



Small Group Leadership:

Dealing with People Problems

Working with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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Small Group Leadership: Dealing with People Problems

This presentation is designed for people who desire to serve Jesus Christ and help lead others to Him.

Learning Objectives

1. Learn what makes a “difficult person” so difficult?
2. Understand root causes of interpersonal difficulties
3. Understand personality type and its impact on dealing with these root causes
4. Find Biblical guidance on this topic
5. Take practical steps to facilitate better interpersonal relationships in your group
6. When and how should a person be expelled from a group?

Content Outline

1. No such thing as a difficult person
2. How God sees difficult people
3. Three categories and several causes, from *Education*
4. Personality types and their role in how a person deals with stress
5. Four universal principles
6. Roles people play in groups
7. When and how to eject a person from a group

Background Material for the Presenter

There are innumerable books, essays, articles, courses, sermons, and blogs on the subject of dealing with difficult people. They range from how to handle difficult people in your family or at work to how to counsel, pastor or lead difficult people. A large number of resources are available for small group leaders. There are lists that include “the dominator ... the victim ... the sneak ... the guerilla fighter,” etc. Each has suggestions,



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sometimes even specific word-by-word instructions on what to say or do. There is so much material of this type, that it is impossible for a good group leader needs to memorize it all.

There are good, effective, and helpful ideas in all or most of these resources, but as a Christian we might take issue with the basic premise. The fact is, according to God's Word, "**All** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23, italics supplied) In other words, every single one of us is a difficult person, so for all practical purposes, **there is no such thing as a difficult person!** Instead, we could consider ourselves as dealing with a person who is finding *life* difficult.

The simplest way to figure this out is to go to any one of the lists of difficult people and how to deal with them, and read it honestly, with a mirror handy. How does it feel to read something like this? "The plain truth is, difficult people are difficult because being difficult has worked for them." Ouch! Maybe, or maybe nothing at all is working for them and they are miserably unhappy. Ellen White has this to say on the topic:



"The divine Teacher bears with the erring through all their perversity. His love does not grow cold; His efforts to win them do not cease. With outstretched arms He waits to welcome again and again the erring, the rebellious, and even the apostate. His heart is touched with the helplessness of the little child subject to rough usage. The cry of human suffering never reaches His ear in vain. **Though all are precious in His sight, the rough, sullen, stubborn dispositions draw most heavily upon His sympathy and love; for He traces from cause to effect. The one who is most easily tempted, and is most inclined to err, is the special object of His solicitude.**

"Every parent and every teacher should cherish the attributes of Him who makes the cause of the afflicted, the suffering, and the tempted His own. He should be one who can have 'compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.' Hebrews 5:2. Jesus treats us far better than we deserve; and as He has treated us, so we are to treat others. The course of no parent or teacher [or group leader] is justifiable if it is unlike that which under similar circumstances the Saviour would pursue." (*Education*, pages 294-295, italics supplied)

"The rough, sullen, stubborn dispositions draw **most heavily** upon His sympathy and love!" That feels much better to read, if in fact we can recognize ourselves as difficult people. On the other hand, there *are* those one or two frustrating people in most groups that are very difficult to feel loving or sympathetic about! What to do?

Well, taking another look at the quote above, we learn that Jesus is sympathetic and loving because “He traces from cause to effect.” This passage, though definitely not exhaustive, mentions three categories, and several specific causes. Let’s look into them a little more.

What Makes Him or Her Difficult?

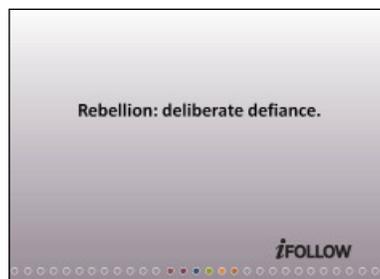
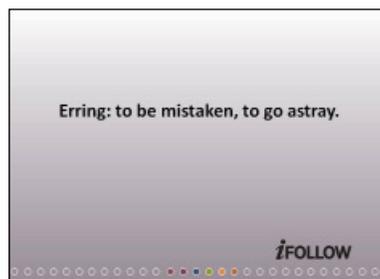
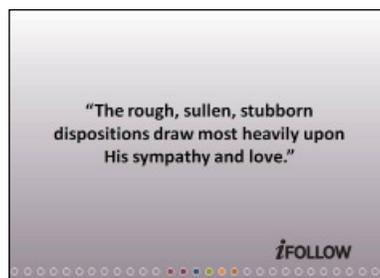
Erring, rebellious, and apostate might be seen as three levels of sin.

