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CEDARCREEKCHURCH

# A Better Way - The Great Divide

November 2, 2020

Whether you've already voted or you're voting tomorrow, whether you're politically savvy or feel a little bit lost, whether you're confident in your voting choice or just going with who best hits most of your preferences—tomorrow is the day—Election Day. Emotions are HIGH. Presidential election years are typically tumultuous, and this year is no exception. As the pandemic and lockdowns continue, there's more time for the news and social media. And all that information (and occasional misinformation) has only exacerbated tensions and conflict, and has led to greater divisions. Thankfully, here at CedarCreek, we have been working through a great message series, *The Great Divide*, to help us navigate these times in a way that honors Christ.

We all know that Satan wants to kill, destroy, and at the very least, divide us. Thankfully, Jesus shows us *a better way*. In John 17, Jesus prays for us to have unity. Check it out:

## John 17:21-23

*<sup>21</sup> "I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. <sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. <sup>23</sup> I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me."*

That last verse is worth repeating, **"May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me."**

As we think about the steps on the spiritual journey—Knowing God, Finding Freedom, Discovering Purpose, and Making a Difference—we don't see, "Oh, and by the way, 'VOTE THIS WAY!'" My heart is broken over the division and vile discourse that election season brings, especially among people who follow Jesus. So instead, *as Christ followers*, may our unwavering focus be to speak, think, and behave in ways that point others to Jesus and let them know how much they matter to him—*how much he loves them*.

It's safe to say this will be an interesting week, whatever the outcome. But, let's not let our actions, our words, or our discourse ruin our testimony for Jesus, cause division in relationships, and tarnish the message gifted to us. May we be instruments of hope, love, and *unity*.

**Questions:**

Are your thoughts fixed on the message of Jesus? Have your words or actions turned people toward or away from Jesus? What are some steps you can take to be a bridge-builder? How can you honor someone who thinks differently than you?

**Next Steps:**

Sometimes the best *next step* is to simply be quiet. While we may have a burning desire to make a point, if it drives people away from Jesus, it's not worth it. Likewise, *practicing the pause* is a beneficial action. Pausing to think before responding can keep us from increasing divisiveness. Most of all, keep Jesus and his message of salvation at the center of all your interactions, always.

**Prayer:**

*Oh God, we are desperate for your peace and for your wisdom to guide us. Help us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to be instruments of peace and unity—even when dealing with people or situations that are divisive. Regardless of how the U.S. election turns out tomorrow, may our TRUST be in you—the author and finisher of our faith. We thank you that you're never changing and our hope is secure in you. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*

# The Mission Remains the Same - The Great Divide

November 3, 2020

Election Day is here. For many, this day has been on your mind for a long time. At the very least, you have read headlines, social media posts, and had conversations about it over the last few months. Others have spent much more time thinking about it. Perhaps you have read countless news articles, listened to podcasts, watched debates, town halls, and more news in the last three months than in the three previous years.

Now that today is here, how are you feeling? Are you feeling hopeful, believing that our country will move in the direction you think it needs to? Do you also have feelings of worry and fear, believing that if the candidate you disagree with is elected, he will lead our country to a divisive and dark future?

Whatever happens with the outcome of the election, our mission as Christians doesn't change. I am not saying we shouldn't care or vote. I believe we should, and our faith should guide our decisions on who we vote for, but once it is over, let's not forget God has a bigger purpose for us to live out.

In a world full of division, chaos, and evil, we have the answer that the world needs—the solutions our country needs. God calls us to share this answer and shine in the darkness as a light to the nations.

## **Isaiah 60:1-3**

*<sup>1</sup> "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. <sup>2</sup> See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. <sup>3</sup> Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."*

So, what can we do in the days ahead to shine and to point people to Jesus Christ? Or in other words, what does it look like to provide the answer to our country's division? 1 Timothy 2:2-4 gives us a few simple steps that we can begin today.

## **1 Timothy 2:2-4**

*<sup>2</sup> I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— <sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

To start, we can live out the principle of "pray first." We should pray for all people to live peaceful and godly lives. We should pray for both sides of the political divide and for those in authority. Secondly, we need to model what it looks like to live in peace. We should honor others by putting their interests before our own and think of them as better than ourselves (Philippians 2). This type of response to others is what pleases God, not arguing with others as we try to prove our point.

God wants all people to know him. He wants them to be saved, and he invites us to be a light in our world. No matter what is ahead, remember that you have the answer—*Jesus Christ*. He is the answer to the questions our country is asking, and we have a mission to share it with those around us.

### **Questions:**

What are your feelings about the election? Hopeful, fearful? Why?  
How does your God-given mission change after the election is over?  
How can you promote peace to others in your everyday life?

