

Session 4: Adaptability

Being open to challenge
and change



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Key takeaways:

- Churches can often get stuck in a certain way of doing things or be resistant to change or challenge. Jesus calls us to adapt for the benefit of others – because he calls everyone to be his disciples.

Feedback from previous session [5 minutes]

If you did the optional next step from the previous session, take a few minutes to share anything you learned or experienced.



Opening question [5 minutes]

**What changes has your church made in the last year?
What were the gains and losses of this change?**

Read aloud [2 minutes]

These words were written in the first century by the Apostle Paul. He was writing to the church in Corinth, where Christians were fighting amongst themselves over who was the most impressive and who should have the most influence. The church was divided into different cliques based on personality or culture or preferred leader. All of this pride and division was hurting the church and hurting the church's ability to witness to the diverse community around it.

In his letter, Paul emphasises the importance of adapting, building bridges between groups, and being humble rather than fighting for status. Paul is willing to identify and connect with all kinds of people – Jews and Gentiles, strong and weak, women and men.

He says he's even willing to take the place of "a slave" (the least impressive and influential position) for the benefit of others.

In the book of Acts, we see that Paul was a master of adapting. He shared the message of Jesus in different ways depending on who he was talking to. As a result, people of all kinds of backgrounds came to follow Christ and participate in the life of the church.

'Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.'

(1 Corinthians 9:19–22)

It takes humility and patience to adapt. We have to spend time listening and learning about people's experiences and perspectives. We have to be open to challenge. Paul was willing to 'become all things to all people' – to do everything within his power to adapt – so that he might share the love of Jesus with all.

Churches can often get stuck in a certain way of doing things or be resistant to change or challenge. But Jesus calls us to adapt for the benefit of others – because he calls everyone to be his disciples.

Discuss [15minutes]

- **What strikes you about the way Paul adapts to interact with different kinds of people?**
- **Does anything challenge you or make you feel uncomfortable?**
- **We often think about weakness as a bad thing. What is Paul's view of weakness?**
- **How did Jesus make himself weak to reach us?**
- **Some Jewish Christians believed that Gentile Christians needed to adopt Jewish culture to be proper followers of God. In our churches, what parts of our culture might we wrongly expect people to adopt to be 'proper Christians'?**

Watch film [5 minutes]

Group activity [35 minutes]

Think about your worship services and midweek activities, choose two of the following areas to focus on:

[Note: you may wish to break into smaller groups that each focus on one area, and then share back with the larger group.]

- Food and fellowship
- Music
- Prayers
- Preaching/teaching
- Holy Communion
- Sharing time/testimonies
- Community projects
- Children's and youth work
- Groups for bible study and prayer

For the specific areas you've chosen to focus on, reflect on how different people are included and involved. You can use the table on the next page to guide your discussion.

These questions are starting points, and there may be other groups in your congregation or community that you want to engage (e.g. caregivers, university students, people with dementia, refugees). Ideally individuals who are part of these groups would be involved in doing this exercise together.

If you did the presence session, you might reflect on what you discovered about the people and organisations present in your local area. How could the church adapt to include them?

If there are key people missing from your current discussion, consider how you could involve them as a follow up to this session.

[Table on the next page]



Group activity
[35 minutes]

Area of church life (e.g. music, hospitality, preaching)	How are people of different ages considered and involved?	How are the different cultures, experiences and ethnicities in your congregation and community reflected?	How can people provide feedback?	How could your church involve more people of different backgrounds in the planning and leading of this?
<p>Example: <i>Music</i></p>	<p><i>Our worship leader usually includes a couple traditional hymns for the older members of the congregation, and a couple of contemporary songs for younger people.</i></p> <p><i>We don't really have anything for younger children right now.</i></p>	<p><i>Not sure.</i></p> <p><i>Every year on Missions Sunday we sing a song in another language.</i></p> <p><i>In the last couple years we've had a number of new people from Hong Kong start coming to church, but they are not yet involved in the music team.</i></p>	<p><i>Not sure. Speak to the vicar or worship leader after the service? Not sure how much people do this. Might be good to find other ways for people to input, if they don't feel comfortable directly approaching the worship leader after the service.</i></p>	<p><i>Maybe approach a few parents to ask for their recommendations for songs children would enjoy in the service.</i></p> <p><i>Approach a couple people who've joined from Hong Kong to see if they'd like to get involved with the music and teaching the congregation a Cantonese song if they're up for it.</i></p>



Pray
[10 minutes]

Thank God that Jesus came for all people, no matter their background or circumstances. Pray that God would give your church the humility and courage to adapt in order to serve your local community more effectively.



Feedback

We would love to hear your feedback on the Growing Good Toolkit and how we can make it better. After you have used the material, please share your thoughts with us in this short survey.

[Provide feedback](#)



After the session [Optional]

Think of a friend or family member of yours who is different from you in some way (maybe of a different generation, a different culture, or a different profession.) Ask them what they liked or disliked about the last church service they attended. Ask them to suggest one thing they would like to see changed in the service.

If you feel God might be calling you to start something new, learn more about [Fresh Expressions](#) or [Messy Church](#).

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