

God's Good News about Politics for You

Total Time: 50 min

INTRODUCTION | 10 min

If there are new people, be sure everyone gets introduced. Even if everyone was here last time, make sure everyone knows each other's names.

Welcome to the final session of our discussion of the intersection of faith and politics! We have covered a lot of ground in the Bible—In Genesis, we looked at God's creation and our place in it. In 1 Samuel, we examined the Israelites desire for a king. Then in Luke, we looked at the temptation of Jesus. Finally in Jeremiah, we reflected on the Israelites' call to seek the shalom of their oppressors.

Opening Question: Which of the past four sessions have resonated the most with you? Why?

Pray to Begin: Let's begin by centering ourselves with The Lord's Prayer¹.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

STORY | 10 min

Looking Back

Looking back, in Session 1 of this five-part series, we saw that God's starting point is that humans were created in His image and given the responsibility of stewarding His creation here on earth. We were challenged to lean in when we experience dissonance with others, to seek to view others (including political opponents) as God's image-bearers, and to look at politics as one important means to live as God's image-bearers in caring for others and for the earth.

¹ English translations of *The Lord's Prayer*, © 1998, English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), and used by permission. www.englishtexts.org

Then, in Session 2 we saw the dangers of putting ourselves and our ideas of what's best on the throne of our lives, and the need to bow to Jesus as our King. We also discussed the human tendency to look to kings or political leaders to do what only God can do - deliver us from evil, protect us, and provide for us. Political leaders can have a huge impact, but as followers of Jesus, our true hope can never be in humans, but only in King Jesus.

Next, in Session 3 we looked at the temptations that this world offers, especially the temptation of power and the temptation of seeking "good" results through ungodly means. It's so tempting to try to justify mean-spirited words and actions in the political realm because "it's a dirty game," but God's work must be done God's way, and that is always the way of sacrificial love, the way of the cross.

Lastly, in Session 4, we started with Connie's story, where she initially distinguished between "spiritual" and "secular" activities and was surprised when Jesus led her to serve her community through getting involved in local politics. In the Scripture study, we saw the people of God being instructed to put down roots and seek the well-being and flourishing of their surrounding communities – even though they were living as exiles in enemy land. Along with this instruction, though, they were given the promise that their exile would end and that God had a future and a hope for them. As we consider how we are called to engage with politics, we are called to seek shalom right here in our broken world – including God's shalom for those who would harm us. And we can do this with confidence and joy because the scriptures promise us that we have an assured future and hope; King Jesus has promised to return and make all things new!

RESPONSE

Take out your worksheets from the last four weeks and reflect on your responses. Looking at the session five worksheet, answer the question in the first box: **What is God's good news about politics to you and your community?**

Take some time to reflect and write, then discuss your answers.

Politics with the Mind of Christ

INTRODUCTION

Preston Sprinkle in his book, *Exiles: The Church in the Shadows of Empire*, highlights a key passage in Philippians that can help us understand how to live out God's good news about politics. Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Philippi while he was enduring a two-year prison sentence in Caesarea. Philippi had been founded as a Roman colony, with most residents proudly possessing Roman citizenship. The Christians in Philippi knew that if they didn't fully embrace the Roman way of life, they could end up imprisoned like Paul or crucified like Jesus. In spite of this certain suffering, Paul's invitation is not to embrace the empire but to follow Jesus.

In Philippians 1:27a, Paul writes, "Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." Preston Sprinkle points out that the word translated to "live your life" is actually the Greek word *politeuomai*, which has the root word of "polis/politics" embedded in it. In a sense, Paul is commanding the Philippians to "do politics" in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus! Paul is reminding them to live as citizens of Jesus' kingdom, not as citizens of the empire around them. He continues on with a call for believers to adopt the "mind of Christ."

