

A BIBLICAL BLUEPRINT FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

HOW CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED TO
HANDLE CONFLICT

LEADER GUIDE

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

We all know that life is messy. It is full of good times, bad times and everything in between. There are times when everything goes perfect and things could not seemingly go worse. Sometimes you meet people that you connect so easily with that you think they are a sibling you were separated from at birth. At other times you can feel as if you have nothing in common with anyone you live, work or serve with. There are few places where the ups and downs of life are more prominent than in the church.

The church is full of people who are just like us and who could not be more different from us. It is a community of people who at their core share one life altering truth, Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior. This one confessed truth is necessary for entrance into this community and governs how we treat one another. The problem is that many people in the church come from different backgrounds, ways of thinking and personality types and if we are not careful, the thing that we all hold in common can take a backseat to the many differences we have. When these differences show themselves we have conflict.

So it is important that we understand that conflict will occur. It is unavoidable and out of our control. But, how we respond to conflict internally and externally is in our control. How we help others deal with conflict is in our control. How we help our church deal with conflict is in our control.

God knew that we would deal with conflict and he has given us instructions and examples from the Bible about how to deal with it. During this retreat we are going to work through 4 lessons that are designed to help us understand what conflict is (session 1), the types of conflict (sessions 2 and 3) and how to respond to those with whom you have had a conflict (session 4). Although this study has been specifically designed for those who lead in the church; it is our desire that the principles contained within are applicable in your home, job and relationships.

His and yours,

Greg, Vince, Andrew, Kevin and Doug

SESSION ONE:

CONFLICT DECONSTRUCTED

By Greg Waltermire

SESSION 1 – CONFLICT DECONSTRUCTED

ESTIMATED TIME OF COMPLETION – 60 - 75 MINUTES PER SESSION

LEADER: Wow. It is so encouraging to see so many leaders in the church sacrifice their time to come to a conference to discuss this very serious issue that every person and church faces... conflict. Ok, there, I said it. Is it surprising to you to have a church leaders training retreat with the theme of conflict management? Probably, your life's experience has taught you that there is a certain amount of conflict even in healthy relationship and churches. The question is will we respond to it biblically?

This retreat will consist of four training sessions. Each of our sessions is going to be roughly an hour long. We will begin and each session with prayer. Are you ready to get started? Let's pray:

"Father we thank you for your love and forgiveness you have shown us in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. We know God that you made us to have relationships with you and others. Father, we confess that sometimes our relationships become clouded and messed-up by conflict. Please give us clarity about how you want us to deal with conflict in a way that glorifies you in our lives and church. Holy Spirit, please give us the courage to choose to change our hearts and attitudes about conflict and those we struggle to forgive. In Jesus name, amen."

1. WHAT IS CONFLICT?

LEADER: Sometimes the most obvious place to start when discussing a serious issue is at the beginning. To make sure that we are all on the same page let us begin by coming up with a working definition of conflict and then look at some issues that help us understand it more fully.

DISCUSSION QUESTION (DQ): *How would you define conflict?*

ACTIVITY (6-7 Minutes): Have attendees break into groups of four and come up with a definition of conflict. (Do not be surprised to hear that this is a difficult task. Affirm the groups and encourage them to do their best.)

DQ ANSWER: "Conflict is tension that occurs when the actions of one person or group threatens the values, goals, or behavior of another person or group."

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT CONFLICT:

A. The **ROOT** of conflict is when a perceived **NEED** is unmet.

- Many times conflict occurs because someone/something is thought to prevent you from having what you think you need.
- These needs may/may not be legitimate or necessary, but they are present and powerful.

GROUP QUESTION: What is the root cause of conflict in the following examples?

- a) A boss informs an employee that he needs to work an extra hour.
- b) The Worship Pastor asks someone else to have the Easter solo.
- c) A mechanic tells a man that his car will not be fixed before tomorrow.

B. Conflict is **NORMAL**

- Because of **SIN** in the world and in us. Genesis 3:1-24
- Because, as human beings, we are finite and **UNIQUE**, 1Cor. 12:4-6

DQ: Ask participants to get back into their groups and share an example of conflict that comes from their normal, everyday life.

LEADER: “You see, conflict can be neither good nor bad, it becomes good or bad based on how we respond to it. Have you ever thought about it that way?”

