

THE STRUGLE

Week 3 - Thermometer vs. Thermostat

THE MAIN POINT

Last week, we went over three different responses to conflict: rage, resentment, and running away. This week we are looking at the students' conflict habits to find out whether they are a "thermometer" or "thermostat." In other words, do they simply react (thermometer) when conflict arises or do they respond (thermostat)? This will help students understand their own conflict habits better and as a result handle their conflict in a healthier way.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Snacks
- Two blindfolds
- 42 building blocks (two groups of 21 each).
- A thermometer

GETTING STARTED

Welcome everyone. Ask them how their week is going. Thank them for joining the group. Go over the rules before jumping in to the discussion.

RULES FOR SMALL GROUP:

Commitment - Commit to being at every group meeting (make it a priority!)

Confidentiality - What is shared here stays here.

Be honest or be silent - don't make up an answer just to have one. Sometimes the most honest answer is no answer, so if you need to, just say pass.

Respect - for one another, their thoughts/ideas/opinions (no put downs).

Let's see how much you remember from our first two weeks talking about conflict!

- a. Can anyone completely avoid interpersonal conflict? Why or why not?
- b. From last week: What are three ways people cope with conflict? What are the advantages and drawbacks of each?

ACTIVITY

Ask two students to volunteer. Give two different students 21 blocks each. Have them build a pyramid-like tower: 6 on the bottom, 5 on the 2nd level, 4, 3, 2 and 1 on top.

Then, blindfold each student and spin them around. Have them build the tower again with the blindfold on. Tell the other students not to help.

Questions for the participants:

- How did you feel the first time you built the tower?
- What felt different the second time?
- At which point did you feel more control?

This week, we are going to continue examining how each of us deals with conflict. Remember, everyone will deal with conflict at some point in their lives. Last week we talked about responses to conflict like rage, resentment, or running away. However, this week we're talking about what in our lives controls us: our circumstances, or ourselves. Like our volunteers who built block towers in front of us, we either tend to control our environment, or be controlled by it.

In how we handle conflict, every one of us leans toward being either a "thermometer" or a "thermostat."

GOING DEEPER

- How does a thermometer work?

- a. What happens to the thermometer if you put it in a refrigerator?
- b. What happens if you hold it over an open flame?
- So if the mercury in a thermometer rises when it's hot and drops when it gets cold... what kind of person is similar to a thermometer? *Answer: someone who is controlled by the circumstances... when things heat up, they get heated up as well... when things cool down, they freeze over*
- How do you think this person handles conflict? *Answers: Quick to run away, or react to a fight? Easily provoked? Very expressive of feelings?*

By contrast, let's talk about how a thermostat works. As an example, let's say we set the temperature in this room to 68 degrees.

- If I open the window on a hot day, and this room starts to feel uncomfortable, what will the thermostat (hopefully) do? If I leave the door open on a cold day, what will the thermostat do?
- So if a thermostat regulates the temperature in the room... what kind of person is similar to a thermostat? *Someone who is controlled from within... or adapts... when things heat up, they cool it down... when things get "icy," they warm it up*
- How do you think a thermostat person handles conflict? *Calms other people down? Peacemaker? Pressure to make everything else OK?*
- Which are YOU more like - a thermometer, or a thermostat? How do you respond to conflict?

Now, a thermometer-type person may come across as overly reactive.
And a thermostat-type person may, by contrast, seem stable.

- But is there a time when it's OK - or even healthy - to be like a thermometer? If so, when? *When you need to admit or face your feelings... when something unjust happens*
- What is the danger in acting like a thermometer too often?
- Why might being like a thermostat in a conflict be healthier than being like a thermometer?

Last week, we looked at three Proverbs related to how we handle conflict: Rage, Resentment or "Run away!"

Let's read two more Proverbs this week. What wisdom do they offer about conflict, as well as thermometer and thermostat people?

Proverbs 12:16

*Fools show their annoyance at once,
but the prudent overlook an insult.*

- What do you think this Proverb is saying? What does it look like to “overlook an insult?”
- Why is it foolish to show your annoyance at once?

Proverbs 17:14

*Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam,
so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.*

- What do you think this Proverb is saying? What does it look like to drop a matter before a dispute breaks out?
- Is that difficult for you?

TAKE AWAY

Hopefully, by now you know a little bit more about how you tend to respond when conflict happens.

- How might knowing yourself better help you deal with conflict in a more positive way?

There's one verse in the Bible that really helps me handle conflict more like a thermostat than a thermometer. I challenge you this week to write this verse down. Put it on your lock screen on your phone. You can use the YouVersion Bible app to create an image. Whenever you're tempted to quickly react instead of intentionally respond, remember this verse.

James 1:19 “Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.”