Betty Pries

THE SPACE BETWEEN US

CONVERSATIONS *about* TRANSFORMING CONFLICT

Study Guide by Karen Cornies

HERALD PRESS
Harrisonburg, Virginia

This study guide is meant to help digest the golden wisdom of *The Space Between Us* so that we can be nourished each step of the way. The guide is entirely built on author Betty Pries's work, using quotes and models from the book.

Whether you read *The Space Between Us* by yourself, with a casual group, or in a formal setting, you can use this guide to connect with the material in the book. The author mentions that we are not meant to heal in isolation—rather, we can carry each other and help center each other. As such, where possible, finding at least one person to share this experience with is recommended. Keep in mind that each person will need freedom to speak or pass and will approach the material in their own way, at their own pace. This content has a personal aspect and may be challenging to work through. Be gentle with yourself and others processing this content, and find support as needed.

The guide accompanies each chapter in two parts: reflection/discussion questions and exercises that are more introspective, most of which are to be undertaken over a period of time. Read the book at any speed you want, and if you can, take time (be it a week or a month or a time that works for you) to digest each chapter. This guide will encourage you to intentionally notice conflict throughout your time of reading, develop the language and nourishment needed to help grow capacity for conflict transformation, and highlight the gifts that conflict can offer.

The Space Between Us invites us to a way of being in the world. Years after first learning these tools from Betty Pries, I still need to go back to them and practice them. Take the time to bring these concepts and tools to mind in your day-to-day life, and you will find that they bring healing. It is when in our insecurity we forget that we—and the people around us—are beloved that we struggle. *The Space Between Us* calls us to a quest into who we are and who we are meant to be. In a way, this book is entirely a prayer for a deep healing breath on this journey. May we all find healing in the space between us.

Introduction

1. Reflect on significant conflicts from throughout your life story (it may be helpful to write them out in a list). What patterns do you notice? How have you typically responded to conflicts? What emotions or thoughts do these memories bring to the surface for you?
2. What is your experience of meditation or contemplative practices? How might these practices intersect with conflict transformation?
3. Identify one significant conflict situation where you want to approach another individual regarding what has happened.
   a. What biases and preconceptions might be limiting your ability to hear the individual with whom you are experiencing a conflict situation?
   b. Consider how the discipline of meditation might help bring about the transformation needed in this conflict situation. Reflect on how you could bring contemplative practices to bear on the conflict at hand.
   c. What transformation do you hope to experience through this conflict situation?

Chapter 1

Disagreements and the Escalation of Conflict

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Consider the steps that lead us into conflict

1. On page 22, the author writes that "pain that is not transformed is transferred." What is the importance of this understanding of pain? How do you see it affecting conflicts?
2. How do we understand the nature of conflict? What causes us to fall from healthy disagreement into conflict? How might we learn to manage our differences well? The chart on pages 35–36 outlines three stages:
   a. *Differences* are neutral.
   b. *Conflict* involves differences that have become personal.
   c. *Entrenchment* is the cementation of the conflict.

   Reflect on the distinctions between each stage. To do this, think of a few contentious issues in the public sphere (for example, COVID-19 vaccination, racism, U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan) and identify where on this continuum you would place them.
3. This chapter identifies some common, unhealthy ways of processing conflict:
   a. *Artificial harmony* is common in group environments. What are its effects in the groups that you are part of? What do you think motivates artificial harmony in these contexts?
   b. *Deflection* occurs when people strategically change the topic. Where do you see this most often, and what do you think motivates this strategy?
   c. "*Otherizing*." Review the "Us-them" chart on page 30. Where does this framework affect situations that you observe in your own life, in the life of friends around you, in the news, and so on? What do you notice about its use?
4. Reflect on these reframing quotes and concepts highlighted in chapter 1:
   a. *The gift of conflict*. "What if conflict is a gift to us, an opportunity to understand ourselves better, to discover empathy for others, to build deeper and more meaningful relationships? Could it be that conflict is an essential counterstroke to life, necessary for us to mature at a psychological, social, and spiritual level?" (p. 72).