PASSAGE: PHILIPPIANS 1:27, 2:3-11 (NRSVue)

²⁷ Only, live your life [Greek: *politeuomai*] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel [...] ²³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

1. What repetitions, patterns, or themes do you see?
2. What else stands out or resonates?
3. What tensions or challenges between characters do you see in the text?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS

1. Imagine that you were in the congregation receiving this letter from Paul. He is in prison and you don't know how long he is going to be there, if he will be martyred or if he will be released. How might people be feeling in response to his suffering?
2. How do you think the Philippians would have reacted when Paul wrote to have the mind of Christ? What about the other commands in the passage (i.e., humble yourself, do nothing out of vain conceit, look after the interests of others, etc.)?
3. What might be some of the obstacles for those in Philippi responding to this call from Paul? What opposition might they face from family, friends, or the government?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Unlike the Philippians, American Christians are not an oppressed minority. If "live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" is to be applied in how we steward our power and resources toward the flourishing of all people with our institutions, what might that look like?
2. In the United States, going to prison or being killed for how we decide to steward our resources and positions of power because of our faith is highly unlikely. But opposition and suffering can take different forms. What might you and your community encounter in choosing faithfulness to Christ?

Potential Examples:

- *"Because of my faith, I started speaking out about injustices I saw in local politics, but my friends didn't understand. They think Christians shouldn't bring their beliefs into the public square."*
- *"I invited an international friend to my home for a holiday. My family shared offensive stereotypes during a meal and I lovingly confronted them. My parents were angry and ultimately my friend and I decided to leave."*

- *“I chose to mobilize voters and vote differently from my family in an election. I got angry phone calls, emails, texts and DM’s from family members questioning my faith, calling me names, and threatening to never to talk with me again.”*

CONCLUSION

In each of our 4 Sessions, you read stories from the authors of this discussion guide and their wrestling with Jesus and politics. In Session 1, Area Director Andrew Berg shared that even though he shared a faith with his classmate Liz, they differed greatly on how they approached politics. And in session 2, Andrew shared vulnerably about how studying scripture in a community where he could bring his beliefs and his questions set him off on a journey where God could reveal Himself in new and powerful ways. In Session 3, Senior Resource Specialist, Jonathan Walton reflected on the simplicity of his upbringing and the challenge of how his mother followed Jesus in rural Virginia. And then in Session 4, Connie Anderson, Multiethnic Resource Specialist with InterVarsity, opened up about how far God has brought her from a family where talk of politics was forbidden to actively participating in city council meetings.

Each of these stories required conflict, confrontation, and vulnerability.

Jonathan entered into the tension with his mother and the physical and emotional distance between where he is now and where he came from. Connie did similar work to live differently from her background for the sake of the Gospel and vulnerably confessed her ignorance while engaging in the political process. And Andrew and Liz lovingly confronted one another in pursuit of faithfulness at the intersection of their faith and their politics. Though certainly not perfectly, Jonathan, Connie and Andrew sought to put their thoughts, actions, and feelings under the lordship of Jesus.

Answer one of the following questions and discuss with a partner in your group:

1. How do your friends and family approach conflict and confrontation?

Potential Examples:

- *“We sweep things under the rug and avoid hard topics like politics. We just don’t want people to be upset.”*
- *“We acknowledge what’s happening, schedule time and have honest conversations.”*
- *“My _____ dominates the conversation. Everyone has to think like them.”*

2. Who are the people and what are some of the circumstances that help you feel safe to be vulnerable?

Potential Examples:

- *"I can always talk with _____. They listen, don't argue, and we can share honestly with each other."*
- *"I like my/our _____ group. We have been together for a long time and been through so much."*

CHALLENGE

You wrote down what God's Good News about politics is on your worksheet. Take a few minutes now to consider who in your life you could talk to about this (friend, family, neighbor, pastor, etc). Share about it with a partner and pray for an opportunity to talk with this person in this coming week.

CLOSING | 5 min

Make sure to thank participants for coming and invite them to whatever opportunities you have next for continuing life together. Share the dates, time and location.

Ex. "Thank you for joining in this conversation. We invite you to stay connected and consider checking out these next steps (ex. Bible study, InterVarsity Conference, Large Group gathering, worship night, etc).

If you look at the bottom of your handout, you'll see a QR code. This code takes you to an electronic version of today's study."

Closing Prayer: Lord, thank you for your love towards us, your love for all people, and Your Will for us to be reconciled to you, one another, and all of creation. Give us the strength, courage and wisdom to love you with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves. Amen.

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

