

Word One Bible Study

Building Bridges/Tearing Down Walls

by Myron Harms

Text: Matthew 18:1-20 (focusing on verses 13-20) for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost, Lectionary Series A

Objectives

Participants will:

1. Identify situations that cause heartache and conflict with others.
2. Recognize the plan Jesus stated in Matthew 18 to use when people are in conflict.
3. Develop a plan to resolve conflict when it occurs.

Materials Needed

3X5 index cards

Box of straws

Rolls of masking tape

Pen, pencil, markers

Newsprint

Blindfolds

Group Guidelines

Break into groups of 4 or 5 to work through the discussion part of the study. Let the person wearing the most white be the small group leader. The leader's job is to guide his or her group through the discussion questions, encouraging everyone in the group to participate.

Building Community

1. Select two people from each small group to perform a special project. Have each of the pairs sit on chairs facing each other about five feet apart. Instruct these pairs that working together they will use the index cards, straws, and tape to construct a bridge from one chair to the next. Give each of the participants different materials to work with. Also, inform them that they will have to do this while blindfolded and without speaking. Ask the other participants in the group to serve as observers. Give the pairs about three to five minutes to perform this task.
2. After the allowed time limit ask the participants to express how they felt they did in accomplishing this task. Also have the other observers share what they noticed about how this pair worked together to accomplish their given task.
3. Share that today's study will be dealing with how we handle conflicts or disagreements we encounter with other people. Let members of the group share a story about a disagreement or incident that they have experienced with either a friend or relative.

Looking at God's Word

1. Read Matthew 18:15-20.
2. What should we first do when we are hurt or offended by someone?
3. What do we generally tend to do?
4. Why might this be harmful?
5. If you can talk the problem out with the other person in a peaceful way what has occurred between you and this other person based on the last part of verse 15? What do you think this means?
6. If you cannot resolve your differences what should your next step be? (verse 16)

7. Why do you think this would be helpful?
8. If the matter still cannot be resolved, why would it be helpful to take this matter to the church?(verse 17)
9. With whom at your church can you discuss a matter who would be helpful in resolving a dispute?
10. This Scripture reading says that the final step is to treat this person as you would a pagan or a tax collector (verse 18). How do you think God wants us to treat this type of person?

Reinforcing What Has Been Learned

When we have been hurt or harmed in some way by another person, it is often very easy to become angry and retaliate with hurtful words or actions. If we can learn to recognize those times when we feel offended and can control our feelings, following a laid out plan of action may keep us from making a situation worse or may even keep a conflict from happening which may only be a simple misunderstanding.

1. In the small group use the section from Matthew 18 to develop a step-by-step plan on what to do when you have a disagreement with someone, or when someone has offended you in some way.
2. After everyone has agreed on the steps to use in the plan, read through the plan together.
3. After reading the plan of action, have everyone in the group sign the plan stating that they will use this course of action whenever a situation arises between them and another person.

Closing

1. Have each small group share the plan of action they will take when they encounter a difficult situation with another person. (If time allows, have the original pairs build another bridge, this time being able to see what they are doing as well as being able to talk to each other.)
2. Close the group time in prayer asking God to help use our conflict plans to resolve problems that will allow us to build bridges to each other rather than to create walls. Also, pray that God will give us His forgiveness when our emotions make us lose control.

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