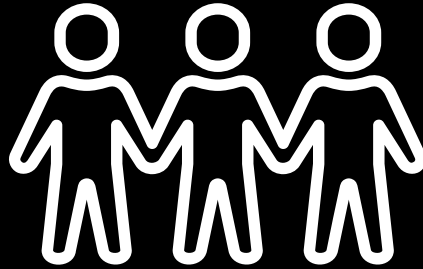




A 5-session Bible study presented by  
Lutheran Advocacy – Minnesota



# CIVICS IN SCRIPTURE

Understanding our call to civic  
engagement & public action

[lutheranadvocacymn.org](http://lutheranadvocacymn.org)

# Table of Contents

<b>How to Use this Bible Study</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Lutheran Advocacy-Minnesota</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Session 1: How Do You Engage?</b> Colossians 3: 15-17	<b>5</b>
<b>Session 2: Governance &amp; God</b> Romans 13: 1-10	<b>8</b>
<b>Session 3: Pursuing Justice for All</b> Amos 5: 10-15	<b>11</b>
<b>Session 4: Power &amp; Accountability</b> 1 Timothy 2: 1-4	<b>14</b>
<b>Session 5: The Political Cross</b> Luke 23: 1-5	<b>17</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>20</b>

# HOW TO USE THIS BIBLE STUDY

## WHAT TO EXPECT

This guide includes seven sessions of content, each related to a different facet of affordable housing. Each session is made up of three pages:

1. An introductory page with the scripture text(s) for that session, their underlying context, a brief overview of how they relate to civic action, a QR code to a supplementary video related to the topic, and additional information. To scan the QR codes, point your phone's camera at the code, then tap the link that appears on the screen.
2. An activity related to the facet of affordable housing that is the focus of the session.
3. Discussion questions about civic action, faith, and a blend between the two.

Additions like opening and closing prayers, devotionals, and other practices in your context are encouraged as well.

## LEAD WITH GRACE

You will most likely not agree with everything in this guide or with everything said in discussion. Civic engagement deals with divisive issues, and disagreements happen.

When conflicting views come up, it is important to lead with grace for one another and keep an open mind. Though we share a desire to better our communities, our ideas about how that should happen can and will differ. A desire to learn from one another is a great foundation for fruitful conversation.

## DISCUSSION

Discussion questions in this guide are divided into three categories:



Questions about political and civic engagement



Questions about the text, faith, and the life of the church



Questions that blend modern-day issues and themes from scripture.

# LUTHERAN ADVOCACY-MINNESOTA

## WHO WE ARE

In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, we advocate for wise and just public policies to overcome hunger and poverty, and steward God's creation. Lutheran Advocacy-MN (LA-MN) and its citizen advocates work for justice in the areas of hunger, poverty, and care of God's creation. LA-MN is a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the six Minnesota ELCA Synods. We seek to live into the ELCA vision to "Step forward as a public church that witnesses boldly to God's love for all that God has created.

## HOW WE DO IT

We work with and through synods, congregations, campus ministries, church members, and others to create and use networks for advocacy. Lutheran citizen advocates write personal emails, make calls, and meet with their state legislators (or members of Congress) to impact decisions. Lutheran Advocacy-MN is non-partisan, and participates in faith-based and other coalitions to enhance advocacy effectiveness and build political will to address important issues in God's world.

## GET INVOLVED

We have a variety of ways for you to get involved in the faithful work of advocacy. Whether you're a seasoned advocate or completely unsure of where to start, we have something for you!

Follow the QR code or the link below to our website to sign up for action alerts, find resources, join our Lenten and Lutheran Letter Campaigns, and learn more about the mission and ministry of Lutheran Advocacy-Minnesota.



[www.lutheranadvocacymn.org](http://www.lutheranadvocacymn.org)

# SESSION 1

## How Do You Engage?

### THE TEXT

#### COLOSSIANS 3:15-17

**15** Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

**16** Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. **17** And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

### THE CONTEXT

#### JESUS IN ALL THINGS

Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians from prison in Rome. The church in Colossae was in danger of falling victim to a group of false prophets. They pushed the idea that Jesus was not fully divine and that his power was limited.

Paul reassures the Colossian church that Jesus' grace is sufficient and encompasses all parts of our lives. Paul paints a picture of Christian life that goes well beyond the walls of any temple or church. He encourages the Colossians (and us!) to keep our minds and hearts set on Christ's mission in **all things**.



### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & FAITH

**Civic engagement** refers to collective actions designed to further the public good.

Our faith moves us to work for the good of all people and to live in community with one another. Civic engagement can be a great way to live out that faith.



### PAUL THE APOSTLE

**New Testament Author & Church Founder**

Paul the Apostle is credited with as many as 14 books of the New Testament, many of which outline what public life ought to look like for Christians in the early church. According to Paul, all we do, including civic engagement, should be done with Christ in mind.