- **Opinions over the choice of restaurants or our church’s budget can be cause conflict, but that does not mean they are bad or sinful. We will look more closely at this in Session 2.**
- **Often, conflict that is not responded to properly will lead to sin.**

Let’s look at a famous conflict from the Bible and see if this is true. Would someone read Matthew 26:36-46?

What were some of Jesus’ struggles/conflict in Gethsemane?

Was He wrong?

Can you believe that JESUS experienced conflict? He had an internal conflict about dying and actually asked the Father to not make that happen if it was possible. Of course we know that it was not and Jesus lovingly submitted himself to the Father's will

So what can we learn from Jesus' example about dealing with conflict?

- Conflict is an opportunity to **GLORIFY** God.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT... how we view God influences how we view conflict?

If God is sovereign, in complete control- Daniel 4:17

Then a God centered approach makes us less dependent on the outcome of conflict.

If God is good, He uses power correctly- Ps 119:68

Then we can trust God to do what is right,

If God is all knowing , Ps 139:4-8

Then he knows the right outcome/solution

2. TYPES OF CONFLICT

LEADER: Let's be honest, sometimes we just don't see eye to eye on everything and there is conflict. Not all conflict is equal. It is different in its source, its importance, and in its intensity. This means that we must learn to identify the particular kind of conflict that is occurring so we can respond to it appropriately. Although we look more closely at each of the following three major types of conflict later in more detail, let us take a brief survey of them now:

1. SIN

- James 4:1-3: Improper desires lead to improper behavior and conflict

-This issue requires loving and Scriptural correction

2. MISUNDERSTANDING

-Someone perceives the situation in an incorrect way

-This issue requires better communication

3. PERSONAL RESISTANCE

*“Do you
understand the
words that are
coming out of
my mouth”
- Rush Hour*

- Matters of strong preference where someone does not want it another way
- This issue requires patience and showing how the proposed solution will still support what they value

GROUP QUESTION: Using these three types of conflict, identify which type is illustrated in the following examples:

- A man is upset when the pew Bibles are changed from KJV to the NIV.
- A church is devastated after discovering their Pastor was stealing funds.
- A family is irritated when they are told that VBS is **through** 6th grade, not **to** 6th grade and their child missed it.

LEADER: Just as there are different types of conflict, there are different types of personalities that are involved. God did not make everyone from a cookie-cutter mold, we are unique, and sometimes, complex. Conflict managers will need to be able to identify and understand the various personality types that are at play in a conflict situation. Here is an overview of five personality types and how they manage conflict.

1. Avoiding (the turtle)

-The turtle avoids being an active participant and claims no responsibility for the conflict or what happens because of it. The turtle leaves the solution to the leaders to pursue or the parties involved to just work it out. This response may be wise or cowardly. They generally are slow to speak and act, but are often insightful. Their procrastination and deliberate thought processes can be annoying to some people.

2. Accommodating (the teddy bear)

-The teddy bear values and works to preserve relationships. They want everyone to get along and believe that is more important than anything that divides relationships. The group must stay intact and be harmonious. The teddy bear is willing to deny their own desires to preserve the group.

3. Collaborating (the wise old owl)

The owl safeguards the interests of the overall group by working with all involved to define the conflict and to carry out mutually agreeable solutions. The owl balances the interests of the whole and the goals on the individual. These solutions strengthen both the group and relationships.

4. Compromising (the fox)

The fox negotiates all parties to gain some ground and to lose some by finding the minimum amount acceptable to every member. This is done in pursuit of the common good for the group as a whole. Sometimes the fox can secure these concessions through persuasions and sometimes by manipulation.

5. Competing (the shark)

The shark has one clear goal- to win at any cost. The shark is assured that their interpretation of what is best for the group will justify whatever measure they take to achieve those goals. As a general rule, the shark is aggressive and dominant and not known as a team player. Their self-esteem is so closely tied to the success of the group that the shark will sacrifice relationships for the group goals.

Try to label a personality type on the people from the list below. You may feel that some overlap into more than one area. Then, match a person on the list with how you see your own personality. Be prepared to share and discuss this later.

- a) Moses
- b) Donald Trump
- c) Your mother
- d) Your Pastor or small group leader
- e) Apostle Paul
- f) Abraham Lincoln

PERSONAL EXERCISE: What personality do you tend to have when seeking to resolve conflict? _____, _____, _____

Are you satisfied with that? YES or NO

Is Christ satisfied? YES or NO

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT?

