

3 Navigating Disagreement

God is with us as we face the challenge of disagreement, which can become an opportunity for stronger relationships if handled well.

Three key points:

- 1** We can have good relationships even when we disagree. In fact, relationships are strengthened when we are able to negotiate conflict well.
- 2** When we're curious about those we disagree with and engage authentically, we can build trust which is needed to have difficult conversations and see where we might need to change.
- 3** This is not about agreeing, saying that difference doesn't matter or that 'it's all relative', but about choosing the way we engage with deep disagreement.



Reflection

i Read this ahead of the session to prepare yourself to host the group.

In the face of disagreement, our natural instinct may be to withdraw and not to rock the boat. Or our tendency may be the opposite – to charge towards the other and only see the rift.

At best, either of these responses will just keep us stuck where we are. But imagine what could happen in our world if every person involved in conflict sought to understand their enemy better.

Jesus isn't threatened by divergent views, as we see in his meeting with Simon the Pharisee

and the woman who washes his feet. He is not afraid of the conflict that will arise by honouring the woman, rather he names the conflict and expresses his view with respect and through storytelling. The woman who washes Jesus' feet would have been in no doubt about the conflict that her actions would spark, but she finds a way to express her conviction both openly and with deep humility.

Being a reconciler is not about eradicating or ignoring difference or saying there are no moral absolutes. It is about finding ways of hearing one another, generously and honestly, in both the things we have in common and where we differ enormously. On this foundation, trust can begin to be built in the midst of even the strongest disagreement.

Session starts here

Welcome

 10 mins

 00:00

Feedback

 5 mins

Ask participants to share briefly any experiences they've had over the past week relating to the previous session. Have your own example to share.

Introduction

 5 mins

Tell participants:

In this session, we will acknowledge that God is with us as we face the challenge of disagreement and explore how navigating disagreement well can become an opportunity for stronger relationships.

Pray

Open the session with prayer, inviting participants to bring to mind disagreements they are facing in their own lives and asking God to be at work in the group as they explore how to navigate disagreement.

 Slide 1





Signpost

We all encounter conflict and it rarely feels comfortable, but we don't need to be overwhelmed by it. Jesus' example shows us that we can respond to disagreement with curiosity and generosity without compromising our convictions. In fact, sometimes conflict can be an opportunity to deepen and strengthen relationships in ways we have never imagined.

Story

🕒 35 mins

🖋️ 00:00

🗨️ Tell participants:

In this part of the session, we are going to **Be Curious** as we engage with two stories. We choose to wonder about the other person and about how God might expand our perspective.

🗨️ Introduce the stories:

- We're going to hear the story of Mariam – a Christian living in London – and her experience of disagreement and conflict.
- Following the story, we will look at the biblical account of a conflict that arose when a woman washed Jesus' feet.
- Listen out for moments in both where people practise the habits of:
 - **Being curious** Listening to others' stories and seeing the world through their eyes.
 - **Being present** Encountering others with authenticity and confidence.
 - **Reimagining** Finding hope and opportunity in the places where we long to see change.



Film

🕒 10 mins

Mariam's story

1) Watch the film

2) As a group, discuss:



What does Mariam's story say to you about navigating disagreement?

🖥️ Slide 2



🖥️ Slide 3



Bible passage

🕒 10 mins

The Woman Who Washes Jesus' Feet

(Luke 7:36-50)

Background

🗨️ 3) Share the background

- News of Jesus had spread and many people were wondering who Jesus was, making both Simon and this woman curious. Simon, a respected religious leader, had invited Jesus into his home.
- In this context, the men would have been reclining to eat and women would have been serving. By being present, this woman was breaking a social taboo.
- There are a lot of themes in this passage, including forgiveness, which we will look at in the next session. Our focus now is on conflict and disagreement. Conflict arises between Simon and Jesus and, although unspoken, between Simon and the woman. On one level, it is a conflict about acceptable behaviour. At a deeper level, it is a conflict about God's approval and God's character.