b. *The cost of numbing and the call to joy.* "Could it be that when we avoid differences for fear of conflict, we also numb ourselves from life's experiences more generally, thereby losing the capacity for deep joy?" (p. 72).
c. *The mug* (see story on pp. 28–29). How does the mug metaphor help us hold on to and let go of what we need to in the midst of a conflict?
d. *Turn judgment into curiosity* (pp. 59–60). Consider the call to stay open to conflict by engaging situations with words like "Tell me more" rather than shutting down conflict. Maintaining a healthy vulnerability in the midst of conflict is challenging. Reflect on what helps to maintain that open posture, and if you have had opportunity to practice this stance or have observed someone practicing curiosity in conflict, reflect on what that experience was like.
e. *Selfhood* (pp. 26–28). Consider how our sense of who we are is affected by conflict. Reflect on what healing of self is needed in the midst of conflict and how insecurities affect capacity to respond well to conflict.

EXERCISES

1. Review the substantive reasoning, process, and foundational needs description and figure on pages 56–58. Work to memorize the foundational needs (using the acronym BRAMS as a memory tool):
   a. Belonging
   b. Recognition
   c. Autonomy/self-determination
   d. Meaning
   e. Security

   Find an example of a conflict where participants are talking past each other between substantive reasoning and process or between foundational needs. Create an alternate conflict scenario where participants begin to talk at the same layer or validate each other's foundational needs.
2. *This week, choose one of the following:*
   a. Consciously use the ABCA model described on pages 46–48 to work through conflicts that arise. Journal about the experience.
   b. Review the "Intent-action-effect" chart and description on page 62. Each time a difference, conflict, or entrenchment comes up, use this language and model to work through it. Describe the impact.

Chapter 2

The Architecture of Selfhood and the Transformation of Conflict

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Explore how to understand experiences of conflict through the metaphor of personhood

1. How do you understand the concept of *selfhood* as outlined on pages 75–91? Reflect on each aspect of selfhood (descriptive, defended, and deeper) and describe each in your own words.
2. "How well we navigate our relationship with the layers of our selfhood . . . influences our conflict experiences" (p. 106). Our deeper and descriptive selves need each other—the universal and the unique. Trouble arises when we separate them from one another. We are to "see and claim both the beauty of our

descriptive selves, where we differ from one another, and the truth of our deeper selves, where we are one with the source of our being" (p. 100).

Where have you seen an unhealthy relationship between the deeper and descriptive selves, and what does it mean to have a healthy relationship between them?

3. "A healthy expression of the descriptive self dwells in abundance rather than scarcity thinking" (p. 87). Consider how the examples of scarcity thinking below can help us cultivate abundance thinking:
   a. People often worry about not being enough and shoulder a burden of shame. As we regard our own characteristics and compare them to those of others, we fall into ego attachment or shame—or both at the same time. The author describes how self-talk, social interactions, marketing, media, the historical narratives of colonialism, slavery, genocides, and other global traumas (often including our charity) reveal the prevalence of our comparative and judgmental thinking. Reflect on examples of this type of scarcity thinking and its impact.
   b. Are we "unable to imagine a world where all matter equally and where no one's characteristics are held as a liability, as a source of shame, or as a reason for self-congratulatory arrogance?" (p. 87). Consider this limited imagination and where it has resulted in shame or arrogance; then imagine what a world where all matter equally would be like.
4. When have you seen the face of God in another human? What does it mean to bear God's face and practice fidelity to it? "What does it mean to be bowled over by a love so great? . . . What if [each one of us is] God's beloved, with whom God is well pleased?" (p. 93). How does the understanding that "both self and other are beloved" (p. 94) affect one's experience of conflict?
5. Problems occur when "our technical dialogue shifts into monologue disguised as dialogue" (p. 102). Where have you seen dialogue disguised as monologue?
6. Reread the excerpt from Thich Nhat Hanh's poem "Call Me by My True Names" on page 108 and discern its meaning for you. How does this contribute to your understanding of both-and thinking?
7. "When we regard the other through a lens of care and compassion, we also find care and compassion for ourselves" (p. 120). How have you seen this lens at work in relationships around you?
8. Read over the principles of the architecture of selfhood outlined on page 119 slowly and reflectively several times. After doing so, consider which stands out to you the most, which is the hardest to come to terms with, and which you most want to focus on.

