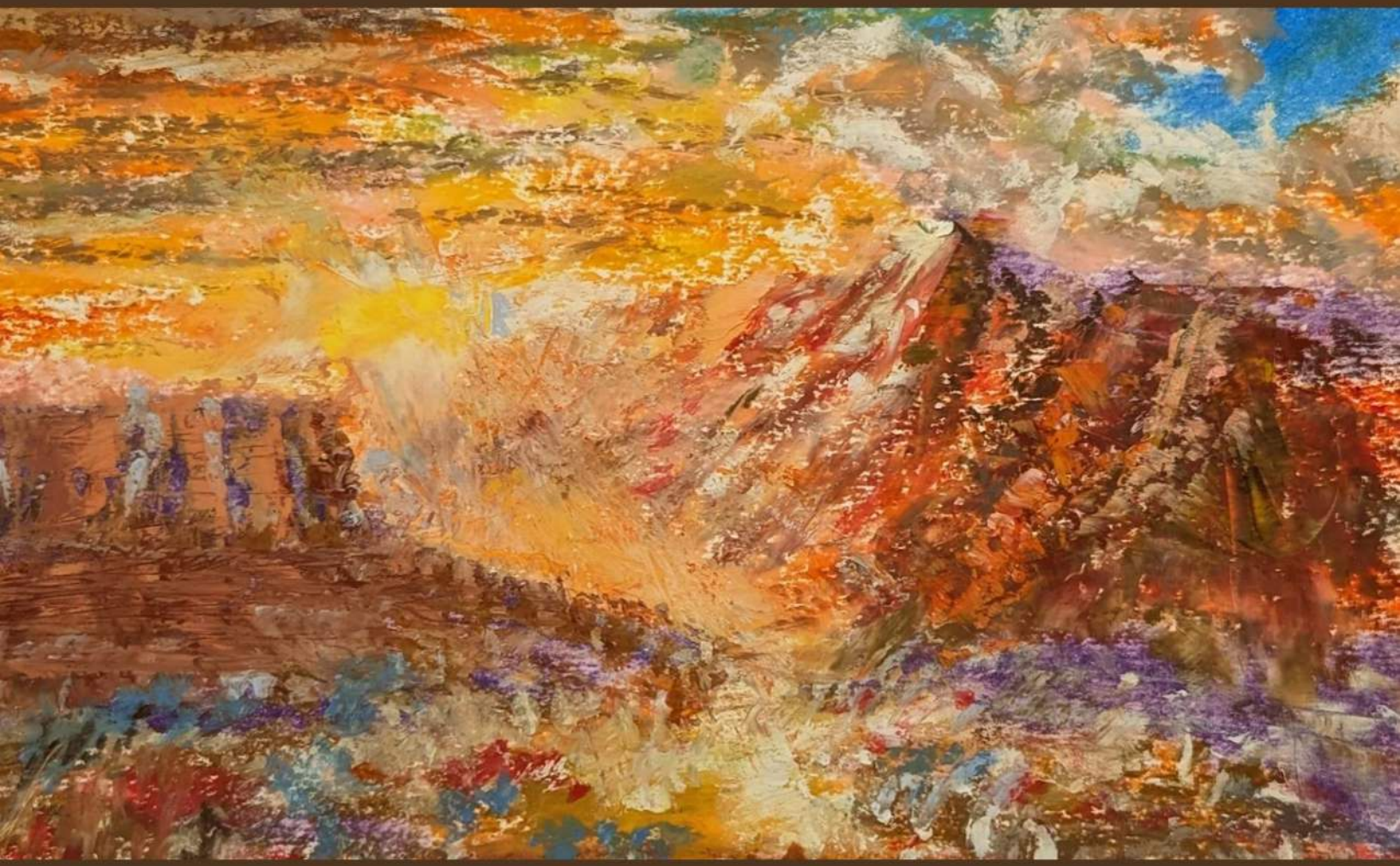
THE BELEAGUERED BELIEVER'S GUIDES

CITIZENS OF ANOTHER KINGDOM

FOLLOWING JESUS BEYOND POLITICS



November 2026

Faith OVER FACTIONS

faithoverfactions.com

Faith OVER FACTIONS

For everyone who wanders and feels far from home.

For the ones who left when the noise got too loud, and the ones still sitting in the back row wondering if they belong.

For the solo believer, the doubter, the tired, and the ones who feel alone in a crowded church.

You are not lost. You are on your way home.
You are not the only one. This is for you.

About Faith Over Factions

Faith Over Factions is a place for the spiritually homeless: people who still love Jesus but can't find Him in the noise of institutional religion or partisan faith. Everything here is free. No email address, no paywall, no algorithm deciding what you see.

You'll find reflections, portraits of Christians who resisted when it cost them something, devotionals for unsteady days, and a private Faith Journal for the questions you're not ready to say out loud. We don't take sides in the culture war. We take Jesus at His word and try to follow Him with honesty, humility, and a lot of grace for the stumbling.

