

THE PEACEMAKING CHURCH



The Leadership Opportunity

Living Out the Gospel Where Conflict and Leadership Intersect

A DVD-based Group Study for Church Leadership Teams

Study Guide



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Scripture provides a practical and powerful system for resolving every kind of conflict. This session reviews the key biblical concepts that help us live as peacemakers, including the Slippery Slope, The Four G’s, the Seven A’s of Confession, and the Four Promises of Forgiveness. This session is intended as a review for those leaders who have not recently read *The Peacemaker* or been through the Peacemaker Ministries *Small Group Study*.

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Protecting Your Church without Losing Sight of Ministry

This session provides an introduction to some of the most common legal risk management issues associated with church life: counseling, confidentiality, and the prevention of child sexual abuse. This session raises several issues that your leadership team will need to consider regarding your policies and practices. While it isn’t necessary for your entire leadership team to go through this session, at least one leader (or subcommittee) should do so, and then competent legal advisors should be consulted.

True Leaders Must Be Peacemakers

Learning to Prevent and Fight the Fires of Conflict

IN THIS SESSION

Church leaders regularly face conflict, but most are not equipped to handle it well. This session explains how the gospel provides a biblical paradigm for preventing destructive conflicts and responding as *peacemaking leaders*.

FEATURING



Ken Sande is president of Peacemaker Ministries and author of *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, which has been translated into ten languages. He is passionate about bringing the life-changing power of the gospel and the wisdom of God's peacemaking principles into the lives of Christians and their churches. His early experience in engineering and law fueled his desire to dedicate his life to biblical peacemaking, resulting in his decision to found Peacemaker Ministries over 25 years ago.

Introduction

Why a study on peacemaking for leaders? *Because leadership matters.* When it comes to conflict, as goes the leader, so goes the church.

Peacemaking leaders:

- Lead well in the middle of *inevitable* conflicts
- Lead in ways that prevent *unnecessary* conflicts

A key characteristic for successful leaders in Scripture is that they are peacemakers.

The Church: Regularly Burned By Destructive Conflict

Some conflicts smolder beneath the surface for years in the form of complaining, gossip, backbiting, resentment, or unforgiveness. These underground conflicts—



the subtle things we don't take the time to get at the root of—can eventually kill a church.

Other conflicts may start with a small spark, but they eventually grow into raging fires that consume marriages, pastoral careers, vital ministries, and entire congregations.

Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. James 3:5

Conflict can leave a scarred and blackened landscape:

- 32% of born again Christians who have been married have been divorced.
- 50 churches plummet into major, scarring conflict every day in the U.S.
- 1,500 pastors quit every month due to conflict, burnout, or moral failure.
- 34% of pastors serve congregations that forced their previous pastor to resign.
- The seven primary reasons for forced pastoral exits involve some form of conflict.

“Sparks” that typically trigger destructive conflict:

- Innocent misunderstandings (Joshua 22:10-34)
- Gossip or careless words (James 3:5)
- Pursuing uniformity rather than unity (1 Cor. 12:12-31)
- Competition over limited resources (Gen. 13:5-7)
- Change (Acts 11:1-3)
- Legitimate desires elevated to sinful demands/idols (James 4:1-3)
- Character or moral failure in leadership (2 Sam. 11) – pastors point to the following common areas of failure:
 - Pride
 - Control
 - A sense of entitlement
 - A lack of accountability or resistance to receiving correction
 - A lack of self-awareness
 - Sexual immorality
 - Abuse of power
 - Financial mishandling
 - Poor work ethic
 - A desire to be served rather than to serve

A little “gasoline” can turn small conflicts into raging infernos:

- Worldly attitudes (1 Cor. 3:1-4)
- Reckless words or foolish silence (Prov. 12:18)
- A stubborn desire to control a situation or other people
- Deficiency in leaders’ peacemaking skills

LESSON LINK

For a deeper look at the issues brought about by change, be sure to complete Sessions 6-7 of this study.



The most likely reason a leader's career will end is because of conflict, and yet leaders themselves acknowledge they have not been adequately trained in biblical peacemaking.

