

## I Don't Agree

### Conversation with Celia and Ali

**What do you do when someone has a different opinion than yours? Do you keep quiet, aggressively push back, or just avoid those conversations? Why do we feel awkward when someone believes something different than us?**

Today, we're sharing a conversation recorded a few years ago between Celia Fielke and Ali Hoopman about whether it's possible to maintain relationships with people who have different values or core beliefs to us.

Celia and Ali share some of the very sticky friendship situations they've found themselves in, and chat about how we can best respond when we're faced with these uncomfortable moments.

**Celia:** Today we're exploring one of the things that can really test a relationship or a friendship. And that is a difference of opinion. What happens when your friends make a decision or choose to do something that you think is wrong for them?

Ali, has there ever been a situation where you've gone up against that?

**Ali:** I can recall a friend of mine recounting a really interesting family situation that she found herself in. Her and her sisters were reflecting on who their brother had chosen for his future partner. This couple was engaged, and it caused some issues with these sisters.

**Celia:** The sisters' opinions are important.

**Ali:** And the sisters' talk, and they didn't necessarily chat with him, and I think the family, they lived various places around the country, so they didn't always get together. So they might not have known this girl very well, but I remember the sisters chatting about it and deciding that the best way forward was to confront their brother.

**Celia:** And did they?

**Ali:** They did and it didn't go particularly well, because he then told his fiancé, and deep wounding occurred then. But they dealt with it really quickly, and they worked it through. They realised it could have got really sour and could have potentially been a breakup for the whole family.

**Celia:** And that's actually really brave, because I was actually engaged once before, and it didn't work out so well. But after I broke off the engagement, my family said, "Oh, well we're really glad, 'cause we didn't really think that he was the right one for you." I'm thinking-

**Ali:** And they never said anything?

**Celia:** They never said anything, and I'm thinking why didn't you say something? But then I thought about it, and I thought, would I have listened? And, you know what would

that have done to our relationship? Probably knowing me and being stubborn, back then, I probably would have said, "Well you know, I'm going to marry him and that's what it is." I probably would have got my back up and just gone ahead with it.

**Ali:** It's such a challenging situation, and I know my friend in her situation, they had to go through quite a lot of negotiation and chatting and laying down, and putting it all out on the table. And that's something I chatted to my girlfriend about when she was telling me about it. It was like, what gives us the right to even go to a place like that and say that to someone?

**Celia:** So can you still be that friend if you're not being true to yourself? And it makes me think of a situation when a close friend of mine was going through something really significant in her life and I really wanted to say, "I think you're making a bad decision. This isn't gonna end well. It's not gonna be good for you." It affected my core beliefs and how I viewed the world and the decision she was making. I chatted to my hubby about it and he said, "Don't you dare, you'll ruin the friendship completely." He was looking at it from another point of view, whereas I was looking at it from the problem, the fact that I didn't agree with it, and I wasn't being true to myself if I didn't tell her. He's going, "You're gonna ruin so many other things." He could see other bits and pieces. Anyway, so I avoided the conflict.

**Ali:** So you didn't tell her.

**Celia:** I just stood by her through the decision that she made, avoided the conflict.

**Ali:** That's like, I have this friend, who I've been friends with at University, and at Uni we were different people and we got on really well, and it's changed since we've had kids. She parents differently, but some of the decisions that she makes and has made in her life, I've really struggled with and I haven't said anything. I've always appeared to support her and not have any issues and just the friendship has appeared to be exactly the same and for her it certainly is. But for me, I really find it difficult now. I find being with her hard, and I wonder whether it's because I'm not true to myself, I'm not true to her, I don't tell her the truth.

**Celia:** That's hard.

**Ali:** I think I've avoided that conflict, but actually the friendship hasn't really survived. Not for me anyway, and I find it a drain and hard, hard work, and I don't know what to do. I still haven't addressed it, but it's a real discontent in my stomach.

**Celia:** So how do you actually stay true to yourself when something butts up against your core values. Your core values, that's your system of truth, or what makes you, you.

**Ali:** I've always lived my life as worrying about what other people think, worrying about doing the right thing, all of those things. There are very few people in my life really that I truly can be totally open and honest with. Probably most people wouldn't even know I was Christian. And that's probably because I didn't actually own that myself.

**Celia:** Yes. You can't go to that place with someone until you are solid and you are firm in the foundation of what makes you, you.

**Ali:** I didn't want to have someone ask, "Well, why have you made that decision and why are you a Christian?" I wouldn't have known what to say. So I just completely avoided that, and maybe I avoided even that friend.

**Celia:** Maybe a part of the friendship issue, too, is you weren't quite centred or sure of yourself. Sometimes we make ourselves little mini-gods if we sit in judgment of others and we're putting it against our belief system if it doesn't align with His, and what the Word says.

**Ali:** What do you mean? I don't get that.

**Celia:** If we're grounded in God's teaching and his Word sits in our hearts, and we want to apply that in the world, we'll apply it in our friendships. But if we're just thinking of "Well, my opinion works like this," and we're not necessarily connected with the Word, we're making ourselves a god as we sit in judgment of our friends.

**Ali:** So we're making judgments, but not based on the truth. Okay.

**Celia:** And we want to be authentic, and I want to live out my faith, and I want to respond to what God wants me to do in relationship with others. 'Cause he's a relational God.

**Ali:** So if God's a relational God, how does he operate with us?

**Celia:** Dare I say the big cliché, it's all about love. God just is a God of love and he loves us.

**Ali:** So how does that then reflect in how we deal with our friends?

**Celia:** I reckon if we're walking in that love, we have the identity with the Father, our Heavenly Father, and we're walking that journey closely with him, feeling his love, knowing where our faith is anchored, knowing where we're going, trusting him in all things, that will just overflow into our relationships.

**Ali:** So people will see God's love reflected in us.

**Celia:** That's right, and they may even seek you out, because they see that in you.

**Ali:** That's easier for me.

**Celia:** Not necessarily. But if we're aligned with God, I think we align far better with others. God will always extend the hand of love. He will always look for the lost sheep. He will always seek out the sinner. We're all sinners. He'll always seek us out in our fallen state to draw us back to him. He's always offering that hand. That hand of friendship. That hand of relationships. That deep and intimate love connection.

**Ali:** So, he's doing that walk with us.

**Celia:** Yep.

**Ali:** And enabling us to then walk with our friends in confidence with the kind of friend we should be to them.

**Celia:** Absolutely.

**Ali:** Without fear.

**Celia:** He gives us the example in how Jesus related to others. He allows us to make the choice, but always calls us back to him. He will forgive us when we make the mistakes, when we do the things the wrong way around.

**Ali:** So, that's a bit like life when our friends make mistakes that we don't believe, we still just forgive them, we still walk with them, it's not up to us to judge them.

**Celia:** That's right and maybe we need to seek a sense of peace in those relationships, like the examples we've just chatted about today. We need a deeper sense of peace, that you know what, God's got them. It's not my job to carry their burden or the mistake that I think they've made. That's their journey. My journey is to love them just like God loves me.

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