

BETWEEN COMPROMISE AND COURAGE
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
DR. JIM DENISON

A DISCUSSION GUIDE ON RACISM

The following discussion guide may be used in a small group setting or for your personal time of devotion. We hope it helps you both better understand the topic and how God might want to use you, in your specific context, to be “salt and light” on this issue. A PDF download is available at denisonforum.org/courage-questions.

1. What is the most recent race-related death you’ve read or seen in the news?
2. How did your family or friends respond to that news?
3. How did you respond?
4. Why is it important to know the history of racism in America?
5. Considering racism in the church, how can your church increase its diversity?

6. Recall Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous quote that Sunday morning worship services are the most segregated hour in America. When that is the case, is it necessarily the result of racism? Can you think of any alternative reasons why Sunday morning worship services might be predominantly one race? What are some ways churches that are not multiracial can partner with other Christians to model the diversity of God's kingdom?

7. "Racism makes crime in south Dallas a 'Black' problem and drug abuse in north Dallas a 'White' problem when they're both our problems." What's the problem with designating social issues to certain races?

8. Before reading this chapter, what did you know about slavery in the Bible?

9. The conceptions and reality of slavery in the Bible are different from those of slavery in America's history. Recall the following important biblical events/statements against slavery in the New Testament:
 - Paul abolished all racial and social discrimination for Christians.
 - Free Christians viewed slaves as their equal.
 - The New Testament church gave those who were enslaved a family and a home.
 - Not a single New Testament leader owned slaves, even though many had the resources to purchase them.

Which points stand out to you? Why? Note the biblical references in this chapter. What do these biblical truths tell you about the early church? How do their practices inform our ideas of church today?

16. Why is it important that we continually return to God and his truth when we think about aspects of community?

17. How can you make loving others more of a priority in your life?

A DISCUSSION GUIDE ON ABORTION

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1. What is your stance on abortion? What views does your local community hold on abortion?

2. Review the following statistics:

- “Every year, more than thirty-six thousand people die on US highways. Every sixteen days, that many abortions are performed in America.”
- “Since the Supreme Court’s Roe v. Wade decision legalized abortion in 1973, more than sixty-one million abortions have been performed in America.”

Before reading this article, were you familiar with the US abortion rate? What does this tell us about the reality of abortion in our country?

3. I state that “abortion is the moral issue of our time.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

4. Review the four arguments that have developed since 1973 regarding when abortion should be permissible.
 - There should be no right to an abortion, even to save the life of the mother. This has been the Catholic Church's usual position.
 - Therapeutic abortions can be performed to save the mother's life.
 - Extreme case abortions can be permitted in cases of rape, incest, or severe deformation of the fetus. Most pro-life advocates would accept therapeutic and extreme case abortions.
 - Abortion should be available to any woman who chooses it.

Which of the statements seems most reasonable and why?

5. Review the five moral arguments for pro-choice:
 - No one can say when a fetus becomes a person, so the mother is the most appropriate person to make decisions regarding it.
 - Abortion must be protected so a woman who is the victim of rape or incest does not have to bear a child resulting from such an attack.
 - No unwanted child should be brought into the world.
 - The state has no right to legislate personal morality.
 - A woman must be permitted to make pregnancy decisions in light of her life circumstances.

Have you ever entered into a discussion or debate with someone regarding these statements? If so, how did you respond? I expound on the five arguments. To what extent do you empathize with my reasoning?

6. Read the following pro-life arguments listed in the article.

- A fetus is a human life and should be granted the full protection of the law.
- Most pro-life advocates are willing to permit abortion in cases of rape or incest or to protect the life of the mother.
- Pro-life advocates agree that all children should be wanted, so they argue strongly for adoption as an alternative to abortion.
- Pro-life supporters do not see abortion legislation as an intrusion into areas of private morality.
- Pro-life advocates want to encourage the health of both the mother and the child and do not believe that we must choose between the two.

Does one argument stand out to you as particularly significant? If so, why? Do you disagree with any of the statements? Do Christians act honorably when standing for these principles? If so, how? If not, how can Christian communities better show their pro-life support?

7. Consider the following approaches to the question “When does life begin”?

- **Functionalism:** A fetus is a “person” when it can act personally as a moral, intellectual, and spiritual agent.
- **Actualism:** A fetus is a person if it possesses the potential for developing self-conscious, personal life. This definition would permit abortion when the fetus clearly does not possess the capacity for functional life.
- **Essentialism:** A fetus is a person from conception, whatever its health or potential. It is an individual in the earliest stages of development and deserves all the protections afforded to other persons by our society.

Which approach seems most biblical? Why?

