

SHALOM

Following Jesus in an Anxious, Angry & Polarized World

*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,
and through him to **reconcile** to himself all things,
whether things on earth or things in heaven,
by **making peace** through his blood, shed on the cross.*
Colossians 1:19-20

What are the virtues and practices that should guide apprentices of Jesus
in an age of anxiety, anger and polarization?
How can these virtues be formed in our lives and in our community?

Week One: Anxious, Angry and Divided

John 8:1-11, Ephesians 2:14-18

We live in a polarized world of opposing viewpoints, demonization of opponents, cancel culture, division inside and outside the church. In such a world, it is so important to learn how to live out the biblical vision of a diverse church that is united in Christ, as a witness to the love of God.

Week Two: Exile and the Kingdom of God

Jeremiah 29:1-7, 1 Timothy 2:1-8

Politics has become, even for many Christians, a new religion, a realm where people place a great degree of “hope.” Our society wants the kingdom without the King, human flourishing (right or left) without reference to God. What does it mean to dwell in exile, as citizens of the kingdom of God within the kingdoms of this world? Why is it important for apprentices of Jesus to understand the benefits and limits of the earthly political realm?

Week Three: Wisdom and Discernment

James 3:17-18, Philippians 4:2-3, Ephesians 4:3-6, Romans 14:1-13

In an age of proliferating digital content, allegations of “fake news,” significant religious, moral and philosophical pluralism, and deep complexity, disputes about what is true, what is right, and what is good are inevitable. How do we know what is worth fighting for? How can apprentices of Jesus approach these disputes in a way that leads to a wise and beneficial outcome for all?

Week Four: The Allure of Gentleness

Galatians 5:13-23, Philippians 4:11-13

Many disagreements in our culture are framed as a battle – a battle for freedom, for the soul of the nation, for family values. The dynamics of social media make it easy to distance ourselves from those who think differently than us, making that sense of battling an unseen, faceless “enemy” even more vivid. Yet the only battle Christians are called to fight in Scripture is against our spiritual enemies in the heavenly realms. With our fellow human beings, made in the image of God, we are called to model the kind of virtues that make human society flourish for the good of all. Why is gentleness preferred over militancy among Jesus’ apprentices? On what basis can we afford to be gentle?

Week Five: Faithfulness and Non-Anxious Presence

Luke 13:18-21

Whether in personal disagreements, corporate discernment, or cultural arguments, it is always a temptation to cast aside level-headedness and allow the anxious emotional forces of anger, grief, confusion and impatience to take over. It is impossible love our neighbour when these emotions are in charge. The gospel takes root in relationships and in culture, not through manipulation and power games, but through the patient, kingdom work of love. How can we develop a steadiness of soul that equips us to be a non-anxious presence in anxious spaces? How does Jesus use our non-anxious presence to change our world?

Week Six: Hospitality and Peacemaking

Luke 19:1-10

The pandemic only has heightened the isolation and loneliness that was already endemic in our digitally connected, but socially disconnected world. In particular, identity politics have come to the fore as a primary way of dehumanizing and labelling the “Other.” But most of Jesus’ most significant ministry happened at meals, in loving conversation with people with whom he had ample reason to disagree. As exiled, kingdom-of-God citizens, marked by wisdom, gentleness, and faithfulness in seeking the good of our neighbours, how does a posture of hospitality cultivate the mutual empathy that could bring “enemies” together? How could the gospel equip us for radical friendship with those who are politically, philosophically, or culturally very different from us?