

Becoming Connected, Adaptive Leaders/Disciples

Session Three
Online 2020-21

Excellence in 
LEADERSHIP

 Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA

Courageous, resilient, and faithful leaders for the sake of the world

Becoming Connected, Adaptive Leaders/Disciples

Session Three Participant Outcomes:

1. Examine how your vulnerability shield works.
2. Describe the role that the leaders play in development of connectivity in a group.
3. Tune in to your thoughts and internal dialogue.
4. Practice giving and receiving feedback.
5. Develop an adaptive leadership process in your faith community.

Preparation for this Session:

- Begin reading *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown.
- Begin reading Chapter 2 of *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* by Ron Heifetz.
- Read this section of the manual.

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Big Picture Snapshot

Loving God, loving others, and loving self are critical spiritual matters. Yet, we often experience a gap or disconnect in our ability to love honestly and authentically. These gaps can be experienced as wounds that need healing. In order to attend to healing, actively working to close the gaps, we must first and foremost immerse ourselves in God and let God show us the steps forward. A different quality of awareness and presence is necessary if we are to address the spiritual disconnects between the points of connection laid out in Jesus' two commandments of love: our self and God, our self and others, our self and the created world, and our self and Self.

Up to this point, we have been exploring ways to heighten our awareness of ourselves by contemplating our own emotional intelligence in the context of our group interaction. Hopefully, we have begun to know ourselves better and use ourselves better in relationship with others and groups by working on our own gap between our self and Self. Spiritual teachers often call this the difference between our False Self and our True Self. Our False Self is the persona we put out there, in the world. Our True Self is the truth of who God is creating us to be, our God image deep within. Our False Self gets caught up in other people's expectations of us. The journey of getting to know who we truly are heals the disconnect between self and Self. In Session 3, we will be taking a deeper dive into this disconnect by exploring ways we feed the disconnect without even realizing it. Our need to know ourselves and love ourselves is great and directly influences our capacity to truly love others. Being our truest self requires both vulnerability and self-differentiation. When we authentically bring our true self into relationships, we are better able to connect with others in loving ways.

Hopefully, our earlier work in family systems has increased our awareness of the part we play in the web of complex familial, professional, and congregational relationships. Expanding the quality and capacity of our awareness of others begins to address the gap between our self and the other. In this session, we will attempt to expand our awareness of group dynamics and our own capacity for leading communities as we explore ways to help a group thrive and adapt in a world of continuous change.

The Courage to Be Who We Are

Ever since we left the womb, we have been confronted with challenges and discomforts in this world. In response to these things, we have learned to cope, protect, avoid, and armor ourselves to remain safe, secure, and happy. These mechanisms, however, also tend to distance us from others and over time, even distance us from who we really are. We have worn our masks so long, we believe them. In her book *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown explores the myriad of ways we keep ourselves from being vulnerable and open to love in relationships. Here are some ways to think about common obstacles to connecting with the people in our community.

Roadblocks to Connectivity¹

Culture of Scarcity We live in a culture of “Never Enough.”

Jesus told the disciples and all who have the ears to hear that he came to offer life, abundant life. Jesus did not offer material or power answers. Jesus demonstrated over and over again that abundant life comes through loving relationship. We followers know that a mindset of scarcity diminishes and even destroys our capacity to live into abundant life. Feeling like we are never enough – good enough, thin enough, smart enough, athletic enough, wealthy enough, successful enough – erodes our ability to accept and love ourselves. Our present-day marketing industry is predicated on selling us something we didn’t know we needed or wanted. A culture of scarcity creates unhealthy comparison and low self-worth, both of which become obstacles to healthy relationships.

Vulnerability Myths

Vulnerability is one of our major themes throughout this course because true vulnerability opens us for relationship. What researchers like Brené Brown are learning is that vulnerability is a key characteristic of wholeness and the abundant life that Jesus embodies. This classic definition of vulnerability – ‘openness to attack or hurt, either physically or in other ways’ – explains why none of us automatically or enthusiastically sign up for vulnerability. And yet, . . . we also know that “to love is to be vulnerable.”² We risk our very hearts when we choose to love. So, let’s explore vulnerability; what it is, what it isn’t. We will start with the myths of vulnerability:

- **Vulnerability is weakness** – Jesus lived a life of vulnerability by demonstrating how compassion and forgiveness were the fulfillment of the law. Being in relationship requires vulnerability, disclosing authentic parts of ourselves, and walking into the arena risking failure. True vulnerability requires courage and strength.
- **I don’t do vulnerability** – “Pretending that we don’t do vulnerability means letting fear drive our thinking and behavior without our input or even awareness, which almost always leads to acting out or shutting down.”³
- **I can go it alone** – Belonging and connectedness is essential to the theology surrounding the Body of Christ. We are bound together in ways that surpass our understanding. Our brains are wired for belonging. Human beings are not solo animals. Both science and scripture attest to this truth.
- **Vulnerability is letting it all hang out** – Vulnerability is not spewing emotion all over the community. Vulnerability is about trust and appropriate boundaries. In order to connect in healthy ways, we need mutuality, reciprocity, and boundaries.

