



# *Want to Talk?* Communication Tools for Divided Times

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

*“As you press on for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline, using only the weapon of love.”*

— Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

### Program Summary

Whether you find yourself navigating a heated disagreement with a spouse, interrupting racism in the office, facilitating political tension in church, or working for systemic change around any justice issue, *Want to Talk? Communication Tools for Divided Times* will guide you in deepening your relationships while staying true to your values. This program draws upon the wisdom of experts in nonviolent communication, civil dialogue, and grassroots organizing, providing practical tools for navigating the political polarization of our time, as well as tough conversations with our loved ones.

### Program Goals

- Learn how Jesus navigated systemic injustice, political unrest, and interpersonal conflict, in order to discern how we might respond to similar situations today.
- Learn communication tools for seeking justice in the issue about which you are most passionate.
- Learn to navigate disagreement in a healthier way – whether in personal relationships or when working for systemic change.
- Strengthen communication skills for assisting divided congregations, organizations, and communities in moving from ‘us and them’ to a greater sense of shared vision.

### Topics and Timeframes

*Want to Talk?* consists of eight two-hour sessions, as well as an immersion experience in which participants implement the skills they’ve learned into their real relationships. The program also contains an optional get-to-know-you session for groups who don’t know each other well or want to spend more time on community-building. While regular sessions are designed to last two hours, some groups may prefer to extend their sessions in order to allow for more dialogue or community-building. JustFaith Ministries provides all the materials and support you need to facilitate this small group program in your own community, regardless of whether



you choose to meet in person or over video conferencing. Below is an overview of the timeline:

**Session 1: Laying the Foundation** — Participants explore the impact of violent communication on our interpersonal relationships and our nation, in order to begin learning about tools for communicating in a way that reflects their faith, their commitment to justice, and their respect for God’s holy image in all people.

**Session 2: Moving Toward Beloved Community<sup>1</sup>** — In moving beyond shame and blame, we can reclaim the connection we’ve lost, as well as subvert the “system” of isolation, alienation, and injustice. This session introduces a practical tool for recognizing and transforming shame and blame in our interactions with one another.

**Session 3: Sacred Listening** — How can we move beyond our judgments in order to encounter God’s image in the other? How can we listen to someone with whom we vehemently disagree? This session addresses these questions and offers tools even for those who are already well-practiced in the art of listening.

**Session 4: Empathy for Justice** — Participants learn tools for empathy for ourselves and others, in order to embody the Beloved Community we are called to be. Skills addressed include making space for ourselves and others to be where we are and empathizing with the impact of injustice (even when we don’t understand completely).

**Session 5: Anger** — The group learns how to deal with hostility and anger in ourselves and others

**Session 6: Requesting Change, Demanding Change:** How can we lovingly and from a place of care ask someone to change their behavior? When we encounter injustice in our communities, how can we effectively ask for — or demand — change?

**Immersion Experience** — Using the skills they’ve learned in the program, participants initiate an important conversation with someone in their lives. The group then convenes to reflect on participants’ individual experiences, share their learning, and pray together.

**Session 7: What to Do When the Answer is ‘No’** — What do we do when our personal or communal needs aren’t met? This session includes tips and tools for finding a “third way” to proceed, setting or clarifying boundaries, and using nonviolent direct action.

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<sup>1</sup> “[Beloved Community](#)” is a term coined by theologian Josiah Royce and popularized by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. For King, the Beloved Community, which reflects the Kingdom of God, was a realistic, achievable global vision in which the power of nonviolence and “agape” love would eradicate poverty, racism, and militarism.



**Session 8: What Next?** – Participants discern how they will commit to “holy conversation” in their personal relationships and in their work for justice.

### Optional Get-to-Know-You Session

In order to build trust and community, your group can opt to engage in an hour-long get-to-know-you session before the program begins.

### Immersion Experience

The immersion experience in this program is structured slightly differently from that in other programs. In *Want to Talk*, each participant will use the communication skills they’ve learned to initiate an important conversation with someone in their life. The group then convenes to reflect on participants’ individual experiences, share their learning, and pray together.

### Resources and Readings

Participants read two books: *The Compassion Book*<sup>2</sup> by Thom Bond and *Crucial Conversations, Third Edition* by Grenny, Patterson, McMillan, Switzler, and Gregory. Articles and short videos, particularly those by Nonviolent Communication expert Dr. Roxy Manning, complement the books and provide a diverse range of perspectives on civil dialogue and justice. Each week, participants will engage in a spiritual practice, which will guide them in trying out new communication skills and engaging in self reflection.

**Place:** St. Anthony on the Lake Dates:

**Sessions:** 9/27, 10/4, 10/11, 10/25, 11/8, 11/15, 11/29 (Immersion Experience), 12/6, 12/13

**Time:** 6:30-8:30pm

**Place:** Fellowship Hall C&D

### Program Fee

\$50.00 payable by check to St. Anthony on the Lake or by Credit Card via mySal. The fees cover the cost of your personal copies of the books and the Participation Guide. You will also have access to the guide online.

### Registration

Space is limited to ensure the overall experience so register early.

Register here through mySAL.

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<sup>2</sup> Participants will not read all of *The Compassion Book* during the program. However, this book contains important wisdom, practical tools, and reflection activities that participants will be encouraged to continue after Session 8. When it comes to communicating in a way that reflects our core values, daily practice is key, and we believe that participants will find *The Compassion Book* to be a trusted companion as they continue on their lifelong journey toward justice and healing.



## Consultants and Partners

We are grateful for the support of Cory Lockhart, Dr. Lewis Brogdon, and Maggie Jezreel, whose wisdom and experience shaped the content of this program.

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