



**Even the smallest act of caring for another person is like a drop of water, it makes ripples throughout the whole pond**



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## Equipped to Care



### Workshop 4

## Dealing with anger, conflict and bullying

(offering a pro-active response)

A manual to assist people who care about people – bringing understanding and hope to those struggling with life issues

# HOPE TRUST



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Assisting people with life difficulties through counselling and equipping people with skills to assist others.

Hope Trust is an Irish charity formed in 2006 to offer a Christian response to the high suicide rate in Ireland. All four branches of Hope, namely Hope Counselling, Hope Training, Hope Community and Hope Ministry, aim to assist people struggling with life's problems in a holistic manner.

Since its inception DVDs, literature, booklets, healing retreats, workshops, bereavement support groups and a counselling service have been developed to assist people to address life in a proactive way, particularly when life feels hopeless, overwhelming and lacking in purpose. Hope Trust aims to educate, equip and empower people with life skills and, where appropriate, offer counselling support to those who need it. Our goal is to be supportive in community outreach where meaningful connection is made with those who struggle with isolation and need to be integrated into society.

This manual is the fourth in the series.

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## Foreward

We are created in the image of God. The bible illustrates God expressing many different emotions, these demonstrate his heart. It is good to know that our God feels, He is not dispassionately watching His creation struggle or placing demands on humanity without understanding the cost involved in pain. In fact, He understands our fallibility and has provided a way to receive the comfort, support, redemption, forgiveness and consolation we need when we suffer pain.

It stands to reason then that if we are created in His image, we too will feel a mixture of emotions. There are times when these may feel overwhelming and beyond our own control.

This manual is designed to offer some suggestions and possible new patterns of behaviour if anger is an issue for you. As Christians we acknowledge that we struggle with the same issues as non-believers, however our hope is to have a different response in difficult situations. This requires us to be aware of our own defensiveness, passive aggressive tendencies of denial or willingness to carry offence or judgment towards others. It requires us to be real with ourselves and others and to keep short accounts.

As believers we are not to make room for the enemy through controlling others or misusing our power. If God has granted us authority in areas, that is with the understanding that we will use that authority to bless and 'build up', not tear down

## Dealing with anger, conflict and bullying

*Nahum 1:3NIV "The LORD is slow to anger but great in power"*

*Ephesians 4:26 "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry"*



As humans we have a need for love, value and worth and our well-being is very much influenced by how affirmed (or we perceive) we are by others. God has created us uniquely, individually and values every single one of us. However through life experiences we either lose sight of this, or have never connected with that greatest of all affirmers, God. We may experience (or perceive) rejection, be under-valued by others or feel we are completely misunderstood by them. This can cause a strong emotional response in us as we react to not having our felt needs met. Dependent upon how we have been raised, we may not know how to control these reactions, or else we feel guilty for having them. It then can cause a very negative spiral which eats away at our unique value and can affect our well-being. This can affect the core beliefs we have about ourselves.

Anger is often very present in these situations. Sometimes we fear it, sometimes we use it as a defence, sometimes we hold onto it and allow it to corrode our souls, sometimes we deny that it exists in our lives.

The scripture in Ephesians 4 acknowledges that we all experience anger but the instruction offered is to deal with it the same day as one experiences it, which is not always an easy instruction to follow. However the consequences of harbouring anger are worse.

## Anger



### What is it?

- It's a secondary emotion (arising out of another emotional response) very frequently associated with fear or with grief or when our perceived needs are not met or overlooked. It is a valid response or reaction, when there is injustice, or unfairness, or when there is an abuse of power.
- It can act as a release valve when a person is under too much pressure. If it is suppressed for too long, it can lead to outbursts of rage. Unchecked rage can lead to uncontrolled behaviour and possibly murder.

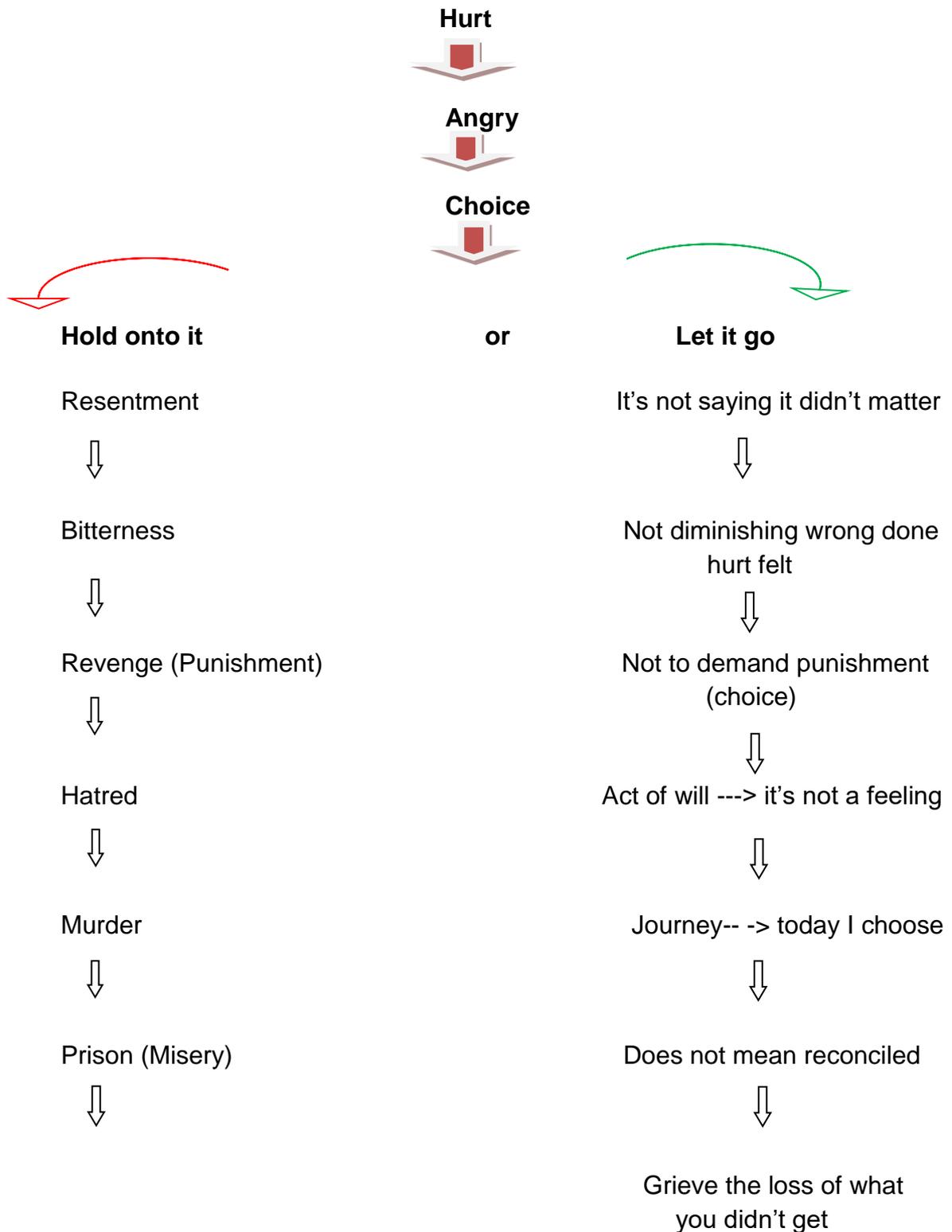
### Is it sinful?