### **Next Steps:**

Write down a list of people you will pray for this week, including the leaders of our city, state, and country. Check out the personal prayer guide for lists and ideas of what to pray for.

Commit to the mission God has given us. Team up with one of CedarCreek's DreamTeams as we work together to introduce people to Jesus and the life-changing adventure he has for them.

### **Prayer:**

*Dear God, nothing that happens today or in the weeks ahead will surprise you. You are all-knowing and all-powerful, and I have comfort in knowing you are in control. No matter what happens in the weeks, months, and years to come, the mission you have given me remains the same. Please, give me a clear mind,*

*strength, courage, and the peaceful spirit I need to live out this mission and shine in a dark world. Amen.*

*This post was written by Ben Bockert, a regular contributor to the LivingitOut.*

# Phewww! - The Great Divide

November 4, 2020

Well, it's Wednesday morning, or maybe afternoon, if you stayed up to watch the election results. Do we even know who won yet? Regardless of the outcome, today is Nov. 4, and tomorrow will be Nov. 5. The sun will come up, and our lives will go on. We still have opportunities to live our lives for Jesus and to promote his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. In his first pastoral letter, the apostle Peter has great advice for us, which notably is not dependent on our circumstances. And, as difficult as this advice may be to follow, it fits into Jesus' command for us to love one another as he loved us, even Judas, the traitor who's feet he washed!

## **1 Peter 3:8-9**

*<sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. <sup>9</sup> Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*

We have all spent the past months letting outside influencers tell us how to think and feel about one side or the other of the great divide—be it political, racial, spiritual, to mask or not to mask, etc. As Christ followers, we are called to be like-minded, united in our love for Christ and for each other. This we hold in our closed hand. While others are blaming, bullying, name-calling, and bashing in general, we are called to love one another, not to “repay evil with evil or insult with insult.” We are to “repay evil with blessing.” Why? So we can inherit a blessing! Peter goes on to quote a part of Psalm 34.

## **1 Peter 3:10-12**

*<sup>10</sup> For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. <sup>11</sup> They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. <sup>12</sup> For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

My favorite part is verse 11: “They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.” In her book, *The Space Between Us*, Sarah Bauer Anderson tells us to be aware of how **we** contribute to polarization. Each of us has our own bias, based on our knowledge and experience. None of us has the whole truth of

the matter. Most of us receive our information from the same or similar news sources, which have their own biases.

Often, we lack personal knowledge of the people with whom we differ. If you find yourself saying, “I just don’t know how they could think that way,” you have admitted there is something you don’t know! Become curious! Ask questions! Allow them space and hospitality to express their thoughts to you.

If you find yourself engaged in a conversation with someone whose opinion is diametrically opposite of yours, show them grace. Listen to their point of view. Allow them space to express themselves. Your grace will often be rewarded with a show of kindness and appreciation that leads to more and better conversations about what matters most: salvation through and life with Christ.

We must seek peace, seek to understand, give grace, and invite grace. *“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.”*

Four years from now, God willing, we will be looking at the results of another presidential election. In the days and months to come, we will have many opportunities to influence our communities with the love of Jesus. As individuals in our local churches, the hope of the world, we are called to make it our mission to follow Peter’s admonition.

It starts with me, the only person in the whole world over whom I have any control.

It starts with you, today. Seek peace and pursue it!

**Questions:**

How do you talk to those with whom you disagree? Are you “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry” (James 1:19)? Do you ask questions, seeking to understand the other’s point of view?

**Next Steps:**

The apostle Paul says in Romans 12:18, “Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.” The next time you have a conversation with someone who has different views than you, pray and invite the Lord into it before offering your own opinions.

Be curious. Ask questions. Listen. Find your common ground and celebrate that unity instead of focusing on your differences.

**Prayer:**

*Father, I thank you for your grace and mercy. I thank you that you first loved us and set the example for how we should love and serve each other. Help us keep our tongues from evil and our lips from deceitful speech. Help us to love each other, to seek peace, and to pursue it. Let your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven, and let it begin with me. In Jesus' powerful name, amen.*

*This post was written by Lauri White, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.*

# Peacemakers - The Great Divide

November 5, 2020

As Lead Pastor Ben Snyder brings our series, *The Great Divide*, to an end, we are reminded that God is in control of our world. We should be unified by Jesus and the mission he has given us, allowing that to be the common unity to help us with our complex differences.

