

What do we do after we agree to disagree?

A path to Peace & Holiness John 17:20-26
2 Samuel 15; 16:15-23; 17:1-14, 23.

Experiences with mediators – usually get the fight to stop, but then what? This is often when intentional interim pastors are called in.

There was a man, who would not agree to disagree. He had a high position in a government administration. He was considered wise. He was called the king's counselor. (I Chron 27:33) We are told that the counsel of this man, "was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God." (2 Samuel 16:23) So the king listened to him. And he was considered so smart, that when a rebel led an attempted coup against the government, the rebel leader also sought out and considered this man's advice.

We don't know a lot about this man and how he got so wise. We do know he came from the town of Giloh, near Hebron. (Joshua 15:51). We know he was a descendent of Caleb, the faithful spy who insisted that the former slaves of Egypt could take over the Promised Land with God's help. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, Caleb was the guy who asked to be given the land where the giants lived – and he conquered it. So, this wise man came from a well known and respectable lineage.

It's possible that Abigail introduced this wise man to her second husband, King David. We think the wise man was her first husband's brother. So, when David was wandering the land as a fugitive from King Saul, and married Abigail, he met this wise man and probably started a friendship that lasted many years.

Also, this wise man was the father of Eliam, one of the 30 so called mighty men, part of the King David's bodyguard. (2 Samuel 23:34).

The Bible only mentions this wise man in three different places. But his life was intertwined with King David from the time David was a fugitive in the Hebron area, & crowned king, to the time of the death of David's son, Absalom.

Eliam was the father of Bathsheba. (2 Sam 11:3) So it is probable that the wise man of our story, was, Bathsheba's grandfather. (2 Samuel 15:34) Ahitophel is his name. (spell it)

Plus, when David saw Bathsheba on the roof top, it's possible that Ahitophel, David's confidant and a person he trusted, was sent to find out who Bathsheba was. (2 Samuel 11:3) After all when someone is committing adultery, most people tend to want to keep it quiet.

So, it's very probable, King David married Ahitophel's brother's Nabal's wife – Abigail, after Nabal died. Ahitophel had a son named Eliam, father of Bathsheba. David caused his grandson-in law, Uriah, Bathsheba's husband to be killed in battle. Then David married Bathsheba, Ahitophel's granddaughter.

So, when Absalom, David's son, led a revolt against David, Ahitophel, sided with Absalom. Ahitophel had plenty of reason to do so. Here are the seeds of betrayal that years later became the motivation to turn on David and join Absalom. Grievance piled on top of grievance.

It seems grandfather Ahitophel carried grudges for years and David never knew it. Its possible Psalm 41 was written during Absalom's revolt, and David laments, (vs 9) "Mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me."

Notice that Jesus quoted this verse in speaking of Judas the betrayer at the last supper, who like Ahitophel, turned against the one who entrusted him with responsibility. (John 13:18)

When Absalom started his revolt, "he sent for Ahithophel, the Gilonite, David's counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so, the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom's following kept on increasing." (2 Sam. 15:12)

When King David fled from Jerusalem, Ahithophel was so respected that when "David had been told, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom," he prayed, "LORD, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness." (31) In

II Samuel 15:34, we discover that David sent Hushai to be Absalom's counselor, with the main purpose of, "frustrating Ahithophel's advice." So, David was afraid of Ahithophel.

In consolidating power, Absalom asked, "Give us your advice. What should we do?" Ahithophel answered, "Sleep with your father's concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. This will be obnoxious to your father, and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute." So, Absalom did." (2 Samuel 16:21)

Next Ahithophel advised Absalom to immediately go and attack David while he and his forces were disorganized. But Absalom did not follow this advice. Scripture says, "For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom." (2 Samuel 17:14)

When Ahithophel saw his advice to Absalom to attack David immediately and kill him, was rejected, he knew that David would come out the victor and there was no future for him. He did not wait for the outcome of the rebellion. Instead he went home, related the events to his family, went into an inner room, hanged himself, and the family buried him. (2 Sam 17:23) Scripture and the historian Josephus record this.

For being a smart man, Ahithophel made an inexcusable error of judgment, in the hopes of getting vengeance on David for the seduction of Bathsheba, the killing of Uriah, and possibly marrying his sister-in-law. Sadly, he never lived to see his great grandson, Solomon take the throne. Or the splendor of Solomon's realm.