## ACTIVITY CIVICS, FAITH, AND YOU

Civic engagement can take many forms. While voting and working the polls are essential, working toward the public good can happen in a multitude of ways. Paul reminds us that Jesus can work through all aspects of our lives, including our civic engagement!

Check each way that you have participated in civic engagement. Then, choose one checked item. In the space below, list every way you can think of that Jesus' mission works through that type of civic engagement.

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Voting                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Being a poll worker                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Helping others register to vote          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Contacting lawmakers                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Attending a peaceful protest             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cleaning up the community                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Volunteering with a non-profit           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Community gardening                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Being involved with a political campaign | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Donating money to a worthy cause         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Buying from local business               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**I participate in civic engagement by \_\_\_\_\_**

This helps me live out Christ's mission in the following ways:

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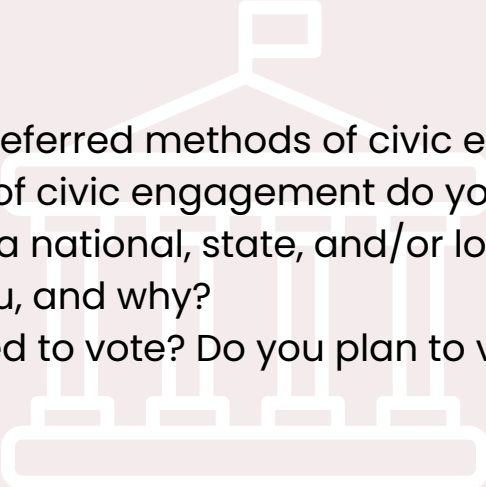
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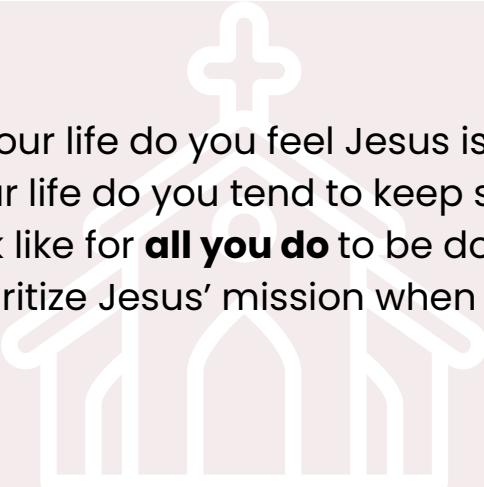
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## DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

### SESSION 1

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

- 
1. What are your preferred methods of civic engagement, and why?
  2. Which methods of civic engagement do you want to do more of?
  3. Which issues on a national, state, and/or local level are most concerning to you, and why?
  4. Are you registered to vote? Do you plan to vote in the next election?

- 
1. In what areas of your life do you feel Jesus is most present?
  2. What areas of your life do you tend to keep separate from your faith?
  3. What would it look like for **all you do** to be done in the name of Jesus?
  4. Is it difficult to prioritize Jesus' mission when you are "in the world?"  
Why or why not?

- 
1. How does your faith affect your civic engagement?
  2. We are called to love our neighbor. How can civic engagement help to further this call?
  3. What does it mean to engage with civics "in the name of Jesus?"
  4. When and where have you felt God's presence while participating in civic engagement?

# SESSION 2

## Governance & God

### THE TEXT

#### ROMANS 13:1-7

**1** Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. **2** Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. **3** For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, **4** for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. **5** Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. **6** For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. **7** Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

### THE CONTEXT

#### DEATH & TAXES

The Roman church in Paul's time was one of the first to welcome Jewish and Gentile worshippers. When Emperor Claudius exiled all Jews from Rome, however, the church was torn in two. When the Jewish members were allowed to return around 5 years later, they found a church that had developed without them.

Paul seeks to reunite the church, and in the midst of civil upheaval, remind them that **God cares about their governance**, and is constantly working for justice through their leaders. With this mindset, even the simple acts like following laws and paying taxes can be expressions of our faith.



### LETTER OF THE LAW

Laws can be vastly different from country to country, state to state, or even town to town. When it comes to scripture, however, **Law (upper case L in this guide)** mostly refers to the Law of Moses, or the many specific rules God gave the Israelites.

Meanwhile, the **law (lowercase l in this guide)** means the rules put in place by human powers.



### EMPEROR CLAUDIUS

Roman Emperor from 41-54 AD

There are many theories as to why Claudius expelled the Jewish people from Rome. Some argue that his goal was oppression. Others would say that Christians and Jews were often in open conflict at this time, and that Claudius simply sought peace for his people.



## ACTIVITY GOD'S GOVERNING HANDS

When examining how God works in the world, the ELCA has historically identified two unique but related ways in which God's authority appears.

God's **right hand** works within the individual, actively redeeming, instilling faith, and transforming the soul.

God's **left hand** works out in the world, moving through human institutions and cultures to affect positive change for God's people.