1. Erring—This word is usually used to mean minor mistakes. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines it as “to go astray in thought or belief; be mistaken; be incorrect.” We have all said, “To err is human.” Or, “Everybody makes mistakes.” The erring person may often be recalled, not by pointing out the error, but by calmly suggesting other possibilities. The group may have agreed on a rule, for instance, of not interrupting each other. Miriam keeps forgetting. The group leader may only have to catch Miriam’s eye, or say, “Let’s listen.” Or the speaker may say calmly, “I’m not finished yet.”

2. Rebellious—Rebelling, on the other hand, is intentional. There is usually anger involved, and the truth is, the anger may have nothing whatever to do with the present situation. Suppose the gentlest reminder makes Miriam’s face flush and her voice grow sharp. She defiantly continues her interruption, and nobody knows why, maybe not even Miriam herself. Now, not only Miriam and the person she’s interrupting, but everyone feels upset, one way or another.

3. Apostate—This is a stronger term, literally meaning “fallen away” or “lost.” An apostate person has forsaken his or her faith or cause. In Greek, **apostasion** is even used of divorce. (*Strong’s #647*) A person who has left his or her faith or church will not likely be in a small group to begin with. And if Miriam is dealt with in a way that feeds her anger instead of defusing it, she may leave the group as well.

But what makes Miriam act like this? She’s a creative, interesting person. She is very intelligent and her insightful comments on the Bible passages under consideration are usually helpful. Other group members like to be around her. That is, until they learn they have to walk on eggshells. The very suggestion of a group-agreed rule



seems to stifle and anger her. She says she joined this group to get away from “rules being stuffed down her throat.”

Perhaps, if the group reaches the “Deep Talk” or “emptying” stage of group life, Miriam will one day share her story and it will reveal that she was raised by a harsh, controlling parent who punished her for every infraction, real and imagined. No matter how gently the group leader says, “Let’s listen now,” Miriam hears, “Shut up, you brat! You *always* interrupt! Don’t you *ever* think of anyone but yourself?”

The passage from *Education* goes on to mention several causes for the “rough, sullen, stubborn dispositions” among us.



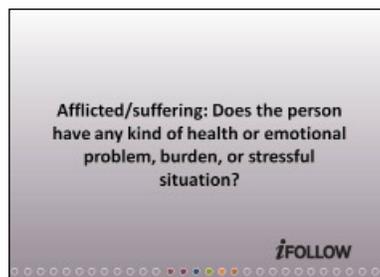
Several Causes for These Difficulties

Rough Usage—This Victorian term refers to child abuse. It may mean physical roughness, such as beatings, being thrown or shaken or worse. It may refer to emotional abuse, such as being called names, belittled, or neglected and ignored. Those who have been abused as children (and the numbers are shocking, including in all churches) have had very specific and tremendous damage to their souls and their sense of self. Miriam may need professional counseling, and she may or may not be able to continue in the group at the same time. The leader and other members will do everything they can to support and encourage her as she seeks the help she needs. She may not know it unless she’s told it a thousand times, but Jesus’ loving arms are still outstretched to her. She can feel them best when they are clothed in the skin and bone of humanity.



Afflicted, Suffering—These are general terms which might include any inner torment. All of us have experienced health problems, sorrow and emotional distress. When we are bearing these burdens we are “not ourselves,” so if someone in the group seems to be forever in the “not himself” mode, there may be an underlying reason.

Tempted—Surely we all understand this one! We are all tempted a zillion times a day, or so it seems. The difficulty is, other people’s temptations seem so tame. Each one may be thinking, “I would never do **that!**” Meanwhile, each is fighting an uphill battle that feels impossible. This is one of the important reasons small



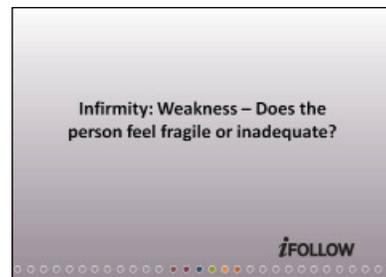
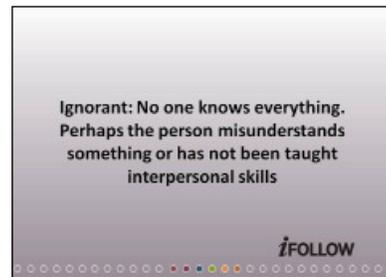
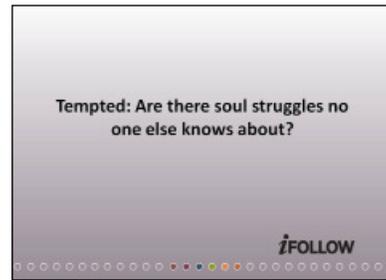
groups exist. Maybe John has real experience and counsel that will give a boost to Joe's efforts. And vice versa. Certainly each can pray for the other, and when they know they are being held up and watched over, they will find new strength.

