

Knot A Leader

by Carol Duerksen

MATERIALS AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Copies of the story found at the end of this session or in the Fall 2007 issue of *With* magazine.
- 2 Newsprint and marker.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS

Play the game "Knots".

Instructions:

- 1 Form groups with at least 6 people and no more than 10, and have those people form a circle.
- 2 Everyone joins hands with someone across from them (but they can't join both hands with the same person).
- 3 Without letting go of each other's hands, untangle yourselves so that you form a circle again.

Hints:

- After you join hands and before you start to untangle, have one person squeeze the hand in his/her right hand. Then have each person continue this down the line until the person that started it gets their hand squeezed. If not everyone got their hand squeezed then there is going to be more than one circle.
- Set a short time limit and make it competitive between the groups. . This will "force" leaders to emerge from the groups.

CONNECT WITH THE STORY

Read the story "Footsteps through Feuds to Friends."

Discuss:

- What are the "knots" in this story?
- What did Jordan do to untangle the knots?

- How was Jordan a leader?
- Make a list of the “knotty” situations in your community. How about your church? What are the things that get everybody all tied up and frustrated with each other?

REFLECT

Look at the list of “knotty” situations. Can you as a class give leadership in any of them? Can you help lead people out of the things that have them tied up? Choose one of the situations and brainstorm about what you could do. Make a list of all ideas...even those that seem impossible. Sometimes it takes a crazy idea to make an impact.

RESPOND

As a class, make plans to take some specific “footsteps through feuds” with one or more of the situations you discussed. What is the miracle you could never have dreamed of? For Jordan, it was to have friends from both public and private schools at his graduation. What can you do to help make a “miracle” happen?

Close with a “sports huddle” where you all put a hand into the middle of the group and pray together. Finish the prayer with the words “Let’s Go with God!”

“FOOTSTEPS THROUGH FEUDS TO FRIENDS”

By Jordan Thomas*

As I walk down the aisle in my cap and gown, I scan the crowd through the corners of my eyes. Standing there with tears of joy and love, the families and friends of my classmates have gathered here to celebrate our achievements. As my steps lead me closer to my seat, I notice my parents standing to my left and my friends standing in the bleachers to my right.

My friends are gathered in what seems like a small cove in the vast, engulfing sea of people. I always knew they would come to support me, and as I saw them standing there, I finally realized the truth that I had been subconsciously suppressing. What I will cherish most about my graduation is not the scholarships I’ve been awarded, not the gold cord of the National Honor Society draped over my shoulder, not even the diploma I will hold in my hands. What I will cherish most is the work I feel I’ve done for my community, symbolized not by an award or certificate but by that group of friends standing together. Maybe nobody will recognize it, but I believe I’ve started a movement.

I live in a community with two high schools: one public and one private. And although I believe an overwhelming majority of the residents here are Christians, there is an undeniable animosity between the schools that has split our community apart. Imagine for a moment knowing that not

a single student can name at least five people who attend the other school in a small town. It is heart-wrenching and inexcusable. I wanted to do something, but I didn't know what.

When I was in grade school and attending the public school, I decided to get to know several kids from Menno Heights*, the private school, because I thought they were cool people. That went fine. But then I entered junior high.

It's at the junior high level that the harsh feelings first arise and then continue into adulthood. Junior high was the scariest time for me simply because no one older than me in high school accepted anyone from Menno Heights. And to protect myself from persecution, I kept my friendships with them hidden from even my closest classmates.

For two years I befriended, in secret, students who attended Menno Heights. For two years I witnessed the bitterness from both sides, and I hated it. I couldn't help but ask myself why: What started all the animosity that has spread over three generations? But everyone I asked had different answers. No one seemed to remember what really had triggered it, nor did they care to remember. I realized that all I could do at the time was endure the hatred.

Once I was in high school, and more secure with myself, I began to openly express my friendships. At first my classmates were a bit uneasy—I did, after all, stand up for the Menno Heights kids whenever I could—but they soon became accustomed to the idea of me actually liking the private-schoolers. Eventually the entire school accepted my friendships as no big deal. All my fears of oppression were now behind me—I was free! And as I got older, I became bolder with my friendships.

At one point, my Menno Heights friends started asking me to transfer to their school. And honestly, I wanted to. I had spent so much time throughout the years with them. And there is a unique atmosphere there that I wanted to be a part of—a feeling of security that really enticed me—something that isn't present at the public school. But my parents said no, and I was forced to attend a school where I really didn't want to be. Even though my parents didn't allow me to transfer, they couldn't stop my friendships.

The most drastic thing I did was at the beginning of my senior year. I joined the Menno Heights soccer team. The entire community was flabbergasted—this was a taboo that called for my ostracism. Soccer is the private school's sport, and football is the public school's sport; and no one has ever dared to cross that boundary ... until I did. To play soccer for Menno Heights, I threw away my five years of cross-country experience at the public school and all hope for any sports scholarships.

What surprised me the most was that no one did anything. Everyone just continued living their lives like nothing had happened. This time I was flabbergasted, but relieved. I was allowed to play the sport I love more than any other, and to this day the only way I can explain it was that my constant association with Menno Heights through the years was paying off.

Is there still enmity in our community? Of course, but it is much less than what I remember it being. Recently I have realized that not being able to transfer to the private school was probably the best thing that could've happened. I think I influenced everyone in the community. Many of the students in both schools have relinquished their hatred of one another. We now attend each

others' sporting events, school plays, and music concerts—something that 10 years ago would have sent parents into a rage. And when I look at the grades below me now, I know that I can name many students who have befriended students of the other school. Finally, I feel as if I'm not alone in this movement.

Please understand, I don't consider myself the first, the one who started it all. Instead, I think I have become somewhat of a leader, and as a leader I have left my example before the community. I can only pray that they will continue to follow it so that when I return, I will see a different, more unified, community.

My footsteps through the years bring me here, to graduation. But they have brought my friends here too, to the gymnasium of the public school—friends from both the public and private schools. That is the miracle I never could have dreamed of when I was younger. I feel I'm living in a fantasy world, where anything can happen. But everything is real, and I am graduating here and now. My friends look back at me with smiles on their faces and in their eyes, and suddenly I don't feel so alone walking down that aisle.

I'm graduating now and moving on. I hope I was able to soften the hearts of those in our community, and that with time, there will be peace and unity. Only time can tell, but I can wait.

* Names have been changed.