EXERCISES

Choose one of the following:

1. Explore your understanding of the self:
   a. *The descriptive self* is described on pages 78–80. Spend time considering which aspects of the descriptive self have shaped you. Here are some prompts to get you started:
      i. *Characteristics and identity categories:* Identify your markers that cannot easily or necessarily be changed (race, sex, skin color, height, hair, body shape), then reflect on identity categories you have been given or taken on (parent, child), professional identities (construction worker, educator, artist), the religion (or atheism) into which you were born or chose.
      ii. *Strengths:* What collection of strengths do you hold (i.e., handiwork, social connections, growing food, articulating complex ideas, a smile, teaching, intuition of care, humor)?
      iii. *Limitations* "can be physical, academic, or social" and "can be associated with incapacity to attend to details, struggle in [a subject], a lack of confidence in social settings, an over-inclination to regard the world through logic or emotion, the tendency to say the wrong thing, and so on."

They do not emerge from low self-esteem, but are "in the bodily container we each were given to inhabit at our birth" (p. 79).

iv. *Circumstances of our birth* include familial history, our mother tongue, our childhood communities, and the social class of our origins. "While we can leave our culture, social class, and family of origin, we will always bear the memory of [that] context" (p. 79).

v. *Foundational framework of our being* "includes everything from our capacity to breathe to our emotions, as well as our capacity to think and our foundational human needs. [This includes] *security* (whether physical, such as for food and shelter, or emotional, such as the need to be free from harm), *self-determination* (including a sense of agency or voice), meaning ([purpose in life]), *belonging* (to know we are not alone, to be cared for and loved) and *recognition* (or acknowledgment)" (pp. 79–80).

b. *The defended self* "emerges . . . when we regard our selfhood as being at risk. . . . It lies at the heart of racism, sexism, and every other prejudice" (p. 88). Using the questions below as a guide, consider where in your life you have been imprisoned by your defended self:

i. When have you felt your selfhood at risk, and how did you respond?

ii. What happened that created an aversion to a vulnerability? What foundational needs were unmet, and which have taken on too strong of an attachment?

iii. When have you noticed a tendency toward judgment, comparisons, and defensiveness, when calmness eluded you and internally you became unrooted, losing the trust of the people you were in conflict with? What thoughts and feelings does this memory evoke?

iv. Many attachments are in the subconscious and thus hard to see. What subconscious attachments have you noticed in others or in yourself when responding to conflict?

v. We can be attached to what we dislike in ourselves. Where have you experienced that?

vi. The defended self can be a denial of foundational needs. It can be low self-esteem, a sense of superiority, or both at the same time. When have you noticed this in yourself?

vii. Groups, too, can become attached to a defensive self. Where have you seen this?

c. *The deeper self* is the presence of God, consciousness, or energy of great love coursing through each person. It does not carry unique characteristics. "We are carriers of divine breath. . . . [It is a] place of nothingness, . . . emptied of every characteristic, . . . [and] it is also the place where we encounter a type of unity with a life force energy greater than ourselves" (p. 90). It "calls us each beloved . . . [and] beats in the heart of each group and also each person—including those with whom we [are] in conflict" (p. 91). Here, no defenses divide. Reflect on a time when you had a sense of your deeper self. What was that experience like?