- Not in and of itself – it does not have a moral value. However how we choose to express it may be hurtful to God, ourselves or others and may also be sinful i.e. can be cumulative and progressive :-  
Irritation -> annoyance -> frustration -> judgement -> criticism -> jealousy -> anger -> indifference -> separation -> rage -> murder

*But I say to you that everyone who continues to be angry with his brother or harbours malice (enmity of heart) against him shall be liable to and unable to escape the punishment imposed by the court; and whoever speaks contemptuously and insultingly to his brother shall be liable to and unable to escape the punishment imposed by the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, You cursed fool! [You empty-headed idiot!] shall be liable to and unable to escape the hell (Gehenna) of fire. (Amplified Matthew 5:22)*

## Anger – is a Symptom

*Its a response to something unfair and unjust*



The choice is stark → Do you want to **hold on** and **die** or **let go** and **live** ?

(Amended version of original Joanie Reilly – Alpha Counselling)



Our response to fear can cause a biological reaction in the brain and body, releasing cortisol and motivating the fight / freeze or flight mechanism. Anger is the emotion that powers the fight response and we can find courage that is abnormal and powers extraordinary boldness.

Christians can attempt to 'disown anger' or deny it exists in their lives, or worse carry enormous loads of guilt because they know they feel this emotion at times. Anger is not bad, how we manage it can be damaging though. We may try to deny it or displace it by projecting onto something else innocent, but whilst we may be proficient in blame shifting or denial, others will feel the effects of our anger either directly or through body language or our silences.

We are made in the image of God – the bible reveals that God feels anger in many different places. It is not surprising then that we feel anger as well. Before we explore the healthy ways of expressing and releasing anger we need to look at what is unhealthy.

## **Unhealthy Expressions of Anger**

### **Open Aggression**

Not monitoring our feelings of anger and spewing out over others shows lack of self control/restraint, disrespect and disregard for others feelings or well-being. It may also be an indicator of a lack of empathy or genuineness towards others. We may feel justified in the reasons for our anger but that does not justify revenge or hurting someone else or even ourselves. People who are frequently aggressive may use this as a barrier or protection against intimacy or because of their own social awkwardness. In Genesis 4: 6-13 – There is an account of Cain's jealousy towards Abel and how this leads to murder and banishment by God from his home country. Cain's anger is volatile and openly aggressive and if handled differently through expressing his disappointment and dialoguing more with the source of his disappointment, God, could have saved the life of his innocent brother.

### **Passive Aggression**

Passive aggressive anger is very indirect and hard to deal with openly – such as targeted jokes or sarcasm that undermines. Habitual lateness or procrastination,

ignoring instructions from authority figures, deliberately sabotaging something planned, not being emotionally honest with self or others, sulking, complaining after the event, being obstinate or evasive, using silence as a weapon. Are all behaviours we may associate with brooding teenagers, who are neither children nor adults; are in the process of individuating but full of anxieties and insecurities; however these behaviours often continue into adulthood and can be frustrating for others to handle.

In the book of Jonah we see Jonah responding in fear to a direction from God – in his flight away he recognises that calamity has been visited upon a whole ship because of his disobedience and he is thrown overboard to save the lives of others. God in his mercy rescues Jonah in the belly of a whale and Jonah repents and agrees to deliver the message to the people of Nineveh. He is angry with God because God exercises mercy towards Nineveh when they repent. In his anger he sulks and withdraws and he is full of self pity, saying he is angry enough to die and he wishes God would take his life from him! His anger is not hidden, but he is passive aggressive and soulish in his outlook. He wants what he wants, not what God wants and his attitudes are very obvious.

### **Suppression of anger**

Suppressing what we feel maybe something that has been learnt in order to feel safe. Expressing what is perceived as negative emotions, or disapproval or our own anger may make us feel too vulnerable. However in order to embrace the ‘freedom’ that Jesus came to release us into, we need to be able to know, express and own our own emotional world. Suppression of anger can leak out in our attitudes towards ourselves or others, the choices that we make or even sickness in our bodies. Too much suppression can lead to a build up that spirals into depression and dark moods. This is cumulative and can spill out into addictive behaviours as an indirect way of trying to deal with the issues or to comfort ourselves. Healing for past hurts can release us from bitterness or habitual behaviours that silence us.

### **How aware are you of your own expressions of anger?**

In order to get a clearer picture of whether you have some unhealthy anger behaviours complete the attached questionnaire. If you feel comfortable doing so, ask someone you know to evaluate how well you know yourself.

