



## Jesus as a Restoring Leader

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Managing conflict is an important part of a leader's ability. Bennis (1997) declared, "Conflict is inevitable, and it can be destructive or useful, depending on how the leader handles it" (p. 208). Northouse (2016) added to the discussion by stating, "The question is not 'How can people avoid conflict and eliminate change?' but rather 'How can people manage conflict and produce positive change?'" (p. 268). Conflict management is part of leadership. The conflict may be between two people or groups or it may be internal conflict based on failed expectations. Either way, leaders need to know how to manage conflict.

This chapter used Robbins' (1996) inner textual analysis to determine Jesus leadership style in John 21:1–15 in dealing with conflict and restoring the relationships with his disciples after each of them deserted Jesus at the arrest (John 18:15) and Peter denied Jesus three times (John 18:27). The inner textual analysis focuses on the words as tools of communication. This is a stage of analysis prior to the analysis of "meanings," that is, prior to the "real interpretation" of the text. Sometimes

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it helps the interpreter to “remove all meanings” from the words and simply look at and listen to “the words themselves” (p. 7) to perform the analysis. Like a jeweler turning a diamond to see the different reflections and angles, inner textual analysis allows a researcher to discover the angles and reflections in the text. Based on the inner textual analysis of John 21:1–25, this chapter identifies four leadership actions that Jesus used in restoring Peter and the disciples to the ministry which are (a) remembering the past, (b) acknowledging the hurt, (c) leading with love, and (d) refocusing on the mission. These four actions align well with radical candor (Scott, 2017) and flexible and adaptive leadership (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

### BACKGROUND OF JOHN 21:1–25

The NRSV biblical text divides John 21:1–25 into the three narrative units 1–14, 15–19, 20–25. Words of action mark the beginning of the units indicating a new narrative starting point as shown below. Robbins (1996) described narrational texture as a focus on the voices in the text whether spoken or unspoken. A careful study of these voices may reveal a pattern that helps to move the text forward or end the section. Like a play, each narration section of the text tends to have an opening, middle, and closing aspect to it. This pattern helps the reader to follow the thought process of the writer. “Opening-middle-closing texture resides in the nature of the beginning, body, and conclusion of a section of discourse. Repetition, progression, and narration regularly work together to create the opening, middle and closing unit of text” (Robbins, 1996, p. 19). The opening-middle-closing pattern of John 21:1–25 can be dissected into three units:

- Scene One John 21:1–14: Jesus and the seven disciples.
- Scene Two John 21:15–19: Jesus and Peter.
- Scene Three John 21:20–25: Jesus, Peter, and the unnamed disciple.

The result of the narrational texture pattern shows a strong interplay between the narrator, Jesus, and Peter. The unnamed disciple reveals his identity at the end by *testifying* to be the narrator, John.

This is supported by a repetitive texture analysis (Robbins, 1996). Bekker (2004) succinctly stated, “Repetitive texture resides in the occurrence of words and phrases more than once in the unit” (p. 18). There is value in identifying the words that are repeated more than once in each verse. It is important to notice the pattern of the words by their occurrence and place in the text. The repetitive texture of John 21:1–25 identifies the key people in the text by showing the repetition of their names include these four groupings, Jesus/Lord, disciples, Simon Peter/Simon son of John, and the disciple. Other key phrases identified include fish, bread, love, feed/tend, sheep/lambs, and death/die.

Other key phrases identified with a repetitive analysis in the pericope are phrases that connect past events with current actions between Jesus and the disciples. Jesus used fish and bread reminds the disciples of the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus used the words love, feed/tend and sheep/lambs three times in his dialogue with Peter refers to the three-time denial of Jesus that Peter committed at his trial. Jesus then mentioned death/die in reference to Peter and the unnamed disciple foreshadowing future actions. The following three sections explore these themes in more detail.

