

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Leading: The challenges of leadership 3: Confidence in taking responsibility and resolving conflict



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: This is the third of three sessions on the need for courage in leadership. This session offers some reflections on how we can avoid denial in leadership - taking responsibility for facing up to and seeking to resolve inevitable conflicts.

Opening question(s) (10 minutes)

When have you had to take responsibility in a difficult situation?



Understanding the information (20 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

It is impossible to lead anything without at some stage having to take responsibility for handling inevitable differences or conflicts. The temptation we will need to avoid is denial – of the true nature of the problem, or of reality. Because people are different, and we are all works in progress, and we live in an atmosphere of spiritual struggle, conflict is unavoidable in any community. Our long-term ability to lead others well will depend on our willingness to take on the responsibility of welcoming differences of opinion and facing up to conflict in a healthy way. As the African proverb says, “A weak person only goes where he is smiled at.” Strong leading which loves people includes the initiative to serve them by refusing to collude with difficult or unhelpful situations, and instead working to bring healing.



In a general sense, the more we are secure enough to create environments in which different voices are welcomed and listened to in the normal flow of life, the more we will avoid more serious times of negative conflict. (Conflict handled well can clarify things, deepen relationships and bring about change.) Yet when differences are combined with either a rise in feelings and/or a sense of people not being understood, a leadership skill is to confront the situation well. As Kate Coleman writes, “The term ‘confront’ literally means: ‘to put face to face; to cause to face or to meet’.” Unless we confront, disagreement quickly deteriorates into accepting a bad situation.

While this session doesn't offer a complete blueprint for resolving conflict, here are common starting points:

Recognising our own temptations in the face of conflict: The ostrich/hedgehog reaction. The tendency to avoid the issue or just to give in to the status quo, coupled with withdrawing from others and/or becoming defensive. Our instinct might be to simply "escape" or to say yes to the strongest voice in order to keep peace. The rhino/bull reaction. The tendency to override the opinions of others, more concerned with winning an argument, than winning over people. Our instinct might be to talk about others, rather than to them.

Acknowledging from the start that it is impossible for conflict-resolution to be pain-free.

Praying for (and if possible with) all concerned before, during and after the process.

Asking myself what outcome I am hoping for.

Agreeing the ground rules for how the conversation should be handled.

Engaging a mediator, if helpful, who is trusted by all parties.

Avoiding unhealthy triangles – for example where persons A and B talk to person C separately, and C attempts to handle the conversation between them in different meetings. It is far better from the start if C can encourage A and B to talk, or for the three of them to meet together.

Having conversations which revolve around three areas – making sure everyone understands the facts around the issue, giving space for the feelings related to the conflict to be explored in a safe manner, ensuring that each party understands the significance of the issue for all concerned.

A good negotiation might look like this:

- Clarifying the outcome we want.
- Giving a chance for each side to state their position.
- Making some proposals about how to move forward.
- Seeing what "give and take" each side is able to offer.
- Coming to an agreement.
- Using "I" language in discussions, in other words only speaking for myself, not on behalf of others, or projecting interpretations on what I think they are saying. Taking responsibility for what I think, feel and how I respond.
- Showing I have listened well by being able to feed back to the other person what I think they have said, and giving a chance to clarify any misunderstanding.
- Recognising that perfect resolution may not always be possible – knowing when to "agree to disagree".

Discuss: Do you recognise the need to learn some of these skills? Which ones?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Nehemiah 2: 11-20 in which Nehemiah takes responsibility for a difficult situation.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:

What does this passage teach me about God?

What does this passage teach me about people?

How does this passage call me to obey God?

What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of conflict resolution.



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.





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