Deficiencies in traditional training produce leaders who struggle with:

- Lack of a solid “peacemaking theology”
- Lack of basic peacemaking skills
- Fear of man
- Lack of foresight and adaptability (overuse of one leadership style)
- Weak in practical application of the gospel
- Self-sufficient attitude

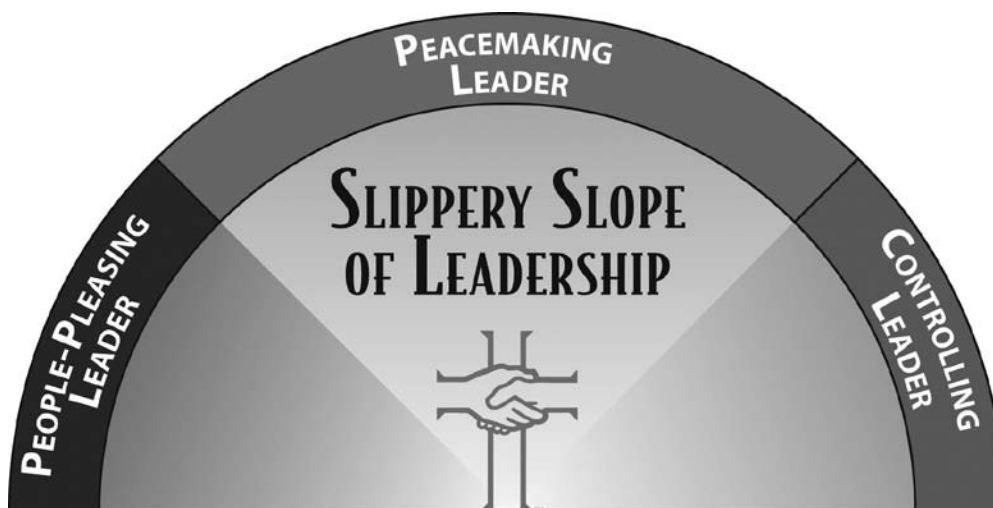
Summary

*When it comes to facing the flames of conflict,
many church leaders are not only poor firefighters;
all too often they are unwitting arsonists.*

But there is good news! Arsonists can learn how to stop triggering conflicts, and poor firefighters can develop superb peacemaking skills.

Understanding the Importance of Leadership Style

The first step in learning to prevent and fight the fires of conflict is to honestly discern what your natural inclinations are when it comes to leading others through conflict. Then you can learn how to counterbalance those inclinations and develop more constructive ways of dealing with conflict.



Three Leadership Styles in the Face of Conflict




By God's grace we can learn to counteract many of these attitudes and tendencies and learn to be a peacemaking leader.



The People-Pleasing Leader	The Controlling Leader
<i>Motto: "Fire? What fire?"</i>	<i>Motto: "Fight fire with fire!"</i>
Tends to be insecure; struggles with fear of man; may have had bad experience with conflict in the past.	Tends to be proud, self-absorbed, and forceful; successful at extinguishing opposition.
Prefers to deny, minimize, or run away from conflict.	Prefers to attack conflict (and people) head on; quick to speak, slow to listen.
Skilled at pacifying people by telling them what they want to hear. Tends to avoid direct confrontation (e.g., may try to counsel or address an issue through a sermon).	Skilled at behind the scenes maneuvering, recruiting allies, and using political structures. Tends to polarize people and trigger factions ("You're either for me or against me").
Success means keeping conflict hidden.	Success means eliminating opposition, even if they leave the church deeply embittered.
Church typically struggles against continual low-level conflict (e.g., gossip, backbiting, etc.). Often a "big back door"—a steady turnover of dissatisfied people.	Church typically pressured to maintain appearance of unity even though it may be highly polarized beneath the surface; people often fearful of voicing differences.
Conflicts such as unresolved offenses and resentments build up like tinder; smoldering fires can eventually burst forth in a surprising blaze.	Conflicts may be suppressed for years, but many controlling leaders are eventually consumed by a conflict they could not control.

Most leaders are inclined to slip into either a people-pleasing or controlling mode when conflict strikes. How far they slide in a particular situation depends on how deeply ingrained these habits are, how aware they are of their natural tendencies, and how intense a particular conflict is. The good news is that by God's grace leaders can learn to counteract many of these attitudes and tendencies and learn to be *peacemaking leaders*.

