

Faithful Disagreement:

*Building Durable Relationships
with God & Each Other*

A Course in Three Parts
moderated by Tom Gamble & David Ealy



FORUM 101: WEEK 1
“What Does It Mean to Agree?”



DEFINITIONS

agree |ə'grē|

verb (agrees , agreeing , agreed) [no obj.]

1 have the same opinion about something; concur: *I completely agree with your recent editorial* | *we both agreed on issues such as tougher penalties for criminals* | [with clause] : *I agree that consumers are always right* | [with direct speech] : "Yes, it's dreadful, isn't it," she agreed.

- (agree with) approve of (something) with regard to its moral correctness: *I'm not sure I agree with abortion.*

2 (agree to or to do something) consent to do something that has been suggested by another person: *she had agreed to go and see a movie with him.*

- [no obj.] reach agreement about (something), typically after a period of negotiation: *the commission agreed on a proposal to limit imports* | [with obj.] chiefly Brit.: *if they had agreed a price, the deal would have gone through.*

3 (agree with) be consistent with: *your body language does not agree with what you are saying.*

- Grammar have the same number, gender, case, or person as: *the writer made the verb agree with the subject.*

- [usu. with negative] be healthy or appropriate for someone: *she's eaten something that did not agree with her.*

usage: Note the distinction between *agreeing to* something like a plan, scheme, or project and *agreeing with* somebody: *I agree to the repayment schedule suggested; Danielle agrees with Eric that we should all go hiking on Saturday; humid weather does not agree with me.* The construction *agree with* is also used regarding two things that go together: *that story does not agree with the facts; the verb must agree with the noun in person and number.*



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Does Agreeing require someone or something to agree with?

Introductions

It's All about Trust

Over this course, we will be addressing perennial challenges of human relationships as well as our relationship to God. In the end, much of what we experience in relationships boils down to trust: trust in our judgement, trust in another's consistency, even trust in the future, to name a few. With this in mind, a thread that will run through the entire course is trust: how it's established, how it's broken, and how, if possible, it can be healed.

Ground Rules

After some basic, demographic introductions, we will establish a covenant. One thing to realize about how God deals with us is that God doesn't use contracts. A contract, if not honored by even one party, can be broken. A covenant, even if abandoned by one party still stands. Despite the number of times we break covenant with God (to be God's people) God still honors the fact of being our God.

This covenant will consist of things the group offers. It is the responsibility of the group to enforce the covenant and to self-police, that is, to be mindful of our individual adherence to our process. Among the items that may appear on our covenant, these following rules are sacrosanct.

One: Confidentiality. What's said as a part of class is confidential. What's said belongs to the Holy Spirit and the group and is not ours to wield, share or otherwise make use of. We

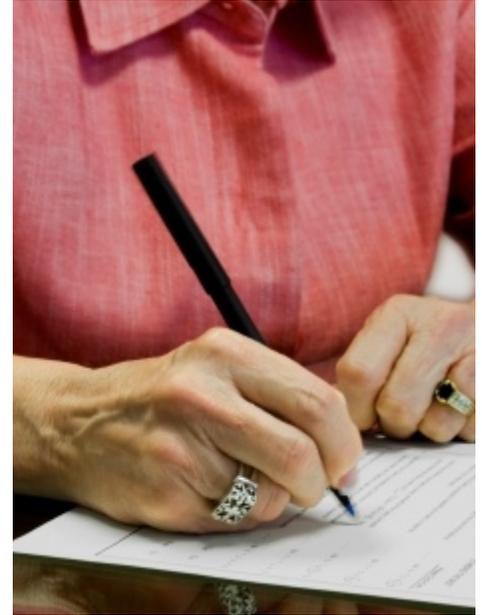
are working to establish a safe learning environment.

Two: Reserve Judgement. We often have far too little information to justify how sure we are of anything, especially what people may or may not mean by things. What is said in the class may come from a variety of places that have no bearing on the class itself. We are dealing in human relationships and that means very tough work in vulnerable spaces.

Three: Speak Up. While every effort will be made to moderate our time for both those quick to speak and those slow to speak, it is everyone's responsibility to participate by speaking. One of the purposes of this course is to *practice* our communication skills and we can't do that if we don't speak.

Four: Listen. While every effort will be made to moderate our time for both those quick to speak and those slow to speak, it is everyone's responsibility to participate by listening. One of the purposes of this course is to *practice* our communication skills and we can't do that if we don't listen.