Ignorant—The most highly educated, widely-read, well rounded person has areas in which he or she lacks knowledge and ignorance which can lead him or her to look like a “difficult person” to someone else. In fact, sometimes the biggest brains in the group are attached to a person who has read every book in the library and written several, but never really learned interpersonal skills. We must be careful never to mock, even internally, another's lack of knowledge. We can learn to look at another person's shortcomings and wonder, “Do I have a hole in my reasoning that's as obvious to others as his is to me?”

Infirmity—This is simply weakness, of any kind. We all have them. In fact, the Hebrews text Mrs. White references is about the high priest bearing in mind that he has his own weaknesses. The Word of God reminds us again and again to be compassionate with each other and uphold each other's weak spots. Paul, who admits to learning this the hard way, by having a “thorn in the flesh” himself, exhorts the Colossians (3:13), to “bear with one another and forgive one another,” and the Galatians (6:2) to “bear one another's burdens and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”

An effective, loving small group is exactly the place for all these things to manifest themselves, and exactly the place to imitate and develop the “sympathy and love” of Jesus so that we can overcome our weaknesses and temptations. Any of these troubles and trials may have happened to someone in the group at some point, but difficulties alone are not enough to earn a person the label of “difficult.” Why is it that although all Miriam's siblings were also abused, her brother is now a strong, healthy man, and her younger sister is timid and afraid, rarely speaking out at all, and instead of rebelling, frantically tries to keep **all** the rules, **all** the time, **perfectly**? It isn't quite so simple as cause and effect. Each has a personality of his or her own, and different ways of relating to and dealing with stress.

With the clear understanding that these are only general categories and people can never be sorted into



neat charts and pigeonholes, it can be instructive to look into some of the common categories of personality types.

Personality Types

There is nothing new about attempts to classify various approaches to human behavior. Hippocrates first suggested the “four humours” which enjoyed something of a resurgence in the late twentieth century, especially with books by Christian writers on the four personality types; Sanguine, Melancholy, Phlegmatic, and Choleric. There are many other scales, from complex ones like the *Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire* or 16PF to short and simple ones like the popular idea of Type A or Type B personalities.

Popular and interesting as these measurements are, the idea of types is falling rather out of favor with recent researchers, who now tend to believe it is “impossible to explain the diversity of human personality with a small number of discrete types.” (McRae *et al*) They can be helpful, however, so long as one bears in mind that they are only broad categories, and those that seem applicable to any given person are changing all the time, as that person changes and grows.



With that in mind, here is a fascinating comparative table found in the Wikipedia article on “Keirsey Temperament Sorter.” It collects scales all the way from the time of Ezekiel to the present, and compares them. Not everyone will agree with the placement of each item in the sorter. For instance, most students of at least the modern theories of the sanguine, melancholy, choleric, and phlegmatic personalities would be very surprised to find choleric listed with “intuitive, ethical, spiritual, and oversensitive,” while melancholy is listed with “sensible, material, and industrious.” But the table does demonstrate that there is some truth in these attempts to understand the variety of human personalities that God has created.

David Keirsey developed the the Personality Sorter after being introduced to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator in 1956. Tracing the idea of temperament back to the ancient Greeks, Keirsey developed a modern temperament theory in his books *Please Understand Me* (1978), *Portraits of Temperament* (1988), *Presidential Temperament* (1992), *Please Understand Me II* (1998) and *Brains and Careers* (2008). The table below shows how Myers’ and Keirsey’s types correspond to other temperament theories, dating from ancient times to the present day.