PAUSE AND DISCUSS (optional)

- 
- » What is your own personal tendency on the *Slippery Slope of Leadership*?
 - » What characteristics of people-pleasing or controlling do you see in your church and the rest of your leaders? How have these people-pleasing or controlling responses led to difficulties in your church and ministry?

Note: A ten-minute discussion here will still allow you to complete this session in an hour, but if you have the time, feel free to spend longer discussing these questions.

The Peacemaking Leader

Motto: “*Let’s use this fire for good.*” Conflict can come into the church and if handled properly, it can actually be healthy. It burns off the “chaff” in the church—the habits and attitudes that need to go—but it doesn’t have to kill the congregation.

Maintains Strong Character – Has the strength of character to avoid the pitfalls of leadership. Understands that pleasing God is more important than pleasing others, and that serving people is more important than controlling them.

“The church is languishing not for [the lack of] leaders but for the right kind of leaders ... History will show that the church has prospered most when blessed with strong leaders and suffered the greatest decline when her leaders were weak. The sheep rarely go much farther than the shepherd.”¹

Tempers Strength with Humility – Strength is tempered by Christ-like humility and wisdom, which enables him/her to be approachable, adaptable, and open to correction or differing ideas.


But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

James 3:17-18

Recognizes Role of Diversity – Realizes that God-given diversity in the church can actually promote healthy discussion, creativity, and growth if people engage one another with humility, respect, and wisdom.

Sees Conflict as Opportunity – Prefers to approach conflict as an opportunity to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be more like Christ (1 Cor. 10:31-11:1).

And Another Thing...



Two articles by Ken Sande on accountability and approachability in leadership can be found on the Peacemaker Ministries website:

www.peacemaker.net/approachability
www.peacemaker.net/accountability

¹ Tozer, A.W. *The Warfare of the Spirit*. (WingSpread Publishers, 2006).



Skilled at Relationships – Skilled at listening, drawing people out, understanding their concerns and interests, and building genuine agreement and cooperation.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility, consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4

Measures Success by Reconciliation – Success is measured in terms of reconciled people who are growing in Christ-like character and arriving at agreements they can all support.

Leads by Example – Committed to living out God’s peacemaking principles in own life so he/she can lead by example (1 Tim. 4:12).

Develops Peacemaking Skills – Realizes that leaders must sometimes assist others in resolving conflict and has therefore developed basic skills in coaching people and mediating conflicts.

Embraces a Church-Wide Vision – Committed to building a “culture of peace,” where every person can be trained and assisted to respond to conflict biblically.

Leads Like a Shepherd – This style of leadership is summarized beautifully in the biblical term, “shepherd,” which provides a rich metaphor for a peacemaking leader.

LESSON LINK

For a deeper look at the practical skills of peacemaking, be sure to go through sessions 8-10 of this study.

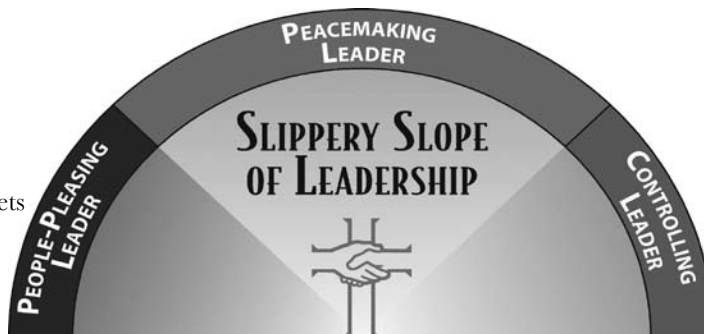


Peacemaking Leader

- **Attitude:** Prays and recognizes the opportunity to minister to a man caught in sin.
- **Action:** Gets involved and enlists the help of others, if needed. Persists in reaching out in love, even when pushed away.
- **Likely Result:** Lord willing, the man stays in the church, repents of sin, and is restored.

