

Civil Discourse 101 – Introduction and First Week

"Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

The Gospel according to St. Matthew 24:44

"Therefore, stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

The Gospel according to St. Mark 13:35-37

INTRODUCTIONS

DEFINITION OF COURSEWORK AND DESIRED OUTCOME

Civil Discourse 101 – Maintaining our Christian identity in the midst of differing worldviews and the conversations that inevitably come up. Today's world is teaching and training people to be in opposition. And in that training, there is included a directive to demonize those who think, act, or feel differently than we do. In former days, we used to be able to have civil discussions with friends and strangers, and even without agreement, we were able to discuss things rationally and without anger. As Christians, we can find ourselves faced with harsh opposition to our views, opinions, or even our random thoughts. Many of us struggle to maintain our loving Christian identity in the face of this fierce opposition. And some of us, bring out this oppositional nature in others without even knowing how we may have provoked it.

Another trouble we have is in maintaining our focus on keeping the first things first in all our actions, interactions, thoughts, words and deeds. As in the opening two readings, Jesus will come at a time and in a way that will be a surprise to us all. We, as Christians, must, "Stay Awake!" And be prepared at all times for His coming. We will spend these next nine weeks building a foundation from which we can work on this, together.

1. The course is designed with the hopeful outcome that all who come will be better able to have significant conversations with others of differing opinions in ways that honor God and those He puts in our path.
2. We will honor each other in our discourse in the class.
3. It is our strong desire that relationships will be strengthened during this process.
4. We will seek to reflect the heart of God in all we do.
5. The course is NOT about convincing others of the rightness of our cause.
6. The course is NOT about sharing the truth in opposition to others.
7. This is NOT a course in Christian apologetics or evangelism.
8. We are here to work on ourselves and our part of the conversation.
9. We will guard the clock so as to retain time for prayer, confession, forgiveness.

OPENING PRAYER

WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

God has given us two great commandments, Love God, Love Others. The first is our vertical relationship with the Lord. This one seems almost easy in comparison to the other, but truth be told, we simply don't have anyone who is easily able to guide us or check us in this one. The other, Loving Others, our horizontal relationship with people, is challenging at the best of times. We all have list of those who challenge us in our lives to love them. We choose to isolate ourselves from them, or in the words of our Lord, we might walk on the other side of the street to avoid them, or turn our eyes away in order to discourage interacting with them.

Both these are commandments from God, Father & Son. And we are equipped to carry these out by the power of the Holy Spirit. We have the command, we have the ability, the questions that remain, are; "Are we willing?" "Does our life express our desire to carry out these commandments?" "Would others say that they see us doing this often during the course of our lives?" "Are we Staying Awake?"

"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" **Luke 18:5b**
In our earthly relational challenges, we find ourselves behaving in ways that are not always faithful, and more often, sinful in nature. During these 9-weeks of Civil Discourse 101, we will seek to prepare ourselves better to Stay Awake, and be ready for the return of Christ. On the way, we will find more joy in our encounters with others, and more light in our spheres of influence as we become beacons of God's love, expanding His kingdom.

COURSE NORMS: What we will expect of each other, and agree to abide by ourselves, so that all will feel safe, able to express themselves without fear, and feel loved by God, and the others in this course. (Norms is another way to say, "rules of the Road.") We have provided some on the list you have on the next page. This list is designed to be fluid, allowing for additions and edits as we go along through this course.

FEELINGS, YOUR, MINE & OURS

Wheel of Emotions - activity

JESUS KNEW IT WOULD BE HARD. HE COMMANDS US TO DO IT ANYWAY

Luke 6:32-35a

PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK

CLOSING PRAYER

IN PREPARATION FOR NEXT WEEK

- **Pray for God to open your eyes to the encounters you have this week.**
 - Where do you see discord?
 - What is the cause of any trouble you see or experience?
 - Where do you see harmony/ peace?
 - What is the cause of this peace?
- **Read through the list of challenging topics below and on the following page.**
 - Circle the ones that cause you to experience strong emotions. (These may be “triggers” for you.)
 - Beside the ones that bring up strong emotions, write down the emotion that comes up with each one. (Use the Wheel of Emotions that was passed out this week)
- **Write out a prayer, asking God to give you a heart for your current enemies.**
 - This prayer might look something like the following; Dear Lord, You know a struggle with those who love/hate our current President. Help me to see them the way that You do, Your precious and beloved children, and not like I do now. Give me eyes to see Your image in them, the one in which You created them. Allow me to look past the issues that I am allowing to divide us, or to set aside those things that cause me to withhold my love for them. Open the eyes of my heart Lord, I want to see You in them, and allow them to see You in me. Amen.
 - Or something like this: Father, the challenges in my relationships are at least partly my fault, maybe even all my fault. No matter who is to blame, I know that I have sinned against those You have connected me to by blood and/or marriage. My heart is cold as stone towards them and I have no feelings of love for them. But You, O Father, love them as You love me, and I am commanded to do the same. Help me, Father, I cannot do this on my own. Give me the strength to set aside the sins that stand between us and to love them as You love me. Amen,

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT GET US IN TROUBLE THESE DAYS?

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| ➤ Foreign Policy/ Iranian War. | Abortion/ Right to Life |
| ➤ Government Shutdowns | Trust in Election Security/ Voter ID |
| ➤ Gun Control | Affordability |
| ➤ LGBTQIA+ lifestyle issues around sexuality | Political Parties |
| ➤ Immigration and Border security | Fraud in Government |
| ➤ Charlie Kirk, life, work & death | Vaccines & the future of Public Health |
| ➤ Wealth Inequity, billionaires | Erasing History |
| ➤ Love, Dating & the Disintegration of Marriage | Moral Duty –do we owe strangers? |
| ➤ A host of prominent political figures; Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, etc.... | |

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND CURRENT EVENTS

Affirmative Action	Factory farming	Racial profiling
Affordable Care Act	Filibuster	Reparations
Alternative medicine	Foreign aid	Russian hacking
Alt-right	Fracking	Sanctuary city
America's global influence	Freedom of speech	Screen addiction
Antifa	General Data Protection	Self-driving cars
Artificial intelligence	Genetic engineering	Smart speakers
Assisted suicide	Gerrymandering	Social Security reform
Bilingual education	Hate speech	Socialism
Biofuels	Health insurance	Stem cells
Black Lives Matter	Human trafficking	Stimulus packages
Border security	Immigration	Supreme Court
Capital punishment	Israel-Palestine relations	Sweatshops
Charter schools	Judicial activism	Syrian civil war
Childhood obesity	Labor unions	Title IX enforcement
Climate change	Land acknowledgments	Trade tariffs
Concussions in football	Minimum wage	Transgender rights
COVID restrictions	Misinformation	Ukraine and Russia
Cryptocurrency	Net neutrality	Vaccination mandates
Cyber bullying	Nuclear energy	Vaping
Cybersecurity	Offshore drilling	Violence in the media
Drug legalization	Online anonymity	Voter ID laws
Early voting	Organic food	Voting fraud and security
Eating disorders	Outsourcing	White nationalism
Equal Rights Amendment	Police reform	Wildfires
Executive order	Political activism	Women's rights
Extremism	Prescription drug addiction	Zero tolerance policies

Pastor Galligar – pastor.galligar@faithlecanto.org
812-350-7820 cell

John Bechler – jbechler79@icloud.com
352-527-8685 cell



935 S. Crystal Glen Drive, Lecanto, FL 34461
Office: 352-527-3325
Fax: 352-527-7043
connect@faithlecanto.org
www.faitheleanto.org