### JOHN 21:1–14

The first unit is a discourse between Jesus and the seven disciples. Jesus used the disciples fishing as an opportunity to reveal who he is by repeating an earlier miracle (Luke 5:4–7) when Jesus helped the disciples have a miraculous catch of fish. Jesus repeats the miracle and then invited the disciples to a breakfast of bread and fish. Both actions would have reminded the disciples of the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:9).

Using Robbins’ (1996) progression texture analysis revealed the progression of the conversation in John 21:1–14 between Jesus and the disciples with Simon Peter taking a lead role within the context of a meal with fish and bread. The narrative goes back and forth between Jesus with the disciples and Jesus with Simon Peter. The real focus of the section is on Jesus and Peter. Peter is separating himself from what is happening with the disciples and Jesus. Jesus speaks to all the disciples, yet Peter responds individually, almost as if the other disciples are not there. The section ends with the eating of bread and fish, again a reminder of the feeding of the five thousand (Burge, 2000) which demonstrated Jesus’ miraculous power over physical reality.

Sensory-aesthetic texture focused on the five senses identified in the text. Robbins (1996) summarized “the range of senses the text evokes or embodies (thought, emotion, sight, sound, touch, smell) and the manner in which the text evokes or embodies them (reason, intuition, imagination, humor, etc.)” (p. 30). Robbins identified three body zones, emotion-fused thought, self-expression speech, and purposeful action to help organize the sensory-aesthetic patterns.

The self-expression speech in John 21:1–14 includes mostly questions and statements by Jesus. Jesus is guiding the conversation and the whole experience. He initiated the conversation with the disciples in the boat, he invites them to breakfast, he offers them a communion meal, he questions Peter and corrects Peter, he predicts Peter’s death and keeps Peter focused on the task of following him. Jesus is the lead character displaying command of the situation with an agenda to teach with the disciples.

### JOHN 21:15–19

The second unit of discourse turns to a discussion between Jesus and Peter. Jesus repeats the same question three times reminding Peter of his thrice denial of Jesus (Matt. 26:34). The repeating of the question hurts Peter but is an important part of Peter’s restoration to ministry. Jesus restores Peter and gives a brief prediction about his death. The unit closes with Jesus again calling Peter to follow him, just as he did the first time they met (Matt. 4:18–19).

The progression of John 21:15–19 centers on Jesus and Peter with the dialogue going back and forth with the word *love*. The progression ends with an emphasis on belt and death, predicting Peter’s death. The progression helps to show the intensity of interaction between Jesus and Peter with the repeat of the word *love* three times.

There is an argumentative nature to this interchange between Jesus and Peter. Robbins (1996) noted how ancient writers often used arguments to communicate points, “Yet, ancient rhetoricians observed that stories, as well as speeches, used argumentative devices to persuade the reader to think and act in one way rather than another” (p. 21). The role of the argumentative sections is to give reasons for what comes next, often guiding the reader to logically expect them. The second (John 21:15–19) and third (John 21:20–25) units of John 21:1–25 show a more obvious argumentative pattern. The purpose of the argument nature in this unit

is to prepare the reader to anticipate the reconciliation of the tension that has been building since Peter first jumps out of the boat to swim to Jesus (v. 7).

### JOHN 21:20–25

The third unit focuses on Peter's inquiry about the unnamed disciple and the fate of this unnamed disciple. The progression texture analysis in the last narrative unit shows an expansion from Jesus and Peter to now include an unnamed disciple who is following along after them on the walk. Peter invites the disciple to join the discussion. However, Jesus changes the word pattern focus from *love* to a focus on mission with the keywords *follow me* and *die*. Jesus does not disclose any information, instead draws the focus back on Peter's and the mission Jesus has for Peter. The unit closes with the disciple identifying himself as John and proclaiming that more could be written about Jesus.

