

Luke 10:25-27

²⁵ One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?" ²⁷ The man answered, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

AGREEING TO NOT DISAGREE

Think About...

- ▶ When did you have a conversation with someone where you both "dug in" on your point of view? You know, when you felt like you couldn't (or wouldn't) understand the other's perspective? As a matter of fact, you were determined to not budge from your own stance...
- ▶ When you feel stubborn about your position on something, what is fueling that stubbornness? What is energizing that defiant voice in your head: "I will not be persuaded by anything you say!"?
- ▶ Why is it often so hard to listen to someone whose positions or ideas are so contrary to our own? We want to be respectful, but why do we insist on getting our own thoughts, responses, and ideas out first?

When we feel this "dug in" response welling up inside, it's a signal that we need to take a deep breath and step away from the table...

The Encounter...

U.S. students who can't yet vote are making their voices heard by wearing politically-charged clothing. Two Michigan middle schoolers sued for the right to wear "Let's Go Brandon" sweatshirts at school (the phrase is intended to be an insult to U.S. President Joe Biden). An Iowa high schooler posed next to the state's governor with "I Read Banned Books" emblazoned on his chest (after the Republican governor led a campaign to ban certain books from public libraries and schools). And a Massachusetts seventh grader's clothing proclaims "There are only two genders." Sohali Vaddula, a Texas high school senior, says: "I think it's really important for us to be able to wear political clothing, because it's a way for us to express what we feel and it's our way of sort of putting pressure on—whether it be legislators, policymakers or people in power, to do what fits our needs and what's best for us."

Consider...

We can develop a "soul muscle" that gives us the strength to listen to others without agreeing with them. We can find common ground, common beliefs, and common ideals if we find a way to listen instead of "agreeing to disagree."

- ▶ **When we agree to end a conversation in disagreement, we've also agreed to remain at a point of separation.** And whenever there is space between people, we open the opportunity for that gap to stretch even further.
- ▶ **For example, let's say you're driving on the highway and are trying to maintain a big gap between your car and the car in front of you.** Because of the increased space between your cars, another car veers over to fill up that gap—you have to brake so you can increase the space again. And that original car is much further away now.
- ▶ **This is what happens when we agree to disagree.** We're saying that the gap between us should stay big, leaving room for new information or new assumptions to fill the gap and make the separation even bigger. Agreeing to disagree means we lose the opportunity to connect at the smallest level.

► **So consider this three-step “fitness exercise” to strengthen your capacity to be present to others:**

1. Listen completely until the other person is finished.
2. Rather than challenging or dismissing the entire conversation, focus on one aspect at a time and ask for more clarification or information. For example: “Okay, so you’ve said this... I don’t see it, so tell me more.” Ask the person to explain it differently so you can find a point of intersection that’s agreeable—even if you need to ask the person to give you another example or story to help you understand their degree of thinking.
3. Finally, remember that you don’t have to agree with what the person believes. But you can agree that the person is entitled to their perspective or opinion. Simply say: “I see what you’re saying.” This lets the person know you heard them, and they may be more apt to listen to your perspective in turn.

ASK

WHICH OF THESE SUGGESTIONS RESONATES THE MOST WITH YOU, AND WHY?

Questions for Conversation...

- This young man understood what his faith was asking of him, and he lived by the rules. But he was likely reluctant to budge from his perspective—that’s why he was “testing” Jesus. What’s something you see in Jesus’s response to the man that could help him see things from a new point of view?
- What impact is Jesus hoping to have by first asking the man, “How do you read (see) it” before he answers the man’s question?
- How do you think Jesus’s response to the man impacted the man’s “dug in” response, and why?

On the Way Out...

In our difficult conversations, when both sides feel “dug in,” our goal is to move toward this point of connection: “I hear what you are saying, and here is how it feels to me.” We often don’t acknowledge where the other person is coming from because we are too quick to respond and disagree. *I hear you* leads us to: “Are there any places where we have common concern, where we can find a point of intersection that is agreeable to each of us?” And then we baby-step our way forward with the ultimate hope of reconciliation. If we commit to listening, then finding where we can agree, we can celebrate the win!