

# Introduction to Political Discipleship

Total Time: 16-26 min

## OPENING | 6 min

*Read the following aloud.*

Welcome to the InterVarsity leadership training on how to grow in our political discipleship and faithful civic engagement! In these five trainings, we'll be talking about what our discipleship could look like in the area of politics and civic engagement.

And as a reminder, here's what this is NOT:

- We are NOT telling anyone how to vote. We are NOT giving anyone a "Christian" voter's guide.
- We're also NOT avoiding this topic just because it's uncomfortable!
- And we do NOT expect everyone in our chapters to think alike or vote the same way.

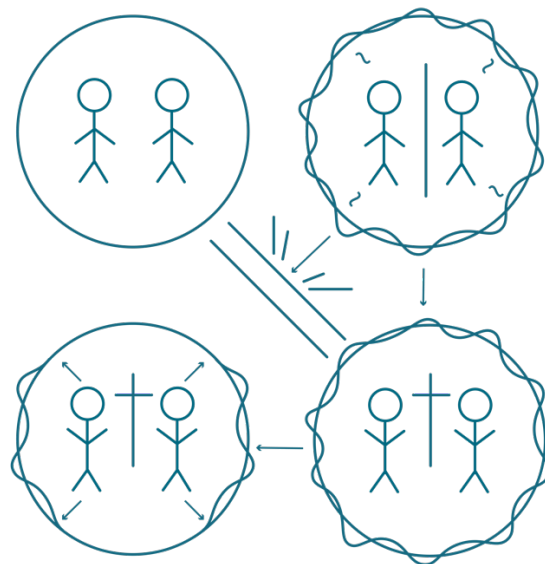
However, we DO believe that following Jesus extends into every area of life, and we want to have Scripture-informed conversations about what it might mean to follow Jesus in this area. When the disciples declared "Jesus is Lord," it was a political statement, not just a theological one. The coming of the Messiah was fused with political implications for the Jewish people and the Roman Empire, and this is also true for us in the United States. If the Gospel was good news to them, it is good news to us—including our politics.

The English word "politics" comes from the Greek word "polis," meaning "city-state." It refers to the way that people living in a large community (such as a city, state, or country) make decisions about power and resources. And since Jesus calls his followers to love our neighbors, obedience to Jesus will likely mean every Christian is involved in "politics"—broadly speaking—in one way or another. While words and actions must be contextualized, the question is *how* Jesus' people should be involved in politics, not only if we should engage at all.

So, every believer should be well-informed about what Jesus has to say about political discipleship and civic engagement. When we say well-informed, we are not saying that we decide what the "righteous" political positions are and then go to Scripture to justify our political platforms and preferences. We are explicitly saying the opposite. **It should**

be Scripture and the teachings of Jesus that inform our politics and shape our civic engagement. The goal is not to be right or to be self-righteous, but to orient our politics around the love of God, neighbor, and ourselves. We invite you to faithfully wrestle with what it means to steward our power and resources in ways that honor God and our neighbors.

## What is God's Good News About Politics?



In some Christian contexts, it is taught that the only fruit of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is victory over one's personal sin and eternal life in Heaven. In other Christian spaces, preaching and discipleship focus on the systemic and institutional renewal that Christ and the Kingdom of God promises, while ignoring personal obedience.

Fortunately, the Bible doesn't separate the two. Our personal and collective sin is met with both individual and institutional transformation. Praise God that Jesus came, died, and rose not only for our lives to be redeemed, but for our freedom from personal, relational, and systemic sin and brokenness. This includes civic and political structures that govern our everyday lives. Wherever there is brokenness and injustice, the kingdom of God came to make it right.

The English abolitionist William Wilberforce didn't just praise God for the forgiveness he found in Christ. He worked in politics to abolish the slave trade in the UK. Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Fannie Lou Hamer didn't just use biblical allusions to

strengthen the argument for the rights for African Americans. They spoke in word and deed, and implored their partners to love their enemies, refuse to seek vengeance, and speak truth to power.

In InterVarsity, we use the Big Story Gospel Diagram as a visual representation of this holistic Christian gospel message. It consists of four key components:

1. **God's Design:** The top left circle of the diagram illustrates God's original plan for humanity, emphasizing that God created humans to be in a loving relationship with Him and to reflect His image. We were made in the image of God to flourish, work, steward, and create, living in blessed shalom with peace among all relationships. That is peace between humanity and God, peace with one another, peace within ourselves, and peace with creation.
2. **The Problem of Sin:** This top right circle illuminates humanity's rebellion against God and the personal, relational, and systemic brokenness that is a result. Due to our desire to live outside of what God intended, we see abuse, violence, jealousy, racism, and all sorts of addictions and afflictions. And this brokenness is not confined to individuals, but afflicts families, communities, and countries.
3. **Jesus' Solution:** The image on the bottom right proclaims that Jesus Christ is Messiah, Redeemer, and Liberator. He is the solution to the problem of sin. It portrays Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as the means through which God reconciles humanity to Himself, offering forgiveness and restoration. But the Gospel story does not stop there but includes the coming of the Kingdom of God to renew all of creation. This includes all individuals, institutions, and every power and principality.
4. **Faithful Response:** The final part of the diagram is the personal and collective response to this radical love and justice. And that is faithful, loving obedience where the fruits of our repentance lead to flourishing communities where Christ comes close, and the Kingdom of God is reflected in the lives and environments of those around us. We have been healed and God has sent us out as ambassadors testifying to the same freedom and reflecting the same love and justice He has shown to us.

Often, there is a temptation to move from the 2<sup>nd</sup> circle to the 4<sup>th</sup> and skip Jesus altogether. But, as followers of Jesus that would mean we are working out of our own will, means, and preferences. As His witnesses, we are to be living testimonies to His love, freedom, and justice, and that is impossible to do unless we have encounters with Him and cultivate that relationship. This is an especially important point when we are approaching costly and contentious areas of life like politics and civic engagement

where brokenness, frustration, rage, anger, and fear are pervasive. Jesus shows us a better way.

## DISCUSSION | 5-10 min

*Break into pairs, small groups, or remain as a whole group depending on your context and discuss the following questions together.*

- What emotions came up for you as you consider the Gospel from this perspective?
- What are some of the political beliefs that you grew up hearing? Where did those beliefs come from (family, media, education, church, etc.)?
  - *Ex. I grew up in a household that didn't talk about politics. It was controversial and we swept a lot of things under the rug.*
  - *Ex. My pastor told us that we were pro-life and that's all that mattered. Christians could never be Democrats.*
  - *Ex. My family isn't from the United States, so I am still trying to figure out what I think about American politics because I was told to work hard and keep my head down.*
- In this discussion, we are arguing that Jesus cares deeply about our political and social engagement. So, on a scale from 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = absolutely), how much does your relationship with Jesus and Scripture have to do with your political beliefs? Why or why not?
- None of us follow Jesus perfectly or have all the answers, and we all have room to grow. So, on a scale from 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = absolutely), how open are you to changing your political beliefs?

## DEBRIEF | 5-10 min

*Once you are done with your discussion, answer the following questions:*

- What resonated with you?
- What is something that challenged you?
- What's one individual or communal step you would like to take next?

*Scan the QR code for more resources  
on God's Good News About Politics*