2. Consider how your understanding of the aspects of selfhood described on pages 106–119 affects conflict situations. For one day, focus on one of the aspects described and reflect on the experience. Repeat that process with the remaining aspects.

a. Preexisting oneness
b. Both-and thinking
c. The location of conflict in identity
d. Unconscious bias, pain stories and hidden attachments
e. Thoughts and feelings
f. Fidelity to the deeper self and the descriptive, bodily world
g. Goodness, generosity, and grace

3. *This week:* Each time you find yourself in a conflict, focus for a moment on the person with whom you have had conflict, perhaps a person you have come to dislike. Recalling that each of you is beloved by the

breath that gives you life, seek to access the love for the other coming from the breath that is pouring love into you, and create a phrase that articulates this that you can use to remind yourself of this truth in future conflict situations.

Chapter 3

Reflections on Selfhood

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Explore themes that deepen our understanding of selfhood

1. Find an "archetypal story" (see pp. 127–28) that relates to the architecture of selfhood—a fairy tale, a legend, a story from a faith text—and analyze it using the architecture of selfhood framework outlined throughout chapter 2 (pp. 75–101). How are the descriptive, deeper, and defended selves portrayed?

   Scales often emerge to protect us from the judgments we have experienced, or imposed on ourselves, when we exposed our naked characteristics to the world. Removing these defensive layers has been described as "dying before we die." Why does it hurt so much to remove them? How do we remove them? And why, if we know that returning to our heart promises new life, do we resist this journey home?

2. Review the story of Jacob (pp. 128–33) and reflect on the following questions:
   a. What stands out to you in this story?
   b. What happened to Jacob during his night of wrestling? What was that experience like?
   c. What is the role of confession in this process?
   d. "Our defended self is not our identity" (p. 133), yet it can be difficult to remember that. How does Jacob act as if the defended self is his identity, and how does he grow to realize it is not?
   e. "How many of us would welcome a new name, an opportunity to release our . . . defended self by which we have defined ourselves?" (p. 131). What does it mean that "our 'old name' does not need to define our future" (p. 133)?
   f. "Jacob knew he had to release his false-self attachment . . . not just to meet his brother . . . [but] *for himself* so that he could come home to himself" (p. 132). What is the importance of this shift?

3. Review the story of the incarnation (pp. 134–37) and reflect on the following lines and questions:
   a. "Jesus, described as both human and divine, [is a guide who embodies] what it means to hold our deeper and descriptive self together. . . . Jesus [practices] fidelity to the life breath of God (Jesus' divinity) coursing in and through his body (Jesus' humanity). It is also an invitation for us, that we too may practice fidelity to this breath that breathes in and through us, that each of us may incarnate this energy of love for the world" (pp. 135–36). What does this mean for you?
   b. "In the book of Genesis, it is said that God breathed into each person, that we are each made in the image of God, and that the breath of God is what gives us life. If this is true, then the day on which each of us was born is also a celebration of the coming of God into this world. Said differently, while Christmas is the annual celebration of the incarnation of God in Jesus, in a sense it is also the celebration of God being born in each one of us. We also are the incarnation of God" (p. 136). How does this affect your understanding of identity?
   c. "The architecture of selfhood proposes that Jesus shows a path to wholeness—and to care for the other—to which each of us is called. . . . We [are to] love our neighbor as though our neighbor *actually is* ourselves, including the person (or group) with whom we are in conflict" (pp. 136–37). How does the incarnation of Jesus call forth wholeness and this type of care, and where have you seen the impact of this in conflict situations?