¹ Brown, Brené, *Daring Greatly*, Penguin Random House, 2015.

² Brown, Brené, *Dare to Lead*, Penguin Random House, 2018, p. 22.

³ Brown, Brené, *Dare to Lead*, p. 24.

- **You can engineer the uncertainty and discomfort out of vulnerability** – Have you ever heard the snarky comment ‘church would be great except for the people?’ Actually, insert any collective noun: the neighborhood, work, government, etc. Relationships are hard because relationships connect more than one person, and people are not easy. There is no way around the uncertainty and discomfort that comes from dealing with real, live human beings.
- **Trust comes before vulnerability** – Two questions help us unpack this myth: How do I know if I can trust someone enough to be vulnerable? Can I build trust without ever risking vulnerability? The acts of trust and vulnerability go hand in hand. One does come before the other.
- **Vulnerability is disclosure** – We do not need to be besties and share our deep dark secrets as a show of vulnerability. We do, however, need to create a climate of psychological safety. We need to be communities where everyone is respected.

Shame

We all have shame, sometimes originating as far back as early childhood. Shame hides in silence and affects our sense of self, our sense of identity. While we may feel guilty for something we have done, shame touches the core of who we are. Finding the courage to share our stories, to bring the pain to surface, is a first step in resisting this significant roadblock to connectivity.

Common protective shields that keep us from living in healthy relationships

- **Foreboding Joy** – When we constantly expect the ‘other shoe to drop,’ we don’t allow ourselves to feel the full joy of the present moment.
- **Perfectionism** – When we focus on achieving perfection, we are living out of our need to earn external or outside approval.
- **Numbing** – When we tell ourselves we don’t care, then we shield ourselves from the negative feelings that are harder or more uncomfortable to process. Not caring usually means you are not allowing yourself to feel.
- **Victim** – Playing the victim often means we are not taking responsibility for our own presence in the situation. Playing the victim can mean we throw our hands up in the air and declare it is ‘not my fault.’
- **Smash and Grab** – When we over-step people’s boundaries and share too much personal information in order to grab whatever attention and energy we can, we derail real relationships from forming.

“Divine perfection is precisely the ability to include what seems like imperfection.”

Richard Rohr



Each protective shield has a possible resiliency practice to counter the negative behavior

- **Gratitude counterbalances foreboding joy** – Take time at the end of each day to count your blessings and ponder how even difficult situations brought about an opportunity for deeper relationship.
- **Seeing beauty in brokenness counterbalances perfectionism** – Notice how the cracks allow light to shine through. Beauty is not the same as perfection. Perfectionism can keep us on a treadmill that destroys the relationships that God brings into our life.
- **Setting boundaries counterbalances our tendency toward numbing** – When we try to distance ourselves from our emotions because we find them too scary or we aren't sure what to do with them, we are not allowing ourselves to experience the joy and beauty life has to offer. Boundaries allow us to pay attention to our emotions in ways and at a rate in which we can handle. Give yourself permission to actually feel your feelings. Stay mindful of your numbing behaviors. Lean into the discomfort of hard emotions. Practice sharing yourself appropriately.
- **Redefining success and seeking support counterbalances playing the victim** – How are you defining success in this frustrating situation? Talking with trusted friends who will not just tell you what you want to hear will help you reframe your perspective and help you not feel alone.
- **Knowing your motivations counterbalances a tendency to smash and grab** – Continually asking yourself 'why am I doing what I'm doing?' will help you monitor your internal dynamic and help you curb negative impulses that might destroy relationships.

As human beings, we have a basic need to belong. Belonging means we need to be somewhat vulnerable in order to be in relationship with others. Unfortunately, in our world today, belonging has to some degree been hijacked by ideologies. We belong to groups we agree with, or that look like us. In a polarized society such as ours, the disconnects between groups are growing wider. Having the courage to be vulnerable is no small task AND is sorely needed. Brené Brown, in her book *Braving the Wilderness*, says "People are hard to hate close up. Move in."

Adaptive Leadership

What is Adaptive Leadership?

Adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive into the future. Adaptive challenges require us to pay attention to three essential movements:

- **Conserve** – Of all that you care about, what elements, values, or practices are essential and must be preserved into the future so that you remain faithful to who you are?

