CROSSROADS
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The Generation Gap

Christian Church is one of the oldest churches in the city and many of its members experienced tough times under the former communist regime. Some of them spent time in prison. All of them struggled one way or another and are grateful that those times have past.

Pastor Adamu leads Christian Church and himself went through these difficulties and imprisonment. Not surprisingly, he often preaches about how God carries His people through the storm and that we should sing in our sufferings. His sermons often draw on examples from the Old Testament and focus on "the God who rescues us in our distress." Much less frequently he preaches on the grace of Jesus Christ, or the work of the Holy Spirit.

The choir is made up mainly of younger people, the children of older members who grew up in the church, but who largely missed out on the experience of the communist years. Although they hear stories about all that their parents went through, they are tired of sermons that focus on suffering and perseverance. They are also tired of singing the same hymns in worship.

Choir members meet to rehearse on Saturday afternoons. After practice, they usually linger to share with each other about the breakthroughs they have experienced in their spiritual lives and their conviction that the Holy Spirit renews and heals us. Many of them want to express this joy and certainty in God's personal care in the way they worship. They would like for the music to be updated to include the modern songs they hear in other churches. Many of these young believers experience the inner movement of the Spirit when they sing and they have begun to express this through the way they move, even dance, during the Sunday worship.

The Elders and Pastor Adamu are appalled by this, as are many older congregation members. To put an end to it, Adamu decided to attend the Saturday afternoon choir practice and give the young people guidance.
When practice was finished, the Choir Director, Tadesse (if you are a woman playing this role, your name is "Helen"), thanked Adamu for coming to their practice. Then Tadesse (Helen) spoke about how God's grace is expressed through his Holy Spirit, how He wants to bless those who depend on Him, and that Christian worship should be an expression of their gratitude for God's love. "We need to change the way we worship," he said.
Adamu listened to this with increasing impatience. He told Tadesse (Helen) that he was young, that when he had lived as long as Adamu and other leaders he would understand how God's grace is most fully expressed in times of suffering. "You young people can sing about "joy in Jesus" because you have been spared the trials we experienced." He also told them there would be no change in the music and that the choir was expected to "behave" when it sang in front of the congregation. Tadesse (Helen) and other choir members were disappointed with his response.

Adamu shared what he had heard with the Elder Board when they met on Monday evening and recommended that Tadesse (Helen) be removed. The Board agreed and decided to replace him with an older member more sympathetic to Adamu's and the Elders' views.

Tadesse (Helen) was hurt and angry, not only by the decision of the Elders, but by the way in which he had been treated. He had not been provided with an opportunity to defend himself, or to share with either Pastor Adamu or with the Board some of the music he and his choir colleagues wanted to incorporate into worship. Tadesse talked with choir members and others in the congregation who supported change. They are discussing whether they should leave Christian Church and worship elsewhere.

This news caused great turmoil in Christian Church. Many of the Elders have children who are either choir members, or who might follow Tadesse (Helen) to another Church. They discussed how to respond. At first, there was a strong sentiment that the younger generation should be told to pack their bags and leave. But, as they considered the impact this would have on the Church, they began to have second thoughts. After a time of prayer, Pastor Adamu said, "I think I need to sit down with Tadesse (Helen), just the two of us. I would like to see if we can avoid this break." The other Elders approved.

Tadesse (Helen) has also been having second thoughts. He and others in his generation grew up in Christian Church. Although they feel the Church needs to change, Tadesse (Helen) also feels an obligation to not just walk away without a serious attempt to have his voice and the voice of other younger people be heard. When Adamu's secretary called to ask if he would meet with Adamu in private to discuss matters and see whether they couldn't avoid a show-down, Tadesse (Adamu) agreed.

You have been asked to serve as a Conflict Coach by either Pastor Adamu or by Tadesse (Helen). They know that you have been through training in how to respond biblically to conflict and, with so much at stake, both Adamu and Tadesse (Helen) want to make sure their time together is as productive as possible.