LEADER: Often, people are so consumed by personal issues relating to conflict and the responses of others, that the glory of God is minimized. There are many outcomes that conflict can bring, but not all of them concentrate on the three things that must remain central when seeking to resolve conflict.

1. **God's Glory** – We have all been created for one primary purpose, to bring God glory. We are to bring him glory in the good times, bad times and every time in

between. We should also be mindful that when conflict occurs in our life and church we should make every effort to resolve it in a manner that brings God glory.

2. **Relationships** - The desire here is for persons and relationships not to be harmed by conflict management. Certainly, we live together and want a strong sense of community where we care for one another. The accommodator and collaborator highly reflect this value and the avoider and competitor do not so much.
3. **Personal goals/interests** - The desire is for self-satisfaction or for an institution (church) to reach its goals is important for this person. In fact, so important that they are likely to damage relationships unintentionally in pursuit of those goals. The competitor and collaborator usually reflect this, while the avoider and accommodator do not. The compromiser is often somewhere in the middle. They tend to use the “give and take” approach which may work or simply provide a temporary solution because the real issues were not adequately addressed.

“Conflict, as painful as it may be, is often necessary and good. Well-managed conflict can bring good to the church and to individuals. Without conflict, we become placid. The goal of conflict management is not to do away with conflict or to run from conflict, but to management conflict toward worthwhile ends.”

- T.P. Jones

SESSION TWO:

SINLESS CONFLICT

By Vince Scarbrough

SESSION TWO: SINLESS CONFLICT

Sinless conflict? Have you ever heard of such a thing? Some will say it is an oxymoron. After all, if there is conflict, then someone must have sinned. We all know that without sin there would be no conflict, right? As we seek to deal with conflict through a biblical framework, we need to understand there are different types of conflict.

3 Main Things to Remember About Conflict

- Conflict is not always the result of SIN, but most conflict will result in SIN if it is left unresolved.
- We cannot LIVE without conflict. It is UNAVOIDABLE.
- It is UNREALISTIC to believe conflict will not occur in the church.

Since we cannot live without conflict, we need to understand how to deal with it in a manner that is consistent with the teaching of God's Word. Our ability to deal with conflict in a God honoring, Christ exalting way is a key factor in how effective our ministry will be in the church and in our communities.

Conflict is a normal part of life that we cannot avoid. Those of us in the church often have the expectation there should be no conflict in the church and there should only be unity. But, this is an unrealistic expectation and the Bible has much to say regarding conflict. Take a look at the following biblical texts and jot some notes regarding the conflicts they detail:

Galatians 2: _____

Acts 6: _____

The 2 Most Common Forms of Sinless Conflict:

1. MISUNDERSTANDING
2. PERSONAL RESISTANCE

The mere mention of the word conflict often brings negative thoughts to mind. As we look at conflict, we can evaluate it in three separate categories: sin, misunderstanding, and personal resistance. In this section, our focus will be on conflict that can be sinless. This type of conflict can include misunderstanding and personal resistance.

The Hope Christian's Find in Conflict

- Conflict can and will be USED by God
- Conflict can be an incredible OPPORTUNITY for relationships to be strengthened.
- Conflict resolved in a God Honoring way will have an IMPACT on those who are watching.

It is unrealistic for us to seek the absence of conflict in our lives or in the church. We need to understand that conflict can and will be used by God. We all know that conflict can destroy relationships and tear churches apart. But, we also need to know that conflict can be an incredible opportunity for relationships to be strengthened, for the body of Christ to be built up and restored, and for the world around us to visibly see the teachings of Christ lived out by the people of God. Resolving conflict in a God honoring, Christ exalting way will have an incredible impact on not only those that are involved in the conflict, but also on those who are watching.

1. CONFLICT FROM MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Most of us can quickly think of a time conflict arose out of our misunderstanding or the misunderstanding of someone else. As we look back on many of those situations, they seem funny, unbelievable, or downright silly now. But, at the time they were not funny and they were not silly. They were a problem and they had the potential to become agonizing areas of conflict.

