

The tired dog:

An older, tired-looking dog wandered into my yard; I could tell from his collar and well-fed belly that he had a home and was well taken care of.

He calmly came over to me, I gave him a few pats on his head; he then followed me into my house, slowly walked down the hall, curled up in the corner and fell fast asleep.

An hour later, he went to the door, and I let him out.

The next day he was back, greeted me in my yard, walked inside and resumed his spot in the hall and again slept for about an hour. This continued off and on for several weeks.

Curious I pinned a note to his collar: 'I would like to find out who the owner of this wonderful sweet dog is and ask if you are aware that almost every afternoon your dog comes to my house for a nap.'

The next day he arrived for his nap, with a different note pinned to his collar: 'He lives in a home with 6 children, 2 under the age of 3 - he's trying to catch up on his sleep. Can I come with him tomorrow?'

It is my prayer that God may use Joy and I to bring you Sabbath rest. You have worked hard, and there is more work ahead, but my work is to give you rest rather than make you work harder.

I envision a wintertime spirituality, where God is in the stillness, the quiet voice. In winter things are dormant and at rest. Some call this 'liminal space' where there is an acceptance, even appreciation of not knowing, not growing, of learning to walk in

the dark, not seeing the path. Someone said 'Liminal Space' is the time when the trapeze artist lets go of the swing and falls, hoping that someone will catch them. If we don't catch each other, which is entirely possible, God is still like our net. God will not leave us or forsake us. This is our faith, if we fall, if we fail to catch each other, may God provide a net.

Other images of providing rest that come to mind are as follows. God calls Joy and I to be for you a shelter, to provide a for you a sanctuary. God calls us to be for you an estuary or a fen. To lead you beside still waters. To be still and know God. Sit there, rest awhile, don't just do something.

Last summer we were in Homer Alaska. I was working as an interim minister for the POP in Anchorage. We visited friends in Homer, where I had lived for a year in middle school. While Joy was out hiking on a glacier, because of a weak knee, I sat in a fen at the top of the mountain above the city of Homer.

A Fen is a type of wetland. A Fen accepts whatever water flows in and works to clean the water and provides nutrients to plants. A fen is a life given, healthy, nourishing, cleansing, resting, quiet wetland.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, may our presence among you be like a Fen, to bring you refreshment and rest, this I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen

Have you ever lost something important to you;

- maybe a mitten,
- glasses,
- a friend [son Paul] It was a great lost...

The Motto: It's about when something we have lost is returned to us in a most unexpected way.

[I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.]

Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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. 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.

In my training as a Transitional Minister I was introduced to a concept called ‘Appreciative Inquiry.’

From the dictionary, to Ap-pre’ci-ate, v. 1. valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems 2. to increase in value, e.g. the economy has appreciated in value. Synonyms: VALUING, PRIZING, ESTEEMING, and HONORING.

In-quire’ (kwir), v., 1. the act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, and SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION, STUDY.

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

“At its heart, AI is about the search for the best in people, their organizations, and the strengths-filled, opportunity-rich world around them. AI is not so much a shift in the methods and models of organizational change, but AI is a fundamental shift in the overall perspective taken throughout the entire change process to ‘see’ the wholeness of the human system and to “inquire” into that system’s strengths, possibilities, and successes. ”

– **Excerpt from:** *Stavros, Jacqueline, Godwin, Lindsey, & Cooperrider, David. (2015). Appreciative Inquiry:*

I wish to focus on tailwinds rather than headwinds.

When I was in middle school my father took a job as being a pastor to a small Baptist congregation in Homer Alaska. We bought a small travel trailer and hitched it to our ford falcon, small car back then. Driving across the Plaines, with the gas pedal to the floor, we could only manage 40 miles. Gong west we were driving into a headwind. We had to by another car.

Gong east, with a tailwind, we could go the speed limit, but going west, against the headwind, we needed a bigger car.

We tend to pay more attention to headwinds than tailwinds, to the barriers than to the blessings in our life. Certainly, this was true in my family of origin.

