

The Importance of Having Friends Who Disagree With Us

As pleasant as it is to have people around us who agree with us, it is probably best that those are not the only people we have in our lives. The ones who disagree with us are often more able to keep us honest. They force us to recognize our ideas are not beyond dispute and our reasoning is not unimpeachable. They ask us questions that might not have occurred to us and if we offer shabby, half-considered responses, they will say so.

I have a good friend Jan Linn I've known for over 25 years who was on a seminary faculty and also started a congregation. I first got to know him when I read one of his books that impressed me. OK, I admit that part of the reason it impressed me was because I had just had a lengthy journal article published on the same subject and we largely agreed. Jan and I corresponded for a while and later both ended up moving to Kentucky where we got to know one another better and we worked on some projects together.

But we don't always agree. And not just on some small stuff. We disagree about some big, important matters as well. And we don't just keep quiet about our disagreements. We argue openly, even in print a time or two where lots of people could see us disagreeing. But we love and respect each other. I value his friendship and when he disagrees with me, I welcome it as an opportunity to learn. He feels the same way.

Recently, another one of his books was published, *A Different Jesus*. But months before it was put into print he sent me a copy of the manuscript to read. He knew for sure I wasn't going to give him a simple, "Amen!" I disagreed with him plenty and sent a lengthy response to his ideas. Of course some of the things he wrote I strongly support. But he wanted me to read his writing so I would point out what I thought were the weaknesses and to offer a case against his position. Later he said, "You made it a better book."

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). I'm a better person and a better thinker for knowing Jan and others like him. I appreciate his integrity, strength and intelligence. I confess that I envy his discipline as a writer, as well. Whether in agreement or disagreement, I trust his good will and I know when he argues with me, he doesn't just try to score points. It is all part of the process of growing together toward greater truth. We are in this together. Even when we disagree about what counts as true we still need to endeavor to "speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25).