Misunderstandings are an example of a conflict that does not necessarily arise from sin. It can arise in the most innocent of situations when each party has the best interest of the other person at heart, yet there is a failure in communication or there is a failure in understanding on behalf of one party or the other. It can arise because of sin, but it does not have to be the result of sin. Remember, we live in a fallen world, and our judgment and knowledge is warped at best.

DQ: Discuss in your group a time you experienced conflict due to a misunderstanding. _____

2. CONFLICT FROM PERSONAL RESISTANCE

Personal resistance typically occurs when an individual or group of people find themselves in opposition to an idea or a change from the status quo. They are not seeking conflict, there is simply something about the idea or change they do not support. In their heart and mind they must resist the idea or change in order to prevent a mistake from being made. Again, this is not necessarily the result of sin, although it has the potential to become sinful. Often this personal resistance results because of the need for additional information, or because of additional issues the person needs addressed. In many cases, this conflict can be resolved quickly if the people involved will take the time to discuss the issues at hand. There are extreme situations in which the person is exhibiting personal resistance for no other reason than to be a thorn in the side of others. A situation such as that will be addressed later in the study.

DQ: Discuss in your group a time you experienced conflict due to a misunderstanding. _____

Remember When Dealing With Personal Resistance or Misunderstanding:

- When not addressed, they often lead to **SIN**.
- It is so important to deal with conflict in its **EARLY STAGES**.

When misunderstandings and personal resistance are not addressed and dealt with, they often lead to sin in the life of one or both of the party's involved. That is why it is so important to deal with conflict in its early stages. If people can resolve conflict while it is in the stage of misunderstanding or personal resistance there are often fewer issues to work through, fewer people involved, fewer hurt feelings, and fewer prideful tendencies to deal with.

Most of us have found ourselves involved in a misunderstanding or personal resistance situation where one party or the other is filled with anger. Anger in and of itself is not sin; it is simply a natural human emotion. As an emotion, anger will subside if we give it time, and we are capable of making wiser decisions once the anger has subsided. God's Word provides specific guidance for dealing with our attitude and it gives a process to use in dealing with conflict. Look at the following verses and write a brief summary of your understanding of what God's Word is telling us to do in similar situations:

Matthew 5:21-26: _____

Galatians 6:1-5: _____

Our relationships with our Christian brothers and sisters must be marked by love and concern for one another. In scripture we find numerous times where Christ exposed the hypocritical teachings and actions of the Pharisees. Today Christ calls Christians to avoid hypocritical judgment and criticism of others. The natural tendency for most of us is to condemn others and to hold them to a higher standard than we hold ourselves. Christ taught that our judgment should begin with ourselves and our actions. We overlook our faults and quickly rush to judge others. King David did this when he was confronted by Nathan regarding his sin with Bathsheba, as recorded 2 Samuel 12:5-7 (NASB95): Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion." Nathan then said to David, "You are the man!"

The purpose of self judgment is to prepare ourselves to serve others. We cannot effectively minister to others and help others grow in grace if we do not first effectively evaluate our own walk with God. The Pharisees brought judgment

upon others in an effort to make themselves look good. Christ addressed the error of the Pharisees in Luke 18:9-14 (NASB95):

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Christian love and service will be uncomfortable. Christ does not tell us to turn our back on another person’s sin or to bring harsh discipline on them. In Matthew 7:3-5 (NASB95) Christ says: “Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” Christ commands us to help others get the “speck” out of their eye (the sin out of their life). But, it is only after we have dealt with the “log” in our own eye (the sin we hold on to). Christ tells us to evaluate our lives, and deal with our sin before we concern ourselves with the sins of others. We must be as severe in our judgment of ourselves as we are in our judgment of others. For only when we have dealt with our own sin in a God honoring manner will we have the spiritual insight to help others. 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 (NASB95) says, If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. *Yet* do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Own Your Own Part:

- Christ calls us to **JUDGE** our **LIVES**.
- We must face up to **OUR** contributions to the situation before we focus on the contribution of **OTHERS**.

Christ calls us to judge our lives in an effort to help others look good. It is easy to see the sins of others, and the Pharisees were very good at that. What they were not good at was helping others to deal with their sin. Jesus called them blind

guides. They were so blind to their own sin that they could not help others see and properly deal with their sin.