In conclusion, John, the narrator presents the narrative as a conversation with Jesus with the seven disciples, Jesus with Peter, and Jesus with the unnamed disciple (we know by content to be John). Why does the narrator focus so much on Peter and Jesus? It seems the narrator is summarizing the gospel and wanted to bring some closure to Peter and Jesus, while at the same time clarifying what Jesus said about him, the unnamed disciple. Jesus did not say John would live forever, just that it is of no concern to Peter.

John is building a story of remembering, remembering Jesus' miracle with the fish and bread, remembering Peter's three denials of Jesus, remembering the rumors about the unnamed disciple. The remembering stories come through in the form of questions allowing the reader to ponder and answer the question. The narrator is using John 21:1–25 as closing arguments convincing the reader of the trustworthiness of the whole book, by referencing back to earlier events that parallel the events taking place in these verses.

### REMEMBERING THE PAST

Some might think it is best to overlook the conflict or avoid it. Lencioni (2012) addressed this directly, "Avoiding conflict creates problems even beyond boring meetings and poorly vetted decisions" but the anxiety and tension can "transfer it in far greater quantities to larger groups of people

throughout the organization they're supposed to be serving" (p. 40). This is consistent with the work of Sande and Johnson (2015) who wrote, "Encouragement to speak up to others about their sins appears frequently in Scripture. Jesus says, for example, 'if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault' (Matthew 18:15)" (p. 73). Conflicts should be worked through so they can be resolved and not avoided. Avoiding only creates more problems down the road.

When dealing with a conflict it is important to start with remembering the past because trust has been broken. Lewicki and Tomlinson (2014) proposed, "Trust is often the first casualty in conflict. If trust makes conflict resolution easier and more effective, eruption of conflict usually injures trust and builds distrust" (p. 126). If team members or leaders and followers do not trust each other, how can the work of the organization be accomplished? If can't and the organization will suffer if trust is not restored.

Burge (2000) identified in John 21 two subjects within the passage, the apostolic mission of the church and restoration of Peter. The apostolic mission refers to the first calling of Peter to follow Jesus to be "fishers of humans" when he first met him and the disciples in John 1:35–43. In John 21, the apostolic mission of the church is "symbolized not only by the great catch of fish but by Peter's private conversation with Jesus" (p. 581). The second subject identified by Burge in this text is "Peter's restoration. Jesus sees in this fallen disciple genuine interest in him but predicts Peter will follow Jesus even in a death that will glorify God (21:19)" (p. 582). So, the restoration of Peter and the other disciples involves remembering the past as Burge writes, "Jesus must get their attention by evoking an old memory" (p. 596). Jesus knew he had to deal with Peter's and the other disciple's actions while offering forgiveness to Peter and to allow Peter to forgive himself. Burge imagines, "The last time Peter stood over a charcoal fire, he denied Jesus (18:18). Now Jesus makes him stand over another charcoal fire (21:9) and with it, review old memories and remove them" (p. 596). Yukl and Mahsud (2010) listed the first guideline for flexible and adaptive leaders when facing a crisis is to "Learn to recognize early warning signs of an impending crisis that can affect your organization; avoid the common tendency to ignore or discount these warning signs" (p. 86).

*Principle One: In restoring relationships the leader needs to initiate the conversation by focusing on the common past before the conflict to start the process of reestablishing trust with the other person but most not be afraid to address the conflict.*

## ACKNOWLEDGING THE HURT

The three narrative units of John 21 show how Peter was withdrawing from his friends and Jesus. He had returned to his prior occupation of fishing. His friends, the disciples, joined him in the fishing boat. Jesus takes the initiative to seek out Peter and the disciples and guides the restoration through conversation. But seeking him out and remembering the past is not enough. Leaders need to acknowledge the hurt caused by the conflict. Lewicki and Tomlinson (2014) offered this advice in rebuilding trust, “If possible, each person responsible for a trust violation or act of distrust should apologize and give a full account of the reasons for the trust violation” (p. 128).