12. In “A way forward in pro-life vs. pro-choice,” I write that Christians should:

- One: build a consensus for permitting abortion to protect the life of the mother or in cases of rape and incest.
- Two: understand that the pre-born possess at least the potential for “life,” however it is defined.
- Three: “Pro-life” and “pro-choice” advocates should work together to fulfill President Clinton’s desire that abortion be “rare.”
- Four: whatever the “pro-choice” position decides to do to help limit abortions, “pro-life” advocates must do all we can to care for both the unborn child and its mother.

Are the points straightforward, or is there room for disagreement? Which of the points resonated most with you? Are there any you would add to the list?

13. Reread the testimony given at the end of the article. In our local communities, how can we better serve women considering abortion or women who have already had one?

14. Does knowing that so many of the “greats” in history were unwanted pregnancies shift your perspective on abortion?

15. Have any of your views been changed or altered after reading this article? If so, how?

A DISCUSSION GUIDE ON POLITICS

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1. Do you consider yourself a political person? Why or why not?
2. Do you think the Bible addresses politics? If so, how?
3. How did God use political leaders in the Bible?
4. Outside of the examples listed in the article, what other political leaders did God use in the Bible?
5. How does God use political leaders today?
6. Why does the church seem to flourish when it's persecuted?

7. Read Psalm 22:28. How does that apply to who rules you? To you?

8. How have you prepared yourself, either now or in the past, for upcoming presidential voting days?

9. How can a Christian discern if God is calling them to serve in public office? (Alternately, why should more Christians consider lives of public service?)

10. Of the four ways listed to engage in politics, which do you routinely do? Why? Which do you fail to do? Why? What other ways might a Christian engage in the political process?

11. Is it ever OK for a Christian to disobey the government? If so, what should be taken into account?

12. How will God's word shape your politics going forward?

A DISCUSSION GUIDE ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

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1. Read Acts 5:17–33. Then consider the questions posed in this chapter’s introduction:
 - Are America’s Christians facing threats to our religious liberty on such a level that we must stand up at any cost? Have we reached that point where we must say to secular authorities, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29)?
 - If you agree, name a few examples of recent threats to our religious liberty.
 - If you disagree, discuss why American Christians have not reached that point. Consider comparing our current cultural and governmental climate to that of the early Christians.

2. Two Supreme Court cases, spurred by church closures in light of the coronavirus pandemic, are cause for concern. In each case, a 5–4 ruling went against a church’s request to reopen. In each case, the dissenting opinions noted how the final ruling “indisputably discriminates against religion, and such discrimination violated the First Amendment.”
 - First, take the side of the majority opinion. Why do you think they voted as they did? (Read the major opinion of *South Bay United Pentecostal Church v. Newsom*.)
 - Next, take the side of the dissenting opinion. Why did they dissent?
 - Why are these narrow rulings cause for concern for Christians?

6. Read Matthew 22:15–22.

- Why was Jesus' answer to the Pharisees such that "they marveled" after having heard it?
- How is "Render to Caesar's the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" relevant to your life today?

7. How can you be an "ambassador for Christ" in the following areas (2 Corinthians 5:20)?

- In your home?
- At your job?
- In your neighborhood?
- With your friends and family?
- At your church?
- Online?
- In the world at large?

A DISCUSSION GUIDE ON REMOVING STATUES

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1. Of the many examples listed (Frederick Douglass, Hans Christian Heg, Ulysses S. Grant, Christopher Columbus, etc.), do you think any of the statues were justly removed?
2. Refer to Lucian K. Truscott IV’s comment that Thomas Jefferson’s memorial “is a shrine to a man who during his lifetime owned more than 600 slaves.” What is your initial response to this statement?
3. Now consider former congressman Jesse Jackson Jr.’s statement on the statue of Lincoln: “It’s not just a statue of a man being subservient to Lincoln. We can’t tear down everything. You can’t on the one hand, celebrate Juneteenth . . . and then tear down the statue that marks the event. How much sense does that make?” How would you respond to his statement?
4. Why do you think there are so many opinions or differing responses to removing statues?

5. Recall these survey results: “A recent poll found that 45 percent of Americans see statues of Confederate war heroes as symbols of Southern pride, while 36 percent view them as symbols of racism. Forty-five percent believe they should not be removed from public property, while 38 percent feel they should be removed. However, 60 percent believe that statues of American presidents who were slaveholders should not be removed.” Do these statistics shock you? Why or why not?

6. Read the following arguments in defense of statues. Do you agree with these reasons? Why or why not? Does one argument strike you as more effective than the others or more important to consider?
 - Historical figures should be judged by their times, not by ours.
 - We should preserve controversial statues in order to learn from them.
 - We should resist anarchy and violations of the rule of law.
 - We should add statues instead of removing ones that already exist.