- **Let Go** – Of all that you care about, what elements, values or practices are no longer essential and need to be let go of so that you might thrive into the future?
- **Create** – How might you be open and creative to invent new ways, new practices, new behaviors, new traditions that build from the best of the past and allow the community to flourish into the future?

Adaptive leadership assumes leaders and the congregation know who they are and what their purpose is. Knowing the core values, deep assumptions, and culture of the congregation is essential. The identity of the community is the ‘DNA’ of what makes this congregation who it is. In this world of rapid change, however, congregations need to adapt (preserve what is essential, discard what no longer works, and create new values and constructs which do work) to a different environment every few years to stay relevant in embodying and proclaiming the Gospel in their context.

The process of adaptive leadership is to observe what is going on, interpret the data, and then create a plan of action to address the situation observed. The ability to observe what is really going on means letting go of assumptions and biases that may cloud what you are really seeing. Models, lenses, or tools to help gather data from both inside the faith community and in the surrounding community can help leaders stay more objective. Next, the data needs to be interpreted. Having diverse perspectives in the interpreting process allows for a more accurate assessment. Once the articulated interpretation feels good, leaders can design a plan of action and implement it. Following the action, the cycle begins again by observing what happened, interpreting what happened, and taking another step.

The Difference Between Traditional Authority and Adaptive Leadership

Relying on traditional authority will not help a faith community move into uncharted territory. When the present looks significantly different than what we have seen in the past, we know we must adapt. Adaptive leadership challenges a system to be open for a much more creative future. Traditional authority focuses on hierarchy, established expertise, and assumed power structures. Adaptive leadership must be open to learning, letting go, and the discomfort of not having all

Task	Authority	Leadership
Direction	Problem definition and solution	Identify new challenges and reframe key questions
Protection	Protect from external threats	Disclose external threats
Order	Maintain norms, order, roles	Question norms, uncover conflict, redefine roles ⁴

⁴ Heifetz, Ron, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, p. 28.



When do Leaders Need to Think Adaptively?

Concept	Identifying Flag
Persistent gap between aspirations and reality	The language of complaint is used increasingly to describe the current situation (i.e. “No one comes to church anymore.”)
Responses within current repertoire inadequate	Previously successful programs, methods, experts, consultants are unable to address the situation.
The usual problem-solving tools no longer work	Traditional problem-solving methods used repeatedly with success. Failures more frequent than usual. Frustration and stress manifest.
The usual stakeholders no longer have answers to ease tension and anxiety	Rounding up the usual suspects to address the issue has not produced progress.
Quick fixes no longer provide adequate relief from the problem	Problems fester or reappear after short-term fix is applied.
Disequilibrium raises anxiety within the system	Increasing conflict and frustration generate tension and chaos. Desperation to try something new increases as urgency becomes widespread.
The system is yearning to prepare for the future that is emerging	A critical mass of people are asking critical questions about the future.

Congregational Characteristics That Signal the Need For a Change to Adaptive Leadership

- **Input and output are not linear**
Programs and budget decisions produce unintended consequences.
- **Formal authority is insufficient**
Positional authority of clergy or council is not enough to effect change in the system.
- **Different factions each want different outcomes**
Proposal works for youth but not for seniors.
- **Previously highly successful protocols seem antiquated**
Tried and true programs, methods, techniques for formation, newcomers, youth no longer work.



Challenges Faced by Communities in Adaptive Change

1. **Gap between Espoused Values and Behavior**

Human beings, whether as individuals or in communities, often espouse a certain set of values and yet their behavior reflects a different set of values.

2. **Competing Commitments**

When a community is faced with an adaptive challenge, decisions can be difficult to make. Competing commitments can distract the system from facing the real challenge and compromise may not serve any constituency well.

3. **Speaking the Unspeakable**

Often times we have two conversations going simultaneously – the external conversation happening around the table and the internal dialogue happening in each person’s head. Getting people to share what seems unspeakable is essential for moving forward in the face of rapid change.

4. **Work Avoidance**

Diversion of attention and displacement of responsibility accompany work avoidance. Ask yourself this question: Are we diverting our attention to technical fixes and programmatic fixes instead of dealing with the underlying challenges of being the church in today’s world?

Reflecting on and Interpreting Your Situation Adaptively

Reflective Questions:

- How is our external environment in which we do ministry changing?
- What internal challenges are mirroring those external changes?
- What are the gaps between where we are and where we are called to be?
- How will we know that we are being faithful and effective in accomplishing our mission?
- What challenges might be just beyond the horizon?

