

# STAY IN THE ROOM



## Study Guide

BY

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**LEARN** to disagree without degrading.

**COMPROMISE** without holding a grudge.

Exchange hurt for **HEALING**.

Find **COURAGE** to stop getting even.

**TRANSFORM YOUR  
TROUBLED RELATIONSHIPS**

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## Study Guide: Chapter 1

### “Authenticity: Can I really tell you who I am?”

1. Dan identifies “authenticity” as the starting point for relational health, which presents the question, “Can I really tell you who I am?” Do you remember the first time you felt uneasy answering that question? What were the reasons for your hesitancy?
2. This chapter alludes to a negative force, exerting strong energy (Satan/sin), that influences us away from a search for reality, unselfish love, and God. Share what you feel takes your eyes off a sincere pursuit of God.
3. Can you think of a time when you blamed outside circumstances for your negative behavior? (i.e. parents, teachers, partners, friends...)
4. How often do you deal with relationships that become complicated or confusing because the starting point or destination of that relationship is not clearly defined or understood?
5. Dan refers to the soul as our moral or emotional nature. As you reflect on the place “where deepest feelings and desires reside,” identify people or events that heavily influenced your development. SHARE.
6. This chapter refers to a hula-hoop as a representation of being in or out of the will of God. Share a time when you were inside the desired will of God and how that felt; then possibly compare with a time you strayed outside the hoop.
7. This chapter indicates that authenticity is “the oxygen that breathes honesty and life into all our relationships.” Think of an example or experience of how this is true?
8. Name a person in your life who most clearly lives a life which exhibits the “ecstasy of alignment,” meaning they are consistently true to their values.

9. Dan speaks of his granddaughter, Jensen, who learned very early to satisfy her audience, building self-esteem. How do you feel satisfaction from others? How do you please your “audience?”
10. Dan describes his “monk stage” that resulted from his devastation when a relationship ended. Have you ever felt the need to turn inward for a season to figure out exactly who you were and what was important?
11. Dan discusses a time in his daughter’s life when she took certain pictures off their “wall of fame.” She could not see the beauty that he saw as the parent who loved her. Identify internal changes once you realized your worth in God’s eyes; i.e. less guilt and renewed purpose.
12. C.S. Lewis said, “God whispers in our pleasure, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain.” Think of a time when God “shouted” into your life.
13. In this chapter, Dan interprets an Acts passage saying Paul did not have a death wish, for there is a difference in wanting to die and being willing to die. He realized dying for what matters was less painful than living for things that do not matter. Is there anything you would willingly die for? Is there something you give significant time and energy to that really doesn’t matter in the lifelong scope of things?
14. Dan mentioned witnessing his mom’s struggle with cancer. What is it about cancer that spurs authenticity? Have you noticed and wondered why some actually thank God for cancer or other traumatic experiences?
15. Reflect on these four ingredients to authenticity:
- Identify where you are
  - Identify what and who you will be
  - Identify the price and power of choices
  - Identify the ecstasy of alignment

Which “ingredient” needs your attention? Spend a few minutes journaling about how you can become a more authentic person in all your relationships.

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## Study Guide: Chapter 2

### “Boundaries: Can I really tell you what I need?”

1. Dan begins this chapter with the story of a broken boundary while hunting with a new stepdad. Review your personal history. Share a time when someone threatened a boundary in your life. How did it influence your future?
2. We have all witnessed the unfortunate scene of a spoiled child whose parents have yet to unlock the mystery of boundaries. What disadvantage does one have growing up without clarity, consequences and guidelines?
3. As you review the diagram about qualities that interfere with peaceful relationships, think about fear, hurt, vengeance, and blame. How are these barriers to success and freedom with those we love?
4. Why is it a risk for ministers in particular to set and enforce healthy boundaries?
5. Can someone be an effective leader without the ability to confront conflict or a boundary breach?
6. Do you think it is possible to have an authentic relationship with someone if we are afraid to tell them what we “need?” Do you feel this a risk we must take?
7. Dan shared the exercise of unpacking baggage. Imagine your own suitcase...share what may be inside that would influence your intimate relationships.
8. Are you a “product of” or a “reaction to” your family of origin?
9. There is certainly no shame in experiencing fear, hurt, vengeance, and blame. It’s impossible to be human and not feel them. However, it is an emotional danger to park in those corners (refer to diagram on pg. 8). To which corner are you tempted to go? Which corner has caused you the most grief?

10. The definition of boundaries given in this chapter begs several questions. If personal boundaries are the physical, emotional and mental parameters we create to protect ourselves, how did we formulate them? Think of your faith, family of origin, and successful or failing relationships. How did they help define your boundaries?

11. If the most basic boundary setting word is “NO,” what are some things you say NO to without pause? On a deeper level, what are some things you want to say NO to, but find more difficult?

12. Most of us do not sit around and contemplate our boundaries, but people who are “self-aware” realize they are responsible for personal thoughts and actions. Our thoughts obviously lead to actions. Think of a time when your actions (positive or negative) revealed your true boundaries, and became the starting point for relational accountability.