7. Review the arguments for removing statues. Do you agree with these reasons? Why or why not? Does one argument strike you as particularly more effective than the others or more important to consider?
 - Slaveholders must not be honored.
 - Confederate memorials must be removed.
 - Offensive statues should be replaced.

8. Consider Dr. Moore's threefold approach to the debate over removing statues. What is most important about each step in that approach?

9. Recall: "Idolatry is worshiping or venerating anything or anyone in violation of God's sovereignty and will. We commit idolatry when we honor people and behavior that defies and disobeys his word." And further: "To honor racism and its related sins is to dishonor God and his word." Does this biblical principle change the way you view any of the arguments for and against removing statues? If so, why? Does it change what you believe about removing statues?

10. Recall: "Monuments and memorials constructed for the purpose of marking, remembering, and teaching history are valuable means of preserving our past and preparing our future." How does remembering the past help us prepare for the future? Do you consider it a greater evil to remove a statue that serves as a remembrance or to leave it as a reminder for future generations? Why?

11. Because Jesus was the only perfect person, we can find flaws in every historical figure. How does this point tie into the fact that idolatry is sin? Even as we honor historical figures who acted honorably, how does our honoring of Jesus Christ shape the way we view history and our world?

12. What inspires some people offends others. If some are offended by a statue, we should tear it down, so that they might not stumble. What do you think of this argument? Do you agree with its reasoning?

13. Do you agree with the statement that “decisions regarding public art should be made by the public”? Why or why not?

14. How is the “extremely emotional and divisive” issue of removing statues relevant to you where you live?

15. How can you respond by loving your neighbor in practical, compassionate ways?

16. What difference can you make that advances the kingdom of God and the public good?

17. Finally, has this chapter helped shape your view of the issue? If so, how? Do you feel more equipped to “choose wisely”? Why or why not?

A DISCUSSION GUIDE ON CANCEL CULTURE

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1. How do you define cancel culture? How much exposure have you had to cancel culture?
2. Of the three examples of cancel culture presented in the article, which most surprises you? In any of these situations, how would you have responded as the one being canceled? As a spectator?
3. I wrote that “anyone can organize such a protest, whether their outrage and called-for response are justified or not.” Why is this a dangerous reality? How can Christians mitigate this effect on social media?
4. What is wrong with the idea of “canceling” someone? For Christians, why is it important to defend freedom of speech?
5. Jill McCorkel says that the collective canceling of someone creates a sense of community. As a Christian, how would you counsel someone who believes that their cancelation of a public figure is for the common good or that participating in a digital boycott gives them a sense of community?

6. I wrote that “cancel culture is rooted in the postmodern assertion that all truth claims are individual and subjective” and that “tolerance is therefore the great value of our society.” How has this affected social media? How should we interact with nonbelievers on social media platforms?

7. How should we be mindful of ourselves in our spheres of influence?

8. Refer to the following five ways that Christianity and culture have interacted historically.

- Christ against culture: retreat from engagement with the fallen world
- Christ of culture: adopt the shifting cultural norms of the day.
- Christ above culture: to divorce Sunday from Monday and religion from the “real world.”
- Christ and culture in paradox: engages cultural issues for the sake of evangelism and ministry but focuses less on cultural transformation.
- Christ transforming culture: seeks to change minds, lives, and society.

Which of the five reflects the way you interact with the world? How about your local community?

9. Reread the passage from John 15:19. Does this alter the way you perceive cancel culture?

10. Consider the three points of response:

- See persecution as a call to courageous perseverance.
- Seek the reward of God before the acclaim of the culture.
- Choose to engage the culture with truth and grace.

Which of the three sounds most challenging? Which is easier to adopt?

Now consider each point separately. In what ways can you encourage your immediate community to live by each point for the glory of the gospel?

11. How has your perception of cancel culture changed after this study? In what ways are you now more equipped to interact with today's culture?

6. How does the question of “the unpardonable sin” relate to whether a Christian can lose his or her salvation? Put another way, can a Christian “fall from grace”?

7. Does our culture accept physician-assisted suicide? What evidence proves your stance?

8. Have you ever given thought to what “extreme measures” you would allow to yourself if placed in a medically precarious position? Or have you had a personal experience with family or friends facing such decisions? How did they decide their chosen path?

9. If you had an aggressive disease and had been given only months to live, would you seek quantity of life or quality of life? Why?

10. What does it mean to be created in God’s image? How does this fact relate to physician-assisted suicide?

11. How do the dualistic and holistic views of the body differ?

12. How can you help others dealing with anxiety, depression, and/or thoughts of suicide?

13. What are three promises of God every Christian can claim when it comes to the problem of suicide?