When we find ourselves in a conflict that involves a misunderstanding or personal resistance we must face up to our contributions to the situation before we focus on the contribution of others. Often, once we have done this, we can simply overlook the minor offenses of others when we openly admit and deal with our faults. Where do we begin? We must first admit the seriousness of our sins. We must freely admit that our sins were so grievous that Christ had to suffer and die upon a cross in order that we might have forgiveness. Next, as a Christian, we must accept that God has forgiven us of all the wrongs that we have confessed and repented of. God does not pick and choose which ones he will forgive, he forgives every single one of them. At that point, our self righteousness should fall away and our sinfulness should become painfully obvious to us. Only then are we able to be wholly used by God in the life of others. As we reach that point, we should be driven by the truth of God's Word:

Ephesians 4:32 (NASB95), Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Philippians 2:2-4 (NASB95), Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Two extremes must be avoided as we examine ourselves:

1. **SELF-DECEPTION** of a shallow examination of our lives.
2. **BECOMING UNBALANCED**. We should not look only at ourselves.

Two extremes must be avoided as we examine ourselves. The first extreme is the self- deception of a shallow examination of our lives. Sometimes we are so sure of our righteousness that we fail to examine our hearts honestly and thoroughly against the truth of God's Word. A quick glance into the truth of God's Word will never reveal the true situation (James 1:22–25). The second extreme is when we get wrapped up in self-examination and we become unbalanced. We should not look only at ourselves. We must look in faith to Jesus Christ and let

Him forgive and restore us. Satan is the accuser (Rev. 12:10), and he enjoys it when we accuse and condemn ourselves!

Only after we have judged ourselves honestly before God and removed those things that blind us can we help others and properly judge their works. But, if we know there are sins in our lives and we try to help others, we are hypocrites. In fact, it is possible for ministry to be a device to cover up sin! The Pharisees were guilty of this, and Jesus denounced them for it. As we live out the gospel and make Christ's teachings and commandments our priorities, we can effectively deal with conflict and develop a closer relationship with God, which in turn will result in a full and fruitful ministry for God.

SESSION 2 HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

Are there any conflicts in your life that currently exist which started as a misunderstanding or personal resistance from yourself or others?

What is the current status of those conflicts (sinless, sinful)?

What steps can you take to resolve those situations?

SESSION THREE:

SINFUL CONFLICT

By David Love

SESSION THREE: SINFUL CONFLICT

1. STEPS TO DEALING WITH SINFUL CONFLICT

Though most conflict begins as sinless disagreements, many conflicts are the result of sin and others lead to sin. For example, John argued very strongly for the Lord's Supper table his father purchased to be moved to the new sanctuary. His motion in a business meeting was not even seconded, and as a result John took out an ad in the local paper detailing hearsay about the pastor's wife. What began as a reasonable disagreement became slander. How are we to respond to such things as Christians? A Christ-like response to sin depends on several things.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT SINFUL CONFLICT

1. How bad was the sin?

When a coroner is trying to determine the cause of death, he must do an autopsy. Many things are checked: skin, heart, lungs, blood, brain, and other organs. Not all sins are the same. They all violate God's law and lead to death, but they are not equal in depravity, effects, or consequences. Discovering the cause of "death" requires some thinking. Was it intentional or the result of recklessness or unintentional? Did it occur publicly, privately, or internally? Did it violate a covenant (marriage, ordination, or contractual)? Was it heresy? Was it premeditated? How many times has it happened? Does it call into question the person's salvation? Have repentance and restitution taken place?

DQ: Are Christians sinning by judging their brother or sister in Christ by asking these questions? _____

2. Who realizes a sin has occurred?

If you realize that you have sinned or have a dirty conscience because you have sinned, it is your responsibility to seek out the other person. Matt. 5:23-24

and 1 Peter 3:7 describe situations where sin against another human being results in our worship and gifts being unacceptable to God. Often times our emotions and “rights” compound the original sin. This happens when we fail to pause and consider our fellowship with other believers.

GROUP ACTIVITY: Explore the following verses and then try to identify which step(s) in “PAUSE.” corresponds to the verse.

Phil. 2:3-4: _____

Matt. 22:39: _____

1 Cor. 13:5: _____

Matt. 7:12: _____

P.A.U.S.E.