Questions for Productive Interpretation:

- Is there any part of this situation that is new to us and that therefore might need a different strategy than we usually use?
- Who are the key stakeholders in this situation, and how might they be positively or negatively affected as leaders address the situation? How would they describe the situation and the consequences themselves?
- Within the congregation, how generalized is the urgency to do anything about this situation, or do we have to figure out a way to “ripen the issue?”
- What are the adaptive elements of this situation, and what are the technical aspects?
- Are we the only ones in the church facing this situation? How are others responding?

Signs of Unproductive Interpretation:

Adaptive change can be difficult and challenging work. Leaders can experience resistance, push-back, and even sabotage when people in the community are being pushed farther or faster than they can tolerate. Leaders need to be aware of signs that may indicate people are not keeping up.

This kind of comment...	Suggests that people see the problem as...	So, encourage a shift by asking these questions...
“If we only had better direction from our pastor...”	A deficiency in the leadership, not the vision or mission.	What is the mission or purpose for this congregation? Where is the real authority to set direction for this community?
“We will have this problem worked out in no time...”	People see the problem as short term, rather than long term.	How could we try to deal with the causes of the situation rather than the symptoms?
“This problem will have an easy fix...”	People are diagnosing the problem as a technical, not an adaptive, problem.	Maybe this situation is more complex than it looks on the surface?
“We can’t seem to carry out our good ideas...”	People don’t feel equipped to address the challenge or they feel overwhelmed by the situation.	What information should we look at in order to better understand the situation? What learning might be necessary for us?
“We can find a win-win solution...”	No one needs to suffer any pain to solve this problem.	What losses might be necessary in order to find a way forward? What might we need to let go of so that we might thrive into the future?

The Renewal – Apostolate Cycle: A Diagram Overview

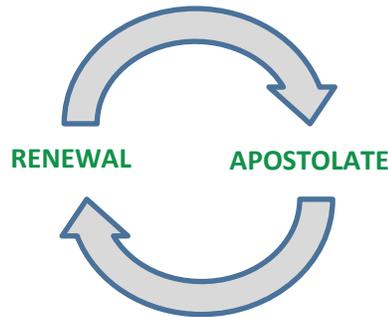
The Renewal - Apostolate Cycle describes a central dynamic of the Christian life:

To love God and to love the neighbor.



This rhythmic cycle focuses our attention on the faithful movement between being renewed in baptismal identity as a beloved child of God AND living as instruments of God’s love and grace in daily life in the world. The cycle reminds us of both the individual’s growth and movement and how the congregation supports and facilitates that movement and growth.

Renewal in baptismal identity and purpose in worship, study, and being equipped for Christian action.



Sent out into the world as God’s hands, increasing evangelism and faithful stewardship in all relationships: our family and friends, our workplace, our faith communities, our civic life, and our global impact.

A Cycle

The cycle demonstrates the conscious and intentional attention to God, prayer life, our relationships, Christian formation, **and** our call to be members of the Body of Christ, in all aspects of our lives.

In that Cycle

We need:	Which is helped by:	Congregation helps by:
To accept dependence on God	Openness to spiritual guidance	Emphasis on worship and spiritual formation
To accept responsibility for our rhythm of spiritual life in terms of renewal and being sent into the world	Attending to both our inward and outward focus of our lives	Offering programs and guidance in creating, experimenting with, and revising spiritual disciplines
To accept interdependence with other church members, family, co-workers, and global community	Life in Christian community and loving service in the world	Becoming courageous, faithful, resilient leaders and communities

For more on the model see Robert Gallagher’s *Fill All Things: The Dynamics of Spirituality in the Parish Church*, Ascension Press.



Feedback

Family of Origin Experience With Feedback

Healthy relationships depend on healthy communication patterns. All communication starts by sending out messages to share with others and receiving responses in return. Even no response is a response. To the person hoping to increase their communication skills, all responses, also known as feedback, can be learning opportunities. Leaders, people whose role is to affect others, must pay attention to all forms of feedback in order to know their next right step in relationship.

Before we begin thinking about the specific elements of feedback, however, we first need to ponder our own personal experience of feedback in our families of origin. Take some time to think about the following questions?

- How was feedback offered in your family of origin?
- Did you experience hyper-critical people in your life?
- Were you always complimented, no matter of the quality of your work?
- Are you usually able to receive feedback with detached curiosity?
- Do you tend to receive feedback with negative self-talk?
- What is your emotional response to the theoretical task of giving and receiving feedback?
- Growing up, did you hear messages of unconditional love? Were the messages you received, 'you can do better?' Were the messages something in-between, or perhaps competing and/or conflicting messages?

