

MODULE 4: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

SESSION 2: THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS

Key Ideas for This Session:

- A disciplined and God-centred approach to conflict resolution, can turn a destructive situation into a life-giving one.
- Reconciliation includes focusing on the problem and not the people; elevating people and prioritizing PEACE
- Key verse: 2 Corinthians 5:18
All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

Conflict Resolution Is a Discipline:

We know that interpersonal conflict is a normal life experience. Every one of us will experience conflict to some degree nearly every day of our lives. Last week we began speaking of an approach to resolve conflicts and ensure relationships stay intact. Today we will review the first steps and add some more.

1) Involve God first, and then the person:

It is God who can change our hearts towards one another and towards issues. When dealing with a conflict, ask God for a change of heart if required, for wisdom and discernment, and for the “fruits of the spirit.”

Galatians 5:22, 23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Does this seem weak to you? Why or why not?

2) Don't delay in dealing with a conflict:

Time does not heal when it comes to conflict. In fact, time tends to make things fester, resentment to solidify and issues to grow in size and stature.

Ephesians 4:26,27

Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

What do you think the phrase “do not give the devil a foothold,” means?

3) Take into account feelings:

Feelings are separate from the rational facts and evidence relating to a disagreement. Feelings need not be justified, nor argued against. They exist simply because they are felt. When a person is able to express their feelings and be heard, it diffuses a hostile situation. It allows for that person to clear their mind and feel like a weight has been lifted. It also puts the person above the problem.

What are some questions you can ask someone to help them express their feelings around a situation?

How might you do this if the conflict is making you angry or upset?

4) Take responsibility for your part:

Most disagreements are not completely black and white. On each side of a serious argument, there may be valid points of view. Likewise, a level of mutual

responsibility may be at play by each person involved, for contributing to the conflict—and contributing to its escalation.

In Scripture, we are instructed to identify and confess our sin, and to attend to our own issues, before we approach others, about theirs.

1 John 1:8

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Matthew 7:5

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

When reflecting on your part in a conflict, here are some questions:

- What am I responsible for in all of this?
- What are my hidden motivations?
- Am I being a hypocrite?
- What can I be doing to diffuse the situation?
- Is there an appropriate compromise on my part?
- Do I need to seek forgiveness?

Are there other questions you might consider asking yourself before approaching the other party in a conflict?

5) Attack the problem not the person

Solving the disagreement itself is the focus of conflict resolution. It is not about a person's generalized character, past wrongs and personality. Therefore, slander, personal criticism, blaming and accusations must be avoided.

Do you agree with this? Do you think it is possible to be disciplined in the heat of an argument?

TIP: Remember that the relationship is more important than the problem.

6) Prioritize peace and cooperation

Proverbs 15:1

A gentle answer turns away wrath.

One of the most effective ways of reducing conflict (and not “gaslighting”) is to respond to arguments, criticism, or anger with a quiet, gentle tone of voice. Avoiding becoming defensive or aggressive also helps reduce the intensity of a disagreement.

PRACTICE A RESPONSE:

PERSON A: “You always interrupt me!”

YOU: _____

PERSON A: “How many times have I told you to shut that door!”

YOU: _____

7) Respect one another when approaching conflict resolution

Matthew 18:15-17

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

These instructions were given by Jesus to His disciples. They describe a process for responding to a problem in a group that causes conflict. Specifically, Jesus is talking about conflict where someone has been wronged or hurt by another person in a group of people. Jesus is concerned with the individuals involved and also with the well-being of the entire group. If the

person is allowed to continue in the group without resolution, the conflict will spread and create problems and division for everyone.

To follow these steps with a desire to prove oneself as being in the right and the other person wrong, is not productive and can be particularly harmful if the person doing the confronting has selfish or impure motives.

Think of Jesus' instructions as a simple, three-step process.

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| 1. Discuss the matter privately with the person you have the conflict with if they are willing. <i>If the issue is not resolved, go to Step 2.</i> |
| 2. Discuss the matter with a trusted person or two, possibly leaders or elders and ask them to help resolve the issue between you and the person who you feel wronged you. <i>If the conflict is still not resolved, go to Step 3.</i> |
| 3. The leaders or elders can bring the matter before the group, and the group should determine if the situation can be resolved. If the person(s) involved in the conflict are unwilling to take the steps necessary to resolve the conflict, they may have to be excluded from the group. |

Was there a time when someone wronged or hurt another person in a group you were in? How was it handled? What was the result?

Sometimes people in group situations respond behind a person's back by sharing their pain and anger with other members of the group. At other times, a person might simply sweep the issue under the carpet to avoid conflict—but the issue clearly remains.

Either of these types of responses can be particularly damaging in a prison or jail setting. How do you think problems between group members can best be resolved safely and with integrity for everyone's well-being?

Break into small groups and brainstorm the following if there is time, or consider these topics this week:

- *Here is a real-life scenario to consider. How would you handle it?*
 - *You live in a neighbourhood where drugs are a common problem, especially with young people. Most of the neighbours know that the people in a house down the street from you are distributing illegal drugs.*
 - *Using the three-step approach from Matthew 18, how might you address this issue?*
 - *What are possible positive and negative implications of using the three-steps in your neighbourhood setting?*