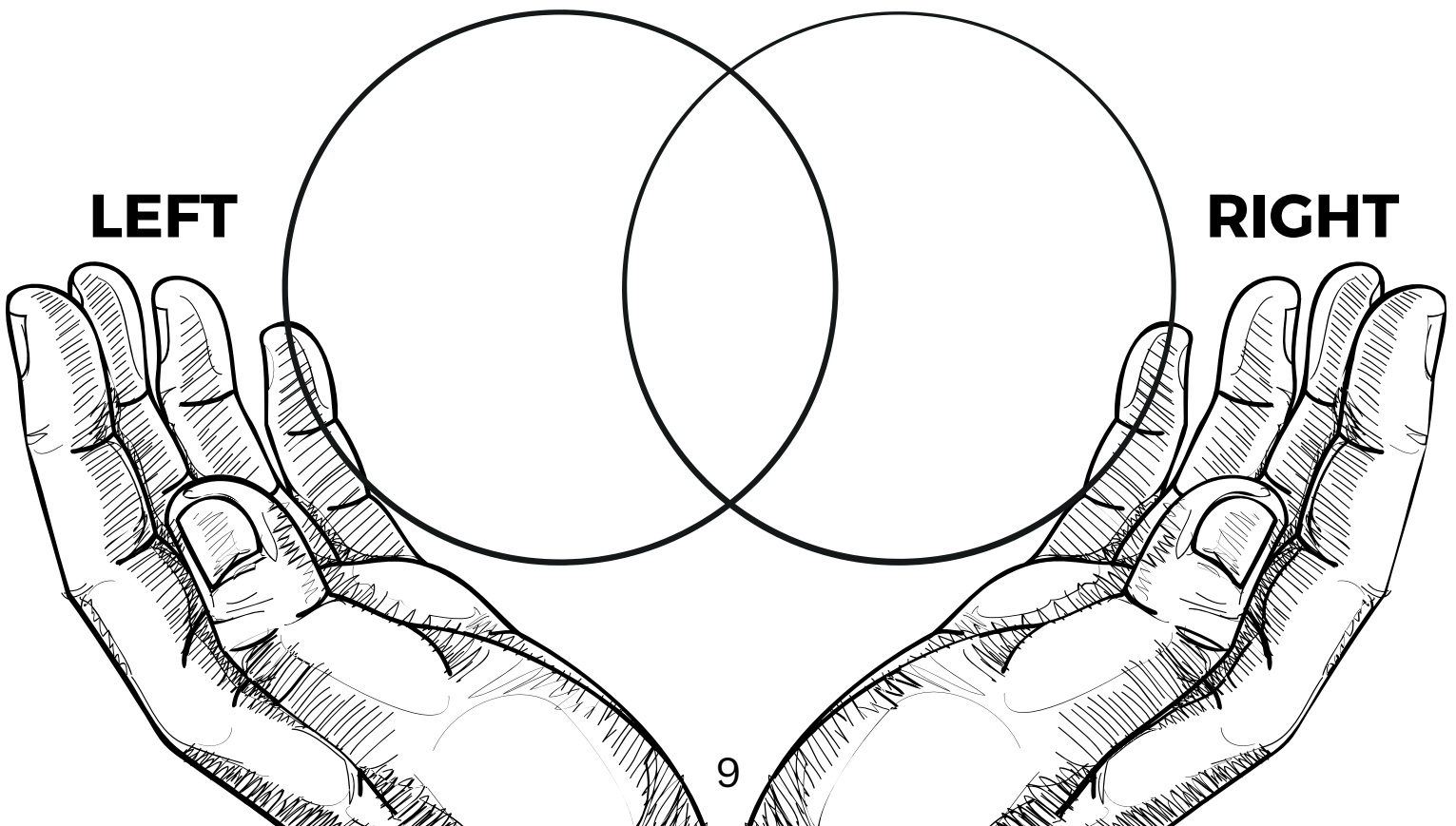
These two methods of governance are each essential in their own ways, and they often overlap and interact. Sort the items below according to which of God's hands you believe it belongs in. Some items may belong in both, and you may add more as you go.



Forgiveness    Redemption    Criminal justice    Housing    Racial justice    Hunger

Salvation    Environment    Hope    Comfort    Grace    Poverty    Faith    Immigration

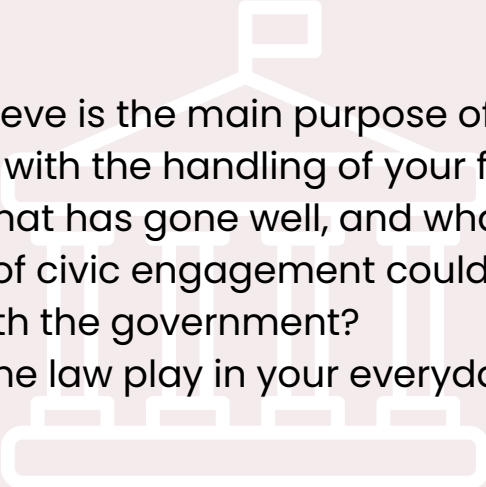
Labor rights    Public health    Love    Elections    Empathy    Healthcare