## Matthew 5:9

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

*"Blessed are the peacemakers"—not peacekeepers.*

In ancient Rome, it was declared that every knee would bow as every tongue declared Julius Caesar "Lord." Meanwhile, Jesus followers were not allowed to meet. It was likely his declaration of "Dictator for Life" that caused his assassination. Augustus Caesar was his successor, and established the Roman Republic by instituting civil service, rule of law, and a common form of currency. He also secured travel and established a huge trading network throughout the Republic. From his leadership commenced a period of time called the Pax Romana ("Roman peace"). During this time, peace was maintained through peacekeepers, not peacemakers.

Peacemakers bring groups of people together by helping them understand and respect each other's rights. Peacekeepers do whatever is necessary to ensure all group stay in line with authority. During Pax Romana, Roman soldiers used force to keep citizens in line with what the Roman government wanted.

Peacemakers are at peace with God and desire to live in peace with all men. Peace with Christ enables us to be ambassadors of God's message to a troubled world. Thus, they shall be called "the children of God."

In our hearts, we know there is a difference between being a peace-lover and a peacemaker. Peace-lovers like the calm and security of "giving peace a chance." But peace has no chance unless it is waged!

Peace is the result of the work, nature, and sacrifice of those who are peacemakers. Those who pursue peace, take risks, and forgive. Those who compromise on personal demands without sacrificing personal honor. Those who are living out Jesus' teachings.

### **Romans 12:18**

*Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.*

It is not always possible to live in peace with all men. Just ask the apostle Paul, who was stoned, whipped, and even left for dead when his only crime was preaching the Good News.

### **Colossians 3:15**

*And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

This is a peace that we have within ourselves, even when there is no peace to be found in the world around us.

### **Questions:**

Is Jesus describing you when he says "blessed are the peacemakers"?

Where do you stand concerning peace in your relationships? Do you really want peace between them and you?

### **Next Steps:**

If you make the choice as a child of God to be a peacemaker, Jesus says you are not only blessed but you shall also be called a child of God who seeks the good for all through loving people as Christ has loved you. Make a difference by reaching out to someone today. It has to start with you!

### **Prayer:**

*Abba Father, I pray that I become a peacemaker in the lives that surround me and in my heart. I pray that by being a light in your name, it will inspire others to share in your peace and to learn your way to peace in this troubled world. Amen.*

*This post was written by Gary Schnabel, a regular contributor to the LivingitOut.*

# **Totally Relying Upon Spiritual Truth - The Great Divide**

November 6, 2020

We read in Proverbs 3:5, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.” Easy enough, right? This Bible verse offers a simple concept—trust. However, do not be fooled. “Trust” is truly complex and not at all simple, especially when it comes to God. We may say we “trust in the Lord,” but when we’re put to practical tests, do we?

The harsh reality is this business of *trusting God* is extremely personal. No one can remove any/all angst I possess by trusting God for me. Conversely, I cannot remove any/all angst another possesses by trusting God for him/her. It is plain and simple—no one can act as a substitute when it comes to trusting God. It’s an inside job!

Although no money is exchanged, trusting God does cost something. The cost is the on-going investment of your time spent getting to know God, to REALLY know him. There is no better way to know God than developing a daily habit of connecting, one-on-one. By studying his word, in the proper context, he reveals his faithfulness to his people at all times. It should come as no surprise that Satan arranges numerous distractions in an effort to “steal” the precious commodity known as time. We genuinely become a threat to Satan and the powers of darkness when we embrace the identity we have in Christ.

Unfortunately, I have yet to find a product for sale named “Trust God.” While there is no shortage of “Jesus Junk” or “Holy Hardware” for sale, none of it will suffice when it comes to trust. There are no shortcuts to developing trust in him. Our ability to trust God is in direct proportion to how well we know him. As we develop our relationships with him, our hearts faithfully know he can be trusted, and we begin to lean into him more and more.

Completely trusting God does not mean problems and challenges will not surface in life. But completely trusting God does mean that no matter how messy or uncomfortable the situation may be, he will be with us every step of the way.

## **Questions:**

What level of trust in the Lord do you possess? What daily disciplines would be

helpful in growing your trust in the Lord? What stands in the way of increasing your ability to trust God?

**Next Steps:**

Build/reinforce your faith and your understanding of God and God's attributes by studying the scriptures for yourself. Make it a priority to spend time exercising your spiritual muscles. Read "trust"-specific Scripture verses to deepen your faith and understanding of God and his attributes.

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, it is my desire to increase my level of trust in you. As I intentionally present the cares of my life to you each day, it is not my goal to reclaim those cares. Empower me to sanitize my thought life with deep trust, knowing my efforts get in your way. Thank you for reminding me the love you offer is pure. I long to have a clean heart before you God, in word and action. In Jesus' name, amen.*