## Which of these statements relate to you?

	Sarcasm is a trait I use in expressing humour	I nurture critical thoughts quite easily
	When I am displeased with someone I may shut down any communication or withdraw	I feel inwardly annoyed when family and friends do not comprehend my needs
	Tension mounts within me as I tackle a demanding task	I feel frustrated when I see someone else having few struggles than I do
	When facing an important event I may obsessively ponder how I must manage it	Sometimes I walk in another direction to avoid seeing someone I do not like
	When discussing a controversial topic, my tone of voice is likely to become persuasive	I can accept a person who admits his or her mistakes, but I have a hard time accepting someone who refuses to admit his or her own weaknesses
	When I talk about my irritations I don't really want to hear an opposite point of view	I do not easily forget when someone does me wrong
	When someone confronts me from a misinformed position, I am thinking of my rebuttal as he or she speaks	When someone openly speaks ill of me, my natural response is to think of how I can defend myself
	I can be quite aggressive in my business pursuits or even when playing a game just for fun	I struggle emotionally with the things in life that are not fair
	Although I know it may not be right, I sometimes blame others for my problems	Sometimes my discouragement makes me want to quit
	Sometimes I speak slanderously about a person, not really caring how it may harm his or her reputation	I may act kindly on the outside while feeling frustrated on the inside
	Impatience comes over me more frequently than I would like	When someone is clearly annoyed with me I too easily jump into conflict
	I have been known to take an 'I don't care' attitude toward the need of others	At times I struggle with moods of depression or discouragement
	When I am in an authority role, I may speak too sternly or insensitively	

### Count the number of questions you have ticked

- If there are more than ten items, your anger is probably more constant than you might like
- If you checked fifteen items or more you can probably recount many disappointments and irritations. This indicates you are vulnerable to the extreme ill effects of anger, rage and explosions or to guilt, bitterness and resentment

Completing the following table will clarify the way you express anger predominantly:

<b>Open Aggressive</b>	<b>Passive Aggressive</b>	<b>Suppressive</b>
I can be blunt and forceful when someone does something to frustrate me	When I am frustrated I become silent, knowing it bothers other people	I am very image conscious. I don't like to let others know my problems
As I speak my convictions my voice becomes increasingly louder	I am prone to sulking and pouting	Even when I feel very flustered I portray myself publicly as having it altogether
When someone confronts me about a problem, I am likely to offer a ready rebuttal	When someone asks if I am frustrated, I will lie and say 'no everything is fine'	I am rather reserved about sharing my problems or frustrations
No one has to guess my opinion; I'm known for my strong viewpoints	There are times when I am deliberately evasive so others won't bother me	If a family member or friend upsets me I can let days pass without even mentioning it
During verbal disagreements with someone, I tend to repeat myself several times	I sometimes approach work projects half-heartedly	I have a tendency to be depressed and moody
I have a history of getting caught in bickering matches with family members	When someone talks to me about my problems I stare straight ahead, deliberately obstinate	Resentful thinking is common for me, although many people would never suspect it
When something goes wrong I focus so sharply on fixing the problem that I overlook others' feelings	I complain about people behind their backs, but resist the opportunity to be open with them face to face	I have suffered with physical complaints (for example headaches, stomach ailments, sleep irregularity)
I find it hard to keep my thoughts to myself when it is obvious that someone else is wrong	Sometimes I become involved in behind-the-scenes misbehaviour	There are times when I wonder if my opinions or preferences are really valid
I have a reputation for being strong willed	I use humour or sarcasm to undermine or 'put someone else down'	Sometimes I feel paralysed when confronted by an unwanted situation
I tend to give advice, even when others have not asked for it	When I don't want to do a project I will procrastinate. I can be lazy	I am not inclined to initiate conversation about sensitive or troublesome topics

The results may fluctuate according to the circumstance that you are facing at any one time. This is designed to bring awareness, not condemnation; if the 'truth will

set us free', then it is important to be real with ourselves about our behaviours. In this way we are better equipped to address and change them.

If you have completed the questionnaires and found the results disturbing it is advisable to seek further clarification with your leaders or a counsellor. Freedom from, or control over, these patterns will alter your life and improve your social skills, confidence and esteem.

### **Anger Exercise in pairs**

What emotions would you be experiencing in this given situation and how would you express them to the person concerned?

1. Someone cuts you off at the traffic lights and narrowly misses a serious accident with you
2. A shop assistant is rude and loudly accusing you of having damaged an item of clothing which is untrue
3. Your child has left a new valuable watch outside in the rain and does not seem concerned
4. Your friend is making jokes at your expense in front of a group of people you don't know
5. Your employer has praised your colleague for work you have done
6. Someone at church has passed a negative opinion about you to someone you know and they have let you know what has been said
7. A neighbour appears to be ignoring you and glaring in your direction

## Healthy Ways of expressing anger

In a situation that stirs an anger response in us:

It's important to recognise what's going on in the situation

How much is filtered through your own perception and how much is factual

What are our responses to circumstances in life – what are we feeling and why?

Take ownership of what is mine ... 'I am feeling ...'

And NOT blaming the other party for your choice of response > 'You made me .. or she makes me so angry!'

i.e. 'when you arrive late, I **feel** angry/disrespected

- Know what you are feeling
- Own and acknowledge your feelings
- Recognise what is beyond your control
- Talk about your response to this
- Once this has been ventilated, release the feelings to God and ask for peace in the situation
- This may be an ongoing process needing to be repeated
- Seek to forgive where this is appropriate; harbouring vengeful thoughts or plans damage you more than you realise and stop God from being able to come to your assistance (as we are judged according to how we judge)
- Once the feelings/situation has been released to God allow yourself to embrace change
- Allow your thoughts to dwell on what is good.
- Praise God for His goodness

**NB :** God chose mercy over judgement at the cross, therefore we need to exercise the same principle of mercy

*David took his issues straight to God. He recognised and owned his own feelings. He was honest with God, acknowledged the things done against him and his own confusion over why this had happened. There was nothing hidden from God, he expressed it all. Once he had the release of expressing his feelings, he then spent time remembering God's goodness to him. He chose to dwell on what would build himself up and did not entertain or give space for the negative to be harboured in his soul. He learned the secret of living in the peace of God and not allowing his enemies to occupy his thinking patterns any longer than necessary. He allowed God to deal with enemies and not seek revenge for himself*

**Understanding  
Ownership  
Unloading  
Releasing 70x7  
Choosing peace**

Ephesians 4: 26 NIV 'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry'

As a **daily exercise** it's important to examine ourselves to know what we are carrying in our hearts that would cause us to sin, separate us from others or settle into bitterness. We block God and our relationship with him when anger remains unresolved in our hearts and lives

**TONIGHT:**

- ➔ **Take an inventory of your relationships, is there anything that needs settling?**
- ➔ **Are you in a process of forgiveness towards them? What is stopping that?**

