

Differences in Denominations
Lesson Plan
Reuben Sairs

Lesson Purpose: To promote healthy attitudes and actions when relating to people of different denominations and when interacting within your own

Lesson Overview: This lesson gives help on the question of how to handle differences in denominations, proposing healthy attitudes and actions. The lesson also provides perspectives from the scripture, from history, and from an understanding of human beings.

Opening: For 52 days in 2015, ninety churches from various denominations worked together as God moved to revive the church and reach people in a three-county area surrounding Goshen, Indiana. Every Monday through Saturday for these 52 days, sometimes at one church and sometimes at another, Christians met for worship and evangelism training. Christians, who often didn't even know each other, worked together in teams of four in assigned communities—showing love by shoveling snow, distributing food, praying for the sick, blessing pastors in their church offices, and sharing the gospel.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:1-16

Mini Lecture: Differences in Denominations

Exercise 1: Disinterest in Denominations—Review the possible reasons given by Sairs for disinterest in denominations. Then discuss the following questions:

- Which reason do the people you know identify with the most?
- With which reason do you identify with most or react to most?
- What reasons are missing from this list?

Exercise 2: Doctrinal Disagreements—In the video, Sairs says: *Disagreements don't happen when you have no interests or passion. . . If you don't work out what you believe, then doctrinal disagreements aren't likely to arise. Vague emotional impressions don't lead to sound choices, and it's not fair to other Christians.*

- Place yourself, with your natural tendencies, on the following continuum.
- As a leader, what are the strengths and the pitfalls of your tendencies? Share these with your group.
- Ask your group to share with you scriptural principles could help you with potential your pitfalls.



Exercise 3: Response to the Segmenting of the Church—On an index card, write the statement from the following list that elicits the most response from you. Spend the next few minutes praying alone about this statement. Prepare to share thoughts from your prayer time with your group.

- Four percent of Americans worship in nondenominational churches.
- We keep leaving, splitting, and forming new groups, which, in turn, will begin to bunch up and start the process of creating denominations.
- Groups that start out as movements almost invariably will either die out in the first generation or become more denominational.
- The fragmentation of Protestant Christianity has increased since the Reformation in the 16th century, and the pace increases constantly. With the decline of the older established groups, the church landscape changed. The older, well-known denominations declined significantly in membership starting in the 1960's.

Exercise 4: Reasons to Bunch Up—Reuben Sairs says: *We find many reasons to divide, but we find many reasons to bunch up, too.* Sairs gives the following reasons to bunch up:

- We can do more together.
- We like to surround ourselves with the like-minded
- Bigger groups have more—money, influence, programs, and opportunities.

In your group, discuss the following questions:

- What benefits of bunching are missing from this list?
- Which of these benefits attracts you the most?
- If people are not good stewards of these benefits, what can go wrong?

Exercise 5: Failures that Contribute to Denominations—Review the list of failures that contribute to denominations. Which of the failures is your greatest personal temptation? Which of these failures might be the greatest temptation of your church? Discuss your thoughts with your group.

Exercise 6: Diversity—Read the following quotations from Sairs and from Ephesians 4. Evaluate your church and your church's relationship with other denominations in light of these statements.

- **Sairs:** *We should seek to be in churches where there is a kind of raucous diversity.*
Paul: *From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*
- **Sairs:** *Churches should actively work against homogeneity.*
- **Paul:** *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*