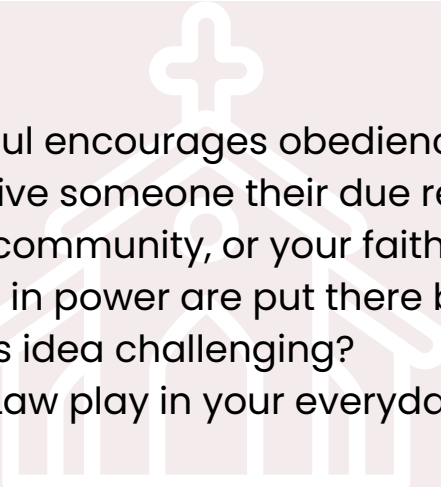



## DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

### SESSION 2

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

- 
1. What do you believe is the main purpose of government?
  2. Are you satisfied with the handling of your federal, state, and local governments? What has gone well, and what could be better?
  3. Which methods of civic engagement could be helpful in addressing your concerns with the government?
  4. What role does the law play in your everyday life?

- 
1. Why do you think Paul encourages obedience in this text?
  2. Have you failed to give someone their due respect or honor? How did this affect you, your community, or your faith?
  3. Paul says that those in power are put there by God. How does this make you feel? Is this idea challenging?
  4. What role does the Law play in your everyday life?

- 
1. When have you experienced God's right and/or left hands at work?
  2. How are God's right and left hands interconnected?
  3. Paul's text shows that God cares about our governance. How does this affect your civic engagement?
  4. Do you agree that things like laws and taxes can be expressive of our faith?

# SESSION 3

## Pursuing Justice For All

### THE TEXT

#### AMOS 5:10-15

**10** There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court and detest the one who tells the truth.

**11** You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine.

**12** For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. **13** Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil. **14** Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. **15** Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.

### THE CONTEXT

#### TRUTH TO POWER

The book of Amos collects the visions of the titular prophet into one of the most justice-focused books in the Bible. Amos was a prophet during a period of great economic growth for the upper-class in Israel. Much of this success was built on the exploitation of those lower on the economic ladder, including farmers, laborers, and those in poverty. The courts were chock full of corruption and bribery, and the system was thoroughly broken.

In Amos 5, we hear God (through Amos) express disappointment in these civil decisions. God reminds the Israelites that in this time of injustice, **God works through civic action to pursue justice for all.**



### TWO KINDS OF JUSTICE

Justice is not an easy term to define, but there are generally two kinds. **Retributive justice** demands proportional punishment for wrongdoing. The US court system often relies on this type of justice.

**Restorative justice**, however, focuses more on forgiveness and repairing the harm that was done. This tends to be more in line with the justice we see from Jesus.



### AMOS

Minor Prophet

Before his time as a prophet, Amos was a shepherd who was victimized by the very systems he warned against. After being called out of his rural life by God, Amos traveled Israel and proclaimed God's vision for economic justice.