- Prepare (pray, get the facts, seek godly counsel, develop options)
- Affirm relationships (show genuine concern and respect for others)
- Understand interests (identify others' concerns, desires, needs, limitations, or fears)
- Search for creative solutions (prayerful brainstorming)
- Evaluate options objectively and reasonably (evaluate, don't argue)

from peacemaker.net

If you have been sinned against or a sin becomes known to you, you must ask yourself, “Is this a sin that should be overlooked? Should I turn the other cheek?” Matt. 5:38-42, Prov. 10:12, and Prov. 19:11 all speak of the virtue of overlooking a sin or a “sinless” conflict. Compare those verses with 1 Cor 5:9-13 and Matt. 18:15-17. Actions which disgrace Christ or his church or which damage or lead others astray are grievous sins. Patterns of sins are repetitive “small” sins which reveal the person to be a wounded/unhealthy believer or a baptized unbeliever. A grievous sin or a pattern of sins is not overlookable. The sinner must be approached and the process of church discipline must be initiated. See the diagram “Biblical Church Discipline.”

3. *Is the sinner also a church leader?*

Christian leaders are held to a higher standard than other members of the church. Those held to a higher standard include: Teachers, Deacons, Ministers, and others who are in an example setting position. These people are also installed because of their character and skills. For these reasons, they are held to a higher standard and a higher threshold of evidence is required. If the alleged sin is only based on one person's testimony, the allegation must be thrown out because the threshold for accusing any leader is two witnesses. This protects them from an individual's false accusation in order to discredit and eliminate a leader from his or her position.

GROUP ACTIVITY: Read the following verses and list what would disqualify a leader from leading in the church?

Elder/Pastor – 1 Tim 3:1-7. Titus: 1:6-9: _____

Deacon – 1 Tim. 3:8-13: _____

4. *What is the level of damage that has been done by the sin?*

Sin always causes some sort of damage. Slander, gossip, cutting comments, and neglect of duties can cause a loss of social standing, low self-esteem, a breakdown of fellowship, and hurt feelings. Some sins cause material damage to the other person or party: theft, violence, and fraud. The level of damage done by the sin should be countered by an equal level of restitution. Restitution is anything that is given or done in order to make the victim whole. Most damage is non-material. A slanderer tells people in the church that a deacon's son is out partying every night. Or...a gossip tells several that the choir director and his spouse were yelling in their home so loud it could be heard in the street. All four victims (Deacon and son, director and spouse) have lost social standing at least and possibly fellowship has broken down in the church. If both these have occurred, what restitution would bring these four individual back to wholeness?

In the case of material damages, restitution would come in the form of money or the return or replacement of goods. What restitution should be given? A member of the congregation adds a few extra votes so that the pastor receives “a vote of no confidence” and gets fired... A member borrows most of the tables and chairs without permission, and they get stolen because he left them out at night... A member intentionally breaks a stained glass window donated by the grandparents of a member with whom she has been arguing...

2. WHY ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS AND RULES?

One purpose for the Biblical confrontation of sin is to preserve the innocence and public reputation of church members. For this reason, confidentiality is required and gossip and slander are discouraged (as well as punishable). Any accusation should be taken to the possible offender first. The one who approaches the possible offender is permitted to seek advice from one or two leaders, but he or she is expected to withhold the person’s name. Also, without additional testimony or evidence an individual cannot pursue anything beyond the first private meeting. There are two exceptions. First, child abuse must be reported even if no evidence or secondary witnesses are available. Second, every married person is free to talk with their spouse about anything they wish, but do so with caution.

Guidance for private meetings...

- Pray for humility and wisdom
- Plan your words carefully (think of how you would want to be confronted)
- Anticipate likely reactions and plan appropriate responses (rehearsals can be very helpful)
- Choose the right time and place (talk in person whenever possible)
- Assume the best about the other person until you have facts to prove otherwise (Prov. 11:27)
- Listen carefully (Prov. 18:13)

- Speak only to build others up (Eph. 4:29)
- Ask for feedback from the other person
- Recognize your limits (only God can change people; see Rom. 12:18; 2 Tim. 2:24-26)

from peacemaker.net

DQ: Please read the following fictional case scenario and discuss the grievousness of sin using information from this session. Also please discuss the ramifications from this sinful conflict which has occurred. Finally suggest basic steps that need to be taken in this situation.

A small group of members, all in the same Sunday School class, have been grumbling about the worship pastor. “The worship pastor sings the hymns all wrong and wants to get rid of the organ.” (Really his is just young and he said that he did not think the organ was good for church growth.) The most vocal member of the class has called him a nitwit and “foolish” and has started to get the whole group to call him “that boy.” What will you do?