Comparative Explanations of Personality Types

Date	Author	Artisan	Guardian	Idealist	Rational
c. 590 BC	Ezekiel's four living creatures	lion (bold)	ox (sturdy)	man (humane)	eagle (far-seeing)
c. 400 BC	Hippocrates' Four Humours	cheerful (blood)	somber (black bile)	enthusiastic (yellow bile)	calm (phlegm)
c. 340 BC	Plato's four characters	artistic (<i>iconic</i>)	sensible (<i>pistic</i>)	intuitive (<i>noetic</i>)	reasoning (<i>dianoetic</i>)
c. 325 BC	Aristotle's four sources of happiness	sensual (<i>hedone</i>)	material (<i>proprietari</i>)	ethical (<i>ethikos</i>)	logical (<i>dialogike</i>)
c. 185 AD	Irenaeus' four temperaments	spontaneous	historical	spiritual	scholarly
c. 190	Galen's four temperaments	sanguine	melancholic	choleric	phlegmatic
c. 1550	Paracelsus' four totem spirits	changeable salamanders	industrious gnomes	inspired nymphs	curious sylphs
c. 1905	Adicke's four world views	innovative	traditional	doctrinaire	skeptical
c. 1912	Dreikurs'/Adler's four mistaken goals	retaliation	service	recognition	power
c. 1914	Springer's four value attitudes	artistic	economic	religious	theoretic
c. 1920	Kretchmer's four character styles	manic (hypomanic)	depressive	oversensitive (hyperesthetic)	insensitive (anesthetic)
c. 1947	Fromm's four orientations	exploitative	hoarding	receptive	marketing
c. 1958	Myers' Jungian types	SP (sensing perceiving)	SJ (sensing judging)	NF (intuitive feeling)	NT (intuitive thinking)
c. 1978	Keirsey/Bates four temperaments (old)	Dionysian (artful)	Epimethean (dutiful)	Appolonian (soulful)	Promethean (technological)
c. 1998	Keirsey's four temperaments	artisan	guardian	idealist	rational

Keirsey, David (1998). *Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence First Edition*. Prometheus Nemesis Book Company.

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Montgomery, Stephen (2002). *People Patterns: A Modern Guide to the Four Temperaments* First Edition. Archer Publications.

Four Universal Principles

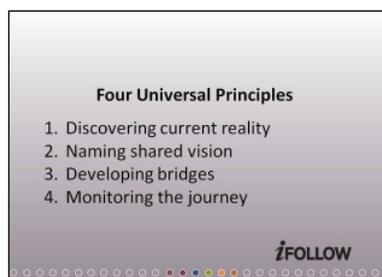
Even if we were to believe that people could be so easily sorted into categories, it would be clear that each would respond far differently to the difficulties and pressures in their lives. Add to these charts and tables the indisputable fact that every individual is, in fact, **unique**, and it is overwhelming to consider how widely varied their reactions will be. Are there any unchangeable, universal principles? Yes, there are, and four wonderful ones are suggested by Judith Bunyi in *Leading Small Groups*:

1. Discovering current reality
2. Naming a shared vision
3. Developing bridges
4. Monitoring the journey

These are intended for church leadership, but seem truly universal, in that they can be applied to nearly any aspect of life, even individually. For instance, what might happen if in our own internal lives we took time and effort to find out and tell ourselves the truth about where we *really* are right now, laid out our dreams for where we want to be, and actively and sensibly built step-by-step bridges to get there, monitoring the journey and changing it as needed?

These principles even fit into the traditional “Four Spiritual Laws” widely used by Evangelical Christians. (1) We are sinners. (2) God loves us and wants to recreate us as He intended us to be. (3) Jesus lived, died, and rose again to make a bridge for us. (4) The Holy Spirit will become our personal guide and mentor for our spiritual journey as soon as we let Him in.

Small group leaders will find Bunyi’s small book extremely helpful in learning ways to see clearly where their group really is, where it wants to go, how to get there, and how to watch over the journey. In fact, Bunyi declares that “church leaders who are attentive to God’s leading and who can hold the tension between today and tomorrow are visionary leaders. Visionary leaders see it all; reality, desired reality, and the bridges to get from one to the other.” (Bunyi, p. 5)



These principles can also be used in specific situations where interpersonal difficulties are distracting the group, but it will require effort. It can be difficult and frustrating to figure out where one's own soul really is and what it really wants and needs, let alone another's. It is accomplished by careful listening. To quote Bunyi again, "Naming a shared vision is accomplished by asking people about their lives and their faith, and by listening very carefully. By listening, we mean the deep listening kind that requires setting aside our own agendas and entering into the worldviews of others, and listening for God through the conversation. It is a significant shift in our understanding of leadership in the church to move from telling people what we think they need to know to listening to people in order to find out who they are and what their desired realities are. Effective spiritual leaders listen to the hearts of people and begin to articulate a shared vision." (p. 4) If we learn to truly listen to each other and help each other understand where we are and where we want to be, it will then become easier to figure out more effective ways of getting there than the irritating methods we've been using.