How you experienced feedback as a child will impact your experience in giving and receiving feedback in your current relationships.

As you ponder communication patterns in your faith community, remember effective feedback happens best in the context of relationships built on trust, AND trust is built by feedback given thoughtfully, appropriately, honestly, and lovingly.

Formal Feedback

The formal definition of feedback is “communication to a person (or a group) which gives that person (or group) information on how one’s behavior affects others.” In a formal setting, feedback helps individuals become more aware of the impact of what they do and say so that they can determine if their behavior is achieving their intent. We do not cause and are not responsible for others’ reactions. People’s responses are based on their perceptions, and perhaps even their projections. If, however, interpersonal effectiveness is our aim, we may very well wish to adjust our behavior in light of the feedback received.

Feedback may have several purposes: a) information that expands a person’s information about themselves and the effect they have on others, b) information that expands a person’s range of choices, c) information that supports or discourages certain behavior.

Feedback emerges in numerous ways:

- **Conscious, intentional** (nodding assent) and **Unconscious, unintentional** (nodding asleep)
- **Spontaneous** (Thanks a lot) and **Solicited** (Yes, it did help)
- **Verbal** (Saying “no”) and **Non-verbal** (leaving the room)
- **Formal** (evaluation forms) and **Informal** (hand-clapping)

Criteria for Constructive Feedback

Avoiding evaluative language reduces the potential for the individual to react defensively. Evaluative statements say more about you and your interpretation. Perhaps you are projecting and not interpreting the situation accurately. Using evaluative language muddles what is your responsibility and what is the responsibility of the receiver.

When giving feedback, choose language that is:

- **Descriptive** rather than evaluative – With a precise description of what the other person did and said and how you felt in response, you are simply stating your perception and the other is free to use or not use the feedback.
- **Specific** rather than general – With specific reference to actual words and actions, the person gets a clear picture of what you saw, heard, and felt.
- **Usable** – Direct feedback toward behavior, something the receiver can change.
- **Requested** rather than imposed – Feedback is most helpful when the receiver has asked for or agreed to a process of giving and receiving feedback.
- **Timely** – Well-timed feedback is given at the earliest opportunity after the given behavior and depends on the person’s readiness to hear it.
- **Clear** – Clarity is essential if the receiver is going to take in and use the information being offered. Be honest, direct, and sensitive when offering feedback. Check in with the receiver to make sure that your message came across the way you intended.
- **Accurate** – Feedback can easily say more about the one offering feedback than the one receiving feedback. Feedback should be an exploration of the effect the person’s behavior has had on you. The same behavior may not have had the same effect on others. Asking others in the group if the person’s impressions were shared by others may be helpful. Avoid exaggeration. Use I-statements rather than generalizing about everyone else in the group.

- **Appropriate** – Give consideration to timeliness and the receiver’s capacity to hear it. If a person indicates they have heard enough to work on for the moment, offering additional feedback is inappropriate. It is also inappropriate to confront another person under the guise of simple feedback.

Confrontation may include feedback, but it begins with a declaration of feelings, perception, and the problem experienced by the person confronting.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Responses to Feedback

For the sake of healthy relationship, we need to consider not just how we offer feedback, but also how we respond to feedback. When receiving feedback, it is often important to clarify the message. Ask questions to get a clearer understanding, i.e. “can you give me an example?” If you are still unsure about the information you are receiving, it may be helpful to paraphrase in your own words what you are hearing. Explicitly acknowledge valid points. If others are around, invite them to offer their perspective as well. Ask for specific suggestions in order to understand what may have been more helpful. Stay open; don’t get defensive. You may feel it, but don’t act on the defensive emotion. Stay focused on what is being said. Remember to offer gratitude to the person for being vulnerable enough to share their opinions.

Inappropriate responses convey your own barriers to healthy relationship. Work on not countering feedback with ‘yes, but...’ or justifying your behavior with ‘the reason I did it that way is...’ Both of these responses may shut down the other person and imply that you are not open to learning about yourself. Challenging and discounting the other person’s perspective are also not helpful in building trusting relationships. Work on being self-differentiated enough to receive the feedback, and then ponder for yourself what may be helpful to your own growth and what may a reflection of the internal work the other person may need to attend to.

Once one has experienced asking for feedback, has received both positive and negative comments, and survived the experience with a newly formed community, the probability of risking being open to feedback in familiar settings is increased significantly.

A Formula for Giving Feedback

“When you _____,	[note the behavior; describe it as specifically as possible],
I felt _____,	[tell how the behavior affects you; use feeling words i.e. frustrated, angry, pleased, etc.],
because I _____.”	[share why you are affected that way].



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Shame Shield