I share this sad story for three reasons. **First**, to help us recognize that sometimes we must dig a little and do some detective work to get a fuller picture of a Bible story. And bad Bible stories often lead us to understand ourselves.

Second, hanging on to a grudge or hurt, may lead you and me to disaster. More than once I've said to myself and others, "Let it go, move on from it, learn from it, forgive it, and go improve the relationship.

Think about Ahithophel when you have a grudge and want to get even. Ask God's help to take the root of bitterness out of your heart, for it will ruin you, and contaminate those around you. And if your descendants nurse that hurt - pain, grievance, injustice, disaster awaits. It is just a matter of time. This attitude provides an opening for the devil and manipulators to use. After all - scripture tells us, the sins of the parents fall onto the third & fourth generation.

Hebrews 12:14-15 instructs us that we are to "Make every effort to live in peace with every one and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." If you think this is just Biblical advice for people who lived in the past, I have had to work with, fortunately only a few, generational grudges have affected church families and conflicts.

If you have a grudge, go and make peace with the one you are at odds with. Forgiveness is a verb, not a feeling. It is something we must do, not something we will feel. Peace & joy comes after we have gone & forgiven the one we were in conflict with. Whether they accept or not, once you have forgiven, you get the peace and joy of God in your soul. As the wisdom from Hebrews tells us, this is the way to holiness, which leads to being able to see the Lord.

And the **third** purpose of this story is to follow up on the Agreeing to Disagreeing in Love theme we looked at in June of 2018. When I came here six years ago, I noticed we have posters up about this theme. So, we looked at what to do in Thought, In Action, and in Life. This is great advice, full of scripture to help us live in peace and holiness. But I've always wondered, what do we do when there are times a decision must be made, or should be made, yet we cannot agree on an action.

So, I want to remind us of that paper, Agreeing to Disagree, and those scriptures, as well as some other ideas that do give us some positive things to do, so we are not like Ahithophel.

First, Pray. Prayer might be the most under rated spiritual tool we have at our disposal. It helps us express ourselves. It helps us expose our inner thoughts to ourselves. It slows us down in our thinking and acting. It ties in with the advice to count to 10 before responding, or wait 24 hours before sending that email or tweet. Most of all we tap into the Holy Spirit and open ourselves up to holy guidance. Prayer is where we start “Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph. 4:3) I suspect we can say, no prayer, no peace and obviously little holiness. Prayer is a great tool to help us know ourselves.

In my experience, we can be better at making decisions around prayer. And we can improve our praying together. I remember a seminar where the speaker was a top fortune 500 business consultant telling us this story. He had been called in by a denominational leadership group to help them move beyond agreeing to disagree. They needed to make some decisions. So, he began the first session by asking, “How many of you believe God tells you what to do?” All hands went up in the air. Then the consultant said, “If God tells each of you what to do, why am I here?” He had their attention. Then he had them listening, talking, and praying – productively together.

In my experience, it is important to maintain another habitual P. That P is **praise**. When I am asked to help a congregation in conflict or that is simply treading water or is stuck, I’ve noticed that people are not offering much praise. Either to Jesus or to each other.

They may not be grumbling or complaining, but they tend not to be praising or thanking. They get over focused on themselves, tradition, their good living, & going through the motions – but forget that all good comes from God. Church life flourishes with committed people.

Everyone needs praise, encouragement, thanks, recognition, and uplifting. Including Jesus. All the time! I remember 4 wonderful sisters, who lived together and were never married. They were as close to holy saints as can be. But in

church they never smiled. Teaching Sunday School, Bible study, and worship were serious business. I never heard them thank anyone or express appreciation to anyone. After a few years, I felt safe enough to ask them why they did not smile when they sang hymns they loved. They told me a sad story - they were raised that way. Church was serious business, best done with a frown of concentration on their faces.

I knew they could smile. I knew they could laugh. We had fun playing dominos together. We laughed as we ate together. It was fun to hear them brag about their many nieces and nephews – some of whom I knew. But when it came to church – expressions of happiness, joy, thanks, and praise were verboten! Not allowed.

I think individuals and congregations run into trouble when we do not pray, openly pray together, and praise God or each other. Prayer helps keep us honest. Praise is the lubrication we need in all our relationships.

Third, I’ve noticed that a sign of congregations in trouble, or that trouble is brewing, is when participants are not **playing** together. Playing or partying is a term I use for potlucks, picnics, hanging around together, any kind of social activity. It is automatic that you can tell when a congregation is beginning to stress over some thing. People stop just having fun together. One way to measure this point is – how long & how often and how many stick around after church?

