

Out of Context
Where Two or Three are Gathered- Session #3
Small Group Notes

Introduction:

What are organizations that you are a member of? What are the basic requirements of those organizations? What are the benefits? How do the requirements to join the organization make it more special or meaningful to be a part of?

How is being a part of a church similar and different to these types of organizations? When you hear about the word church membership, what do you think of? Why do we sometimes hear of people that shy away from joining a church? How have you seen being a member of the church as impactful in your life?

Discuss:

1. Read Matthew 18:11-14

This story demonstrates the value that God places on individuals. It also reflects a certain amount of care that we are to demonstrate among one another in the church. Similar to the Lost Sheep or Prodigal Son in Luke 15, we see a care for people that are not just lost but for all who are a part of our community as believers. As the church we are in community based upon our belief of Jesus as God's Son and the Risen Savior and Lord (Read Matthew 16:13-20)! Furthermore, we are bound together as sheep in the care of our Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Even so, God calls us to shepherd one another. Therefore, the shepherds reaction to hearing of one lost sheep is what should be reflected in all of us as we love one another. It should be focused, patient, seeking, rejoicing, and protecting.

What are times that we get this verse wrong in how we are to view the lost or those in the church?

How have you seen the church act as the shepherd in this account? When has there been a time that you acted more like a sheep and

received the care of others? When has there been a time that you were called to demonstrate the love of a shepherd?

2. Read Matthew 18:15-17

In these verses, we have an application of Jesus' teaching from Matthew 16. Jesus clarifies that it is the church as a whole that ultimately wields the keys to the kingdom of heaven. The process that Jesus lays out is not to try and see how we can exclude someone, rather to help bring someone back to the fellowship of the church. Still, we have a responsibility to one another to care and that care is reflected in loving confrontation over sin. The process is: 1. The first step if your brother sins against you is to go and rebuke him in private. 2. If the first step in the process of reconciliation fails, then the second step is to take one or two with you. This approach has the advantage of establishing the good will of the offended party in the sight of two fellow Christians. 3. Finally, the third step is to treat someone as a tax collector. This relationship is ironic as Matthew is writing these words, being that he was a former tax collector. Therefore, the call is treat them again with love but as someone that needs to be approached again with the grace and truth of the gospel.

Does this biblical reality of conflict resolution make you uncomfortable? Why or why not? How, when it is used in the right way and motive can bring about transformation more than anger? How can it be possible for churches to abuse this authority? If so, how?

In contrasting to calling out someone publicly, what benefit does beginning with a private discussion offer for those involved?

3. Read Matthew 18:18-20

If this process is done humbly and according to the Word, this is quite binding in the eyes of God, even if the unrepentant ones just go to another church. There is real power in agreement in prayer and in the presence of Jesus. This is exactly what the unrepentant ones miss out on. The words also show how to agree is literally "to symphonize." Jesus wants us to complement each other like a great orchestra. Therefore we work together the best when we care for each other, gather with each other, and encourage each other to follow the Lord no matter the cost.

What does verse 18 have to do with the steps of church discipline outlined in the previous verses? What does verse 18 tell us about the power God has given to the members of the local church?

What encouragement do verses 19 and 20 offer believers as we seek to resolve conflict? What encouragement does this Scripture offer for a unified church body? If we fail to hold church members accountable for their actions, what do we risk happening in our church? What does it say to the outside world?

Given what you've learned about how crucial conflict resolution is to church unity, will you pledge to promote the unity of the church by seeking reconciliation with other members as Christ taught us? In what specific ways can our group pray for you as it relates to seeking reconciliation?