

A LEADER LAB™ Training Experience

Love Without Condoning

Holding conviction and unconditional love at the same time.

Single Session

60-90 Minutes

Facilitator Guide

Before You Facilitate

What This Lab Is

This LEADER LAB™ challenges parents, coaches, educators, and faith community leaders to examine one of the most misunderstood tensions in relational ministry and formation: the difference between condoning, accepting, and loving. It's designed to be uncomfortable in the right ways — not to settle the theological debate on sexual ethics, but to confront the behavioral and relational failures that happen when leaders conflate those three distinct things.

The goal isn't consensus. The goal is a commitment — one specific, named action each leader will take differently because of this session.

Facilitator Posture

Hold the tension. Don't resolve it too quickly. The discomfort participants feel between their convictions and their relational failures is the formative material. Your job is to keep them in that space long enough to act, not long enough to argue.

What Participants Will Leave With

- A clear, three-part framework distinguishing condoning, accepting, and loving
- Theological grounding they can articulate to others
- A named, specific next-step commitment
- Language to have conversations they've been avoiding

Materials Needed

- This facilitator guide (printed or digital)
- Participant handout (commitment card — last page)
- Whiteboard or flip chart for discussion capture
- Timer

Session at a Glance

The Honest Question	Open · 5 min
The False Equation	Part 1 · 10 min
Provocation 1 — The Neighbor Test	Discuss · 10 min
Three Concepts, Three Definitions	Part 2 · 15 min
Provocation 2 — Where Have You Failed?	Discuss · 10 min
Theological Anchors	Part 3 · 10 min
Provocation 3 — Presence or Verdict?	Discuss · 10 min
The Commitment	Close · 10 min

For a 60-minute session, reduce each discussion block to 7 minutes. For 90 minutes, allow discussions to breathe fully.

Open · 5 Minutes

The Honest Question

Begin with this question. Don't answer it. Just let it land.

Discussion Provocation

Think of someone in your life whose choices you deeply disagree with. Are you actually in relationship with them right now — or have you created distance and called it principle?

Give participants 60 seconds of silence to sit with it. Then say:

Facilitator Script

That tension you're feeling — between what you believe and how you're actually living with people — is exactly what this Lab is about. We're not here to change your theology. We're here to examine whether your theology is actually producing the relational life it's supposed to.

Part 1 · 10 Minutes

The False Equation

Teach this section directly. Keep it crisp.

The Equation Most Adults Are Operating From

Acceptance = Approval

This is the equation quietly running in the background for most of the leaders you serve. It leads to two conclusions — both of them wrong:

- "If I fully accept this person, I'm implying I approve of everything about them."
- "If I don't approve, I need to create distance to stay faithful."

The first conclusion collapses love into endorsement. The second collapses conviction into isolation. Neither one reflects the full picture — biblically, theologically, or relationally.

Key Teaching Point

These are two completely separate questions: What do I believe about ethics? And how do I treat a human being made in the image of God? Conflating those two questions isn't theological faithfulness. It's theological error.

Discussion Provocation — The Neighbor Test

Do you have someone in your life whose choices you disagree with — overspending, a toxic relationship, a self-destructive habit — whom you still love fully and stay close to? Are you condoning their choices by staying in relationship? So why does this feel different?

Allow 10 minutes of open discussion. Capture key responses on the whiteboard. The goal is to surface the inconsistency participants already sense.

Part 2 · 15 Minutes

Three Concepts. Three Definitions.

Walk through each concept distinctly. These aren't points on a spectrum — they're categorically different things.

1 Condoning

Moral agreement with a belief, behavior, or identity claim. Suggesting something is acceptable, right, or without consequence. This is a statement about ethics.

Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Romans 1:32 (ESV)

Condoning isn't the same as tolerating. It isn't the same as staying quiet. It's an active moral signal — spoken or unspoken — that something is acceptable. Most leaders in traditional faith communities aren't condoning when they love. But they fear being perceived as condoning, and that fear is driving the relational failure.

2 Accepting

Receiving a person as they are — fully, without precondition — into relationship, community, and dignity. This isn't a statement about behavior. It's a statement about personhood.

"And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers... But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion."