**Managing Anger**

- Practice relaxation techniques. Anger can be an overwhelming emotion because it is so physical--your heart and mind may race, your muscles can tense and you may feel sick. Focus on relaxing your body and mind to help look at the situation more objectively.
- Be assertive as you express anger rather than being aggressive or physical. Clearly and firmly discuss why you are angry with the person who has caused your anger, emphasizing your needs. If she tries to argue, do not engage in the argument. Just come back to your own needs
- Use anger to fuel constructive or creative activity. If expressing your anger did not diminish it, seek a physical activity to direct it towards. Dance, exercise and drumming are three ways you can work off the extra energy of anger. Projects that you find personally rewarding can also help you deal with anger. If you habitually 'let out' your anger in an aggressive way in order to avoid suppressing it, you are in danger of reinforcing and fuelling it more through outbursts, tirades, punching and hitting. Learning how to calm yourself is far more beneficial as long as it is not simply 'shutting down' your emotions.
- Some people consider it weakness if one does not express oneself aggressively and that others will not respect them if one is seen to be weak. However respect is more frequently earned through one being sure of what

one believes in, but having the ability to entertain other viewpoints and maintain control of oneself.

- Some say ‘I can’t help myself, anger isn’t something you can control’. However whilst one may not be in a position to control the situation one is in, we can control how we express how we feel. Even to the point when someone is deliberately pushing our buttons- we can treat others with the respect we would like to receive ourselves.
- Out-of-control anger hurts your physical health. Constantly operating at high levels of stress and tension is bad for your health. Chronic anger makes you more susceptible to heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol levels, a weakened immune system, insomnia, and high blood pressure.
- Out-of-control anger hurts your mental health. Chronic anger consumes huge amounts of mental energy and clouds your thinking, making it harder to concentrate, see the bigger picture, and enjoy life. It can also lead to stress, depression, and other mental health problems.
- Out-of-control anger hurts your career. Constructive criticism, creative differences, and heated debate can be healthy. But lashing out only alienates your colleagues, supervisors, or clients and erodes their respect. What’s more, a bad reputation can follow you wherever you go, making it harder and harder to get ahead.
- Out-of-control anger hurts your relationships with others. It causes lasting scars in the people you love most and gets in the way of your friendships and work relationships. Chronic, intense anger makes it hard for others to trust you, speak honestly, or feel comfortable—they never know what is going to set you off or what you will do. Explosive anger is especially damaging to children.
- If you’re struggling with out-of-control anger, you may be wondering why your fuse is so short. Anger problems often stem from what you’ve learned as a child. If you watched others in your family scream, hit each other, or throw things, you might think this is how anger is supposed to be expressed. Traumatic events and high levels of stress can make you more susceptible to anger as well. (<http://www.helpguide.org/harvardmedical>school.health publications)

## Awareness of our feelings – assertive expression without blame shifting

Taking responsibility for your feelings will help you improve your communication when you feel upset or angry. One way to achieve this is by using “I” statements. This technique will allow you to communicate what is upsetting while minimizing blaming. If our statements feel too blaming, the person we are trying to speak to will often become defensive.

→ Ie. ‘**You**’ statement You make me angry because you are always late

→ ‘**I**’ statement - I feel frustrated when you come home late because I stay awake worrying

→ You never call. You don’t even care

→ I feel hurt when you forget to call because it seems like you don’t care

## Feel Statements

These statements take the form of "When you did **that thing**, I felt **this way**. **That thing** is a behaviour of the other person, and **this way** is your specific feelings. Here are some examples:

- "I felt embarrassed when you told our friends how we are pinching pennies."
- "I liked it when you helped with the dishes without being asked."
- "I feel hurt and am disappointed that you forgot our anniversary".

## I Messages

It is called an **I message** because the focus is on you, and the message is about yourself. This is in contrast to a **You message** which focuses on and gives a message about the other person. When using **I messages** you take responsibility for your own feelings, rather than accusing the other person of making you feel a certain way. A **You message** does not communicate a feeling, but a belief about the other person. The essence of an **I message** is "I have a problem", while the essence of a **You message** is "You have a problem". There are four parts to an **I message**:

1. **When** ... Describe the person's behaviour you are reacting to in an objective, non-blameful, and non-judgmental manner.
2. **The effects are** ... Describe the concrete or tangible effects of that behaviour. (This is the most important part for the other person to understand - your reaction.)
3. **I feel** ... Say how you feel. (This is the most important part to prevent a build up of feelings.)
4. **I'd prefer** ... Tell the person what you want or what you prefer they do. You can omit this part if it is obvious.

The order in which you express these parts is usually not important. Here are some examples:

- When you take company time for your personal affairs and then don't have time to finish the urgent work I give you, I get furious. I want you to finish the company's work before you work on your personal affairs.
- I lose my concentration when you come in to ask a question, and I don't like it. Please don't interrupt me when I am working unless it is urgent.
- It is very hard for me to keep our place neat and clean when you leave your clothes and other stuff lying around. It creates a lot more work for me and it takes a lot longer, and I get resentful about it. I'd prefer that you put your clothes away and put your trash in the basket.

**Common** mistakes that stop expression of feelings in a respectful and productive way

- ➔ Not expressing a feeling at all, expressing a belief or judgment.
- ➔ Sending a disguised **You message**.
- ➔ Only expressing negative feelings.

### **Dealing with Conflict**

The thought of 'conflict' generally triggers different responses in people:

- Do you generally view conflict positively or negatively? (does the thought of it make you want to run for cover?)

- Does conflict affect you more cognitively, emotionally or physically? (your thinking become scrambled, your stomach churning or fear rising in your heart?)
- Does the way you handle conflict mirror that of your role models as a child? (your actions are automatic responses)
- Do you believe that you have too much or too little conflict in your life?

