

I Have an Idea, But I Need Your Help...

"Let your gentleness be known to everyone... Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."

-Philippians 4 – Selected Verses

The Situation of our World...

In the past year, I have had many conversations with folks both here at David's and beyond our church community about the state of our world. The conversation often circles around to an observation about how polarized our country seems to have become. Sometimes this has caused a rupture in long-standing relationships between friends and even members of the same family.

Our Calling in Christ...

The frequency of these conversations has caused me to ponder what kind of creative response is being asked of me as a follower of Jesus Christ. I name Jesus as the starting point because it seems to me that any creative engagement that builds up the human family in a lasting way must begin with an affirmation of Christ's call to be agents of self-sacrificial love, healing and reconciliation.

This was the core of Jesus' life and ministry and it is the primary calling to any who would claim to be Christian and who would seriously undertake his call of discipleship: to be agents of self-giving, transformational love in the world.

The challenge is that it can be hard to know how to actually engage this life of discipleship. Writing to the Philippians from prison, the Apostle Paul knew about the challenges of living in a culture in which people often misunderstood each other and worked actively to diminish each other. Into that reality he offered the words, I have shared above.

Paul suggests that no matter what, as people of faith, **we must never forget that we have the ability to choose how we will engage and respond to those with whom we differ.** He counsels that our thinking must begin with a foundation of considering that which is most noble, honorable, just. At the core, I believe Paul is offering counsel about the position of our hearts toward each other and toward the world. In other words, can we see in the "other" a beloved child of God? This is no easy task. It requires a discipline of prayer and thinking that must be grounded in a Love (God) that is larger than the "little loves" which often take up residence in our lives.

Now the idea...

The other day, an idea arose as a gift and challenge in my heart that there must be intentional and collaborative ways to build a different kind and quality of conversation in the context of our families and friends, our workplaces and the world, especially with those with whom we may disagree or have differing opinions.

It occurred to me (as I am sure it has to you), that no one arises full grown out of nowhere. Even Jesus, grew in wisdom and stature. That said, might there be a way that we can cultivate conversations in our daily lives that seek to really understand the forming and shaping influences of another person's story? Might this kind of energy help to surface common ground around which the world might be strengthened? This would not be to convince someone that they are wrong or to prove oneself right, but to occasion a different kind of conversation in which all the partners might be changed by the grace of the encounter.

There are many questions that have arisen in my heart (too many to name here). How would such conversations get started? Where would they happen? What tools might I or any of us need to cultivate safe space? How can such a process be developed in a way that feels natural and not forced, yet intentionally happens? What are the best questions that I need to be ready to ask of others and myself when the opportunity arises for such conversations to happen? How can I ready myself to get out of my comfort zone and actually spend more time with folks who think differently from me? What might be the best ways to get such a movement going? These are just starters...

An Invitation to the Understanding Project

I have to tell you that I don't have a clue about how to start a movement, but I feel compelled to throw myself into this and I hope you will be interested too. I also have no idea about the best way to go about this, which is why I need others, like you, to be part of this thing to which I believe Love is calling us. I have chosen the name "Understanding Project" for this effort. It seems to me this captures both the essence of the need and the necessity of intentionality (project: to throw something forward in a planned way). This is not meant to suggest that there will be completion, but rather an intentional ongoing pilgrimage of discovery and healing that will emerge in its own way and time. It arises out of my conviction that this is the kind of life to which Christ calls us. **I need partners to consider how best to do this. I hope you will join me. The first step? Let me know of your interest by emailing me: dave@davidsucc.net.** Then we will gather, pray, dream, act and invite one person at a time to the transformational work to which we have been called. Thanks for considering this. Blessings, Dave