from the group that has been marginalized. During this phase, we truly befriend one another. We adopt a spirit of curiosity about each other, asking questions like, "What have your experiences been with my group (e.g. Christians, the church, LGBTQ people, etc.)" and "What do you wish I understood about you?" and "Tell me more about what it's like to be in your shoes." Permission is asked for initiating hard or awkward questions and safety provided to refuse engaging, if too uncomfortable. We trust the sincerity of the person who is sharing themselves with us and remember to embrace a confidence that God is already at work in the heart and life of the 'other' group or person. Embracing a non-anxious approach, we accept that it is not our responsibility to "fix" or "convert" them to our perspectives, beliefs, or opinions. We encourage, validate, and affirm their sharing, staying open to stories and compassionate towards pain and hurt.

*"We associate with persons on our own wave-length easily. But following God sometimes means keeping peace by surrendering our own opinion. Besides, who's wise enough to know everything? Don't get cocky; get another opinion. Even if you think well, give up your own ideas once in awhile for God's sake, and accept another's opinions. This will turn to your good."
– Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ*

2. Serve the 'other' – meaningfully sacrifice self and meet real needs

God himself came into our world and served us. Informed by Jesus' example and instructions in Matt. 20:26-28, we must adopt a posture of servanthood to those we seek to understand. This is the action step that follows on the heels of step one. Once we have attended to learning the needs, hopes, and hurts of the 'other', we respond with action. This step includes apologizing, in both word and action, for the wrongs done to the 'other' group. It involves attempting to make reparations for these injustices. We speak the "language"

of the 'other' – using terminology and frameworks they appreciate, understand, and find non-threatening. This step is also spent in being a friend in other ways, outside the topic of dialogue. We give rides to the airport, deliver meals to households experiencing difficulty, celebrate victories together, and support one another through trial and loss.

In situations where persons have been brutalized or have suffered at the hands of others, words of comfort, hope and promise – unaccompanied by presence and action – are small comfort indeed.”

- Christine Pohl & Chris Huertz, Friendship at the Margins

3. Share – dialogue with the 'other'

Once a good 90% of our efforts are spent in repairing the breach and rebuilding trust and establishing rapport, we can venture into honest dialogue. In steps one and two, we earn the right to be heard by each other through our demonstrated dedication to one another. The right to share our own perspectives with honesty and clarity is typically earned through a special relationship, such as develops in the first two steps, or a special role (such as a counselor, advisor, pastor, etc.) Once the trust is developed, it's time to speak up. We are truly honest with one another. For example, we may say things like, “One thing I have a hard time understanding about your perspective is...”; “My own belief is [insert your thoughts]. What do you think about that?”; “Can we agree to disagree on this issue, or will it hurt our friendship?” Sharing honestly usually either deepens or dissolves the relationships. Not all will feel comfortable or ready to share openly, or to hear with honesty the perspectives of the other person. That's okay. This is an invitational, permission-based phase of sharing.

“It helps, when a person doesn't feel God's presence and isn't getting any of God's answers to such intimate struggles, to have someone in their corner fighting with them every step of the way - not someone fighting against them every step of the way.”

- Andrew Marin, Love is An Orientation