EXERCISES

1. There is great pain and resistance in extracting ourselves from accumulated layers of defenses. We may be unable to imagine an identity without low self-regard, or we may not recognize how a self-congratulatory way of being gets in the way of relationships. Reflect on a time when you wrestled with shedding a defensive layer—what made it difficult?
2. Dive deeper into one (or more) of this chapter's archetypal stories to explore the shedding of defensive layers:
   a. The dragon story (pp. 121–22). Place yourself in the role of the princess, the dragon, and then the wise woman. What are your thoughts and feelings in each role?
   b. Jacob/Israel (pp. 128–33)
      i. Jacob knows he needs something but does not know what he needs. When have you experienced this during your own times of wrestling?
      ii. Consider a time when you wrestled with yourself and your complicity in harm done to others. How did a time of wrestling change you? Jacob's gait was changed. What marker of this wrestling have you experienced?
      iii. "A blessing without confession risks being another attachment, another defended-self achievement by which we can ride above our terrors . . . or our complicity in the harm done" (p. 131). In Jacob's story, the wrestler gives Jacob something more important than a blessing—true selfhood. Identify a time in your life when you experienced something similar.
   c. The incarnation (pp. 134–37)
      i. When have you experienced the invitation to "practice fidelity to [the breath that] breathes in and through us . . . [to] incarnate an energy of love for the world" (p. 136)?
      ii. "Loving our neighbor as ourselves is possible because of the unity between self and other at the level of the deeper self" (p. 137). Over the next week, intentionally reflect on your interactions with others, and identify where you interact with people around you out of this deep sense of unity.
3. *This week:* Walk through the model of removing our defended-self layers outlined on pages 126–27. Journal about a current situation in your life to which you can apply this model and commit to going through these steps (summarized below).
   a. We must *wrestle* with our demons to release our attachment to them. If we do not, our defended self will control us, consciously or unconsciously. "We notice our complicity in the conflicts in our lives; we observe embarrassing or shameful patterns; we see our biases" (p. 126).
   b. We can then *respond* to our demons "with grace rather than shame, compassion rather than violence, acceptance rather than rejection. . . . We accept our demons *by accepting the stories of our defended self without judgment and without attachment*. It can be as simple as saying without judgment in our voice, 'Oh, hello, demon/defended self. There you are again'" (p. 126). When we accept our demons, they lose their power over us.
   c. We then can begin to *release our attachment*, recognizing that "there are always more demons to release!" The author quotes Sister Grace Myerjack: "The Spirit takes us back through our patterns over and over again, until we realize that they are no longer necessary" (p. 127).
   d. We can then *rest* in self-compassion, being "gentle with ourselves, tender with our raw and exposed flesh. . . . All of us fall down and all of us have dragon scales we are working to release. Courage is learning to hold ourselves with . . . compassion as we learn to get up again" (p. 127).

Chapter 4

Conflict Transformation

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Explore the transformation of selfhood

1. Reflect on the image of "salting from the inside" on page 139 and consider how this applies to conflict situations. Continuing this theme, the author points us to the words of CEO William O'Brien: "The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition" (p. 140). What does this mean to you? What does it look like to cultivate a healthy interior condition?
2. In forgiveness, it is in release that we find ourselves again (see p. 150). Reflect on how the mystery of forgiveness has played out in your own life or the experiences of others, and respond to the questions below:
   a. Is it possible to hold boundaries and forgive at the same time?
   b. What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?
   c. "Grace for the other is possible only when we have practiced grace for ourselves" (p. 157). When have you extended forgiveness and grace to yourself?
3. "*When we can accept the complex reality of others, we can begin to accept ourselves and our own complexity*. . . . Over time, our inability to accept the brokenness of the people around us will turn on its head to become the inability to accept ourselves" (p. 163). Where have you seen this principle at work in conflict situations? How do our expectations of others affect our capacity to respond to conflict? (Reread the "If they can, they will" principle found on pp. 161–62 as you consider.) How does approaching conflict from a "learning and connecting" stance rather than a "teaching" stance affect conflict situations?
4. "Our communication patterns and our capacity to forgive are deeply connected. . . . How we lean in to our conversations with one another . . . is correlated with our capacities for forgiveness" (p. 165). What does this mean for you?
5. "When we hold tightly to our identity as victim and place the other in the role of offender, our vision becomes myopic, limiting our ability to think creatively about how to respond to the conflict and cementing an us-them view of the world" (pp. 166–67). Where have you seen this victim/villain/rescuer dynamic at work in conflict?
6. A monk describes what monks do all day as: "We fall down and we get up again." Falling down is a normal part of the human condition. Each of us fails, sometimes in big ways, so how do we get up again? Reflect on the "getting up again" model on pages 167–72 as you respond.