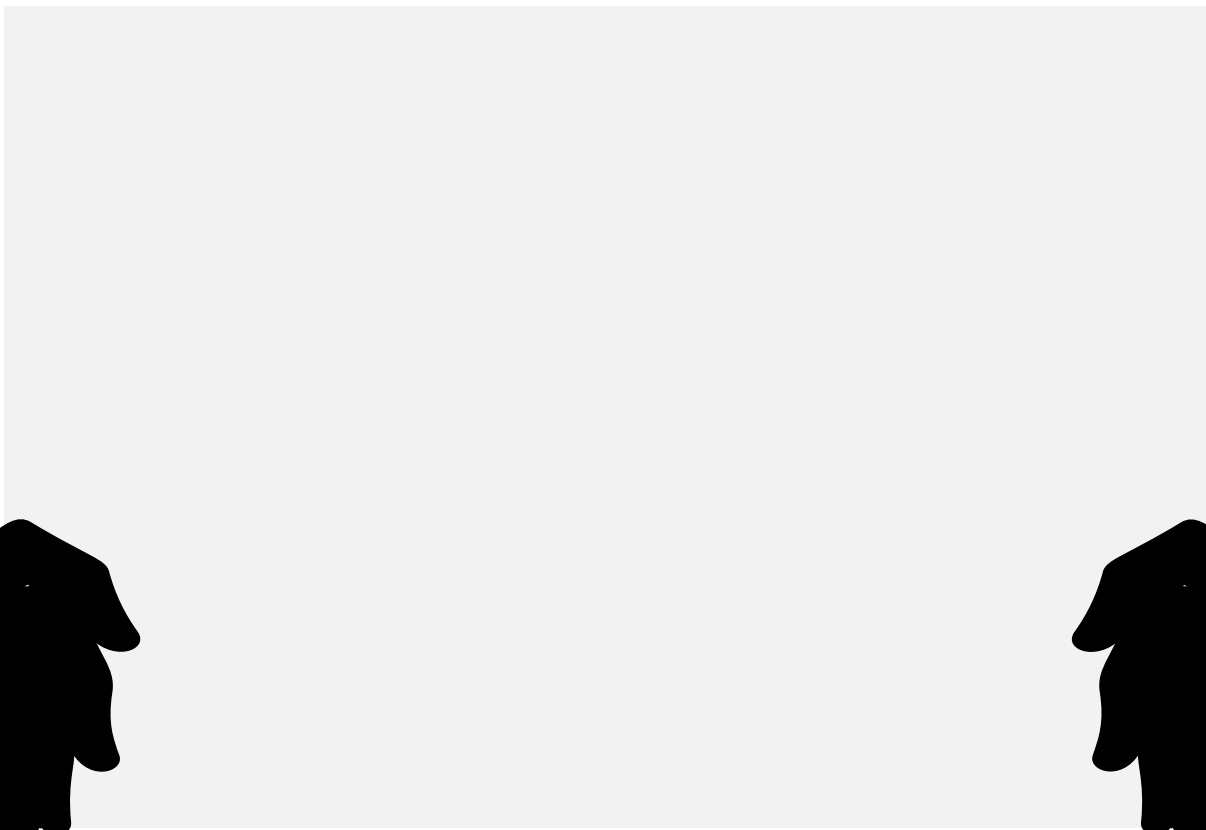


## ACTIVITY PROTESTING WITH AMOS

One of the most common methods of civic action is peacefully protesting. Concerned citizens have raised their voices for all kinds of issues, and protesting is a great way to help the voices of the marginalized and disenfranchised heard.

Imagine you are a shepherd or laborer in the time of Amos in the Old Testament. You have been overtaxed, exploited, worked to the bone, and paid poorly for your efforts. Taking these issues to court means running into corrupt officials, and you are frustrated.

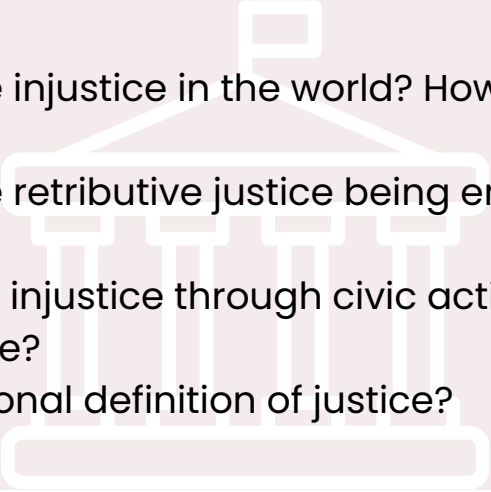
What would your protest sign look like? Would you include a slogan or design of some kind? Design your protest sign below!

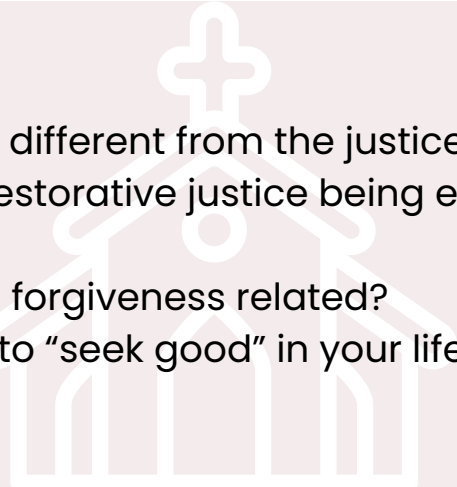


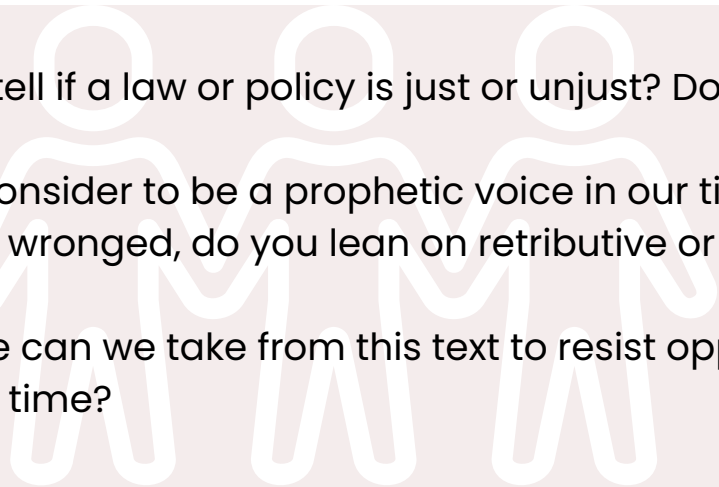
## DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

### SESSION 3

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

- 
1. Where do you see injustice in the world? How could civic action help address that?
  2. Where do you see retributive justice being enacted? Is this type of justice effective?
  3. Have you resisted injustice through civic action before? What was that experience like?
  4. What is your personal definition of justice?

