# Can We Still Talk to People We Disagree With?

*Rise and Shine – July 8st*

**<u>Romans 12:20</u>**
*No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."* (For context, read 12:9-21.)

The article below illustrates how having conversations with severe Detra tors often has the unintended – or at least un-emphasized – effect of causing those people to regret their hateful words. It also creates a safe space for those who often proclaim to hate such spaces, and thus starts the process of changing minds.

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***In the news***

## <u>Conversations with People Who Hate Me</u>

Mr. Rogers famously once said, "Frankly, there isn't anyone you couldn't learn to love once you've heard their story." Now a podcast is putting that theory to the test.

Dylan Marron has a lot of haters. The actor and activist makes online videos about social justice — and the comments that appear on those videos can be harsh, to say the least.

Plenty of people would just ignore all that negativity, but not Marron. He decided to reach out to his harshest critics to ask about what set them off, and why. With his latest project Marron is flipping the script – refashioning his antagonists into partners and turning a curse into a gift. Welcome to *Conversations with People Who Hate Me*.

After such projects as <u>the *Every Single Word* project</u> , which reduced movies' runtime to just the dialogue spoken by people of color, *Sitting in Bathrooms with Trans People*, which is exactly what it sounds like, and <u>the *Unboxing* series</u>, where the host literally "unpacked" problematic subjects like Police Brutality and Rape Culture, he found himself as a major target for aggrieved viewers.

His viewers were especially incensed any time the topic of Islamophobia arose. Many of them argued that Marron, a gay man, was stupid for supporting a religion that doesn't support him.

"You can only be reminded so many times that you're a 'fag' and a 'waste of oxygen' before you find ways to tune it out," Marron says of the online hate he's incurred in recent years.

Around the time these comments hit a peak, Marron decided not to tune them out anymore. He realized that on a social media platform like Facebook, you can just click on the profile photo of whoever is trashing you and learn a lot about them. Soon he discovered that some of the same people who took time out of their lives to tell him off had more layers than he might have originally thought.

What he ended up creating is perhaps the timeliest podcast of 2017. In a year in which Americans have never felt more divided, *Conversations with People Who Hate Me* is a refreshing glimpse of people at loggerheads culturally, learning through direct exposure–rather than from stereotypes. As Marron says at the top of the first episode, it's neither debate, epic shutdown, nor an attempt to search for common ground. Instead, it's "an experiment to see what happens when two people with very different views of the world listen to each other."

"I am not pretending to be some sort of bipartisan moderator ... of course I have a stake in this. I clearly agree more with one side, but that doesn't mean I can't foster a space for meaningful, nuanced, dialogue."

Although there are no gotcha moments on the show, *Conversations with People Who Hate Me* may ultimately be an elaborate set up after all. By giving the kind of people who claim to hate safe spaces an actual safe space to exchange ideas, Marron may be tricking them into becoming better informed—dare I say, more woke—people.

"I'm still in the process of learning from this show," he says, "but it's helped me confirm a hypothesis: most people soften when they feel listened to. And they'll even listen to you in return."

"I love the calls. I love the calls so much. The calls make me feel like maybe the world is good after all. Because someone who thinks very differently from me,

someone with whom I shared a very negative introduction, they are willing to talk. There are at least a handful of people who I've come across who are willing to own up to things they've written online and it gives me hope."

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

**Matthew 18:15-17**
*"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.* (For context, read 18:15-35.)

In speaking with his Apostles here, Jesus clearly beckons them to resolve their differences with each other rather than letting them fester. However, he charges them to seek to resolve such issues with the individual before the group.

**Questions:** How do you handle it when those close to you "sin" against you? What about those not so close to you? How does our handling of these types of conflicts allow us to model the life of Christ?

**Romans 14:1**
*Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions.* (For context, read 1:1-12.)

In this section of his letter to the Romans Paul implores his audience not to judge one another. In this line in particular, Paul asks his readers to invite those who disagree with them in, without attempting to change their minds… have a conversation without debate.

**Questions:** How have times when you've conversed with people who disagree with you served to shape your life? Did it change your mind in some way? Did you leave these conversations with a feeling of satisfaction?

**<u>1 Peter 3:8-9</u>**

*Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 9 Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.* (For context, read 3:8-12.)

The verse above indicates that those who are called to bless others, and want to be blessed, must do so even in the face of evil.

**Questions:** Are we, the church, called to bless?

## Prayer in Times of Conflict (BCP p.824)

O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*