

## Moving from Personal to Public: Living Your Faith in the World

### Overview:

It's not unusual for Christians to associate the public expression of our faith with witnessing, taking a stand on moral issues, or voting their values on election day. While these are all forms of living the Christian faith, Scripture calls us to a more comprehensive approach to living and working in the world. This discussion encourages group members to consider the public responsibility that accompanies a personal faith.

### Discussion:

As a group, read and reflect on the following verses. What do they tell us about how God intends us to live out our faith?

#### **Matthew 5:13-16**

**Matthew 6:9-13** (pay special attention to v 10) "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

- How does this perspective differ from the perspective that faith is strictly personal?
- What is the fruit of this public faith?

#### **A Change of Heart**

Jim Wallis, founder of the Sojourners movement, describes the spiritual shift that must happen for us to move from private to public faith:

"Our conversion, then, cannot be an end in itself; it is the first step of entry into the kingdom. Conversion marks the birth of the movement out of a merely private existence into a public consciousness. Conversion is the beginning of active solidarity with the purposes of the kingdom of God in the world. No longer preoccupied with our private lives, we are engaged in a vocation for the world. Our prayer becomes, 'They kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' If we restrict our salvation to only inner concerns, we have yet to enter into its fullness. Turning from ourselves to Jesus identifies us with him in the world. Conversion, then is to public responsibility—but public responsibility as defined by the kingdom, not by the state. Our own salvation, which began with a personal decision about Jesus Christ, becomes intimately linked with the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The connection between conversion and the kingdom cannot be emphasized enough."

- Jim Wallis, "The Call"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gushee, David P. and Isaac B. Sharp. *Evangelical Ethics: A Reader*. John Knox Press, 2015.

- According to Wallis, what does it mean to be converted?
- How is does this conversation express itself in a believer’s daily life?
- What’s your gut reaction to this quote? (Areas of agreement or objections?)
- Does it characterize your faith journey? What might it mean for your life and work?

### **Flourishing, Wholeness, and Delight**

As the Lord’s Prayer reminds us, we should long for God’s Kingdom to be as real here on earth as it is in heaven. But what does that mean?

Scripture describes it as *shalom*, a comprehensive state of well-being or wholeness. As the Lord told Jeremiah, “Seek the *shalom* of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its *shalom*, you will find your *shalom*” (Jer. 29:7). Author Cornelius Plantinga describes it this way:

“[Shalom is] the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight...We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or cease-fire among enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things out to be.”<sup>2</sup>

- Think of your community—in what ways does it most need shalom? (Be specific.)
- How could your vocational gifts, resources (time, money, possessions), or relationships help others flourish?
- What might it cost you to pursue shalom in your community? What might you gain?

### **Application**

Spend a moment identifying specific steps you can take to live your faith more publically. Encourage the group to start where they’re at—as Jim Wallis observes, their hearts may not be converted to the idea that personal faith comes with a public responsibility. As a group close your time by praying for clarity and courage to pursue *shalom*.

### **Additional Resources:**

“How to be Religious in the Public Square,” a speech by David Brooks at The Gathering, a conference for Christian philanthropists. This 35-minute podcast requires a time commitment for your group, but it’s fantastic! Well worth a listen. (Brooks starts speaking at 8:35.)

<https://thegathering.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/David-Brooks-The-Gathering-2014.mp3>

<sup>2</sup> Plantinga, Cornelius. *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*. Eerdmans, 1996.