### **Key points**

- Important to realise that conflict is all around us
- That avoiding it is impossible and undesirable
- Managing it is possible

### **What is it?**

'the internal or external discord that results from differences in ideas, values, or feelings between two or more people'. Marquis and Huston (2006 p524)

### **Why does conflict occur?**

- Differing values
- Competition over scarce resources
- Miscommunication or lack of communication
- Relationship breakdowns

Change is an inevitable part of life. Seeing things from a different perspective is normal and natural. Conflict can arise when two (or more) are navigating change or a differing perspective. Conflict resolution is what two, (or more) parties become involved in when trying to find a peaceful resolution to a disagreement or difference of opinion. Goals or aims of resolution would be:

- ➔ Producing a solution that all can agree to through negotiation with all parties involved
- ➔ Working effectively and quickly to not elongate the process
- ➔ Try to improve and not hurt the relationship between the groups in conflict

## **How can conflict resolution be accomplished?**

- Have a desire for understanding – being open minded and teachable. This is only possible if one is willing to try to see and understand the others viewpoint
- Through maintaining peace during the negotiation. This can only be accomplished by being willing to grow oneself and not being too rigid in one's thinking
- Understand the issue being contested by not personalising and viewing the issue as a personal attack
- Communication and clarification is important to improve understanding
- Discuss and brainstorm possible solutions – looking at all alternatives
- Choose the best one for all involved
- Utilise an objective third party where necessary
- Resist pressure tactics, stalling or delays but be committed to working the issue to its conclusion
- Aim at a win / win solution

## **Recognise your own reactions to conflict**

Do you become:

- Mad internally, but keep quiet and give silent treatment
- Withdraw to safety to avoid an argument
- Get angry, call names, use sarcasm, criticism to get your view across
- Give in > I guess you're right, with a sigh
- Deny or pretend that everything is ok – there is no conflict
- Use humour to de-escalate but also avoid dealing with the issue

All the above are common coping mechanisms that are usually unsuccessful – conflict is common but does not have to be negative or destructive – we need to have a change of mindset in order to deal with differences of opinion.

We need to remain open to God bringing clarity and direction when there appears to be a deadlock. He is able to change hearts, including your own!

## **Important to not lose sight of:**

- the relationship with the other person – are you in danger of losing connection over just wanting to prove you are right?
- the issue – is it worth the effort – choose your battles wisely
- whether you are as willing to listen openly to their side as you are to share your own?
- what God has said to you regarding the conflict
- whether this is an appropriate time and place to address the issue?

### **Different dynamics or stances when there is conflict**

<http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/win-lose>

**I win / you lose** > brow-beating, out-manoeuvring – ‘the winner’s self esteem is enhanced, but if ‘losing’ or seen to be wrong, there is a sense of a loss of status. In danger of losing sight of the issue, too much personal investment into being right – can be very dogmatic, inflexible and aggressive

**I win (a little) / you win (a little)** Negotiating a compromise where both parties give a little in order to make the result tolerable to both. But they both walk away possibly seeing the other as an opponent and that they have lost. Not really a win for either

**I lose, you lose** Feelings of a need to protect oneself, often based on previous failed attempts and characterised by a sense of frustration and an expectation to lose. One withdraws from the fray psychologically / physically but can lead to reluctant compliance in commitment to the process

**I lose (a little)/You win (a little)** Based on fear and the belief that relationships are too fragile to endure a difference of opinion. The desire is to avoid conflict and appease others – never opposing another ‘s opinion – however always conceding can lead to unbalance and domination in a relationship.

**I win, You win** (concept adapted from Transactional Analysis and the Games People Play). Both parties feel listened to or respected and have a sense of having gained

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<p>I'm not okay You're not okay (I lose / you lose)</p> 	<p>I'm not okay You're okay (flight response/passive) (I lose / you win)</p> 
 <p>(fight response/aggressive) I'm okay You're not okay (I win/you lose)</p>	<p>I'm okay You're okay (flow solution/assertive) (I win / you win)</p> 

**De-escalation** - *reduce the intensity of (a conflict or potentially violent situation).*

When you de-escalate someone or some situation, you **act to improve the situation** (and not make it worse.) Your intervention might be *something you do, something you say* or even *choosing to do or say nothing*. Just about anything could be the right response.

You definitely want to **avoid the wrong response** (i.e. escalation).

### "One Response Does Not Fit All"

**De-escalation Skills** involve the **expertise** to *assess a situation, determine a supportive approach* and the *ability to implement the solution* which successfully de-escalates the situation. The following process is particularly important:

1. **Assess** - the situation to determine the level of escalation, risks and source of conflict
2. **Adapt** - develop a specific approach to addressing the assessed problem

### 3. **Attend** - implement the plan with your selected de-escalation techniques

Note: **This is a continual process.** Continue to re-assess the situation in order to respond effectively. Whether you *improve* or *worsen* the situation or *make no impact at all*, you will only be able to have the right response when you **continually assess and respond accordingly.**

A common misconception of de-escalation skills is that you can learn a specific technique and it will always de-escalate the person in front of you. It is not uncommon to hear people say, "I usually do \_\_\_\_\_, but this one time it didn't work."

The same technique will not always work because **different people have different needs.** You can even take the same two people and the same issue and the situation may resolve differently on a different day. You will be most effective when you can adapt in the moment to the needs of the person you're trying to support. The only response that works every time is the **right response** for that specific situation.

### De-escalation

Key Point: The leverage or trigger point of the pattern that leads situations to escalate is the perception part — specifically *the perception of threat.*

The big idea to remember when you want to de-escalate a conflict is:

- ***Make yourself non-threatening to the other person.***

Specific steps to accomplish the goal of making yourself non-threatening include:

#### 1. **Control your tone and body language**

A significant portion of the message people receive from you in face-to-face communication is conveyed through your body language and your voice tone. If you look threatening, you are threatening. If you want to de-escalate a situation, remember to control your tone and body-language. If you want to minimise situations that escalate, work on 'a way of being' that is 'cool, calm and collected'...

#### 2. **Listen**

Don't rush to defend a position! Listening is a powerful tool. Allowing the person space and time to 'vent' is important. When other people think that you have not listened to their concerns, they will almost invariably see you as a threat.

### **3. Acknowledge and accept their emotions/feelings**

Building on the idea of listening, accept the other person's feelings without passing judgement on them - don't tell them how they feel. It is usually okay to ask them how they feel and then to acknowledge it.

For example, if an individual says something like "The sewers are talking to me," a feeling response might be, "That must be pretty scary," or even, "Tell me what that feels like." This isn't getting into a therapist's bailiwick, but it is using a handy therapeutic tool. Most likely it will elicit a response that is positive, since the individual will know that you are trying to understand what's happening.

### **4. Apologize for your contribution**

Very few conflicts/escalating situations are entirely the fault or responsibility of only one party. There is almost always something that you have done to make the conflict worse. To de-escalate the conflict, accept responsibility for your contribution and apologize for it.

