

DISAGREEING

HOW TO HANDLE CONFLICT



Many people are uncomfortable with disagreement and lack confidence in dealing with it. But disagreement can be the mark of a healthy group. It can be:

- An opportunity to learn from other points of view.
- A sign that individuals are being given space. Their views are not ignored or suppressed.
- An encouragement to share honestly, which deepens friendships.
- A learning experience. People can see how to handle differences and apply this to their other relationships.

A SIMPLE APPROACH

The animation suggests one way of approaching disagreement. You might say something like:

'I sense we have some strongly held views here, and that we may not agree with each other. Welcome to the church! The church is full of different opinions.

Differences can be helpful. If we listen to each other, we may find new ways of thinking about God. And these insights may round out our picture of Christ.

Jesus is too big to be expressed by a single mouth. We need lots of voices. It's been said, 'It requires the whole church to reveal the whole Christ.'

So let me suggest a way in which we can listen to each other and allow God to speak to us through our different views.

Let's take a moment of silence to reflect on what so-and-so has just said.

Then, let's go round the group and each respond. But don't feel you have to say anything.

When everyone has had their say, let's have another pause to process what we've heard.

Then, let's go round the group again. Let each of us say where we think we saw God's love (if we believe in God) in how people responded – the expression on someone's face, what someone else said, their tone of voice, how a person listened, and so on. Again, don't feel obliged to do this, but feel free to share if you like.

Finally, let's have some silence to pray about what we've heard, to thank God for Abdul, Jane or whoever sparked our thinking, and to pray for one another in our different responses.

Then I suggest we move on and discuss another theme.'

DID IT WORK?

At the end of the prayerful silence, you could ask if people found the process helpful. If they did, why not ask if they would like to repeat it when they next disagree?

Maybe this could become one of your group's holy habits.

Of course, this is not the only way to handle disagreement. As with all the animations, the suggestion here is no more than an idea – to be adapted, built upon, spark a better thought, or to be ignored if you prefer.

Just do what works best for you and the group, and is faithful to Christ.



SILENCE IS THE KEY

The vital point is this. When discussion gets painfully tense, people with wisdom say that a silent, prayerful pause can do wonders! This was Yan's experience in the video.

Silence gives people a chance to calm down, get a bit of distance from their emotions, seek God's help, and begin to see the issue from other people's point of view.

Dr Eolene Boyd-MacMillan, a Cambridge University psychologist, advises people to pay attention to what happens in their bodies in a conflict situation. 'Does your heart pound? Do you clench your fists? Does your jaw become tight?... This alerts you to the fact that you are feeling stressed... And then you can remind yourself to take a deep, slow breath.'

She adds, 'When you change the way that you engage with conflict, you give people permission to change how they do conflict.'

For more insights into handling conflict, watch the videos you'll find in the [Core Team](#) section of *Godsend*.

DON'T ASSUME YOU'RE RIGHT

Remember, too: if you are the leader, your view won't always be the right one. So instead of correcting others, listen to them first. They may have something to teach you.

There's no need, then, to run away from disagreement. Help the group to become a safe place in which people can share thoughts and feelings honestly. And watch how relationships deepen as a result.