



GROWING TO BE LIKE CHRIST

30 min.

If your group wants to stay together and become fruitful, you will face conflict. Conflict is guaranteed whenever a group goes beyond the "niceness" stage of hiding conflicting opinions and preferences. As you learn to use conflict productively, your group will become a sharp iron tool in God's hand, a tool that sharpens each member without harming anyone. You can contribute to your group's growth by taking the initiative to face and resolve conflict in God-honoring ways.

2. How would you say you view conflict? Check the following words that reflect your view, and explain why you feel that way:

- Good
- Healthy
- To be avoided
- Difficult
- Challenging
- Unhealthy
- Frightening
- Opportunity
- Bad
- Other: _____

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul had quite a bit to say about how to work through conflict:

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger,

brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³²Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

—Ephesians 4:25–32

3. What principles do you find in this passage for dealing with conflict in a godly way?

4. Suppose you think that one member of your group is dominating the discussion, with the result that others are becoming passive and silent. How could you deal with this situation in a way that speaks truthfully to your neighbor (verse 25), says only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs (verse 29), and is kind, compassionate, and forgiving (verse 32)?

5. What do you think it means to "give the devil a foothold" (verse 27) when you face conflict with someone?

6. How is it possible to address a conflict without giving the devil a foothold?

7. (Optional) How do unwholesome words damage our relationships?

8. (Optional) On your own, complete these two sentences:

- One thing that I think would make this group better is _____

- I would share this idea with the group if _____

Will you share your idea with your group? It's up to you!



DEVELOPING YOUR SHAPE TO SERVE OTHERS

10-30 min.

9. (Optional) If you didn't finish sharing your Lasting Impressions worksheets in session 4, you may continue those now.

10. Groups handle conflict more productively when they have a solid foundation of strong relationships. When persons know that others value them as unique individuals, they are less likely to hurt others or become hurt when they disagree. Taking the time to affirm each person's strengths is a way to build that foundation.

Place a chair in the middle of the group and invite someone to sit in it. The other group members proceed to each state something that this person has contributed to your group. How has this person helped you build a genuine community—perhaps through showing a love for God's Word, praying, sharing food, displaying a sense of humor, or expressing kindness? Limit your sharing to one phrase or sentence, and move quickly around the circle. (If time is an issue, it's not necessary that everyone share something for each person.) When the sharing is finished, pause to pray for this person, thanking God for his or her specific contribution and asking God to work in his or her life. The leader, apprentice, or someone else may lead in prayer.

Then invite someone else to sit in the chair. Keep the process moving—it's important that everyone take a turn in the chair.

Note: As you pray for the person in the chair, consider laying your hands on his or her shoulders. This can be a powerful way to minister to someone. Groups often comment about what a wonderful experience this is.



SURRENDERING YOUR LIFE FOR GOD'S PLEASURE 10-20 min.

11. Sit next to your spiritual partner(s). Together do one or more of the following:

- Share what you learned from your devotional time this week.
- Recite your memory verse.
- Tell how you're doing with the goal you set for yourself.