### **5. Focus on the future**

Getting hung-up in the past is a sure-fire way to make conflicts worse. When you shift the conversation to the future, you engage both you and the other person in a problem solving activity rather than a fault-finding exercise. You create hope, and you make yourself less threatening.

SOURCES: <http://rightresponse.org>;  
<https://www.crisisprevention.com/Resources/Knowledge-Base/De-escalation-Tips>

**Spiritual input around conflict would concur with the above:**

Whilst Jesus was never afraid of conflict, as He challenged what He considered the misrepresentation of God and misuse of power by the religious leaders of the time. He was always appropriate in his responses to situations. He looked into the heart of a matter and saw the needs of people first.

*Blessed are the meek... Blessed are the merciful... Blessed are the peacemakers... (Matthew 5:5ff);*

There is no room for self-righteousness when expressing love to another. Challenge or conflict is necessary when exposing an 'untruth' but this should be done in love and in such a way that the one being challenged feels supported at the same time. Sometimes people say they are doing something 'in love' but then proceed to be critical, judgemental or condemning and leave devastation in their wake. It is never pleasant to have to challenge another person, but those who do it kindly, gently and allow room for the other to make a choice, are better able to receive the challenge.

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1Cor. 13:4ff);*

If one allows the Holy Spirit to motivate and guide us, our thinking and actions, then the following should be the fruit in our lives:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal.5:22f).*

**Power, control and bullying:**

**What is your perspective on power?**



Power > what does it look like to you?

.....  
.....

How does it make you feel? .....

If this is negative : Why?



.....  
.....

If this is positive : Why?

.....  
.....



What action/behaviour do you take when exposed to it?

.....  
.....  
..

Does this usually have a positive outcome .....

.....

Would you want others to do the same to you? .....

.....

..



Have you ever been dominated by someone else, or have you ever misused your authority?

.....

How did the receiver react to you?

.....  
.....

It is important to look at one's perspective on power and control. The dictionary refers to power as 'the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of

others or the course of events'; in, and of itself, there is nothing that is negative about that. However if one's motivation behind the influence is self-seeking, using fear, control and intimidation, then the direction becomes questionable.

### **What is/are intimidation and fear?**

Intimidation is referred to as tactics used 'to frighten or threaten someone, usually in order to persuade them to do something that you want them to do'. In other words, coercive and threatening behaviour, which might well be abusive. Gaining power in this way requires taking control away from someone else; often playing on the weakness of the one being intimidated. This can be witnessed where there is an imbalance of power in dictatorships or overbearing authority figures. However it operates just as effectively when someone uses their weakness to gain control of a situation through manipulative behaviours, such as withdrawal of affection

The definition of fear in the English dictionary is 'an unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of danger, pain or harm' whilst in the Baker's bible dictionary fear of God is referred to as 'reverential awe or worshipful respect' - 'to fear God is to do His will' – 'to fear God is to know Him and to know him is to fear him' – 'it is healthy fear that enables one to praise God and to enjoy the benefits and blessings at His hand'.

### **As the ultimate authority figure, what is God's perspective on power?**

- If you were wanting to control the world would you offer free will to the human race?
- Nahum 1 : 2-7 > talks of the mighty avenging power of a God to whom the whole earth submits. God has the capacity to end all things in the same way he created all things – but he chooses to persevere with fickle man because of the covenant he has made to do so, sealed by the blood of his own Son
- In Matthew 5: 5 > Jesus refers to how blessed are the meek (mild, patient, long-suffering) for they will inherit the earth – meekness is sometimes referred to as **power under control**

- 2 Cor 12: 9 *'But He said to me My grace(my favour and loving kindness and mercy) is enough for you (sufficient against any danger and enables you to bear the trouble manfully): **for My strength and power are made perfect (fulfilled and completed) and show themselves most effective in your weakness. Therefore, I will all the more gladly glory in my weaknesses and infirmities that the strength and power of Christ (the Messiah) may rest (yes, may pitch a tent over and dwell) upon me!**'*. Paul understands that God's power is fully trustworthy, dependable and to be relied upon, however it is in submission and worship of God that he is strengthened and not in trying to be strong in his own strength which is changeable.

So different to how the world views weakness

- Philippians 2 : 1-5 – Jesus himself humbled himself, submitting to the same attitude of heart and humility thinking more highly of others, than himself. He looked to the interests of others and in accordance with God's desires for others. Despite the human levels of frustration and impatience he may have felt from time to time and when others treated him unfairly. He was powerful because he had strength and could have called on the host of heaven to annihilate his enemies, but he chose not to do so – He did not have the need to appear strong, His need was to reflect His father and the love and forgiveness of the father

What is God's view on power (meekness and humility, surrender)

Does he limit it? If yes, when?

When God gave us free will and freedom to choose, what limits did he place on this gift?

What does that say about how God views us and our potential? High value on us, desires relationship based on our freedom to choose Him and not on compulsion or religious thoughts

What might that say about how we are to relate to others?

How do we share this powerful gift of valuing others when we are:

- confronted by prejudice (judgmentalism)
- confronted by fear (avoidance or protection )
- facing different world views (need to be right)
- with broken people with broken boundaries (walls or fences?)

**What then is bullying and how can we address it better?**

### **Definition**

A form of aggressive behaviour which is usually hurtful and deliberate; it is often persistent, sometimes continuing for weeks, months or even years and it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. Underlying most bullying behaviour is an abuse of power and a desire to intimidate and dominate (Sharp & Smith, 1999).

Key elements: aggression, hurtful, intentional, persistent, power, domination



## Nature

- Verbal – most common (70% of reported incidents )
- Physical – most visible (evidence on the body)
- Psychological – most damaging to mental health
- Also sexual or cyber

Intent : damage another's self esteem

Example : social exclusion where the victim feels undervalued, unwanted, rejected



As cited in the 'Journal of child psychology and psychiatry "Bullying is a pervasive problem among children and adolescents and may take various forms including physical, verbal, relational or cyber" (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008)

We often think of bullying as being physical aggression, which of course it can be, but not exclusively. "The fundamental intention of bullying is for a person to damage another person's self-esteem, thereby reducing the latter's sense of personal power and consequently the ability to pose a threat" (Brown, 1997, p. 29)

(O'Moore, 2010) defines it as “The repeated aggression that characterises bullying can be verbal, psychological, physical or sexual in nature...tends to involve very wilful and conscious acts of aggression, manipulation or both”.