Pull up a chair. You're welcome here.

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THE BELEAGUERED BELIEVER'S GUIDES

Citizens of Another Kingdom

Scripture quotations are from the New Living Translation unless noted.

Part One: Honest Ground

1. For the One Whose Church Picked a Side

Maybe it happened in an election year. The sermon drifted from the text to the news, the room nodded along, and you sat very still. Maybe it was a flag carried down the center aisle, or a prayer for the nation that sounded a lot like a campaign ad. Or maybe nothing was said from the pulpit at all, and you learned where you stood in the parking lot afterward, or at the Thanksgiving table.

Somewhere along the way you found out that loving Jesus was no longer enough. You were also expected to vote a certain way and distrust the right people. When you didn't, the temperature in the room changed.

If that's your story, you aren't imagining it. And you're far from the only one.

When politics becomes a faith

Politics is how neighbors decide things together: roads, schools, taxes, who pays for what. It's necessary work, and Christians have done it faithfully in every century. But in our time it has swollen into something bigger. It hands out identity and enemies. It holds rallies that feel like revivals. Its leaders get spoken of the way Scripture speaks of the Messiah, and the people across the aisle get spoken of the way Scripture speaks of demons.

This pull doesn't belong to one party or one country. Some Christians have fused the cross with the flag. Others have fused it with their own cause, and they look down on the first group with exactly the certainty the first group feels about them. Either way, a movement ends up doing work that only Christ was ever meant to do.

The Psalms saw this a long way off: “Don’t put your confidence in powerful people; there is no help for you there” (Psalm 146:3).

What it cost

Most people reading this could make their own list. A brother you haven’t really talked to since an election. A small group that broke up over one comment. A pastor who preached the text faithfully and lost half his members, or one who stayed quiet and lost the other half. A church you gave fifteen years to that you can’t walk into anymore without your chest tightening.

Jesus prayed for his followers on the night before he died: “I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me” (John 17:21). He tied the world’s belief to his people’s unity. When the church splits along party lines, the world notices, and it draws conclusions about Jesus.

You may have been one of the casualties. You may also have watched friends walk away from faith altogether because of what they saw. Both losses are real, and it’s right to grieve them.

“Not of this world”

When Jesus stood before Pilate, he was asked a political question. Are you a king? His answer has been quoted at plenty of rallies, usually to mean something he didn’t say:

> *Jesus answered, “My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world.”*
>
> John 18:36

Notice the little word *of*. In the Greek it means *from*. Jesus doesn’t say his Kingdom has nothing to do with this world. He says it doesn’t come from here. Its authority doesn’t rise out of votes or armies, and it doesn’t grow the way earthly kingdoms grow.

The proof is in the next phrase. If it were that kind of kingdom, his followers would be fighting. A few hours earlier, in a dark garden, Peter had tried. He drew a sword and cut off a man’s ear, and Jesus told him to put it away (John 18:10-11).

So here is a real King, standing in front of the most powerful government on earth, refusing to fight on its terms. Most of what follows in this guide is commentary on that scene.

A strange crew

Then there's the matter of who Jesus chose. Among the Twelve was Matthew, a tax collector, a man who had made his living collecting money for the occupying power. Also among them was a man Luke lists as "Simon (who was called the zealot)" (Luke 6:15). Scholars debate what that nickname meant in Jesus' day. It may point to zeal for God's law, and many connect it with fierce resistance to Rome. Either way, the Twelve included a man who had worked for the empire and a man whose name suggests he wanted it gone.

The Gospels are silent on how those two got along. Both of them stayed.

Who this is for

This is for the beleaguered. For people who still love Jesus but couldn't stay in a church that seemed to love a party more. For people who stayed and now feel like strangers in their own pew. For anyone tired of being told that faithfulness comes with a voting record.

It's for people on every side of the aisle, too. If you came hoping this guide would finally say your side was right, it won't. If you came braced for it to say your side is the problem, it won't do that either. Its claim is older than both sides, and simpler: Jesus is Lord, and nobody else gets the title.

What lies ahead

The guide moves in four parts.

Honest Ground begins with Israel's old longing for a king they could see, in 1 Samuel 8. Then it makes room for the grief of watching the wrong people win.

Two Loyalties looks at what we owe the government and what we don't, at heavenly citizenship as a present fact, and at how exiles in Babylon were told to live.

The Neighbor Across the Aisle turns toward the people on the other side: the slow poison of contempt, and how to tell the truth with love still in it.

Practice gathers simple habits from across the whole Church. Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christians have prayed for their rulers, good ones and terrible ones, since the first century. Those practices belong to all of them, and to you.

Each chapter ends with a few questions. Answer them in a journal, out loud on a walk, or not at all. They're offered, not assigned.