EXERCISES

This week, choose one of the following exercises:

1. Perhaps the most important aspect of processing conflict well is the health of our interior condition and our capacity to see the other with unconditional positive regard (love). Identify someone with whom you have experienced conflict, and spend some time viewing them through the lens of unconditional positive regard. Shift then to viewing yourself through that lens, using the author's insights into "nonviolent nonresistance of self" as a guide (pp. 152–55). What was this experience like for you?
2. When has forgiveness been a significant part of your life experience? What was healing about it? What was not? How did grace and compassion factor in to this experience? Following the example on page 152, make a list of people to forgive and, if nudged in that direction, do the same. Where appropriate, use the five steps to a good apology on pages 170–71 to offer an apology to someone. What was the experience like?

3. The author reminds us it is said that "hanging on to resentment is like drinking poison but expecting the other person to die" (p. 161). Make a list of resentments you are holding and create a ritual to symbolize letting go of them.
4. Intentionally hold a conflict conversation using the steps outlined on pages 174–76 to help facilitate talking well together. After the conversation is over, reflect on each step, assessing how you integrated each step (or didn't integrate it) into the process.

Chapter 5

Conflict Transformation and the Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Spiritual disciplines to help us navigate conflict

1. The first spiritual discipline the author explores in this section is prayer, which is often expressed as reaching out to a higher power to act in the problems in our lives. Spend some time considering the concept of "being saved" as outlined in this section using the questions below:
   a. What does it mean to "pray to be saved" (pp. 181–85)?
   b. On page 185, the author writes, "In a strange way, sometimes our conflicts save us." How do you interpret this statement? What is at the root of this idea?
   c. "When we cry out to be saved, we discover that we need saving not only from the aggressor . . . [but also] from our fears, our self-doubt, our desire to run away" (p. 184). What has this looked like for you?
   d. "While our fears initially protect us, over time they can imprison us" (p. 184). Where have you seen this at work? How can we be saved from being imprisoned in this way?
   e. How does being saved differ from the unhealthy victim/rescuer dynamic that can entrench conflict?
2. The second spiritual discipline addressed in this chapter is meditation. One way that meditation can help us is by strengthening compassion by maintaining healthy boundaries (pp. 193–94). Reflect on what this looks like using the following questions as a guide:
   a. On page 193, the author writes, "This is a paradox: we offer compassion—an energy that brings us nearer to the other; and we hold boundaries—an energy that puts distance between us and the other. Living with this paradox involves engaging both energies at the same time. After all, if we are only boundaried, we lose the other; if we are only compassionate, we lose ourselves." Where have you seen a healthy example of this paradox? Where have you seen the scales tipped toward eclipsing either compassion or boundaries?
   b. The author continues, "It is also true that if we are only boundaried, over time we also lose ourselves—the self cannot survive without connection. Similarly, if we are only compassionate, we lose the other—the other cannot survive with too much connection" (p. 193). Where have you seen this dynamic in conflict situations?
   c. On pages 193–94, the author describes how she uses a hand gesture—one hand open and one up like a stop sign—to identify the balance of compassion and boundaries. How does this image assist in maintaining that creative tension?
   d. From the perspective of spiritual disciplines, how do we offer both compassion and boundaries at the same time?