Putting It Into Practice: Six Labels

Armed with all the information we have gathered on what makes some people seem so difficult to get along with, and bearing in mind that every one of us uses these ineffective methods at one time or another, let's look at six of the labels sometimes given to the roles people may play that make trouble for themselves and others. Most of the time, members are not aware of how they are affecting others, or the course of the group's life together. If matter-of-fact redirection or encouragement does not work, the leader may need to talk to the person individually, outside the group. Perhaps one of the most important things to understand is that one's first reaction to hurtful words or actions is naturally an impulse for self-protection, perhaps by attacking in kind. Self-protection is not necessarily a bad thing. God built it into us so that might survive in this sinful world. But if we can stop and listen, truly listen, not just to the words, but to the person's whole self, body and soul, we may find that we don't need to defend ourselves or take the attack personally, but can try to determine, and to help the other determine, where they really are and what they really want and to find some better ways of getting there.

1. The Dominator—This person can't seem to stop talking. His stories are long, his knowledge about any subject is bottomless, or so he seems to think, his way of doing things is the only right way, and he is willing to explain why at great length.

What does he need? Is it a simple bid for attention? If so, perhaps there are ways friends can encourage and uplift the person at other times besides the group meetings. Is the apparent dominator actually insecure and trying to prove something? Might he fear that he isn't really smart enough, or good enough, or whatever? Could he be given the task of listening to and encouraging others' ideas and explanations?

Sometimes this person is best dealt with as directly as he acts. “Thank you, Harold, your ideas are good ones, but I’d like to hear from some others, too. We only have a half hour left, and we need to stay on topic.”

2. The Bully—More aggressive than the dominator, this person is actively unkind to others, either openly and obviously—“That was a stupid thing to say!”—or disguised under a polite veneer; “Let me help you do that,” in a tone that implies “because you’re messing it up!”



What does she need? Bullies have generally been bullied in the past. It is quite often a cover-up for fear, though the bully will have to come a long way before she will be able to recognize that. A gentle but unintimidated friend or mentor may be able to help this person greatly, over time. In the meantime, though, she must not be allowed to speak degradingly in the group. It helps to have a covenant in place from the beginning in which members promise to respect each other no matter how they may disagree. The group leader must immediately respond, showing by example how to be respectful and firm at the same time. “Martha, we have all agreed to respect each other.” The leader may also confront her feelings, asking, “Are you angry? Can you share with us what you are angry about?” It is likely not the “stupid thing” the other member just said.

3. The Victim—This poor person has had a hard life. Every other church or group she has participated in, the other people have had it in for her and she had to leave. She is so glad to have met this new group of nice people. **Warning**, this is not the true present reality, though she believes it is. Again, it will take time and care to help her understand that people are not really out to get her. She instinctively takes everything as a personal attack.

What does she need? She is in a desperate search for acceptance, but she is not sure what that looks like. Sooner or later something someone says or does will offend and hurt her again, so she may not stay long enough to learn how to love and be loved, but in the meantime, as she is listened to and learns to listen, she can be challenged to think in a new way. Don’t get caught up in trying to apologize “well enough” that she will believe no one meant to hurt her. Each can listen for her truth, and share theirs, doing their best to envelope her in the unconditional love and acceptance of God.

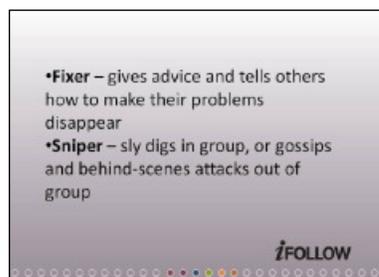
4. The Avoider—The other group members may be willing to be vulnerable and share, but not this one. Not only does he not want to talk about anything real or deep, he doesn’t want to hear it, either, and may change the subject so skillfully the group doesn’t even realize it until later. Really clever avoiders can change the subject to something like trusting God to take care of these troubles people are sharing, and

make it sound as if sharing deep pain from the heart is “living in the past,” or actual lack of faith.

What does he need? On the face of things, it may seem obvious to others that what he needs is to learn to face difficult feelings and topics head on. But the avoider often has no idea he is avoiding anything, and may only be defensive if he is accused of doing so. The first step to learning not to avoid may be to see others not avoiding. When a horse in training refuses to go through a gate that looks scary to it, the rider does not have to force the horse. Indeed cannot, the horse is bigger! The rider can calmly turn the horse in a small circle until it comes back to the gate. The horse refuses again, the rider circles again ... there's that gate again! After awhile, without fuss, the horse will go through. In the same way, the leader can simply listen, nod in agreement with the suggestion that we all trust God, and ask the question again. Or others who are less afraid can share their deep feelings and show, without necessarily ever saying so, that admitting to feeling frightened or angry or anxious does not mean one is not trusting God; that in fact, sharing those feelings leads to greater and deeper trust, not only in God, but in each other.

