

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

(Acts 2:42-47)

Making the Case for Small Groups

LESSON 3: Conflict

While you shouldn't seek out conflict, when truth meets life, conflict is inevitable. But scripture prepares us for this – *Ephesians 4:15, 25, 29*

Conflict must be addressed with direct, loving communication rather than resentment, hidden emotions, or unresolved anger, which destroy community. The two needs for conflict resolution are confronting unrepentant or unconfessed sin – *Matthew 18:15-20* – and repairing relational breakdown – *Matthew 5:23-24*. While it might be easier to ignore conflicts, it is not wise or scriptural, as Paul points out to his charge in 2 Timothy 4:2.

Preparation

Pray for discernment. Is this a real conflict or just my wounded ego? Am I at fault or is this just a misunderstanding? You needn't apologize if you were in the right, but perspective and empathy may be in order. *Pray over your words.* If possible, go over what you plan to say, asking God for clarity and perspective. If not, try to prepare the listener in advance. *Pray for sensitivity.* Let me hear, see, and understand. Help me be an active, observant listener.

Ground Rules

RULE #1: *If it happens in the group, process it in the group.* You can disagree on doctrines or specifics, but if someone questions someone else's character or motives, you must deal with it internally.

RULE #2: *The leader is responsible for process, not outcomes.* Set some accountability and discussion guidelines and stick to them.

RULE #3: *Validate the conflict.* Affirm members for taking the difficult steps to conflict resolution – the humility to admit you might be wrong, the courage to share your feelings, the persistence to grow even when it is hard.

RULE #4: *The conflict need not be resolved at this meeting.* If possible, allow time to process the conflict.

RULE #5: *Conflict must be processed with trust and confidentiality.* Members must be free to opine without fear but also, after reflection, to retract or restate, which requires confidentiality.

Guidelines

STEP #1: *Start soon.* Don't wait six months to confront.

STEP #2: *Meet face-to-face.* No email or snail mail.

STEP #3: *Affirm the relationship.* You seek resolution because you care about the other person.

STEP #4: *Make observations, not accusations.* Address concerns without character attacks.

STEP #5: *Get the facts.* Let the other person share.

STEP #6: *Promote resolution.* Remember the goal is restoration.

If these ground rules and guidelines do not lead to restored community, there may be a deeper need for confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. See the leader resources area of our website for tips on accomplishing this effectively. But the most important thing to remember is that Biblical community is first and foremost about loving each other, which is much more important than being right.

DISCUSSION:

Share an instance where you were in conflict, which was later resolved successfully.

Have you ever been quick to anger and discovered later that it was a misunderstanding? How did you handle it?

What happens when you let conflict go unresolved?

Read James 1:19-20. How does that apply to this lesson?