

How to engage your political “enemy”

Self-Control

It takes self-control to have conversation about hard things with people we may not agree with. Self-control is listed in Galatians 5 as one part of the fruit of the Spirit. That is, when the Holy Spirit gets to work in us, our ability to practice self-control increases.

Be curious.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ... If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:9-10, 18)

Here’s a list of questions that can help us have genuine love for each other and help us to live peaceably with all:

- What are your hopes for the future that moved you to vote the way you did?
- What are your fears for the future that moved you to vote the way you did?
- What hopes/fears do you have now?
- How can I pray about that with you?

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” (Romans 12:15)

“Let your gentleness be known to all.” (Philippians 4:5)

Be compassionate.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

When the election results are known, some will be elated or relieved, others may be disappointed and upset. It’s important to meet people where they are and let them feel what they feel.

Think about things that can bring us together:

- “How can we pray together for our [this] country?”
- “What good thing can we work for together?”
- “Where’s a great local place that could use our support?”

Be Christ-like.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”
(Philippians 2:3-4)

“Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray for the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”
(Jeremiah 29:7)

When his class reads works by German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer (who was executed for treason against Hitler in WWII), one of our professors invites his students to choose an enemy to pray for daily over the course of the semester. The students are asked to journal about their experience. To a person, the daily prayer for their enemy changes their hearts toward the person.

Jesus himself prayed for his enemies on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Praying that God forgives our enemies (as God forgives us!), is a really good first step.

How can you love those who may be your political ‘enemies’?

Here’s a prayer that can help: →

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
(Matthew 5:43-48)

A PRAYER FOR A NEIGHBOR*

WHO IS BEHAVING LIKE AN IDIOT

Oh Lord, you who commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves,

I confess to you an utter lack of desire

to love my neighbor who is behaving like an idiot.

As much as I am tempted to ask you

“to teach them a lesson”

and “to put them in their place”

and “to give them what-for,”

I ask rather for the seemingly impossible:

that you would perform a miracle in my heart

by the power of your Holy Spirit,

so that I might be freed from bitterness, hatred,

and the oppressive feeling that I live ultimately in an

unfair universe

where neighbors get away with things

that they shouldn’t

and that God remains detached and uncaring.

I pray this in the name of the One

who loves my neighbor and me alike

and who will do right by each of us in the end. Amen.

-- A prayer by David Taylor, a pastor in Houston

*Insert colleague, relative, church member, political leader ... for “neighbor,” if you need to.