5. The Fixer—The fixer is an able assistant to the avoider, though she usually does not realize it. She thinks she is being open and zeroing in on the stated problem—someone else's, of course. She will second the idea of “just trusting, letting go and letting God,” but will also give all kinds of good advice about what the other person should do to make everything fine again.

This is a very easy rut for Christians to fall into. Far too many of us believe (and have been encouraged, even taught to believe) that Christianity is about having the Right Answers, when in fact, the body of Christ is meant to be the safest place in the world to share the agony of the questions. All the questions! Even the doubts. Thomas may have been gently reminded by Jesus that it is a blessing to believe without seeing, but it's worth noting that Jesus didn't say that until **after** He went to extra trouble to address Thomas' doubts and questions, let him touch, let him see for himself. (John 20:26-28)



What does she need? She needs practice at becoming more comfortable with unanswered questions and unfixable problems. Her wish to be of help and service is commendable, and can be recognized and affirmed. But she must be gently reminded that we don't have the answers for each other, but are here to listen and love. Her fix-it attempts can often be defused by a simple reminder that the covenant the group discussed and signed at its inception reminds us not to offer advice or analysis to each other. The leader may ask a gentle question like, “Joan, are you

listening to Nancy’s heart, or are you trying to talk her into something?” Unlike some of the other roles, fixers are often aware and trying not to be fixers, so it might be as simple as a smiling, “Joan, you’re not trying to fix things again, are you?”

6. The Sniper—Particularly damaging to the group is a person who either sneaks barbs and sly digs into the group conversation, or worse, because harder to track down and deal with, goes around talking outside of the group about the people and what they have said. The sniper may gossip, share inappropriate details, or even attack the group, its leader, etc.

What does he need? The single most essential ingredient in a healthy small group is trust. If a person is sneaky and sly and untrustworthy, it’s a sure bet he hasn’t learned to trust others, either. The group leader has the difficult, two-sided task of absolutely putting a foot down against breaking of confidence, and yet also helping this member to learn trust. If the sniper is warned, and breaks confidence again, he may have to leave the group, but others can still attempt to befriend him and model trustworthiness for him outside of the group setting. Within the group, sly digs must be confronted directly, but as calmly as possible. It’s helpful to use an “I statement” such as “When I heard you say [specific words] I felt [name the feeling] because I thought you meant ...” Give the person the chance to rescind, or reword, or even apologize, if necessary.

Monitoring the Journey

Groups sometimes forget this step. They just get in a rut of habit and stay there until they fall apart, and don’t know why. In a healthy group, monitoring may be done by several aware and experienced group members, and certainly will be discussed sometimes in the group as a whole, as they regularly evaluate whether they are on the track they really want, or God wants for them. But its direction will be the task of the group leader, who will usually be the one to ask the questions and start the process of these evaluations, and who will ideally be a member of a leadership group as well, where she can ask for help and counsel when she needs it, especially when she discovers herself trying to “make” the group go where she thinks it ought to. Definitely not in the group leader’s job description!

What If Nothing Works?

Everyone does some of these things some of the time. We are in small groups together to learn better ways of being authentic with each other. But some people really are unable to change without more in-depth help. How can we know when someone needs more than we can give? Is it ever necessary to ask someone to leave

the group? And how do you do that? To answer these questions, I am going to quote directly from one of the most helpful small group websites www.community4me.com. One of Jerry Hampton's pages has FAQs, and here are his answers to two difficult questions:

1. Should a person ever be ejected from a workshop or an ongoing group? In my 30 years or more of facilitating groups of thousands of people, I have "made" six people leave. Three were in small groups and three were in public workshops.

As a facilitator you must always consider **the group as a whole** when making hard decisions. If an individual's behavior is such that it constantly keeps the group from functioning, then ejection must be considered. My cases were as follows:

Ongoing Small Groups

Two cases in ongoing groups were persons that badly needed therapy because of their anxiety levels. In both cases, the individuals completely demanded all group time and no one else got to speak. These people could not listen to anyone else but themselves.

A third case in an ongoing group was where a new person to the group tried through manipulation and other means to completely change the group purpose from a share group to one that did only social activities, like attending concerts, movies, etc. Others in the group complained because they needed a share group where they did not have to "do" but just "be."

2. How do you eject a person from a group? With care, compassion, and understanding, but firmly.

For the two people in the ongoing groups that needed therapy, I went to their homes and talked with them in a caring way. I explained how they dominated the group where no one else felt they belonged. In one case, I arranged for some free therapy.

In the third case for the ongoing group, I went to the person's home and asked them if they were getting what they wanted out of the group. The person talked for about an hour and decided they were not getting what they wanted and quit the group. I did not have to ask them to quit, they talked themselves into it, which was a big relief to me.