3. "What we resist we entrench" (p. 199). Consider examples of where you have seen this entrenchment because of resistance in conflict situations that you have observed. What do we typically resist, and how does that become entrenched in conflict?
4. "One of the accusations sometimes leveled at the world of mindfulness and contemplative spirituality is that while we may be at peace, the world around us is very much not at peace. . . . Mindfulness is only mindfulness when it includes a focus on the other and on the health of those around us. In short, mindfulness is not intended as an individualistic act" (pp. 211–12). How familiar are you with mindfulness or contemplative spirituality? Where have you seen these disciplines fall short? Where have you seen them meaningfully and holistically bring healing?

EXERCISES

This chapter outlines spiritual disciplines to help us navigate conflict, so these exercises help put these disciplines into practice.

1. Prayer. As you are comfortable, engage in any of the prayer forms outlined on pages 181–92 (summarized below).
   a. *Pray to be saved from a particular pain*. In moments of pain we long for healing.
   b. *Pray for angels*, for "a hand of grace" to be nearby and for knowledge that we are not alone.
   c. *Pray for healing from our complicity.* "I did this. I was not my best self. I am sorry. I was wrong" (p. 188).
   d. *Pray for those suffering our pain*. "Pray words of acceptance for our pain ('I accept my feelings of pain'), followed by words of acceptance for the world's pain ('I take into my soul the pain of those in the world experiencing what I too have experienced'). . . . [Then] release our pain and release the world's pain ('I release to God and to the universe my feelings of pain; and also the world's pain')" (p. 190).
   e. *Pray for the person with whom we are in conflict*. It can be "wishing the other well, . . . praying for God's light to shine on the person, . . . expressions of love and hope for the other's well-being, . . . our wish for resolution of the conflict" (p. 191). You can use the following prayer: "*God, embrace this person with your arms of loving-kindness*" while "remaining committed to seeing the face of God in the other" (pp. 191–92).
2. Meditation
   a. Using the model on page 194, practice the meditation for compassion and healthy boundaries. Reflect on the experience.
   b. Practice the silent meditation outlined on pages 196–97. How did it affect your capacity to sink into the embrace of God, into your deeper self?
3. Mantras
   a. Using the allow-accept-release-rest mantra model outlined on pages 201–4 as a guide, practice creating a mantra to use in a conflict situation you are experiencing.
   b. Read the healthy conflict mantra principles and examples on pages 205–6 and create a mantra that you need in your life at this time. Share it with at least one person.
   c. Notice the micro-judgments that you engage in. In your mind, practice saying to the person about whom a judgment was made and to yourself this mantra for micro-judgments: "I love you. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Thank you" (p. 207). Assess how this mantra works for you, and if needed, create your own based on the healthy conflict mantra above. The mantra can transform judgment into healing for ourselves and the space between us.

d. "Part of becoming 'free' involves holding a clear boundary between what is ours to hold and what belongs to the other to hold, . . . [saying to the other], 'Your journey is yours to walk and not mine. I will not become a host to the pain you seek to give me. I return your journey to you and invite you to care for that which is yours.' . . . Setting a grace-filled [boundary] frees both . . . to walk our own journeys at our own pace. Of course, . . . it is not easy to discern between what is ours to carry and what is not" (p. 209). The mantra for unbearable pain is outlined on pages 210–11. Practice this mantra.

4. We do not heal alone. "We heal in the care of one another. It is not because we are weak. It is because we are not meant to walk our hard journeys alone" (p. 212). Sometime this week, intentionally choose to center someone who is on a difficult journey and needs centering.
5. Practice the "letting go" exercise on page 213. How did this exercise bring you closer to the heart of God, your deeper self?

Conclusion

Consider these parting words, adapted from the author's conclusion on page 219:

> There is great pain in the removal of layer upon layer of our dragon scales because over time, we have come to love the scales that imprison us. In the first instance the scales protected us; over time they became comfortable to us. The path that we are asked to walk asks us to risk removing our scales. Consider what scales need to fall away to make room for self and other to breathe again. Know that as you walk this journey you are not alone and that you are beloved.
>
> Take a deep breath and find the joy of meaningful relationships and presence through the journey of conflict.