

Leader's Guide

Strengthening the Family

Forgiveness is a Beautiful Gift

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

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August 9, 2026

Conversation Goal

To help group members learn to distinguish between healthy disagreement and destructive conflict, recognize how personal preferences, unresolved emotions, and attitudes can contribute to division, and then invite the Holy Spirit to reveal what needs to be surrendered.

The goal is **not** to identify who is causing problems in the church or determine who is right in a particular disagreement. Philip's message ultimately turns the question inward: **What is happening in my heart, and am I willing to surrender it to Jesus?**

Synopsis

Conflict is inevitable wherever people gather, including the church, but disagreement does not have to become division. Philip challenged us to distinguish between biblical convictions and personal preferences, to recognize when anger or unresolved hurt can become destructive patterns, and to take responsibility for our own contribution to the health of the church. Ultimately, he called both leaders and congregants to surrender themselves to Christ, pursue peace and integrity, and allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and lead us toward greater unity.

1. What are we actually dealing with?

Discussion Question

How can we tell the difference between a conflict that needs to be confronted and a disagreement that simply requires us to extend grace and let go of our preference?

Teaching Point

Conflict itself isn't necessarily sinful. Philip points to Paul and Barnabas as an example of two faithful believers who experienced a sharp disagreement. Scripture doesn't suggest that every disagreement means someone is rebellious, divisive, or spiritually immature.

One of the first steps toward spiritual maturity is learning to distinguish between truth and preference. Some things matter deeply because Scripture speaks clearly about them. Other things are simply matters of personality, tradition, taste, or personal preference. When we treat every preference as though it were a biblical conviction, conflict becomes much more likely.

Leader emphasis: The goal isn't to avoid disagreement. It's to learn how to disagree without allowing disagreement to damage our love for one another.

Follow-Up Prompts

- Why is it sometimes difficult to admit that something is simply a preference?
- What happens when we treat our preferences as though they are biblical principles?
- How can humility help us discern whether an issue is truly important?
- Is it possible to disagree strongly while still loving and honoring someone? What does that look like?

Additional Scripture

Romans 14:1-13 - Don't quarrel over disputable matters.

Philippians 2:3-5 - Consider others more important than yourself.

James 3:13-18 - Contrast earthly wisdom with wisdom characterized by humility and peace.

Romans 12:18 - "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

2. When does "what I want" become a spiritual issue?

Discussion Question

Where do you see the temptation to turn personal preferences into "church issues," and how can we keep our preferences from becoming more important than the mission and unity of the church?

Teaching Point

Philip identified something that can be uncomfortable for all of us: many church conflicts aren't actually about major theological issues. They can begin with things like music, worship style, temperature, furniture, programs, buildings, preaching style, or the way something has always

been done. Preferences aren't inherently wrong. The problem comes when **my preference becomes more important than Christ's purposes or the good of His body.**

This is an opportunity to help people distinguish between: **"I don't like this."** and **"This is wrong."**

Follow-Up Prompts

- Why is change particularly difficult when we've been part of a church for a long time?
- How do we respond when the church does something differently than we would choose?
- What questions could we ask ourselves before expressing a complaint?
- What does "dying to self" look like when nobody is asking you to compromise biblical truth?

Additional Scripture

1 Corinthians 10:23-24 - Not everything permissible is beneficial; seek the good of others.

Philippians 2:1-4 - Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 - Love is patient, kind, and not self-seeking.

3. What might be happening in me?

Discussion Question

What can happen when we allow anger, hurt, or resentment to remain unresolved? How can we recognize when an emotion is beginning to become a pattern?

Teaching Point

Philip connected this sermon with the previous conversation about spiritual footholds. Ephesians 4:26-27 warns us not to allow anger to become an opportunity for the enemy. His personal story illustrated how unresolved anger can move from an isolated emotion into a recurring pattern that begins affecting other relationships.

This is an important distinction: **Feeling anger isn't necessarily sinful.** What we do with anger matters.

The question isn't simply, *"Am I angry?"* but: **"What is my anger producing in me?"**

Is it leading me toward honest conversation, prayer, repentance, and healing? Or is it producing resentment, gossip, withdrawal, retaliation, criticism, or division?

Follow-Up Prompts

- What's the difference between experiencing anger and allowing anger to control us?
- Why do unresolved emotions often affect the people closest to us?
- What are some warning signs that anger or resentment is becoming a pattern?
- Why is it sometimes easier to blame someone else than examine our own response?
- What might change if we began praying for God to reveal our own contribution before asking Him to change someone else's?

Additional Scripture

Ephesians 4:26-32 - Deal with anger rather than giving it room to grow.

James 1:19-20 - Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Hebrews 12:14-15 - Watch for a "root of bitterness."

Psalms 139:23-24 - Invite God to search the heart.

Proverbs 28:13 - Confession and turning from sin lead toward mercy.

4. What is the Holy Spirit asking of me?

Discussion Question

As you sit with this message, what, if anything, is the Holy Spirit inviting you to surrender, confess, change, or pursue?

Teaching Point

This is the heart of the conversation.

Philip's sermon ultimately isn't asking us to diagnose everyone else's problems. It is asking us to place ourselves before God and allow Him to search our hearts. His closing prayer asks God to help us recognize what is happening **"in our own hearts."** The Holy Spirit may reveal something different to each person.

Follow-Up Prompts

- Is there a relationship where God may be asking you to pursue peace?
- Is there a preference you've been holding too tightly?

- Is there something you've been saying about someone that you wouldn't say if they were in the room?
- Is there a complaint you need to turn into prayer?
- Is there something you've done that you need to confess or apologize for?
- Is there something you need to release rather than fix?
- Is there someone you need to forgive?
- What would it look like to surrender this situation without knowing how the other person will respond?

Additional Scripture

Psalms 139:23-24 - "Search me, God..."

Psalms 51:10-12 - Ask God for a clean heart and renewed spirit.

James 4:7-10 - Submit to God and draw near to Him.

Romans 12:18 - Pursue peace as far as it depends on you.

Philippians 2:12-13 - God works in us both to will and to act according to His purpose.

5. What will I actually do?

Discussion Question

What is one specific step you will take this week in response to what God has shown you?

Teaching Point

A Holy Spirit prompting becomes discipleship when we respond to it with obedience.

The goal isn't to leave group thinking, *"That was a really good discussion about conflict."* The goal is to leave knowing, **"Because of what God showed me tonight, I am going to do something differently."** The step doesn't have to be dramatic. It might be very small.