None of Hampton's examples include a situation where someone who has been asked to leave the group will still be part of the lives of the other group members. In the case of a small group within a church, if it becomes necessary to ask someone to leave a group, it will require care and prayer to prevent rifts from developing. In Matthew 18, Jesus asks us to try to work things out together, first one-on-one, then in a smaller group, then as a church.

Possibly the most important, and misunderstood, thing He says in this passage is, if the person resists all attempts to work things out, “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (18:17.) Numerous churches and groups over the centuries have seen in this a reason to ostracize or shun someone. All that is needed to combat such an attitude is a good study of how Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors! If someone must leave the group, every effort must be made to maintain a good relationship with the person, just the same. The group and this person were not right for each other right now. That doesn’t make it a bad group or a bad person, or even a “difficult” person. Just a beloved child of God who is finding life difficult, and needs different help than the group can provide at this time. This person will still need help, if he will accept it, in figuring out where he really is, where he’d rather be, and how to get there.

Because in the end, that’s the point of small groups.

Present reality; I am all alone in this skin of mine.

Desired vision; I want to learn to live in a Christ-centered family of authentic love.

Bridge to get there; Let’s hold hands in the dark and feel our way there together.

Handouts in this Package

1. Keirseley Temperament Sorter
2. Four Universal Principles



iFollow
Discipleship
Series:
Working
with Jesus

Action Plan
& Presenter
Notes

**Small Group
Leadership:
Dealing
with People
Problems**

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Additional Resources

Brinkman, Rick and Kirschner, Rick (1994). *Dealing With People You Can't Stand: How to Bring Out the Best in People at Their Worst*. New York City: McGraw-Hill. (A lively, amusing, and thought-provoking book that not only teaches specific techniques for dealing with people who drive you crazy, but will also help you deal with why you drive yourself and others crazy!)

Bunyi, Judith N. (2000). *Leading Small Groups*. Nashville: Cokesbury.

McCrae, R. R.; Terracciano, A.; Costa, P. T.; and Ozer, D. J. (2006). "Person-factors in the California Adult Q-set: Closing the door on personality types?" *European Journal of Personality*, Volume 20, pp. 29-44.

Pike, Bob (2005). "Are You A Leader? Six skills and how to build them." *Discipleship Journal*.

Rosenberg, Marshall and Ghandi, Arun (2003). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language for Life*. Puddle Dancer Press. (This book, and the workbooks and companion books that go with it, are invaluable reading for anyone who wants to learn to communicate compassionately, and stop allowing another's feelings to control one's own, or for that matter, to stop allowing one's own feelings to control one's life! Dr. Rosenberg's website, at www.cnvc.org, contains endless information about NVC, training and certification, his schedule, recommended reading, etc.

Video/DVD

Adams, Milton (2008) *Growth Groups*, Silver Spring, MD: NAD Church Resource Center. Video available as Pastor's DVD Volume 13 distributed by www.advent-source.org

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a different reaction to the phrase “difficult people” and the phrase “people who are finding life difficult?” Why or why not?
2. Does it help you to think of people as having personality types? How? Are there ways in which you think this kind of labeling could be detrimental instead of helpful?
3. Share a time when you felt you were a difficult person. What happened? Share a time when you thought someone else was a difficult person. What happened? Do you think the material in this unit could help you in the future?
4. How will you use the Four Universal Principles in your personal life?

Group Activities

Activity 1

Purpose: To gain insight into personality types and why they affect one's ways of dealing with stress.

Preparation: Make enough copies of Handout 1 for each participant. You will need space for several small groups or teams to work, as well as writing materials and Bibles.

Assignment: Pass out the handouts. Dividing them into small groups, let them brainstorm together and come up with a Bible character they think fits each column. (If necessary, remind them to look for women as well as men.) They should find a few Bible passages to support their claims. Next, let each one decide in which column they personally feel they fit, and why. Finally, let each group choose one of the stressors listed in the Ellen White quote (listed on the PowerPoint) and consider how each person would react to that stressor. If bold, sanguine Peter had been abused as a child, how might he have behaved within the "small group" of Jesus' disciples? What might practical, material, industrious Martha have been like when she was ill? We know that sensitive, receptive, spiritual Mary was, in fact, troubled by demons in some way. How did that impact her faith in Jesus? (Compare the sisters' reactions when Lazarus was dead and Jesus delayed His coming, for instance.)

Time: Allow 15 minutes or longer for groups to come up with characters. You may not fill *all* the blanks. Allow a further half hour for sharing and debriefing.

Activity 2

Purpose: To gain insight into ways of managing interpersonal problems in small groups.

