

Living Out Our Faith in a Divided Culture

A. The Bible is our guide in all matters of faith and practice.

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is **useful to teach us what is true** and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. **It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.** God uses it to **prepare and equip his people** to do every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT)

1. Choosing to follow what the Bible says means rejecting the counsel of those who don't want to do what the Bible says. **“Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.** But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.” Psalm 1:1-3 (NLT)
2. Meditating on God's Word will change the way we think about everything. “Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, **but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.** Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”
Romans 12:2 (NLT)

B. We must make the most of every opportunity we have to live out our faith.

“So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. **Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.** Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do.”
Ephesians 5:15-17 (NLT)

1. Opportunities to live out our faith often come disguised as problems. “Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: ‘Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. **Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?**’” Esther 4:13-14 (NLT)
2. We must live out our faith in Jesus even if we suffer for doing so. **“If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed,** for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs. **But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian.** Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name!” 1 Peter 4:14-16 (NLT)

C. We must speak the truth in love.

“We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, **we will speak the truth in love,** growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.” Ephesians 4:15 (NLT)

Speaking the truth in love means:

1. Telling people the truth because we love them. **“Wounds from a friend can be trusted,** but an enemy multiplies kisses.” Proverbs 27:6 (NLT)
2. Telling people the truth of the gospel with gentleness and respect. “And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, **always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way.** Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.” 1 Peter 3:15b-17 (NLT)
3. Listening before speaking and handling disagreements without getting angry. “Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: **You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.** Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.” James 1:19-20 (NLT)
4. Not using profanity or name-calling to make a point. **“Don't use foul or abusive language.** Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.” Ephesians 4:29 (NLT)
5. Never forgetting how sinful and foolish we were before we met Christ, **“You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world, He**

is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature.” Ephesians 2:2-3 (NLT)

D. We are engaged in a spiritual battle.

“A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For **we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.**” Ephesians 6:10-12 (NLT)

“And lead us not into temptation but **deliver us from the evil one.**” Matthew 6:13 (NIV)

E. We conquer evil by doing good.

“**Never pay back evil with more evil.** Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, ‘I will take revenge; I will pay them back,’ says the Lord. Instead, ‘If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.’ **Don’t let evil conquer you but conquer evil by doing good.**” Romans 12:17-21 (NLT)

“**A gentle answer turns away wrath,** but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1 (NIV)

F. We can comfort and encourage each other.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, **so that we can comfort those in any trouble** with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” 2 Corinthians 1:4 (NIV)

“So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NLT)

G. We must pray.

1. We must pray for each other. “Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. **Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.** And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God’s mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God’s ambassador. **So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should.**” Ephesians 6:18-20 (NLT)

2. We must pray for spiritual awakening. “I urge you, **first of all, to pray for all people.** Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf and give thanks for them. **Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity.** This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. For, there is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time.” 1 Timothy 2:1-6 (NLT)

Good News! “For God is working in you, giving you the **desire and the power** to do what pleases him.”

Philippians 2:13 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions:

1. Share about a struggle you went through that you have come to see as a God ordained opportunity to live out your faith. What happened? Who was watching? How did God use your obedience? (Ephesians 5:15-17, Esther 4:14)
2. Why do you think it’s important that we use the Bible as our guide to live out our faith? (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Psalm 1:1-3, Romans 12:2)
3. Discuss the following ways we can speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15) Which one challenges you the most?
 - Telling people the truth because we love them. (Proverbs 27:6)
 - Telling people the truth of the gospel with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15-17)

- Listening before speaking and handling disagreements without getting angry. (James 1:19)
 - Not using profanity or name-calling to make a point. (Ephesians 4:29)
 - Never forgetting how sinful and foolish we were before we met Christ, (Ephesians 2:2-3)
4. Read Romans 12:17-21 & Proverbs 15:1. How can God expect us to obey these Bible verses when others are often mean and hateful to us? (Acts 1:8, Philippians 2:13)
 5. Why do you think there is so much immorality, anger, division and violence in our country? (Ephesians 6:10-12, Matthew 6:13)
 6. Brainstorm on a few ways we might be able to comfort and encourage other believers in our country and around the world (personal notes, phone calls, praying for specific needs, etc.) (2 Corinthians 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:11)
 7. Spend some time as a group praying for our country, our leaders, spiritual awakening, and other Christians. (1 Timothy 2:1-6, Ephesians 6:18-20)