- 
1. How is God's justice different from the justice we do?
  2. Where do you see restorative justice being enacted? Is this type of justice effective?
  3. How are justice and forgiveness related?
  4. What does it mean to "seek good" in your life?

- 
1. How can you tell if a law or policy is just or unjust? Does your faith play a role?
  2. Who do you consider to be a prophetic voice in our time?
  3. When you are wronged, do you lean on retributive or restorative justice? Why?
  4. What example can we take from this text to resist oppression and injustice in our time?

# SESSION 4

## Power and Accountability

### THE TEXT

#### 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— **2** for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. **3** This is good, and pleases God our Savior, **4** who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

### THE CONTEXT

#### PRAYING FOR THE POWERFUL

Paul wrote this letter to his associate Timothy for a variety of reasons. Timothy was among the Ephesian church at the time, and Paul warned him about the issues happening there. Beyond that, though, Paul offered that to make the Ephesian church strong and enduring, Christianity would need to be a lifestyle.

Paul encouraged Timothy to pray for all people, and specifically lifts up those in power. Paul knew that leadership did not change their position as our siblings in Christ. Timothy is reminded that those in power need prayer, love, and support as well.

If we want to be the bearers of Christ's mission to the world, that means loving our neighbor, even when our neighbor controls the levers of power in society. When these leaders fall into sin (like we all do!) then **we are also called to hold them accountable for their actions.** 1 Timothy reminds us that **the powerful in our world are our family in Christ too.**



### PARTS OF PRAYER

Paul mentions several key parts of a prayer in verse 1.

**Petitions** are requests for the person praying. **Intercession** is a prayer for another person or situation. **Thanksgiving** is the recognition, thanks, and praise to God for our many blessings.

Though it is not mentioned, **confession** of our sin is also an essential component of prayer.



### TIMOTHY

**New Testament Author and Scribe**

Timothy of Lystra was a crucial figure in the forming of the early church. He was a close companion of Paul. Being younger than many of his colleagues did not stop Timothy from making himself essential to the growth of the church in his time.



## ACTIVITY PRAYER PRACTICE

Engaging with leaders on a federal, state, and local level is an effective and important method of civic engagement. Whether this happens in the form of a letter, a phone call, or an in-person meeting, this a time-tested strategy to advocate for the collective good. The text from 1 Timothy also encourages praying for these leaders.

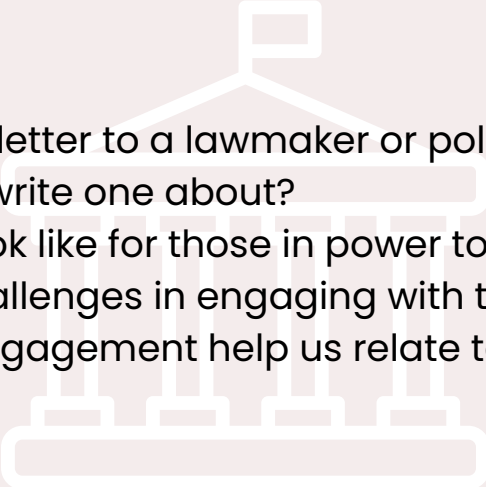
Select a politician or lawmaker that you know of. In one half of the space below, write them a short letter. Include your opinions on specific policies, if you have them.

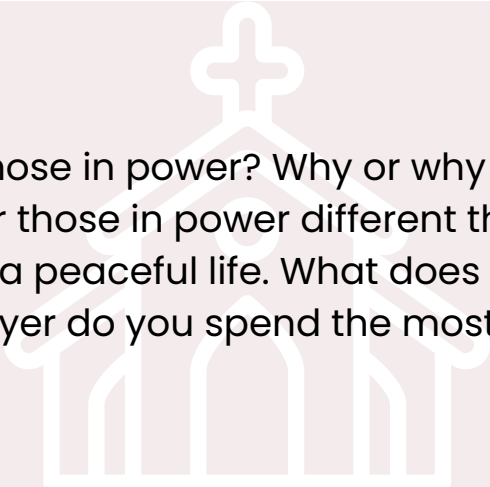
In the other half of the space, write a brief prayer for your selected leader. What you pray for specifically is up to you. Take note of the similarities and differences in writing your letter and your prayer.