When Paul writes, rejoice, it was our family trait to complain. When he says, don't fret, don't worry but pray, fretting and worry were our way. We always found ways to emphasize what was wrong, weak, broken, the glass was always half empty. Headwinds. We all face them; persons, families, congregations.

Paul encourages the congregation to pay attention to tailwinds, blessings, gifts, privilege, to be mindful of what we have rather than what we lack, to live in a house of faith rather than the house of fear.

The story of my friend Floyd Zehr. "It could have been worst. I could be in the hospital or jail."

While we are with you, our task will be to give our attention to what is beautiful, lifegiving, blessings, to what brings joy; for gratitude, thanksgiving, love. To help foster common positive experiences.

If something is broken, sick, or a house or family divided, don't we try to fix it, heal it, unite the house? Sometimes the best way to do this is to 'count your blessings', to be grateful for what you can, to learn how to accept irreconcilable differences.

In the passage from Philippians, notice the context is one of tension, disagreement, perhaps irreconciled differences between two women leaders.

[I urge Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.]

In today's political climate I doubt people will come to be of the same mind if that means coming to agreement. Some favor nationalism and some favor globalism. This is true all over the world. There are different ways to govern. Think of "To be of the same mind" as to 'have the mind of Jesus.' To have the same mind, to have the mind of Jesus when it come to service, simplicity, peacemaking, being a responsible part of a community, showing gentleness, love, civility, attentiveness, an ability to understand and to even love the people on the other side.

Joy and I are to act like 'Paul's loyal companion,' to help all who have struggled to build, maintain and enable this congregation to flourish; for all your names are 'in the book of life.' The church is a School of Love, to teach us and our culture how to love the person on the other side, who has become our enemy.

We just moved. Neighbor house is a stone's throw away. He is proud to display his confederate flag wrapped around a tree. My

first encounter with him, our daughter's puppy was visiting our house he runs into the neighbor yard wanting to show his appreciation to the neighbor. Very first words the neighbor says to me is, 'I'm going to shoot that blankly blank dog.' What to say? How to make peace, to extend blessing, to listen but also keep my own boundaries

"I can understand your concern. Once I can catch that dog I promise to keep it on a leach."

I had seen his cat hunting on our land. "Don't want that dog to harm your cat. Your cat is welcome to hunt on our land. So, what's your name?"

This is different than my response to a neighbor we had in PA 35 years ago. Three of my daughters and I were burning some bush on our land. The neighbor came crashing thru the trees carrying a large knife claiming our land was his land. Regretfully, I threw some gasoline his way. I wasn't raised Mennonite

Don't throw more gas on the fire. When we curse those who curse us, this releases the power of evil spirits. When we bless those who curse us, when we love and show gratitude, this releases the power of the Holy Spirit who works in mystery ways to transform us and the situation. This is not just agreeing to disagree in love. This is not just being faithful regardless of the situation. It is that love, blessing, gratitude, joy, these actions release the power of God. With God all things are possible. When we bless those who curse us, the blessing releases divine power.

Other reasons why we wish to focus on positive shared experiences.

While I am with you I hope to do no harm. I hope to be a non-anxious presence among you, to love, to listen, to be attentive, available, not to take sides but when needed to self-differentiate.

I hope to do my best to 'Lead you to Jesus'. This is different than leading you to a new vision. I can't do that. Never could. But I can lead you to Jesus.

I am more of sheepdog than a Shephard. Jesus is the Shephard and I am his sheepdog, to bring you to Jesus, the Shephard of our soul.

[The image has its weakness. I promise not to nip or bite you, but I have been told that the best sheepdogs don't bit either.]

Because I am an interim minister there are some advantages. I can be more like your spiritual grandparent than your spiritual parent. I can enjoy the visit and not have to put the kids thru college.

I promise, do my best to feed you, to nurture you biblically and spiritually. I promise that I will do the study, the preparation, and not give you warmed up old sermons. I promise to be available and listen to your stories. I am grateful for this challenge, this opportunity, this calling to love. Thank you.