



ANCIENT FUTURE
Group Life Conference
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COMMUNITY

Dealing with Difficult People

Marie Shepherd & Ray Ercoli

Ray Ercoli

Ray Ercoli has been on the Willow Creek Community Church staff for 16 years and has been a small groups pastor in Community Care since 1997. He is currently the director of all workshops and support groups in Community Care. Ray came to Christ here in 1982. He has been married for 16 years and has three children aged 12, nine, and seven.

Marie Shepherd

Marie Shepherd is an area pastor with Neighborhood Life at Willow Creek Community Church. She's been on staff for 17 years. She is excited to live out the vision of Neighborhood Life at Willow: "Love God and Love your Neighbor." Her responsibilities as an area pastor include the leadership, shepherding, and development of small groups as well as neighborhood teams in her geographical area. With such a people-intensive ministry, Marie has had lots of opportunities to practice the values and principles taught in this breakout. Marie lives in the North Chicago suburbs and has three grown children and four grandchildren.

Session Description

Difficult people know how to push all the wrong buttons and can often cause problems in a small group. How can the leader handle these people in a way that helps them grow, and at the same time maintain group unity? Identify how your leadership style can impact group problem-solving. Explore how to employ healthy group boundaries in order to maintain community and provide balance in your group.

Goal

For small group leaders to deal with conflict biblically

Principle #1 — The Log Factor — Matthew 7:1-5

Know your own weaknesses and tendencies.

Questions to ask yourself: You may be contributing to the problem!

1. In a group, do I immediately correct people so I can straighten them out? — judgmental/confrontational
2. Do I try to ignore problems hoping that they will go away or that someone else will address the problem?
3. Do I even recognize that there is a problem in the group or does someone else always have to complain first?
4. Do I dominate the group discussion myself?
5. Do I create a group that is dependent upon me to solve all the problems and not nurture a culture of cross-care and accountability?

Story of Dan and Mike

Group Discussion Exercise

How did your family handle conflict as you grew up?

1. Did your family argue out loud — very vocal — but never resolved issues?
2. Did your family avoid conflict with each other and never addressed issues?
3. Did your family address issues in a clear and rational manner that allowed you the freedom to express your feelings without judging you?
4. Did your parents pay enough attention to you to even know if there were problems that needed to be addressed?
5. Other

Principle #2 — Create Mutual Accountability — Matthew 18:15-17

The goal of the leader is to foster the development of a group that is willing and able to address complex relational issues outside of the assistance of the leader. Each member has and feels the freedom and responsibility to address issues with others in the group privately and does so in an appropriate manner.

1. Model conflict resolution skills to your group. Handle issues both publicly and privately so that others learn the biblical standard for conflict resolution.
2. Don't do more than the people seeking the help do for themselves. If you have a group member who is frustrated with another member but will not meet with the person to talk one-on-one about an issue, then they need to grow. See Galatians 6:1-5.
3. Look for ways to encourage growth and development in your group members.
4. Always come into a conflict resolution with humility. Remember that you can be a difficult person too.

Forgiveness Exercise

Forgiveness means that we actively choose to give up our grudge despite the severity of the injustice done to us.

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

Ephesians 4:32 (NASB)

Healing process in forgiving others:

Make a list of everyone who has sinned against you, offended you in some way, or whom you have negative feelings toward for any reason. Then, walk through the following process in prayer with God or with a trusted, mature friend, for each person and situation on the list.

1. ADMIT your hurt, anger, and any other emotion to God.
2. ASK for God’s perspective on yourself, the other person(s), and the situation.
3. CONFESS to God any sin of resentment, bitterness, self-pity, etc.
4. FORGIVE the person. This may be a willful choice at this point. We don’t have to feel “loving” toward them to say to God, “Because of your forgiveness to me, God, I forgive _____ (name the person), for _____ (name the offenses).” You might need to forgive yourself and forgive God here, also.
5. ASK for God to heal you emotionally. The emotional healing is usually a process. It does not happen overnight.
6. PRAY for the person regularly (Matthew 5:43-44).
7. ASK God if you need to go and share with the person involved. This is only after there has been some emotional healing and you definitely feel led by God to talk to the person.

Principle #3 — Be Prepared — 1 Peter 1:13

Know in advance how to handle situations so you are not caught off guard.
Practice!

FACILITATING A GROUP: WHAT TO DO WHEN...