Preparation: Put these roles (dominator, bully, victim, avoider, fixer, sniper) and others you can think of, on slips of paper with a line or two of instruction (e. g., "You are a dominator. Start a longwinded story and don't let anyone interrupt your flow." "You are a bully. Speak crossly and unkindly to another person in the group.")

Assignment: Ask for volunteers to play each role. After someone plays the role for a minute, stop them and ask the rest of the group what questions they would ask or what they would say to help the person see where he/she really is, and find out

where they really want to be. How would they help the person build a better bridge? At first, try giving the roles arbitrarily, without letting the volunteer see which role he/she will have to play. Then you might wish to try doing it by allowing people to actively choose either roles they know they sometimes play, or roles completely opposite from their usual style. Deeper insights may be gained in this way.

Debrief: How do people feel playing these roles? What kinds of different feelings do they experience when they play roles that are familiar or unfamiliar? Are there feelings of guilt or remorse or worry that need to be dealt with? Remember, these are labels, and everyone does some of them some of the time. The answer is to find bridges, not assign or take on blame.

Time: Allow one minute for each role play and three minutes for others to respond. How long you take will depend on how many people you have and how many times you go through the roles. Allow 20-30 minutes for response and discussion (and reassurance, if necessary).

Handout 1

Master Chart of Personality Types

Models of personality types are only tools. People cannot be pigeon-holed or charted, and all of these categories are fluid and somewhat interchangeable. Every human has aspects of all of these columns in his or her personality, and they change throughout life. You may not agree with what is presented in this table, but it does demonstrate some consistency of theories over many centuries.

Date	Author	Artisan	Guardian	Idealist	Rational
c. 590 BC	Ezekiel's four living creatures	lion (bold)	ox (sturdy)	man (humane)	eagle (far-seeing)
c. 400 BC	Hippocrates' Four Humours	cheerful (blood)	somber (black bile)	enthusiastic (yellow bile)	calm (phlegm)
c. 340 BC	Plato's four characters	artistic (<i>iconic</i>)	sensible (<i>pistic</i>)	intuitive (<i>noetic</i>)	reasoning (<i>dianoetic</i>)
c. 325 BC	Aristotle's four sources of happiness	sensual (<i>hedone</i>)	material (<i>propraietari</i>)	ethical (<i>ethikos</i>)	logical (<i>dialogike</i>)
c. 185 AD	Irenaeus' four temperaments	spontan-eous	historical	spiritual	scholarly
c. 190	Galen's four temperaments	sanguine	melancholic	choleric	phlegmatic
c. 1550	Paracelsus' four totem spirits	changeable salamanders	industrious gnomes	inspired nymphs	curious sylphs
c. 1905	Adicke's four world views	innovative	traditional	doctrinaire	skeptical
c. 1912	Dreikurs'/Adler's four mistaken goals	retaliation	Service	recognition	power
c. 1914	Springer's four value attitudes	artistic	economic	religious	theoretic
c. 1920	Kretchmer's four character styles	manic (hypomanic)	depressive	oversensitive (hyperesthetic)	insensitive (anesthetic)
c. 1947	Fromm's four orientations	exploitative	hoarding	receptive	marketing
c. 1958	Myers' Jungian types	SP (sensing perceiving)	SJ (sensing judging)	NF (intuitive feeling)	NT (intuitive thinking)
c. 1978	Keirsey/Bates four temperaments (old)	Dionysian (artful)	Epimethean (dutiful)	Appolonian (soulful)	Promethean (technological)
c. 1998	Keirsey's four temperaments	artisan	guardian	idealist	rational

Keirsey, David (1978). *Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence* First Edition. Prometheus Nemesis Book Co.

Montgomery, Stephen (2002). *People Patterns: A Modern Guide to the Four Temperaments* First Edition. Archer Publications. p. 20.

Source: Wikipedia article, "Keirsey Temperament Sorter"

Handout 2

Four Universal Principles

1. Discovering Current Reality

Where am I now?

Where are we now?

What is the hidden truth of our present situation?

2. Naming Shared Vision

Where do I want to be?

Where do we want to be?

Not where we **think we should be** but where do we **really** want to be?

3. Developing Bridges

How can I get from here to there?

How can we get from here to there?

What is the long view?

What are the first steps? The next steps?

What other information do I (we) need?

4. Monitoring the Journey

Am I making progress in getting where I want to be?

Are we making progress in getting where we want to be?

Have we gone off the track?

Do we need to reconsider our route?

Source: Bunyi, Judith N. (2000). *Leading Small Groups*. Nashville: Cokesbury.

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HANDOUT

**Small Group
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with People
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