

Building Community *This is how they will know you are my disciples...*

4. Challenges to Community - Conflict

To start with:

Compile a list of as many conflict situations you can think of in the New Testament.

(e.g. Disciples arguing over who was the greatest; Jesus telling Peter 'Get behind me Satan'; Jesus and Satan in the wilderness; Jesus and the Pharisees; Martha and Jesus at Lazarus' death; Ananias, Saphira and Peter etc...)

- What caused these conflicts?
- What strikes you about the list? *(It may well be how much conflict there is!)*

One of the biggest challenges to being a community where people can genuinely love one another is our ability - or inability - to deal with conflict. In any meaningful relationship or community conflict is inevitable at some point. This study looks at some of the ways we might get better at handling it in a healthy and Christ-like way.

1. Personally, how do you tend to deal with conflict?

(You could give people a copy of this list and ask them to tick the ones they have a tendency towards.)

- Ignore it and pretend it hasn't happened
- Pretend everything is fine but inwardly seethe
- Pretend everything is fine with the person involved but discuss it with other people

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- Cut relationship with that person
- Look for ways to 'get your own back'
- Apologise and smooth things over - even if it's not your fault
- Add it to a mental list of crimes you have stored up in your mind
- Fight back/defend yourself - in a direct and immediate way
- Walk away, reflect and pray; then try to address the problem later
- Other

2. What would you say are the consequences in a church community of some of these responses? Why do you think as a rule we are so often bad at handling conflict?
3. Spend some time looking at the following verses and reflect on how they might help us deal with conflict within the church community.

Matthew 6.9-15
 Matthew 7.1-5
 Matthew 18.15-17
 Romans 12.17-21
 1 Corinthians 6.1-8
 Philippians 4.2-3
 1 Timothy 5.1
 James 1.19

4.
 - a. What do you find challenging about this teaching and why?
 - b. When have you dealt with a difficult situation, or had someone approach you about your behaviour, in a way that was in line with these teachings? What happened?
 - c. How might we encourage each other to respond in a more godly way to conflict in our community?

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5. a. Given this teaching, what would be a godly way to address concerns you might have about wider aspects of church life and how things are done/decisions are made?
- b. If you did address concerns about something within the church and your suggestion or idea did not appear to be implemented, what would be an appropriate response?

Reflect and pray

- In pairs/small groups spend some time praying for each other for love and wisdom in knowing how to deal with challenging situations - either inside or beyond the church.
- You might ask people to pray quietly by themselves for any conflict situations they are currently in that need some measure of resolution and for the ability to be gracious if people come to talk to them about their behaviour.
- Pray for the leadership for the times they have to deal with criticism and conflict.