What if...	How They Might Affect the Group	What a Leader Can Do to Help
...someone talks too much.	A person who talks too much can drain the life of a group as they control and dominate conversation. Others in the group lose their chance to contribute because this person is always talking, which may lead to resentment against the "talker." Those who talk too much also tend to keep the conversation at a more surface-level, avoiding feelings and deeper issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Look for a break in this person's comments, then ask the group, "What do the rest of you think?" or ask another person, "What do you think, Joe?" A short silence may be needed for group members to feel that "the coast is clear" for them to finally speak. This might require patience and might be difficult for the talkative person to allow. ▪ If a talkative person continues to dominate conversation, you may need to have a private conversation with them about their behavior. Let them know that you're glad for their participation but invite them to listen and learn from others in the group as well. This might be hard for them to hear. Extra gentleness is needed for this conversation.
...someone talks very little or is silent.	A person who doesn't talk may be shy, filled with shame, or just feel like they have nothing valuable to add. When a member of the group is conspicuously silent, other members may feel anxious or even feel judged by the lack of responsiveness from the silent person. If this under-the-surface dynamic continues over time, it can erode the overall trust of the group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do not pressure a quiet person to talk. Be curious about why they might be hesitant to share and be considerate of their need to process. ▪ Consistently encourage this person's participation by responding to and appreciating any comments they do make. Don't stop inviting them to share. ▪ Mention, "What you're thinking is important to me. Would you like to share anything?" ▪ If you feel that their silence is beginning to negatively impact the group, you may want to speak with them privately. Ask them what their silence means and how you can encourage them to participate.
...someone tries to "fix" everyone's problems by giving advice.	A person who routinely gives quick answers may think they are trying to be helpful but might actually be hurting the person in pain. When someone tries to "fix" our problem too quickly, they short-circuit our process of healing and may even inflict a new wound of not being heard or feeling alone in the problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A private conversation with this person may be necessary. They may not be aware that they are "fixing" others. ▪ Invite this person to give the gift of patient listening before they give advice. ▪ Encourage this person to allow other people to be where they are. Challenge them to permit the emotions or questions of others, even if it makes them uncomfortable. Let them know this is a loving thing to do for someone else.
...someone consistently blames or confronts.	Conflict in a group is not a bad thing. It may indicate that group members are becoming more honest about their feelings. Conflict becomes a problem in a group, however, when a person doesn't take responsibility for his or her own feelings but blame others instead.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage group members to always use "I" statements rather than "you" statements. (Ex: "I feel angry when you say..." instead of "You make me angry when you say...") ▪ If a person's anger becomes disruptive to the point of breaking down the group, ask your leader for help. This person may need individual attention and should not be permitted to dismantle the group with their behavior.
...someone often interrupts or engages in side conversation	Interruptive comments and side conversations can erode the safety of a group. A person who commonly does these things may be acting in their own fear of intimacy or need to control or may be simply unaware of their behavior. The group may respond to that fear by not talking or avoiding deeper levels of conversation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When someone interrupts repeatedly, stop him or her by asking the first speaker to finish their sharing before moving on to the person who interrupted. ▪ If side conversations are an issue in the group, ask the group to talk about what it feels like to have a side conversation going on when they are trying to share. End this discussion with a renewed commitment to listen to each other. ▪ If this issue seems to revolve around the behavior of one person, it may be helpful to have a private conversation with them. Let them know the impact of their behavior on the group, and let them know that their valuable input will be better received in turn.

Role Play Group Exercise

At your table, choose a "Group Leader" and a "Difficult Person." Pick one of these issues as their problem and practice handling this situation. Your group today is discussing John 4:4-25 (The Samaritan Woman at the Well).

⁴Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

¹³Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷"I have no husband," she replied.

¹⁸Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

²¹Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

²⁵The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."

John 4:4-25 (NIV)

Personal Development

Honest to God?
Bill Hybels

Descending into Greatness
Bill Hybels and Rob Wilkins

Ordering Your Private World
Gordon MacDonald

Changes That Heal
Dr. Henry Cloud

Boundaries
Drs. Henry Cloud and John
Townsend

Hiding from Love
Dr. John Townsend

Restoring Your Spiritual Passion
Gordon MacDonald

The Lies We Believe
Dr. Chris Thurmond

The Marriage Builder
Larry Crabb

Healing for Damaged Emotions
David Seamands

Telling Yourself the Truth
William Backus and Marie Chapien

The 12 Steps: A Spiritual Journey
Ron Halverson

Birthright
David Needham

You Gotta Keep Dancin'
Tim Hansel

Love Is a Choice
Drs. Robert Hemfelt, Frank Minirth,
and Paul Meier

Codependency
Pat Springle

Can Christians Love Too Much?
Dr. Margaret Rinck

Inside Out
Larry Crabb

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team
Patrick Lencioni

Leading Life-Changing Small Groups
Bill Donahue