

Week 1

Discussion Guide

We begin our first week laying the groundwork for our time together. In the following weeks we plan to discuss issues like the relationship between church and state, the place of politics in the church, the dangers and responses to racism, communism, marxism, the modern gender dysphoria, and how all of this relates to the future hope of the church. But, before we begin with “what” we really need to talk about “how”. How should Christians discuss and wrestle over challenging, potentially divisive issues that are increasingly unavoidable in our modern world?

Q: What do you think about the quote that we started the evening with, “Strife is a transgression that has often soiled Christians before a watching world”?

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. *Ephesians 4:1-6*

In the first verse the apostle Paul exhorts us to ‘walk in a manner worthy of our calling’ and one of the ways we do that is to resolve our conflict (especially among Christians) even when it’s hard.

Q: Have you considered how relational collateral or debt (well resolved conflict or poorly resolved conflict) impacts your ability to hear your brothers and sisters in Christ at Mercy? *Before another person ever opens their mouth to speak, what are you thinking about them? Do you have your own examples?*

Q: Unity does not always mean conformity. Can anyone share examples of having a deep and abiding unity *in spite of* differences?

One pastor said that pride comes from a “wrong evaluation of myself, when I refuse to accept God’s view of me.”

Q: In God’s view I am a rebellious sinner in desperate need of saving but I am also a saint who He loved so much that He carried out a plan of saving. You can see both the negative and positive sides of this. How should this humble us and assure us?

Q: Have you considered how pride prevents you from seeing a grey area in between your black-and-whites?

One piece of advice that we’re often given is to engage with a soft answer as an outworking of the gentleness and patience described in v.2. As a matter of fact Proverbs 15:1 says, *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

Q: When we are really passionate about a topic (i.e. masks, politics, etc.) why is a soft-answer so hard? Why does a soft answer make us feel as if we are losing control of a situation?

Paul encourages us to bear with one another in love and *forbearance or long-suffering* is one of those great words that seem to show something of their meaning in the sound of the word. This is a loving understanding of brothers and sisters in Christ that makes you want to go over-the-top with compassion and understanding. This type of long-suffering moves us to want to know and understand each other better.

Q: What things (events, upbringing, trauma, etc.) in your lives have had the greatest impact on your perspective on the social issues in our culture today (racism, masks, government, communism and capitalism, gender confusion)?

Q: How well would you say you understand the “backstory” about the people around you?

Finally, as Paul calls us to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace” you can hear an acknowledgement of the reality of the fall and the resultant conflict that is inevitable. But you can also hear the remedy for the church; that in Christ we would maintain unity of the Spirit in bonds (shackles) of peace. Be bound by peace!

Q: Consider a time when your words caused long-lasting damage. In what ways do you wish you had used your tongue differently?