Jesus is asking Peter to acknowledge the hurt caused by his actions when he asks, “Do you love me?” three times in John 15–19. Jesus is not condemning Peter nor is he overlooking the denials, he is acknowledging the event while showing love. Jesus is still in control of the conversation with Peter, confronting Peter, and acknowledging Peter’s failure. Shepherd (2010) proposed that through interplay with the Greek words, Jesus is calling Peter to realize a deeper, self-sacrificial type of love:

Thus, while Jesus’ three questions may well signal his intention to rehabilitate Peter following the latter’s three denials, Peter’s own continuing failure to grasp the kind of love that Jesus demands results in Jesus’ final and most pointed attempt, “Feed my sheep” (*βόσκει τὰ πρόβατά μου*), to evoke in Peter a consciousness of the self-sacrificial love (imagined in Ch. 10, eucharistically illustrated in Ch. 13, and exemplified in the crucifixion) to which Peter is being called (p. 791).

Shepherd’s summary of the conversation between Jesus and Peter is also a reminder of how John describes Jesus coming in *grace* and *truth* (John 1). John 21 gives a clear example of Jesus using *grace* and *truth* with Peter on the beach. Jesus is engaging Peter and presenting a model of interaction with others based on acknowledging the hurt of past actions (truth) while offering forgiveness (grace) for those actions. John 21 reminds every reader that forgiveness is available even to deniers of Jesus. As Burge (2000) stated, “The work of the church can only go forward when we are unburdened of our destructive memories through the gracious forgiveness of God” (p. 596).

Scott (2017) developed a framework to balance two concepts of caring personally (grace) and challenge directly (trust). In creating her four-box concept, she names the concept of in the upper right box, Radical

Candor. She writes, “‘Radical Candor’ is what happens when you put ‘Care Personally’ and ‘Challenge Directly’ together” (p. 9). It is the balance of grace and truth that Jesus demonstrated in John 21. Jesus cares personally for each disciple and especially Peter and John. Then Jesus challenges directly Peter, acknowledging his betrayal but restoring him through love. Scott stated, “Radical Candor works only if the other person understands that your efforts at caring personally and challenging directly are delivered in good faith” (p. 16). Jesus having built and trust and relationship with the disciples over three years could then be honest in his restoration of the disciples while also loving them deeply.

*Principle Two: Leaders lead with grace and truth when confronting a broken relationship. Truth acknowledges the hurt caused and grace assumes the best in the other person.*

### LEADING WITH LOVE

Leading with love implies a level of forgiveness by the one offended. If the one offended has not worked through their own emotions and hurt of the conflict it will be hard for reconciliation to take place. Sande and Johnson (2015) state, “Forgiveness is how you move from merely solving a problem to repairing a relationship. It’s the means of finding lasting solutions and enduring peace” (p. 87). Jesus’ actions in John 21 shows he has forgiven Peter and the disciples because He seeks them out. This event is the third post-resurrection sighting in the book of John (Burge, 2000). Jesus then draws Peter aside and begins asking him three times if Peter loves Jesus. Beasley-Murray (1987) emphasize the key point:

The one issue Jesus must clarify with Peter is his relationship to him after the debacle in the High Priest’ court; the sole element of that relationship concerns Jesus’ love, for without it all else is vain (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1–3) (p. 405).

Lee (2017) added an interesting element to his exchange by proposing there is a tonal difference in the Greek words for love that Jesus uses verse Peter’s word:

In the conversation in John 21, Simon Peter is being formal and polite. He draws back from using Jesus’s plain word, which might imply a certain familiarity. This does not mean that he loves any less, only that he feels unable to express it so directly (p. 29).



According to Lee, Jesus uses a less formal, more familiar word for love, expressing a deeper relationship, while Peter kept a more formal attitude. As Lee concludes, “More likely the compiler of this Gospel, John, introduced the subtle detail of Peter’s choice of word to portray Peter’s respectful attitude to Jesus” (p. 30). Either way, Jesus is pursuing Peter in love and wants to reestablish Peter’s love for him. When we see to restore a relationship or resolve a conflict, do we lead with love? Do we lead with a love that does not overlook the offense, but offers forgiveness for the offense?