People-Pleasing Leader

- **Attitude:** Doesn’t want to confront or offend; afraid to scare someone away.
- **Action:** Preaches a sermon series on marriage and purity, hoping the man gets the point.
- **Likely Result:** The man stays in the church and continues in his sin.



Controlling Leader

- **Attitude:** Willing to confront.
- **Action:** Gives ultimatum by communicating, “Stop this now or you’re out of here!”
- **Likely Result:** The man leaves the church and continues in his sin.

Leadership Styles in Practice: A Man Trapped in Adultery

The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The Key for Peacemaking Leaders

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the key to turning the flames of conflict into a blessing rather than a disaster.

When conflict breaks out and relationships are broken, it is not a time to come at each other with a bunch of “should’s,” or threats, or warnings. Instead, it is a time to come at people with the hope of the gospel of Christ.

Remember, the greatest conflict in the world was the estrangement of sinful mankind from the Creator of the universe. This conflict was resolved through the gospel, the good news that Jesus died and rose again to save us from our sins and reconcile us to God.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. Colossians 1:19-22

The more we understand the gospel, the more willingly we will live it out, clothing ourselves with the character of Christ and imitating his reconciling love toward others in the midst of conflict. People who understand the gospel in its fullness tend to be eager and enthused to forgive others. People who do not value or understand the gospel tend to be slow to reconcile.

Two Examples:

- **The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant** (Matt. 18:21-35) – Remember the great debt that we have been forgiven.
- **The Story of the Pharisee and the Sinful Woman** (Luke 7:36-50) – Whoever has been forgiven much will love much.

One of your key tasks as a leader is to **find ways to fan into flame a love and passion for the gospel** in a way that keeps people excited about the fact that they have been forgiven so much.

The gospel is what helps us to avoid sliding into people-pleasing or controlling leadership styles, and to serve our people as peacemaking leaders.

It is certainly wise for a church leader to improve his or her skills for resolving conflict. But remember, the gospel is the primary tool of the peacemaking leader. The more you embrace the gospel of Christ, delight in it, meditate on it, and are transformed by it, the more effective you will be in guiding your people through conflict in a way that glorifies God and strengthens his church.



The more we understand
the gospel, the more
willingly we will live it
out, clothing ourselves
with the character of
Christ and imitating his
reconciling love.



Discussion Questions

1. Recall when you've seen both positive and negative examples of the truth in the statement, "As goes the leader, so goes the church." What happened?
2. Which is a bigger issue in your church: conflicts that smolder under the surface for years and then flare up quickly, seemingly out of nowhere? Or raging fires of highly polarized factions and broken relationships?
3. What leadership situations have you been in that might have shown an example of a "poor firefighter" when it comes to conflict? An "unwitting arsonist"? What "sparks" and "gasoline" may have contributed?
4. [If you have not already done so, please answer/discuss the "Pause and Discuss" questions from earlier in this session.]
5. Which of the characteristics of a peacemaking leader do you already see modeled by your church leadership? Which characteristics would you most like to see developed? Why?
6. How is the gospel of Christ an encouragement to you, even as you see areas for growth as a peacemaking leader?

What's your main take-away?

As you end the discussion time, have everyone in your group share one thing that they will take away from this session and apply to their roles as leaders.

DON'T FORGET TO PRAY



Before you dismiss, share prayer requests (especially those related to the issues from this session).

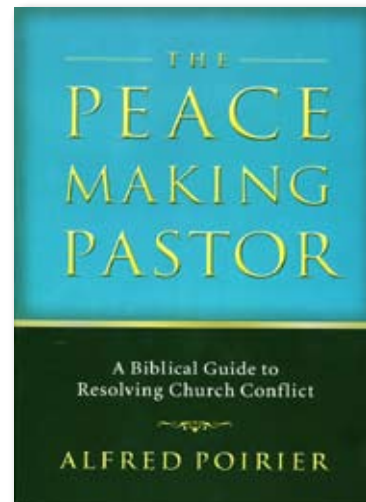
FOR FURTHER STUDY



The Peacemaking Pastor, Alfred Poirier (Baker Books, 2006)

The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict, Ken Sande (Baker Books, 3rd ed. 2004)

Guiding People through Conflict, Ken Sande and Ted Kober (Peacemaker Ministries)



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