Five: Pray. One of our conversation partners throughout this experience is God. Prayer, both spoken and silent, must be a part of what we are doing. It is very appropriate (and even encouraged) to ask the group to pause at any given time in order to pray together.



Homework

There is a fair amount of time between classes. This is to facilitate you having time to do the reading assignments and writing exercises. While none of this will be graded, it is to your advantage to have done the assignments. There will, of course, be grace, but the class will be operating *trusting* that you've done your homework!

Facilitators

TOM GAMBLE has led development of self-managing work teams in manufacturing facilities. His contact information is rtgamble122@aol.com or 336-578-3632.

DAVID EALY has studied and practiced pastoral counseling. His contact information is david@hawfieldschurch.org or 336-524-1234.

Overview

James 5:13-16

If any of you are suffering, they should pray. If any of you are happy, they should sing. If any of you are sick, they should call for the elders of the church, and the elders should pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. Prayer that comes from faith will heal the sick, for the Lord will restore them to health. And if they have sinned, they will be forgiven. For this reason, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous person is powerful in what it can achieve.

There are two problems that immediately emerge when trying apply James' advice: do we trust each other enough to really confess and do we trust God enough that we really can heal each other?

The two overarching goals for this course would be to learn skills as a community for building trust and practicing those skill in order to make healing possible.

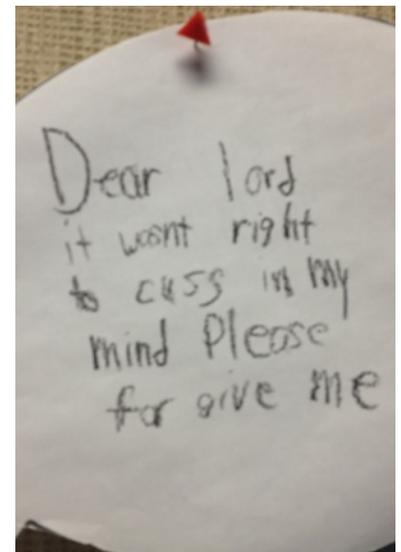
The approach to doing this is to use several sources for reference: the Bible, *Strength to Love* (by Martin Luther King, Jr.), *Faithful Disagreement* (by Frances Taylor Gench), as well as other sources as appropriate for current information on events, issues and techniques.

Forum 101 is an introduction and rehearsal of communication skills, with particular attention paid to "active listening". Ground rules for good communication are established and role playing is enjoined to allow a safe space for reflection and experimentation.

Forum 102 is where "issues" are introduced in order to practice communication skills and Jesus' admonition in Matthew 7:1 against being judgmental. Particular attention is paid to the power of language and the culture of words.

Forum 103 involves learning the skill of both giving and receiving confessions with particular attention paid to our role in the *healing* process.

In all, these are courses that transpire over several weeks a piece. Because of that, the need to train facilitators will grow as participation grows.



Course Schedule

FORUM 101

September 8 @ 3pm Week 1: What does it mean to agree?
September 22 @ 3pm Week 2: What does it mean to disagree?
October 13 @ 3pm Week 3: Trusting what is said.
October 27 @ 3pm Week 4: Trusting what is heard.

FORUM 102

November 10 @ 3pm Week 1: Paying attention to our Filters.
November 24 @ 3pm Week 2: People are different than Computers
December 8 & 22 @ 3pm Weeks 3 & 4: Rehearsing with actual issues.

FORUM 103

January 12 @ 3pm Week 1: Why forgiveness is hard.
January 26 @ 3pm Week 2: Why confession is hard.
February 9 @ 3pm Week 3: Wielding our power to heal.
February 23 & March 9 @ 3pm Weeks 4 & 5: Practicing what we preach.

Semantic Warnings

READ:

The definitions on page 2, paying particular attention to the note about “usage.”

WRITE:

In the spaces below, take time to reflect on each question and to write down examples. Be prepared to share at least one.

What are some examples of things you have agreed TO?

What are some examples of things you have agreed WITH?

What (if anything) is the difference between your two lists?

How do you know if you agree with someone?

How do you know they agree with you?



If I agreed with you,



we would both be wrong.

Being Agreeable v. Agreeing

READ:

The excerpt from *Faithful Disagreement* on the right.