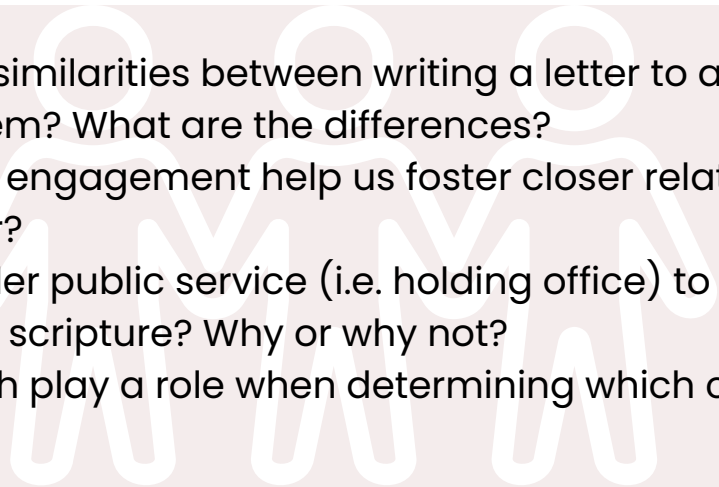
## DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

### SESSION 4

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

- 
1. Have you sent a letter to a lawmaker or politician before? If not, which issue would you write one about?
  2. What would it look like for those in power to be held accountable?
  3. What are the challenges in engaging with those in power?
  4. How can civic engagement help us relate to those in power?

- 
1. Do you pray for those in power? Why or why not?
  2. How is praying for those in power different than praying for others?
  3. Paul encourages a peaceful life. What does peace mean to you?
  4. Which part of prayer do you spend the most time on? Why?

- 
1. What are the similarities between writing a letter to a lawmaker and praying for them? What are the differences?
  2. How can civic engagement help us foster closer relationships with those in power?
  3. Do you consider public service (i.e. holding office) to be service as it is described in scripture? Why or why not?
  4. Does your faith play a role when determining which candidate to support?



# SESSION 5

## The Political Cross

### THE TEXT

#### LUKE 23:1-5

**1** Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. **2** And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king."

**3** So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"You have said so," Jesus replied.

**4** Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

**5** But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here."

### THE CONTEXT

#### POLITICAL PLOTTING

We view Jesus' death and resurrection in hindsight, knowing that Christ defeated death and sin for our sake. Even so, Jesus' arrest and execution on the cross was the end result of an elaborate scheme and a tenuous alliance between religious officials and the Roman government.

#### **Jesus' execution was highly politically motivated.**

Rumors flew about a supposed "King of the Jews" with a massive following and a claim to religious authority. Those who plotted to kill Jesus didn't just disagree with Him, their institutional power and even their very livelihoods were threatened by Him.

Crucifixion as a method was also chosen politically. Criminals hung on crosses would serve as a message to anyone who defied Roman rule: fall in line, or this could be you. Jesus' execution wasn't just meant to kill Him, it was meant to end the church before it even began. However, we know how this story goes. **Even in this violent and tragic act, God was still working for our benefit and our eternal salvation.**



### THE CHIEF PRIESTS

**The Sanhedrin** was the high council responsible for legislating the political and religious life of the Jewish people. They are also referred to as the chief priests, elders, or scribes at times.

This council played a significant part in Jesus' execution, a fact which led to the unfortunate claim that, "The Jews killed Jesus." This claim is a rash generalization which is often used by anti-semitic hate groups to justify their views.



### PONTIUS PILATE

**Roman Governor of Judaea**

Pilate was a contentious figure in his time, regularly finding himself in conflict with Jewish religious authorities. As governor, he had sole authority to order executions, making his cooperation essential to the scheme against Jesus.

## ACTIVITY HOPE IN THE CROSS

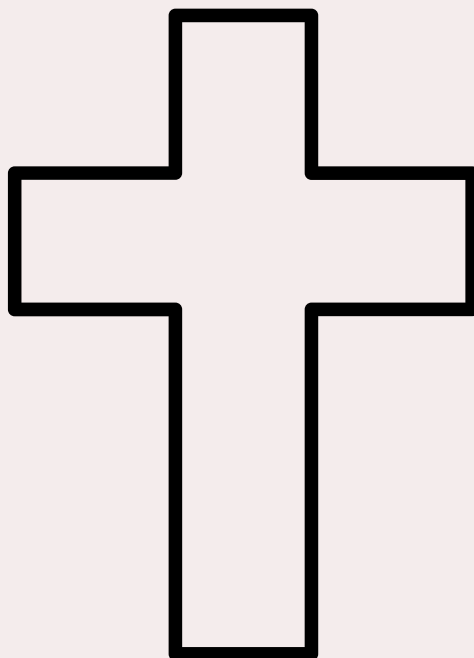
Progress toward the public good rarely happens in a straight line. Even with dedicated civic engagement, there will always be difficult moments, concessions and compromises, and even tragedies along the way. Jesus spent his life working for the good of His people, and even employed some civic action himself. This effort was seemingly thwarted with his arrest and execution.

Jesus' death caused even His closest friends to lose hope and (at least for a time) give up on their good work. Political action by powers much greater than them had resulted in violence and injustice being done against an innocent man. Hopelessness and fear would have been natural reactions.

However, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ now serves as a powerful reminder that God works through even the biggest setbacks to bring us hope for the future.

In the cross pictured below, write or draw a political or social issue that you have lost hope for. In the empty space around the cross, write or draw why this issue feels hopeless to you. Use as much detail as you would like, and include multiple reasons if necessary.