### **Why does bullying exist?**

Society rewards bullies – cutthroat industry / reality TV shows – nice people don't entertain or win!

Adults model behaviours – in families, business and government – what message are we sending to our children?

- Bullying occurs in the absence of alternative, more positive behaviours
- Children see 'bullying' work and assume it is acceptable
- How do we set limits in our homes, discipline our children?
- How do adults get what they want within their own homes? Constructively or with negative, manipulative or aggressive means?
- Do our children know how to disagree or confront without loud words or a show of force?

### **Origins**

**S**ibling rivalry : Which we read of in the case of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4)

**I**nadequacy : Saul feeling insecure around David

**N**on acceptance / Jealousy : Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37)

Basically it is SIN

### **Causes**

At an early stage when children :

- start to become assertive
- seek to establish themselves
- discover how to influence or manipulate relationships
- find the secret to getting attention, status, control

**Note** : greater exposure to seeing violence on TV/ Internet

Bullies > characteristically > use domination and anger, they can be defiant and impulsive using strategies that are very shaming. Sometimes this is in order to gain power, maintain it or because they have lived with those messages and don't know any other way or action to take. Whether done singly or in a 'pack' it is intended to belittle and minimize their victim.

Alternately bullying can be accomplished in a passive, manipulative way through spreading rumours, passing anonymous messages, through silence or shutting someone else out.

### **Participants**

1. Bully - power, respect, attention, followers, doesn't consider consequences
2. Victim - weak, vulnerable, shy, loner, different - but can be anyone
3. Bully-victim - impact of bullying makes them into a bully - anger reaction
4. Bystander - observes everything but refuses to get involved

### **Where do we expect to find bullying?**

#### **Question ?**

- Home - parents/children, between spouses, among siblings, children/parent
- School - peers, teachers
- Workplace (factory floor or high level management ) boss / colleagues / sexual harassment
- Clubs or Organisations (even Church)
- Anywhere there are people together there is potential for bullying (human nature)

### **Effects of being bullied**

There is a myth behind the well known children's rhyme :

'sticks and stones may break your bones but words can never hurt you'

*Various studies point to some effects*

- Boys bullied at age 8 are likely to become involved in adult criminality
- Early school drop out / underachievement
- Greater chance of experiencing depression as adults

- Higher levels of psychosocial distress
- Higher rates of anxiety disorders and suicidal tendencies
- Experience - shame, embarrassment, insecurity and low self-esteem

### **What are the signs?**

#### What should we be looking out for?

- Distress - worry, sadness, guilt, shame, failure
- Depression, anxiety, socially reclusive
- Low self-esteem, insecurity, perfectionist (nothing is ever good enough)
- Anger, aggression, violence
- Self harm, suicide ideation, eating disorders
- Persecutory delusions
- Overuse of drugs and alcohol to numb the pain

**Note :** Bully-victim group is most vulnerable / showing greater signs of more serious mental health problems than either the bully or the victim

### **There are many different expressions of Bullying**

#### ***Examples:***

- Sexual harassment
- Domestic disputes
- Discrimination
- Ethnic or cultural superiority
- Elder prejudice
- Employee intimidation

### **Work-place Bullying**

#### ***Examples***

- spreading rumours, hurtful gossip or innuendo
- Yelling, name-calling, mocking, insulting or ridiculing

- Unwanted physical contact or gestures that intimidate
- Invalid or unjustified criticism
- Fault-finding or unwarranted blaming
- Displaying offensive photos or objects
- Temper tantrums, mood swings, shouting
- Humiliation, public reprimands or obscene language
- Ganging up against a co-worker

## **How can we help?**

### ***Passively***

- Awareness – gaining awareness and understanding about the issue
- Understanding of the different roles
- Picking up on possible signs
- Appreciating that people in our family or church may be suffering long terms effects
- Compassion for all of the individuals
- Listening ear /supportive /non-judgmental
- As a parent - watch for signs of withdrawal, changes, help the child to talk/ confide

### ***Actively***

- Showing that we care and want to support
- Advice / referral / suggest that they seek help
- Walk alongside them in their pain
- Identify resilience
- How can we help children to be assertive without being aggressive?
- In school scenarios – find out if there is a bullying policy - what are procedures?
- For adult victims – what do they need? Counselling or prayer ministry
- Using force or the same tactic is not a long term solution

- Listen to the victim and gain some understanding for their story – find ways to support them that will not accelerate the situation
- If they are being targeted frequently, what else needs to be addressed? Their lack of esteem, confidence, belief in their own value: why is that low?

Confrontation is necessary – if by a third party, the victim should be protected from further intimidation but set clear boundaries about what you will and will not tolerate.

Wait for a time when you are both calm to talk to your loved one about the anger problem. Don't bring it up when either one of you is already angry.

Remove yourself from the situation if your loved one does not calm down.

Consider counselling or therapy for yourself if you are having a hard time standing up for yourself.

Put your safety first. Trust your instincts. If you feel unsafe or threatened in any way, get away from your loved one and go somewhere safe.

### **Anger isn't the real problem in abusive relationships**

Despite what many people believe, domestic violence and abuse is not due to the abuser's loss of control over his behaviour and temper. In fact, abusive behaviour is a deliberate choice for the sole purpose of controlling you. If you are in an abusive relationship, know that couples counselling is not recommended—and that your partner needs specialized treatment, not regular anger management classes.

- Using force or the same tactic is not a long term solution
- Listen to the victim and gain some understanding for their story – find ways to support them that will not accelerate the situation
- If they are being targeted frequently, what else needs to be addressed? Their lack of esteem, confidence, belief in their own value: why is that low?  
[http://www.helpguide.org/mental/anger\\_management\\_control\\_tips\\_techniques.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/anger_management_control_tips_techniques.htm)

### **How to address this?**

- If by the victim – a firm statement to stop

- If you are the third party, listen without judgement, this maybe the beginning of empathy for the aggressor.
- Self-awareness or other awareness helps bring understanding
- Create opportunities for victims to talk as well and take time and offer support so that strategies to address bullying can be developed – help them find their voice if they have not had one before
- Become known as a safe adult in your neighbourhood, or community, one that is approachable enough for a child to confide in
- Mentoring or buddy systems in schools / churches / communities can help empower and address attitudes and behaviours

### **Creating an anti-bullying environment**

Need to address the underlying factors that lead to bullying.