🖥️ Slide 4



- The woman undoubtedly knows that her actions will provoke strong reactions, but she still chooses to do the unexpected and express her conviction with both boldness and humility – this combination of honesty, courage and humility gives us a powerful model for engaging with conflict.

4) Invite a volunteer to read the passage



Small groups

🕒 15 mins

5) Discuss in small groups:



What do you learn about Jesus in this story?



In Mariam's story and the Bible passage, how do the three habits help people navigate disagreement?

If time allows, two or three people feedback a highlight to the whole group.

🖥️ Slide 5



Signpost

Jesus seeks to encounter the person behind the conflict, the issue or the label. He chooses to engage, naming the conflict and enabling it to be brought out into the open. He invites Simon to look again at the dignity of someone initially dismissed as having little value. Approaching disagreement in this way can change our experience of conflict and ultimately our relationships. To do this involves taking the risk to commit some time and energy to the person we disagree with, rather than disengaging.

i **Note:** *This activity is designed to help participants explore their responses to disagreement and how they might better understand those with whom they disagree. The emphasis is not on debate or identifying the best arguments on either side of an issue, but on seeing disagreement through the eyes of another person.*

🗨️ **Tell participants:**

In this part of the session, we are going to **Be Present** as we engage with an activity. We become aware of ourselves, our surroundings, the people we share this space with and of God's presence with us.



Activity

The Iceberg

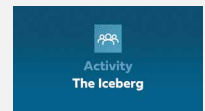
🕒 15 mins

- 1** Label one side of the room 'agree' and the other 'disagree'.
- 2** 🗨️ **Tell participants:**
 - Notice one side of the room is marked 'agree' and the other 'disagree'.
 - I'm going to read a series of statements.
 - As I read each one, decide if you agree or disagree and move to that area of the room according to the strength of your opinion.

i **Note:** *Those with a strong view will stand on one of the far sides. Those who do not feel strongly will stand nearer to the middle.*
- 3** Select one or two trivial statements from the list below (or create your own statements) as a warm-up to the activity
- 4** 🗨️ Ask two or three people to feed back their view from each side.
- 5** Now read a polarising statement from the list below and repeat the activity, asking two or three people to feed back their view from each side.

difference.

🖥️ Slide 6



6 ■ Ask the group to reflect silently on the following. Say:

Notice how you were listening to the two perspectives:

- Were you relieved to hear a view that reinforces your own?
- Were you feeling defensive and preparing your counter-argument?
- Were you making assumptions about other aspects of this person as they shared their view?

7 Read one more polarising statement and ask people to again move accordingly to the side of the room that reflects their point of view.

8 This time, instead of asking for feedback, invite participants to now move to the exact opposite position, occupying the space in contrast to their view.

9 ■ Tell participants:

- 'Step into the shoes' of someone with the opposite view to your own.
- Be curious about the person with that view.
- What are their life experiences? What might they be hoping for, or fearful of?

10 ■ Ask two people:

- Share the opposite view as if it were your own (using 'I', 'me' – not 'she/he/they').
- Where do you think the person who holds that view might be coming from?
- How does it feel to see the issue from the other person's point of view?

Trivial Statements:

- Dogs are better than cats
- Money is there to be spent, not saved
- Tea is better than coffee

Polarising Statements:

- Capitalism works
- Equality can go too far
- Globalisation is a force for good
- Preventing climate change is the most pressing need of our time
- The UK should apologise for colonialism
- Our society has fewer moral values than it did 50 years ago
- Church and politics shouldn't mix
- Killing is never justified



Signpost

When we disagree, we often see only the position or opinion of the other person. This could be compared to the 10% of an iceberg that is visible above the surface. Below the water is another 90% of the iceberg. These might be our motivations, experiences, needs and fears – the many complex elements that lead a person to hold a position or view. When we're curious about that 90% in others, we open up new possibilities within disagreements.