One deacon’s son and another deacon’s wife were caught in the church closet kissing by three adults. After some questioning, the male admitted to a three-month affair with the married woman. She refused to admit the 3-month affair, but she did confess and repent of the closet kissing. Where could the church, deacons, or pastor go from here?

How grievous is the sin in the scenario above? _____

What are the ramifications from this sin? _____

What are some basic steps that need to be taken in this situation? _____

SESSION 3 HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

Have you created or are embroiled in a sinful conflict currently?

What steps do you need to take to remedy this situation?

Do you know someone who is trapped in sin and needs to be confronted?

What steps do you need to take to help them?

SESSION FOUR:

RESPONSES TO CONFLICT

By Andrew Hancock

SESSION FOUR: FORGIVENESS

*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13*

DQ: How do you define forgiveness? _____

Leader: the goal here is not to give the answer yet, but have the people think about how they define forgiveness. Possibly have a writer come to the board and list the characteristics of forgiveness that the class comes up with together.

1. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT FORGIVENESS?

What do these verses teach us about God's forgiveness. Jot down your thoughts below:

Psalm 103:11-12 _____

Psalm 130:3-4 _____

Micah 7:18-19 _____

Acts 10:43 _____

Ephesians 4:32 _____

ANSWER: God's forgiveness is vast—he has removed our transgressions, he has forgiven our sins and not kept a record, he has removed them like throwing them into the depths of the sea! This forgiveness God gives is complete because Jesus Christ died on the cross—we should forgive—in Christ God forgave us.

DQ: How should we forgive? (Colossians 3:13; Matthew 6:12-15)

ANSWER: We should forgive others as God forgave us. This means that we do not count their sins against them, do not harbor them in our hearts, and do not use

them behind their backs. This means that our motivation to forgive others comes from the amazing grace that was given to us in God's forgiveness through Christ.

"You can't shake hands with a clenched fist." - Indira Gandhi

DQ: What is the main point of the following story? What does it teach us about forgiveness? (Matthew 18:21-35).

ANSWER: The main point of the parable is that our forgiveness needs to be great and unlimited. We need to embrace God's total forgiveness for us and then turn around and treat others with the same grace.

2. Thoughts about forgiveness

- Forgiveness is not a feeling, but an act of the will. A **DECISION**.
- Forgiveness is not **FORGETTING**, but a promise not to dwell on, bring the offense up, and use it against a person in the future.
- Forgiveness is not **EXCUSING** away someone's offense, but dealing with it **HONESTLY**.
- Remember God's forgiveness and grace and rely on his **STRENGTH** to overcome **UNFORGIVENESS**.
- **HARBORING** unforgiveness is extremely costly—it creates bitterness, anger, talking behind people's back, hostility, and crushes one's spirits.

Leader: read through Sande's chapter on forgiveness to help you prepare this mini-lesson. Share some examples from your own life that illustrate these principles. Pick out some Scriptures that support your points.

3. THE FOUR PROMISES OF FORGIVENESS FROM THE PEACEMAKER

Through forgiveness God tears down the walls that our sins have built, and he opens the way for a renewed relationship with him. This is exactly what we must

do if we are to forgive as the Lord forgives us: We must release the person who has wronged us from the penalty of being separated from us. We must not hold wrongs against others, not think about the wrongs, and not punish others for them.

Therefore, forgiveness may be described as a decision to make four promises:

1. "I will not dwell on this incident."
2. "I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."
3. "I will not talk to others about this incident."
4. "I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship."

By making and keeping these promises, you can tear down the walls that stand between you and your offender. You promise not to dwell on or brood over the problem or to punish by holding the person at a distance. You clear the way for your relationship to develop unhindered by memories of past wrongs. This is exactly what God does for us, and it is what he calls us to do for others.

Definition Revision

Write out your revised definition of forgiveness.

SESSION 4 HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

What is the most meaningful idea you got out of this session?

Are you harboring an unforgiving spirit toward anyone? Pray over this and consider the verses on God's forgiveness. Is there anyone you need to forgive? How will you do this?

Is there anyone you need to ask for forgiveness from? What is your plan for this?

Is there any relationship where you can apply the four promises of forgiveness?

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