Social behaviour - need to teach how to interact, communicate and be assertive

- Using “I” statements
- Addressing issues that may lead to confrontation without fear

Assumptions around equality > bullying may be directed towards weight / gender / assumed or known sexual orientation / disability / religion / special education – people need to become educated about the things they fear or discriminate over

Consider yourself – do we allow our impatience to belittle others or change our behaviour. Do I label certain people, refusing to see them as God does – am I trustworthy around them?

Revenge > is often the advice given. It may feel good temporarily to stand up to the bully but it rarely leads to a change in behaviour. Overcoming adversity is a greater lesson to learn.

Progressive behaviours need to be adopted to de-escalate a situation, gain empathy and understanding for others, or help them understand how we experience them and their behaviour. At the end of the day it is not our responsibility to change others’

behaviour, but we are responsible for our own. Where we can support others who are struggling, we should, but by non-violent means.

**NB: Recommended viewing Netflix** - 'A girl like that' - bullying that leads to suicide and the sequel interview post the filming of the programme

### **Children Learn What They Live**

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If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.

If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.

If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.

If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.

If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.

If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.

If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.

If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.

If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.

If children live with fairness, they learn justice.

If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.

If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.

If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

### **An example of a Biblical view on intimidation – a bible study on DAVID**

David was described as a man after God's own heart – a worshipper, a warrior, an adopted son, a friend, a leader, creative and compassionate yet bold, brave and a risk taker. Despite this he faced many dilemmas and difficulties, sometimes of his own making.

How did he handle intimidating circumstances?

**A Youth** (1 Samuel 16 & 17)

- Seen by his family as 'the baby' and of no account or value but he didn't allow that to define or dictate to him. This lack of value had pushed him to find his value and identity in God Ps27:10
- Shepherding – lions attacking flock, he confronts them – believed God would deliver him
- Playing his harp for Saul – eyes focussed on who he was worshipping, not on the court
- Confronting Goliath – knew His God so well that he trusted that God would win a victory – no apparent fear of the intimidation by Goliath, he only 'feared' God

Note -

- He knew where his strength came from
- His focus was outside of himself
- He refused to entertain fear. He must have felt it, but he didn't embrace it. He chose to believe in what God had communicated to him

**B Young Man** (1 Samuel 18 -24)

- Celebrated warrior – didn't ask for adulation or notoriety – he was simply brave for his King
- He must have been confused by Saul's jealousy in court
- He becomes a fugitive, living like an outcast afraid for his life, however he chooses not to speak or act against God's anointed

Note –

- He was still brave but not receiving affirmation for his bravery, rather rejection from the one he was reporting to. He is still secure in God's love and trusting God through the confusion
- After an opportunity he had to get revenge on Saul, he confronts His King and asks for an explanation. However he cannot trust the positive response he receives as he is once again pursued

## Question

How had the intimidation shifted for David between A & B?

In A he was facing external opponents, viewed as the enemy – seemed right to fight to the death. However

In B he was facing internal opponents, King Saul who was in authority over him, and the one he respects. He refuses to kill him, he honours God too much

Which approach was right?

BOTH??

(Kept his heart right – true to himself and God)

Is there anything he could have done differently?

## C King (11 Samuel 11 & 12)

- He was now in a position of power able to act in ways opposite to how he had been treated
- He honours God and takes his role seriously, leading by example
- Until faced with boredom, not going to war with his army, he loses focus and direction and takes liberties with Bathsheba
- He abused his position of authority and power. Facing the consequences of this, the pregnancy, he had her husband killed

What is different for David between B and C?

Note -

- He had always been under human authority, but he is now in a position where he is exercising authority over others
- Power went to his head
- He inadvertently became the bully
- Only the prophet Nathan confronts him over his actions
- God shows him a picture of himself and he gets 'victim empathy' – he is horrified as he realises what he has done

**(Key :** bullies can get empathy for victims when they understand what it feels like to be bullied

Also : how blinded, or unaware, leaders can be to the impact of some of their choices or decisions)

#### **D Older man** (11 Samuel 14 – 18)

- David faces his son Absalom's lack of respect for his leadership and manipulating for power and control
- Situation has to be confronted but he is broken hearted about it, slow to act decisively, the result is very painful for David

Note -

- With greater authority comes greater responsibility
- Failure to discipline or confront is not necessarily loving

#### **Application :**

Authority is costly to the giver (give away control) and the receiver (requires us to step up and utilise it without expectation of thanks) Wise authority demands humility and fairness and has the ability to keep order and balance. Abuse of authority however can destroy.

- We have a choice over **who** we give authority to in our lives
- We also have a choice over **whether** we exercise the authority we are given or whether we give it away by refusing to exercise it (our silence or inactivity can be construed as compliance to the demands and will of others)
- On the other hand we may exercise authority **without love** and cause damage to others

“We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers and principalities”

**Seeking power and control are human aspirations** and leave us open to manipulation by spiritual powers and principalities through our sinful motivations and choices

**Seeking God and His presence are Godly aspirations** and bring us under the control of His spirit and His authority in our lives, leading us to His empowering and direction

When God trusts us with positions of authority they can then come from a base of humility and submission and not one of control

- A David was intimidated and overcame – confident in His God
- B David was bullied and was long suffering – confused at his leader
- C He became powerful and a bully – arrogant and self absorbed, no acknowledgment of God
- D He changed and distanced himself from having to confront; delegating authority to others. He was weakened by uncertainty

**Self Reflection:**

What is your response to authority in your life?

How much of this is motivated by –

- Fear
- Shame
- Pride
- Respect

Do you have a need for control, and if so, how much is influenced by fear/shame/pride/respect?

Are you aware of how others experience you?

Who is in control in your life right now and how is this demonstrated?

If you have ever experienced bullying/or been a bully, is there an area in David's life that challenges you or you identify with?

**There are four published workshops in this Equipped to Care series**

### **Workshop One**

Relating and responding to others in an empathic way

### **Workshop Two**

Developing healthy caring patterns by being aware of our own and understanding others

### **Workshop Three**

Responding to those affected by suicide and self-harm

### **Workshop Four**

Understanding anger, conflict and bullying and developing more proactive responses

For more information about obtaining booklets or organisation of a workshop contact

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