13. “That’s just the way I am” is a common thought for many. As we mature in emotional intelligence, we realize we are the overseers and arbiters of our behavior. How might you take ownership of your thoughts, actions, and growth?

14. On page 53, the concept of boulders and knapsacks is discussed. Do you perceive yourself as someone who carries the burdens of others on a regular basis? When do these burdens become boulders? When should we hold another responsible for their personal load?

15. If you are prone to journaling, spend some time thinking about your own boundaries...and who threatens them. As the overseer, be honest with yourself.

# STAY IN THE ROOM

## Study Guide: Chapter 3

### Compatibility: “How can we get along if we are so different?”

1. Dan begins this chapter with a parasailing story. Think of a time when you abandoned your natural fear, discovered freedom and, dare we say, exhilaration?
2. Successful risk and trust lead to future risk and trust. Think of a time when risk led to increased confidence for a new challenge.
3. Any deep relationship begins with risk, then vulnerability, progressing to compatibility. How does the baggage discussed in Chapter 2 impact one's ability to take a chance on relational depth with someone?
4. On page 59, a discussion ensues about being NICE or NEW. Reflect honestly before God. Do you tend to be exceptionally NICE or radically NEW?
5. Matthew 18:15 says, “And **IF** there is a conflict...” Acknowledgement happens first. For example, a pit in your stomach is a common sign. What is your signal that a conflict is real?
6. Once the conflict is undeniable, the next step is **YOU**. “And if there is a conflict, **YOU**...” The scripture doesn't ask about fault or responsibility, just honesty and ownership. How difficult is it to examine yourself, possibly put yourself in “someone's else's shoes,” and acknowledge something must be done before the relationship can resume peacefully?
7. “And if there is a conflict, you **GO**...” Dan reminds us that even brave and bold people shake in their boots when confronted with conflict. Share a time when the fear or risk of failure stopped you from resolution. What happened to the relationship?

8. In contrast, share a time when, with your heart beating briskly, and after processing the situation fully, you took the steps necessary to face the person honestly and humbly. What happened to the relationship?

9. Does scripture promise a happy ending if we follow these steps?

10. Why is it so important to **GO IN PRIVATE**? How do the dynamics change if you bring along a few friends who agree with you?

11. Dan admonishes us to make reconciliation the goal of the private meeting. He discusses the question, “Do I want to be **RIGHT** or **REDEMPITIVE**? How do you prepare for a redemptive outcome?

12. In Chapter 3, Dan teaches that reconciliation is not easy, pretty, happily ever after, or necessarily resolution. At that point, how does it feel to make a decision to **STAY IN THE ROOM**?

13. **FOR JOURNALING** or discussion: What does the concept of “Staying in the Room” mean for a follower of Christ? Reflect on how Christ has “stayed in the room” with us.

# STAY IN THE ROOM

## Study Guide: Chapter 4

### Discernment: “What do I do when I don’t know what to do?”

1. Review I Kings 3:9 and Philippians 1:9, also referred to on page 79 of Chapter 4. Discuss the meaning of discernment and what distinguishes it from the facts.
2. A person is fortunate to have a voice of discernment in their life. If appropriate, describe that person in your life and when you discovered the gift of discernment in them.
3. Dan says discernment will come when we honestly seek it, genuinely want it, and wholeheartedly act on it. It opens the door and gives courage to make tough, life transforming choices. Share a time when you were graced with the gift of discernment and possibly how it changed your life.

### Seven Steps in the Discerning Process

4. Chapter 4 teaches that covenant relationships are “mutually submissive” in nature. What do you think that means?
5. Dan indicates that all relationships begin like a contract, but have the possibility to mature with time into something more. What could you do to help transform a contract relationship into a “covenant” connection?
6. We all live with expectations of those we care about. Dan writes that expectations fuel our hopes and dreams. Reflecting on the chapters on vulnerability and boundaries, how risky is communicating our expectations?
7. Think of a time when your expectations had to be adjusted or communicated in a clearer way. For example, we have to redefine our



expectations with children all the time. If the expectation is not crystal clear, it's not fair to be hurt when they are not met.

8. Businesses, churches, and schools have mission statements. They guide decisions and future development plans. Relationships also need a STRATEGY DESIGN. The first ingredient is a “**decision to trust**” the relationship. When a person earns your trust, what are the expectations?

9. The second ingredient in a STRATEGY DESIGN is the “**acceptance of pain.**” Any relationship will be hurtful and cause emotional pain at some point. When it happens, communication is key. Think of a time when your partner or friend caused you hurt or pain. How can being vulnerable, honest, and forthright become a building block in the relationship?

10. The third ingredient is an “**intentional plan.**” How did time invested help you truly know and trust your partner or friend?

11. The fourth ingredient is an ongoing assessment of “**relieved regret.**” Have you been able to examine/assess a difficult situation when it was over? In hindsight, have you been able to determine ways to prevent the hurt and further build endurance?