To avoid getting to the point of agreeing to disagree, & to get beyond agreeing to disagree, people and congregations need to increase their prayer, praise & play. To manage and decrease conflict between families over several generations, members need to pray, praise, and play.

And a fourth way to measure, improve & keep up with congregational health is **participate**. One of the first signs of an Ahithophel like spirit is people withhold their ministry or offer-ings. They stop being dependable. Instead of having a generous encouraging involved spirit, with persistent involvement, they hold grudges, grumble, stop giving, and reduce participation.

Congregations may be doing all the steps and taking the scriptural advice we studied in the Agreeing to Disagree ideas, but these four elements are also crucial. Even more – they are like first aid. Or better yet – preventative medicine. The real benefit is – church is a fun healthy attractive spiritual place to be. No one wants to part of a group of sourpusses, back biters, and people who only talk in the parking lot. Unity, peace, joy, & holiness is a witness.

And there is one other key to making every effort to live in unity, but it is the word **probing**. We need to be curious, inquisitive, and questioning. We desire deeply to try to comprehend, how we feel, act, and speak. As well as other people. It is wanting to understand better what and why events occurred – so we can do better and rejoice that we did well.

I have found that people in conflict have lost all curiosity in how relationships went bad. They often are in their corners, ready to fight or at a minimum, just silent & stewing. This prevents relationships from healing and the group going forward in healthy wise ways. We must cultivate a curious inquisitive attitude as we realize, **“I never thought of it that way.”**

That’s the name of a great book. I ask you to read it and wrestle with it. You can get it from the library. **I never thought of it that way**, by Monica Guzman. She challenges us to learn:
How to ask what you really want to know (even if you’re afraid to).

How to grow smarter from even the most tense interactions, online or off.

How to cross boundaries and find common ground—with anyone.

We often think we have the answers, but we need to be asking a lot of questions. We need to be open to hearing & learning other people’s ideas. Monica in her personal search, about how to work with differences of opinions, including with her own family, discovered the most eye-opening tool is, we are **not** using: our own built-in capacity to be curiosity & probe. The book subtitle is: How to have fearlessly curious conversations in dangerously divided times.

I think the times we live in are challenging us to really work at peace. I predict the cultural, social, religious, and political divides will get worse, here and around the world. Rose and I discovered the importance of probing, curiosity in our first intentional interim. We noticed both sides of the church conflict had all their arguments but no interest or capacity to work to understand the other sides viewpoints. All they wanted was to get the other side to admit they were wrong, & to get the church leadership to condemn them. They all had no curiosity and no desire to probe each other in order to learn.

They did come to a kind of peace. The fighting stopped. But only two people had the guts to explore together how relationships went wrong. They also met with the leadership with curious questions about how they hurt them. But others just backed away from this step of curiosity.

So, we need to really work on going beyond agreeing to disagree, to get to unity as Jesus asks us to. Because decisions sometimes need to be made, not just worked around for us to be witnesses for the Kingdom of God as well to be fully healthy congregations. No decision is a type of decision. And we need to give up vengeance and work at forgiveness.

So, we need to improve our praying, praising, playing, participating, and probing. All this leads to unity as Jesus prayed for his followers. This is not the unity of being nice to each other. It is the state of being united or whole. It is the state of being undivided, being one, in all major values. It is coalescing around Jesus and what he teaches, represents, and models. Christian unity is the result of God bringing together people of differing ethnicities, backgrounds, ideas and social classes into one family by faith in Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Gal. 3:26–28).

The church’s unity - already a spiritual reality, but not yet fully realized - reflects the glorious unity of the Trinity to the effect that a watching world is compelled to believe the truth of the gospel (John 17:11, 20–23; Eph. 4:4–6). At times this takes great effort to listen, defining and facing truth – especially about ourselves, as

well as the biblical meaning of love. But it is something the church at it's best is known for and expected of. So let us not just agree to disagree. May we find ways to live & witness together for the glory of God. Let us go beyond Agreeing to Disagree to praying, praising, playing, participating, and probing. May our neighbors and families say the same about us as this ancient man.

As a third-century man was anticipating death, he penned these last words to a friend: "It's a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people are the Christians - and I am one of them."

Today In The Word, June, 1988, p. 18.