*Principle Three: Leaders must forgive the offense in their heart first before they can seek to restore the broken relationship in a loving way. But once the relationship is restored, leaders do not keep bringing it up but allow the relationship to start fresh from that point. It takes time to rebuild the trust, but the subject is not held over another person’s head.*

## REFOCUSING ON THE MISSION

After Jesus has restored Peter, he reminds him of the bigger mission. Northouse (2016) stated the adaptive leader need to provide direction, “by providing direction, the leader helps people feel a sense of clarity, order, certainty, reducing the stress people feel in uncertain situations” (p. 267). Jesus is not just interested in restoring Peter and the disciples, but He wants to recommission them to the mission He called them to. As Burge (2000) commended, “Peter—and each of us—is called to embrace the body of Christ, to love it, to tend it, and to protect it” (p. 598). Peter is being restored to live a life glorifying God even in death. Death is not the focus of the passage, but Jesus is reminding Peter and the disciples they are part of a bigger mission of the church. Referring to the catch of fish at the beginning of the chapter, Burge writes:

The miraculous catch of fish is no doubt a symbol as well as a surprise. Jesus is still the disciples’ champion, aiding them in the struggle of their labors. But more, he wants to direct their work, and with this help, they will find catches beyond their wildest belief (p. 594). The mission is the reason for the restoration of a broken relationship. Jesus still had a plan and purpose for Peter, and we need to see restoration as also having a plan and purpose for the greater mission of our organization.

*Principle Four: The leader must keep the vision of the mission of the organization as the focus so once the broken relationship is restored there is a renewal toward the common goal.*

## SUMMARY

From this brief interaction with the inner textual analysis of John 21:1–25, we see Jesus dealing with the disciples who fled during his arrest and specifically with Peter who denied Jesus three times. The inner textual analysis shows that Jesus is the center of John 21; he is directing the disciples and calling them to experience him anew. However, Jesus is doing more than interacting with the disciples, he is walking Peter and the disciples through a process of restoring a broken relationship after a conflict with the themes of remembering the past, acknowledging the hurt, leading with love, and refocusing on the mission. From these four principles of leadership developed:

- **Principle 1:** In restoring relationships the leader needs to initiate the conversation by focusing on the common past before the conflict to start the process of reestablishing trust with the other person but most not be afraid to address the conflict.
- **Principle 2:** Leaders lead with grace and truth when confronting a broken relationship. Truth acknowledges the hurt caused and grace assumes the best in the other person.
- **Principle 3:** Leaders must forgive the offense in their heart first before they can seek to restore the broken relationship in a loving way. But once the relationship is restored, leaders do not keep bringing it up but allow the relationship to start fresh from that point. It takes time to rebuild the trust, but the subject is not held over another person's head.
- **Principle 4:** The leader must keep the vision of the mission of the organization as the focus so once the broken relationship is restored there is a renewal toward the common goal.

Flexible and adaptive leaders need follow these principles as Yukl and Mahsud (2010) state “Finally, to be flexible and adaptive in a world full of change and uncertainty is difficult and stressful and leaders need to have a high level of commitment to do what is necessary and ethical” (p. 91) especially when dealing with conflict.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How have you handled conflict in the past? Was the relationship restored?
2. How have you seen unresolved conflict create anxiety that has affected your team?
3. Why is it important to restore trust by remembering the past at the start of the process of reconciliation?
4. How hard is it for you to forgive someone who has offended you? Why is forgiveness the key to leading with love in the reconciliation process?
5. How can you as a leader ensure you do not dwell on past mistakes when you have a conflict with a team member?
6. How can you practice grace and truth in dealing with your team members?
7. Why is ending with a call to refocusing on the mission so important for moving forward after a conflict?

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