Luke 10:25-37 (ESV)

The Samaritan didn't require the wounded man to have the right theology, right ethnicity, or right background before offering care. Acceptance is the precondition for any meaningful relationship. Without it, there's no relationship — only a verdict with a person standing near it.

You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving.

Amy Carmichael

3 Loving

Actively willing and working toward someone's genuine flourishing — which sometimes includes honest conversation, and sometimes means simply being present without an agenda. Love is the most costly of the three because it's sustained, unconditional, and oriented toward the other person's actual good — not their comfort, and not your own conscience.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4:15 (NIV)

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIV)

Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

The Framework at a Glance

	Condoning	Accepting	Loving
What it says	"This is right"	"You belong here"	"I am for you"
What it requires	Agreement	Presence	Commitment
What it doesn't require	—	Approval	Agreement

Discussion Provocation — Where Have You Failed?

Be honest: in your role as a parent, coach, educator, or leader — have you withheld presence from someone because you were afraid your closeness would look like condoning? What did that cost them?

Allow 10 minutes. This discussion should be personal, not theoretical. Push participants away from hypotheticals and toward their own actual relationships.

Part 3 · 10 Minutes

Theological Anchors

These are the anchors that hold the framework together. Walk through them with enough depth to give participants language they can carry out of the room.

1. Imago Dei — The Non-Negotiable Foundation

Every person — regardless of belief, behavior, or identity — bears the image of God. This isn't a reward for right living. It's a permanent marker on every human being. Any relational posture that treats a person as less than an image-bearer isn't a theological position. It's a theological failure.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27 (ESV)

2. Ordo Amoris — Ordered Love

Augustine's concept of ordo amoris (ordered love) argues that loving anything — even a person — more than or in place of God distorts love into idolatry. But it also clarifies something important: loving a person isn't the same as making them your ultimate. You can love fully and still have ordered affections.

Our heart is restless until it repose in Thee.

Augustine of Hippo, Confessions

The leader who withholds love out of fear of disordered affection has misread Augustine. Ordo amoris isn't a ceiling on love for others. It's a framework that frees us to love others rightly — without making them carry the weight only God can bear.

3. Jesus' Pattern — Movement Toward

Jesus consistently moved toward people that the religiously observant kept distance from — and he was criticized for it. The criticism came from people who believed proximity implied endorsement. Jesus' response wasn't to defend his theology but to keep moving toward people.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

Luke 15:2 (ESV)

The purity-distance framework — the idea that proximity to sin is itself sinful — isn't a biblical framework. It's a cultural one that has been dressed in theological language.

4. Truth and Love Are Not Opposites

Some communities have tried to hold conviction by sacrificing relationship. Others have tried to hold relationship by sacrificing conviction. The biblical vision refuses both. Truth without love becomes a weapon. Love without truth becomes sentiment. The command is to hold them together — at real cost.

The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it, but in the end, there it is. The question is whether we will deliver it with the kind of love that makes it receivable.

Timothy Keller

Discussion Provocation — Presence or Verdict?

What does the person you're thinking of right now need most from you — your verdict, or your presence? And what would it actually cost you to give them the one they need?

Allow 10 minutes. End this discussion before it resolves. The remaining discomfort is the point.

Close · 10 Minutes

The Commitment

Don't let the session end with discussion. End it with decision. Give participants 3 minutes to write their commitment privately before sharing with a partner or the group.

Closing Facilitator Script

You came in today with a theology. You're leaving with the same one. What we're asking you to change is not what you believe — it's whether what you believe is actually producing love. Not sentiment. Not distance with a theological explanation. Real, present, costly love. So before you leave, write one name. Write one action. And mean it.

Why Leaders Struggle With This

Before the commitment moment, name these barriers honestly:

- Fear of being misread by their own community — closeness to someone can feel like a statement to others
- Uncertainty about what love actually requires — when unsure, distance feels safer and more principled
- Conflation of platform and relationship — feeling like proximity implies public endorsement
- Lack of models — most have never seen conviction and warmth held simultaneously

Participant Commitment

Use this section at the close of the session. Complete it privately, then share with one person in the room who will follow up with you.

The person I'm thinking of

The specific action I will take

When I will do it (date / situation)

Who will hold me accountable

The Question to Keep Asking

What does the person in front of me need most right now — my verdict, or my presence?