Groups of 3

🕒 15 mins

1 🗨️ Ask participants:

- Arrange yourselves into **groups of three**.
- Each group is to gather around two chairs.

2 🗨️ Guide the groups through the activity instructions below:

- In each group, one person will volunteer to explore a disagreement that is meaningful to them. This is **Person 1**.

Continued...

i **Note:** *The disagreement could be one of the issues from the activity above, or an example of their own.*

- The remaining two, number yourselves 2 and 3.
- **Person 1**, sit in the first chair and share your perspective on the disagreement, while the other two actively listen.
- **Person 2**, reflect back what you've heard.
- **Person 1**, now sit in the second chair, which represents the opposing view, and 'step into the shoes' of the one who disagrees with you.
- **Person 1**, share the disagreement from the opposing perspective as if it were your own (using 'I' statements). **Person 2** and **Person 3** again listen deeply.
- **Person 3**, reflect back what you've heard.
- **Person 1**, return to the first chair, representing your own true perspective.
- **Reflect as a group** on what made it difficult to be present in these disagreements and what helped you reimagine the opposing points of view.

3 If there is time, groups can repeat the activity with another volunteer.




Signpost

Disagreements can be complex and difficult. But often, it is not our disagreement that prevents good relationships; it is our instinct to draw back from relationship when disagreement arises. We cannot force another person to act in a particular way, but we can choose how we respond. Together, the three habits can help us see a new way forward and show that we are committed to the other person in spite of our conflict. When we practise these habits, we nurture our relationships and build trust with others so we can have difficult conversations without giving up our own convictions.

Sanctuary

 10 mins

 00:00

 **Note:** *Reading each of the reflections that follow, guide this time of prayer in whatever way works best for your group. For silent prayer, we suggest leaving one minute of silence between each paragraph to allow people to pray.*

Tell participants:

In this part of the session, we are going to **Reimagine**, noticing where we are most in need of renewed hope.

As we pray, we invite the Holy Spirit to expand our imaginations of what is possible, as individuals and as a community.

 Slide 7





Prayer

Offering our story to God

The path of our lives will bring us into contact with conflict and disagreement. But we have an opportunity to reimagine our response.

Think back to Mariam; bring before God someone with whom you disagree or are in conflict. Ask God to help you **Be Curious** about their story.

Think back to Simon the Pharisee. Bring before God any conflicts you are afraid to address openly. Ask God to help you **Be Present**.

Think back to what we've learnt about listening, hearing and expressing our views. Ask for God's help where you struggle to **Reimagine** a conflicted relationship.

Loving God, fill us with your Spirit now,

Help us to **Be Curious** about others' stories – listening as often as we speak.

Give us the courage to **Be Present** – engaging our whole and unique selves.

Inspire us to **Reimagine** what's possible – finding hope by glimpsing you at work.

In Jesus' name. Amen.



Top Takeaway

Invite one or two people to share a one-line takeaway from the session or something they feel inspired to do between now and the next session.

Application

🕒 5 mins

🖋️ 00:00

Suggested actions for your group:

1 Be Curious

Seek to understand something new about a person or an opinion you disagree with.

2 Be Present

Notice your physical responses in disagreements. How could your body language show an openness to the other person?

3 Reimagine

When you next encounter someone you disagree with, look to strengthen the relationship, rather than to win the argument.

i **Remind participants** to make notes in their *Guide* following the session, perhaps writing or drawing something they want to take away from this session and what they want to do in their daily lives as a result.

Heads up

Practising Forgiveness

At the end of this session, encourage participants to reflect on their experiences of forgiveness – both of forgiving others and of being forgiven. Forgiveness is not neat and tidy – they don't need to have a perfect story. It may help to describe it as an experience of moving beyond hurt. Reflecting on these experiences will help participants engage with the next session, but they won't be expected to share these experiences in full.

🖥️ Slide 9



End