12. Dan points out that people living in “Stay in the Room” relationships never stop listening to critics or stop laboring with points of disagreement. What does the proverb, “Iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” really mean?

13. Frank Sonnenberg says “trust is like blood pressure. It's silent, vital to good health, and if abused, can be deadly.” How does this ring true for the important relationships in your life? Is your “ROOM” big enough for someone who has broken your trust?

14. Is it important that your significant others empower you to dream and succeed? Reflect on the saying, “She thought I could do it, so I did!”

15. FOR JOURNALING and DISCUSSION:

Answer the following questions about your most significant relationships.

AUTHENTICITY: Can I really tell you who I am?

BOUNDARIES: Can I really tell you what I need?

COMPATIBILITY: How can we get along if we are so different?

DISCERNMENT: What do I do when I don't know what to do?

Determine if your relationships are more about survival than growth.

STAY IN THE ROOM  
Study Guide: Chapter 5  
Enthusiasm: “How can I develop  
redemptively, reconciled relationships?”

1. Think about things you are enthusiastic about: possibly a cooking show, your son’s baseball games, or gardening. Identify and discuss three.
2. Dan begins Chapter 5 with an exaggerated story about an airplane experience in first class. Think about the significant others in your life. Do your loved ones get the leftovers of your energy at the end of the day? What can you do to make them feel like they are in “first class” when you come together?
3. Dan defines enthusiasm as the result of a life humbled and honed by love and laughter. If you had an enthusiasm “thermometer,” where would your mercury be?
4. Enthusiasm is a choice. What could you do today to shoot a fresh injection of perspective and enthusiasm, like kindling for a fire, into your flickering relationship? Share ideas to try with your group.
5. We celebrate what we value. Again, share ideas about how you show your loved one they are valued...in “first class.”
6. Stephen Covey introduced the concept of an “emotional bank account” in his book about the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Imagine you have an account with each person you love. We must continue making deposits to build trust, respect, dependability, and value. Share ideas with the group that would be deposits for someone you love. DEPOSITS BUILD ENTHUSIASM!!

7. When your “emotional bank account” has a healthy “balance,” it can withstand a difficult time. What are some things that would cause a “withdrawal” in your relationship? WITHDRAWALS DRAIN ENTHUSIASM.
8. Check out Ephesians 4:15 or pg.107, second paragraph. In each tough situation you face, once again you must answer the question, “Do I want to be right or redemptive?” The answer to that will determine the TONE of your voice. Share a time when your TONE, or “speaking the truth in love” made a difference in your conflict.
9. Dan alludes to roles within relationships. Do you tend to be a SCREAMER or a SWEEPER?
10. Screamers ignite major fires...the louder the voice, the higher the flame. If you tend to react this way, what can you do to decrease the fuel from the fire?
11. Some families/couples actually have rules to follow during conflict. If you were writing rules during a peaceful time, what would they be?
12. If you tend to be a SWEEPER, (just sweep the conflict under the carpet and NOT DEAL), what did you learn about being AUTHENTIC and guarding BOUNDARIES that might help you navigate during conflict?
13. Henri Nouwen defined discipline as “the effort to create some space in which God can act.” Do you think it would be appropriate to bring your conflict to the heart of God? Is there a chance that your loved one would be open to praying with you? Have you ever done it? Possibly share successes or challenges in this area.
14. Let’s think about being EASILY PROVOKED. What are some things that just “flip your switch” or “set you off?” Fill in this blank: “I hate it when you...” For the more diplomatic, “When \_\_\_\_\_ happens, it makes me feel...”
15. Let’s move the dial to PERSEVERANCE. The first family/couple rule during conflict should be “We will figure it out...leaving is not an option...nor is it used as a threat.” This book addresses the urgency to RUN

during difficult times. Discuss how being willing to STAY IN THE ROOM builds security in any relationship.

16. Unresolved anger gains negative momentum. Examine Ephesians 4:26-27, Matthew 5:23-24, and Matthew 18:15 referenced on pg.110 in Chapter 5. Is it easy to pray when the burden of conflict is present in your spirit? How do these scriptures address this?

17. Lewis Smedes identifies three stages in every act of forgiveness: (page 114)

- a. We rediscover the humanity of the person who hurt us.
- b. We surrender our right to get even.
- c. We revise our feeling toward the person we forgive.

Do these stages resonate with your experiences as “someone who forgives?”

18. Lewis Smedes also tells us what FORGIVENESS IS NOT:

- a. Forgiving is NOT forgetting.
- b. Forgiving is NOT excusing.
- c. Forgiving is NOT smoothing things over.

Dan concludes that the grace to forgive is from God, but the **decision** to forgive is our own. In your experience, how do you process a decision to forgive?

For JOURNALING and DISCUSSION:

Dan’s encouragement to STAY IN THE ROOM by displaying authenticity, defining boundaries, understanding compatibility, developing discernment, and building enthusiasm is challenging, but WORTH IT!

What is your greatest “TAKE AWAY” from this study and how great is your ENTHUSIASM to put it into action? May God bless your journey!