WRITE:

In two or three sentences maximum both whether or not you agree with Gench's premise and why or why not.

Conflict is a perennial reality in the life of the Christian community, and whatever its focus or setting (congregational or denominational), the Bible can help us live more faithfully with our disagreements and more fully into the peace, unity, and purity that is God's gift to us in Jesus Christ. But there is a catch: this requires that we read it. The Bible, to be sure, features prominently in most ecclesial family feuds, given our reverence for it. All parties to a church conflict typically invoke it to justify their own positions. Indeed, many of us are quite accomplished at arguing about the Bible. But ironically, as theologian John Burgess tellingly observes, "Presbyterians are better at asserting the authority of Scripture than at actually opening the Bible"-and I suspect the same holds true for more than a few Lutherans, Methodists, and Episcopalians (not to mention others). As Burgess notes, "The church's appeal to biblical authority is more often rhetorical than real. Our arguments about Scripture frequently expose just how little we really know the Bible itself. We appeal to a select handful of passages to justify our positions but lack the capacity to order Scripture as a whole. We say that the Bible matters but spend remarkably little time actually reading it."

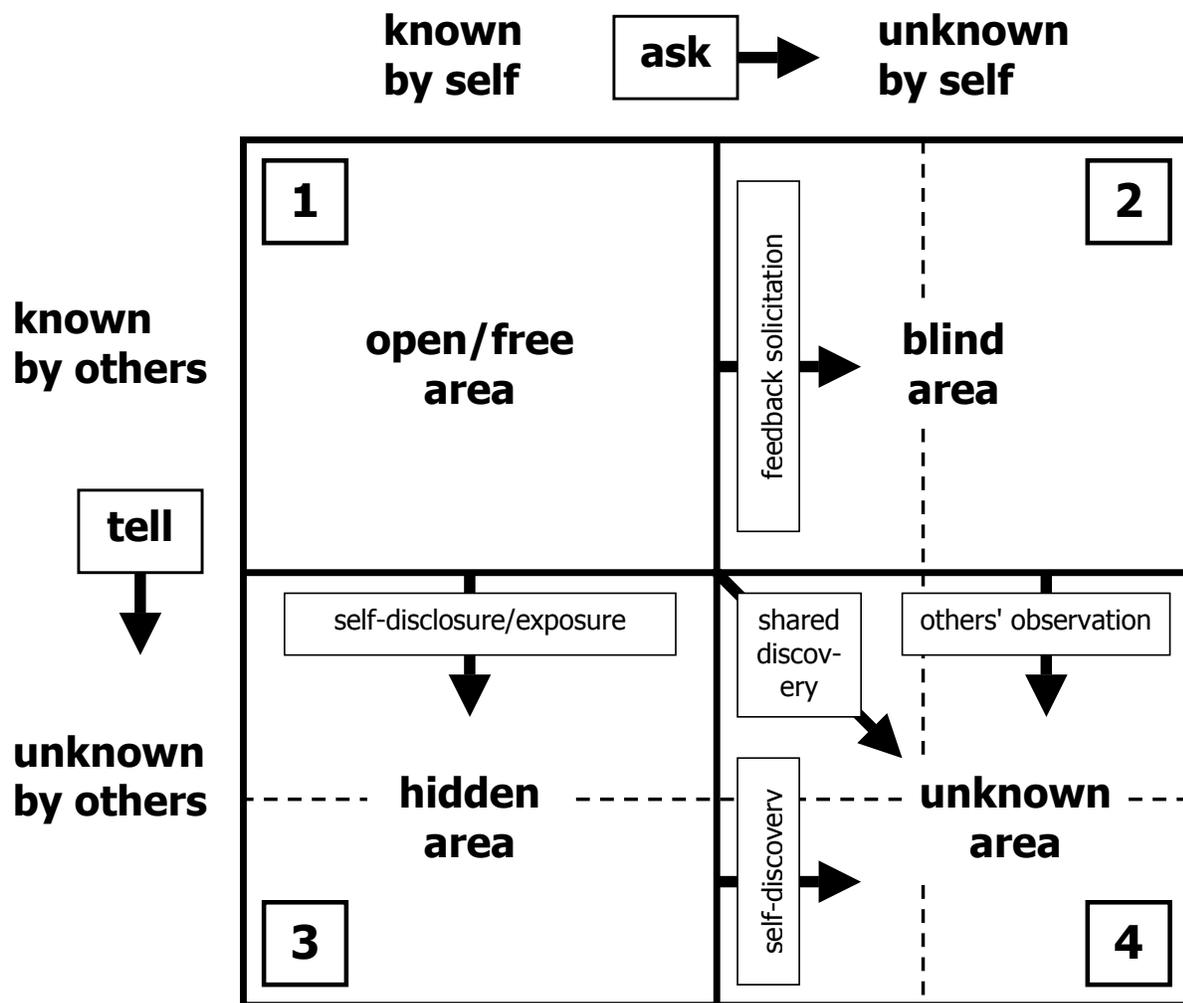
Frances Taylor Gench. *Faithful Disagreement*
from the Introduction

