

# Voices: Learning from and being the loyal opposition

December 16, 2020

I did not vote for Joe Biden. In fact, I always have voted Republican, except in a couple of local elections where I cast a ballot for a Democrat.

I have voted for winners and losers over the years. I voted for candidates who were losers in more ways than one.

There always is tension within my heart concerning the disconnect between the ideals for which we fight and the personalities for whom we vote. Character is an important issue, but elections require us to vote for principles, ideas and issues above the personality of any given candidate.

Personalities come and go in politics. I try not to vote for personalities, but to support candidates who most closely—but never perfectly—resemble my personal beliefs about government and society.

After the Electoral College vote this week, it appears I have voted for another losing presidential candidate. This comes at a time when our nation is so bitterly divided, and when I feel marginalized in the public forum because of my Christian faith.

I constantly am reminded that, as a Christian and a local church pastor, my influence in our culture is waning. How do I approach a future in this country and in my community where my voice no longer may be as influential as it once was?

# **Learning from the loyal opposition**

Surprisingly, I may have found a way forward by learning more about the life and career of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, famous liberal Supreme Court justice. What does Ginsburg have to do with my presence in my country and community at the end of 2020? Her time on the Supreme Court was a model of the loyal opposition.

Ginsburg served 17 years on the U.S. Supreme Court before her death. She was on the losing side of many cases that came before the court.

When writing her dissenting opinions, Ginsburg explained clearly, and sometimes passionately, why she disagreed with the majority opinions. Ginsburg often would end her written opinions by stating simply, "I dissent."

She remained active on the court until she died. She did not quit or give up. Some say her written dissensions were acts of hope that one day the court might read her opinions and be swayed in future cases.

I am impressed by her ability to remain on the court, even to develop a personal friendship with conservative justice Antonin Scalia, and to make losing arguments while also remaining hopeful.

Perhaps the Lord is preparing me for my role as the loyal opposition in my country and community.

## **Being the loyal opposition**

First, I am going to be a loyal American, family member, pastor and friend. I am not going anywhere. It may be necessary to get some distance for a time, but I will not separate completely or permanently.

I commit to be present and express my ideas and beliefs as clearly as I can so they may be taken seriously. I will try not to vent my emotions and frustrations, but please forgive me when I do.

I commit to listening well and to taking your ideas seriously. By doing this, it is my hope we will find a way forward together as a nation, as a family, as churches and as friends.

The enemies of this country, as well as God's enemies, do not want us to go forward together. I will not let them win in this case. America is too important, as are our families, friendships, churches and communities.

Second, it was the great Irish philosopher, Bono, who wrote, "We are one, but we are not the same." I choose not to fret over our differences. But there *are* differences, and I dissent.

I do not agree with everything I hear or witness in local, state or national politics. I do not agree with how some people speak of one another and act toward one another. I do not agree with all the decisions made by my friends, family or church members.

By dissenting in a right and good way, I hope to be influential in the lives of others, but that is an unknown. Regardless, I must live according to my principles and beliefs. Currently, that means in much of society, culture, politics and, at times, in church life, I dissent.

As far as it depends on me, I will be engaged with others, even those with whom I disagree. I will seek to understand and to be understood.

I hope to persuade or be persuaded. Ultimately, I hope by engaging with others, God's Holy Spirit will reveal Christ, convince of the truth, and lead sinners to repentance. I want to be a witness and reveal Jesus in all I do and say.

I am hopeful for the future of our country, families, churches and friendships. I am hopeful, because I personally have experienced God's grace. If God has given grace to me, then there is hope for us all.

*Scott Jones is the pastor of First Baptist Church in Rockport and a member of the Baptist Standard board of directors. The views expressed are solely those of the author.*