

The (Un)Common Good Study Guide Week 4

Summary

Chapter 8: Conservatives, Liberals, and a Call to Civility

This chapter explores the growing divide in political discourse and the loss of civility in public dialogue. Wallis argues that both conservative and liberal perspectives contribute valuable ideas—personal responsibility and social justice—to the common good. He emphasizes the need for civil discussions where people listen, learn, and find solutions together instead of engaging in ideological warfare. He calls for a return to genuine problem-solving, strengthening relationships, and creating a more compassionate, solutions-focused society rather than one entrenched in division and blame.

Chapter 9: Redeeming Democracy

Wallis asserts that democracy, at its best, is rooted in moral and spiritual values, including the belief that all people are made in the image of God. However, cynicism and money have distorted the democratic process, limiting participation and prioritizing the wealthy over the common good. He encourages people of faith to reclaim their prophetic voice by advocating for voting access, reducing corporate influence in politics, and engaging in grassroots movements. True democracy requires active citizenship, a commitment to justice, and the willingness to challenge systems that prioritize power over people.

Chapter 10: Economic Trust

This chapter challenges the current economic system, which prioritizes profit over people and fosters inequality. Wallis critiques greed-driven financial institutions and calls for a moral economy based on transparency, accountability, and fairness. He advocates for economic repentance—moving away from exploitative practices and toward shared responsibility, fair wages, and sustainable business models. He urges faith communities to actively challenge unjust economic systems and work toward financial policies that reflect ethical and compassionate values, ensuring a just and equitable future for all.

Spiritual Practice: Gratitude

Gratitude is more than simply saying “thank you”—it is a way of seeing the world and a way of being in relationship with God and others. In a world that often focuses on scarcity and fear, gratitude helps us reorient our hearts toward abundance, generosity, and hope. This practice invites us to pause, reflect, and intentionally cultivate gratitude in our daily lives.

Gratitude is transformative. As we practice thankfulness, we open ourselves to greater generosity, deeper joy, and a renewed awareness of God’s presence in our lives. May we go forward with hearts full of gratitude and a commitment to sharing our abundance with others.

Guided Gratitude Practice:

Sit comfortably. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so. Take a few deep breaths, inhaling through your nose and exhaling slowly through your mouth. Let your body and mind settle into this moment.

Think about a moment this past week when you felt deeply grateful. It could be something simple—a kind word from a friend, a beautiful sunset, a meal shared with loved ones, or an unexpected blessing.

- Where were you?
- Who was with you?
- What emotions did you experience in that moment?
- How did you feel God's presence in that experience?

Silently offer a prayer of gratitude for this moment. Acknowledge how this experience has reminded you of God's generosity and the goodness in your life. If you feel comfortable, share one thing you're grateful for with the group.

Scriptures

Micah 6:8 (NRSVUE)

He has told you, O mortal, what is good,
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice and to love kindness
and to walk humbly with your God?

Doctrine and Covenants 163:3a&b

3 a. You are called to create pathways in the world for peace in Christ to be relationally and culturally incarnate. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness.

b. Above all else, strive to be faithful to Christ's vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth. Courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace.

Discussion Questions

1. Wallis emphasizes that our conversations should be rooted in respect, even when we strongly disagree. How does the Enduring Principle of Worth of All Persons guide us in having more civil and meaningful discussions, especially in today's polarized world?
2. In what ways have you seen civility and mutual respect strengthen relationships within your congregation or community? When have you experienced the opposite?

3. The call to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) is an important biblical concept. How can we balance standing firm in our beliefs while remaining open to dialogue and understanding?
4. Wallis suggests that faith should inform our public life, not in a partisan way, but in a way that seeks justice and the common good. How do Community of Christ’s Mission Initiatives—particularly Pursue Peace on Earth and Abolish Poverty, End Suffering—challenge us to be engaged in shaping a better society?
5. Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a states, “God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God’s will. ... Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.” How should this influence the way we view and participate in government, policy, and community activism?
6. Wallis critiques an economy driven by greed rather than fairness. How does our understanding of discipleship and generosity (including principles of disciple’s generous response and stewardship) challenge the economic inequalities we see in society?
7. In Community of Christ, we talk about being a prophetic people, not just a people with a prophet. How can we, as individuals and congregations, take action to advocate for a more just and ethical economy?

Practicing the (Un)Common Good: 5 Actions for the Week

Did you practice any of the “Actions for the (un)common good from last week? What was your experience? Choose one of the following to do this week:

Journaling Reflection: Take 10–15 minutes to write about a time when you had a difficult conversation with someone who had different political or social views. Did you approach it with civility and mutual respect? How might you apply the principles of Worth of All Persons and Pursuit of Peace to future conversations?

Support Ethical Businesses: Before making a purchase this week, research a company’s labor practices, wages, and sustainability efforts. Choose to support businesses that align with values of fairness and justice.

Engage in Civil Discourse: Engage in a respectful conversation with a friend or family member who holds different views. Focus on listening to understand rather than responding to persuade. Approach the discussion with curiosity, patience, and a willingness to learn from each other.

If you don’t feel comfortable or able to have this kind of conversation yet, take time this week to research resources on healthy dialogue and bridge-building conversations. Look for books, articles, or workshops on civil discourse, active listening, or conflict resolution. Practicing

empathy and understanding is just as important as the conversation itself. Some great resources to explore are included in the Resources section below

Advocate for Economic Justice: Write to an elected official or sign a petition supporting fair wages, worker rights, or policies that help eliminate poverty. Use your voice to advocate for the common good.

Practice Generosity with a Grateful Heart: Participate in the Disciple's Generous Response this week by giving from a place of gratitude and abundance rather than obligation. Consider making a financial gift to support a cause that promotes justice and economic equity or simply take time to notice and appreciate the abundance in your life. As a practice, download and engage with the "7-Day Guide to Gratitude" at cofchrist.org/generosity-spiritual-practices.

Closing Poem

Don't Hesitate

By Mary Oliver

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy,
don't hesitate. Give into it. There are plenty
of lives and whole towns destroyed or about
to be. We are not wise, and not very often
kind. And much can never be redeemed.
Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this
is its way of fighting back, that sometimes
something happens better than all the riches
or power in the world. It could be anything,
but very likely you notice it in the instant
when love begins. Anyway, that's often the
case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid
of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.

Project Zion Podcasts

[199 | A Prophetic People | Ron Harmon](#)

[203 | A Prophetic People | Matt Frizzell](#)

[211 | A Prophetic People | Linda Booth](#)

[279 | Peace, Justice, and the Role of Conflict | Matt Frizzell](#)

[317 | Grounds for Peace | Spirituality and Social Change](#)

[362 | Climate Brewing | Engaging the Faith Community](#)

[684 | Grounds for Peace | Linda Stanbridge | Social Justice and the Prophets](#)

Other Resources

- Braver Angels (braverangels.org) – Workshops and articles on engaging in civil conversations.
- The Center for Nonviolent Communication (cnvc.org) – Tools for compassionate communication.
- "Crucial Conversations" by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler – A book on navigating difficult discussions.
- [Statement on Political Activity from Community of Christ](#) dated September 2020
- [Faith in Action: A Guide to Faithful Political Engagement](#) from the Michigan Mission Center