The reality is, our interpretive sense of Scripture is always incomplete. Whether we're talking about ourselves or others, we are not mindful in complete ways of pieces that impinge on our understanding or thinking. This is certainly true of our human interactions as well.

That awkward moment..
When you've already said "what?" three times and still have no idea what the person said, so you just agree.

Being Agreeable v. Agreeing

Johari Window model



© design alan chapman 2001-4 based on [Ingham and Luft's Johari Window concept](#)

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Matthew 18:19

READ:

Matthew 18:19

WRITE:

What is the meaning of this passage?

READ:

Matthew 18:15-22

WRITE:

What is the meaning of this passage?

Matthew 18:19

Again I assure you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, then my Father who is in heaven will do it for you.

Matthew 18:15-22

¹⁵ “If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them when you are alone together. If they listen to you, then you’ve won over your brother or sister. ¹⁶ But if they won’t listen, take with you one or two others so that every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ But if they still won’t pay attention, report it to the church. If they won’t pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector. ¹⁸ I assure you that whatever you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. And whatever you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I assure you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, then my Father who is in heaven will do it for you. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I’m there with them.” ²¹ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said, “Not just seven times, but rather as many as seventy-seven times.”

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Is there a difference between your definitions? What kind of “agreeing” is Jesus referring to: agreeing TO or agreeing WITH?



What Does It Mean to Agree?

WRITE:

How would you explain to a child what the word “Agree” means?

DISCUSS:

In pairs or groups of three to four, discuss a time when you agreed with something you later regretted. As you tell your story pay attention to why you agreed and why you later regretted.

Do you think God has regrets agreeing with us?

Homework:

Read the excerpt from *Strength to Love*. Think about examples when you have put what King is referring to into practice. Does agreeing mean that you go along with everything someone is saying? Does agreeing mean being in lockstep with someone or something? What did it mean for the general populace at the time to agree with the Nazi party in Germany during the Holocaust?

A French philosopher said, “No man is strong unless he bears within his character antithesis strongly marked.” The strong man holds in a living blend strongly marked opposites. Not ordinarily do men achieve this balance of opposites. The idealists are not usually realistic, and the realists are not usually idealistic. The militant are not generally know to be passive, nor the passive to be militant. Seldom are the humble self-assertive, or the self-assertive humble. But life at its best is a creative synthesis of opposites in fruitful harmony. The philosopher Hegel said that truth is found neither in the thesis nor the antithesis, but in an emergent synthesis which reconciles the two.

Jesus recognized the need for blending opposites. He knew that his disciples would face a difficult and hostile world...So he said to them, “Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves [Matthew 10:16].” And he gave them a formula for action, “Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” It is pretty difficult to imagine a single person having, simultaneously, the characteristics of the serpent and the dove, but this is what Jesus expects. We must combine the toughness of the serpent and the softness of the dove, a tough mind and a tender heart.

Martin Luther King Jr. *Strength to Love*
from page 13-14

Practice Makes Perfect

READ:

The Apostles' Creed is recited worldwide and in many languages in many churches.

WRITE:

Do you agree with the Apostle's Creed? Why or Why not? What difference does knowing what the language means or the history behind the document make in your assessment?



I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our
Lord; who was conceived by the Holy
Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered
under Pontius Pilate, was crucified,
dead, and buried; he descended into
hell; the third day he rose again from the
dead; he ascended into heaven, and
sitteth on the right hand of God the
Father Almighty; from thence he shall
come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy
catholic Church; the communion of
saints; the forgiveness of sins; the
resurrection of the body; and the life
everlasting. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed
Book of Confessions

Notes



Notes

