



## **5 Keys to Keeping Peace in a Politically Divided Group**

Remember when “murder hornets” were the biggest thing we had to worry about in 2020? With all that’s taken place in the first eight months of this year—COVID-19, lockdowns, racial injustice, protests, political tensions—it feels like we should all just take a beach vacation for the rest of the year. Unfortunately, that’s not possible for most of us, so we’re now trying to navigate through more tension online and in-person than seemingly ever before. If you haven’t felt it yet, just pop open Facebook, Twitter, or any app where people gather and voice their opinions. It’s natural that those conversations and opinions are going to carry over to your small group. And that’s not always a bad thing.

We want people to be themselves while in our group, and part of that is allowing them to share anxieties and worries taking place in their lives. The problem comes when those times of sharing turn divisive. Masks or no masks. Trump or Biden. Pandemic or hoax. Virtual or in-person church/school. Passions spill over on each side, and winners and losers are staked out by the group. However, the message of the gospel—the place where our groups should ultimately stake our flags—isn’t a message of divisiveness. It’s a message of unity, borne from the fact we’re all unified in our need of a crucified and risen Savior to save us from our sins.

So the question becomes: How do we successfully lead a group of people through a gospel discussion who are deeply divided on the issues of the day? Here are five ideas.

### **1. SET CLEAR GROUND RULES.**

- Every group should have some type of covenant or agreement in place for expectations of how the group will function.
- As a part of that agreement, ground rules should be set on how political issues will be handled and discussed when they come up.
- Above all, every conversation must be filled with faith, hope, and love. If those three things aren’t present, the debate will have to stop.

### **2. ACKNOWLEDGE THERE ARE DIFFERENT OPINIONS IN THE GROUP.**

- If there’s more than one person in your group, I can almost guarantee there will be different opinions on hot-button issues. Just acknowledging that fact from the beginning will help alleviate some of the tension.
- Determine that you’re not going to have political contests within the group. Contests create winners and losers. We’re all winners when we cling to the message of the gospel.

### **3. CONTINUE TO PRACTICE THE “ONE ANOTHERS” IN YOUR GROUP.**

- Pastor Derwin Gray recently wrote, “Jesus says that people will know we are His disciples by the way we love one another. Love doesn’t mean I approve of your sin. Love means I recognize your human dignity and worth.”

- As we continue to practice the “one anothers” in our group, the more we will see our fellow brothers and sisters as children of God, not as political foes.

#### **4. BE READY TO CALL A TRUCE.**

- There will be moments and issues where it’s impossible for everyone to be in agreement. It will be up to you then as the leader to call a truce and ask everyone to agree to disagree on the topic at hand.
- Continuing to debate will take time and energy away from the core mission of the group to study God’s Word and make disciples. Know when it’s time to call it and move on.

#### **5. KNOW WHEN TO TAKE A DISCUSSION OFFLINE.**

- There will be times when a heated discussion should be continued outside of the group meeting. If the debate has turned personal between group members, it’s best to step in and suggest returning to it at a different time.
- Don’t let the conflict fester too long without resolution. More time and space can sometimes lead to more built-up pain. Hurt people will hurt people.
- With all of these options, use Paul’s advice in Ephesians 4:32 as your guide: “And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.”
- Even in this most divisive of times in history, we’re all bonded together by the love God had for us by sending His one and only Son to die for us. We can all unite around that!

#### **Think about:**

- What words or phrases can I use when things are getting too heated?
- Do I have a group member that is a natural peacemaker who could help when tense situations arise?
- What topic(s) do I personally have strong feelings about that could potentially cause a disagreement? How can I appropriately express my view without causing conflict?

—Chris Surratt is the discipleship and small groups specialist for Life Way Christian Resources, a ministry consultant and coach with more than 20 years of experience, and the author of *Leading Small Groups: How to Gather, Launch, Lead, and Multiply Your Small Group*.

—Article from [FactsandTrends.net](http://FactsandTrends.net)