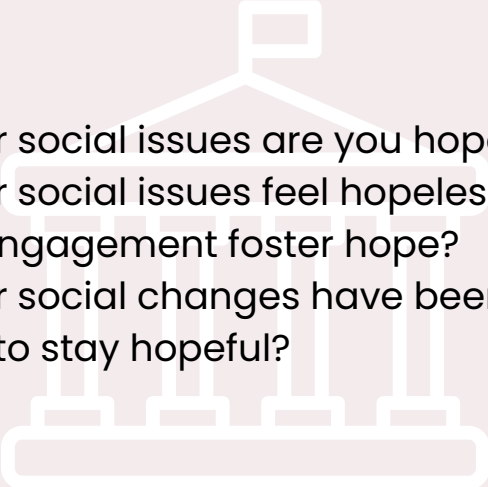
Finally, cut the cross out of your page, leaving behind the hopelessness surrounding it. Keep the cross cut-out as a reminder that God is working for our good, even on issues that seem hopeless.

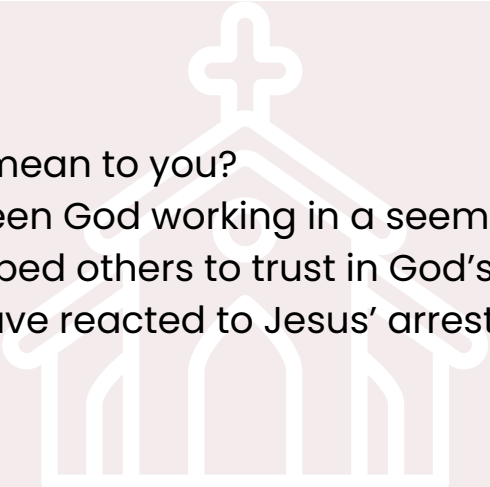


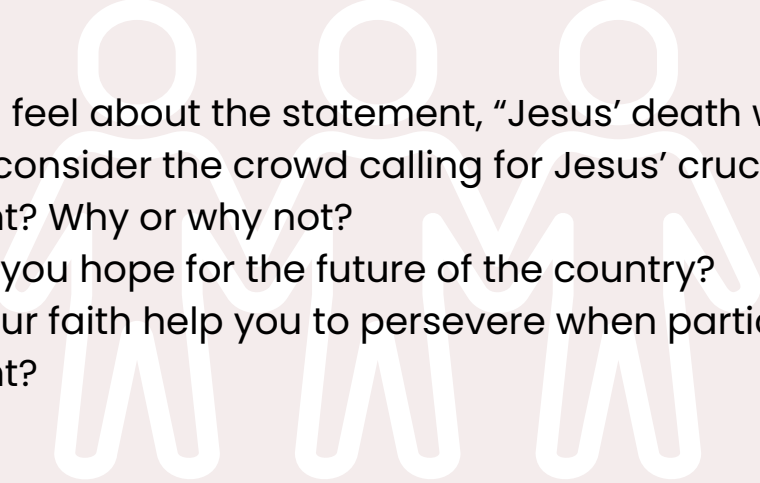
## DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

### SESSION 5

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

- 
1. Which political or social issues are you hopeful about?
  2. Which political or social issues feel hopeless to you?
  3. How does civic engagement foster hope?
  4. Which political or social changes have been the hardest for you?  
What did you do to stay hopeful?

- 
1. What does hope mean to you?
  2. When have you seen God working in a seemingly hopeless situation?
  3. How have you helped others to trust in God's work in the world?
  4. How would you have reacted to Jesus' arrest and execution if you were a disciple?

- 
1. How do you feel about the statement, "Jesus' death was political?"
  2. Would you consider the crowd calling for Jesus' crucifixion to be civic engagement? Why or why not?
  3. What gives you hope for the future of the country?
  4. How can your faith help you to persevere when participating in civic engagement?

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## ELCA GROUNDING

This Bible study is based on *A Social Message on Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy*. This social message was adopted by the ELCA Church Council in June 2020.

Lutheran Advocacy-Minnesota bases our own policy agenda on the social messages and statements of the ELCA, which cover a broad range of issues. We highly encourage you to make use of these great resources.

Scan the QR codes below to access all statements and messages.

### Messages



### Statements



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I can still remember my parents' reaction when I first became passionate about justice work. "Oh boy. We raised an activist!" they said, to which I replied, "You betcha!"

I firmly believe the call to love our neighbor doesn't end at the voting booth, it pervades every aspect of our lives, politics included. In fact, civic action is a powerful way to be God's voice for the vulnerable and marginalized.

I hope that this study can help you and your community in your own journey as citizen advocates, justice seekers, and beloved children of God. Thank you, and may God bless you on your journey as a citizen advocate!

Jacob Summerville  
Author, editor, & designer of *Civics In Scripture*

## DISCLAIMER

Lutheran Advocacy-Minnesota does not own any of the supplementary material used in this Bible study.