



Near and Now

When My Calling Requires Difficult Choices - Barnabas and Paul When They Part Ways
By Kelly Rayner

Warm-up Question

Think of a time you disagreed with someone. How did it end?



Photo by Sebastian Herrmann on [Unsplash](#)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company

Read [Acts 15:36-41](#)

Bible Story Reflection

It seems like disputes are plenty nowadays. Look on any news channel or social media and you will find plenty of examples. Everyone wants to believe that they are right, that their opinion or view is the correct one. Sometimes it is easier in these moments to walk away from others. While this response is helpful to provide space to self-regulate and to protect one's self from hostile situations, we are also reminded that God is working in these spaces of disagreement. In Acts, we are brought to a moment between Paul and Barnabas where a disagreement over travel companions causes the two of them to depart from each other. If we look forward from this point, we see the writer continues to share the works of Paul, while Barnabas is not mentioned again.

This departing of disciples works to show us two important things, the first being that the disciples were human, the second being that God's call works in all of us, even when we are in disagreement. It is easy to find fault with either of the ministers in this story, claiming that one could have done something different to resolve the conflict. The truth is that both men were at fault, but neither was wrong in their decisions. Instead, they parted ways, recognizing that their disagreement could continue on, potentially getting even sharper than it already had. Each answered their call to service and continued on.

And sometimes this is the call we are given. In Matthew 10:14 we are told that in our travels, if anyone does not welcome us, we are to shake the dust from our feet and continue onwards. But God does not end our call there. For we are called, like Paul and Barnabas, to return to the places we have been, not only to the places we have been accepted, but to those places of disagreement. In each of these places we recognize that the love of God is working and while we may not always resolve conflicts, we are each deserving of the grace and love of God. For even as Paul and Barnabas parted ways, they both did so with the blessings of God.

Discussion Questions

1. How might this story differ if it was written from Paul's perspective? What about Barnabas's?
2. What practices do you have for caring for yourself when faced with conflict?
3. How do you practice God's love for those who disagree with you?
4. In what ways could the church community better support disagreements?
5. What tools do you have for approaching disagreements?
6. How do you determine when it is time to step away from a disagreement?
7. Where do you see God working in disagreements?
8. How do you see grace working in departings?

Activity Suggestions

Either out loud with a group or on paper finish the statement “When I experience conflict, I need...”. Afterwards identify helpful ways to address your needs while addressing the conflict.

Either out loud or with a group practice stating phrases such as:

“I disagree with you”

“I don’t agree but I would like to know more”

“I better understand your side; can I share my opinion/view/belief?”

How did it feel hearing these phrases? How might they be helpful in disagreements?

On a piece of paper, write out practices you have for navigating conflict. With a group, discuss how these practices are helpful, if there are ways they might not be helpful, and how these practices might vary based on the level of disagreement.

Prayer Concerns

The peacemakers, those who are prioritizing self-care/protection, those who seek to hurt instead of build communities

Closing Prayer

Sometimes, O God, your call leads faithful people in different directions. Give me clarity to know when it is time to chart a new course and take a new path. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