FOR REFLECTION

1. When did you first realize that people around you expected your faith to come with a politics attached? Write down where you were and who was there.
2. Jesus told Peter to put the sword away. When politics comes up, what do you reach for: a post, a cutting remark, a cold silence?
3. Matthew and Simon followed the same Lord. Who is the one person on the "other side" you would least want to share a table with?

2. Give Us a King

Samuel was old, and his sons were a mess. Scripture doesn't soften it: they "were greedy for money. They accepted bribes and perverted justice" (1 Samuel 8:3).

So the elders of Israel came to Samuel at Ramah with a request.

> *"Look," they told him, "you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have."*
>
> 1 Samuel 8:5

Notice where the request starts. It begins with a real failure. The judges were corrupt, the old leader was fading, and the people were tired of injustice. That is usually how it goes. The longing for a strong ruler grows out of watching the system fail you, and then wanting someone big enough to fix it.

God's answer to Samuel is one of the saddest lines in the Old Testament: "they are rejecting me, not you. They don't want me to be their king any longer" (1 Samuel 8:7).

"He will take"

God let them have their way, but first he told Samuel to warn them, and the warning is worth reading in full (1 Samuel 8:11-17). Read it with a pencil and circle one verb. The king will draft your sons for his chariots. Then he will take your daughters. He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves. He will take a tenth of your grain, and he will take your servants. He will demand a tenth of your flocks.

Over and over, the king takes. And at the end comes the line nobody wants to hear: "When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but then the LORD will not help you" (1 Samuel 8:18).

The people heard all of it. Then they answered:

> *"Even so, we still want a king," they said. "We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will judge us and lead us into battle."*
>
> 1 Samuel 8:19-20

There it is, the whole longing in one breath. We want to be like everyone else. We want someone to judge for us, and someone to fight our battles.

The same longing, every season

Every generation has heard this request in its own accent. Elect the right person and the country will be saved. Pass the right laws and righteousness will follow. Get our people into power, and then the church can finally be safe.

It sounds different depending on who is saying it. The right person might be a strongman who promises to protect the faithful. Or it might be a reformer who promises to build heaven on earth with the right policies. The hope underneath is the same. Somebody with power will finally do what God seems to be taking too long to do.

Isaiah heard the version that was popular in his day, when Judah wanted an alliance with Egypt against Assyria: "What sorrow awaits those who look to Egypt for help, trusting their horses, chariots, and charioteers and depending on the strength of human armies instead of looking to the LORD, the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 31:1).

Horses and chariots were the most impressive power anyone could see. That was the whole appeal.

David's psalm answered that appeal long before Isaiah: "Some nations boast of their chariots and horses, but we boast in the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7). It's worth noticing that a king wrote it. David had chariots available to him. He still knew which one to boast in.

Two lies

When power changes hands, two temptations tend to show up together. The first is messianic politics: if we can just get the right person into office, everything will be saved. The second is despair: the wrong person is in power, so God must have lost control.

Those two feel like opposites, but they rest on the same mistake. Both put a human ruler at the center of the story. One makes him a savior and the other makes him the end of the world.

Scripture puts someone else at the center. God's throne doesn't come up for reelection. Leaders are still better or worse, and it's still right to care who wins. But no ruler, good or bad, gets to be the main character.

A pirate and an emperor

In 410 the Visigoths sacked Rome. Many Romans blamed the Christians for abandoning the old gods, and Augustine, a bishop in North Africa, spent more than a decade writing a reply. It became *The City of God*.

Early in the book, Augustine asks what a kingdom is, once justice is taken away. His answer is blunt: nothing more than a robbery on a large scale. Then he retells an old story. Alexander the Great captured a pirate and demanded to know what he meant by seizing the seas. The pirate answered that he did the same thing Alexander did. He just had one small boat, so they called him a robber. Alexander had a great fleet, so they called him an emperor.

Augustine still valued government. Late in the book he argues at length that earthly peace is a real good, one Christians should use and be thankful for. He simply refused to confuse any earthly city with the city of God.

Bread and a hillside

Centuries after Samuel, a crowd of about five thousand men sat on a hillside in Galilee and ate bread they hadn't baked. Jesus had fed them out of almost nothing. They knew what they wanted next.

> *When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself.*
>
> John 6:15

They had the right King in front of them, and they still wanted the wrong kind of king. They wanted someone who would keep the bread coming and drive out the Romans, by force if necessary. Jesus walked up the mountain alone.

He would be crowned later, outside another city, on another hill. The crown would be made of thorns.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Samuel's sons really were corrupt. What real failure first made you long for a strong leader to fix things?
2. Read 1 Samuel 8:11-18 with a pencil and circle every "take." What has your political hope taken from you: sleep, friendships, peace, time with God?
3. The crowd wanted a king who would keep the bread coming. Finish this sentence honestly: "I want a leader who will guarantee me ____."

3. When the Wrong People Win

You know the feeling. The results come in, or the headline breaks, or a leader you trusted turns out to be someone else entirely. Your stomach drops. You lie awake. In the morning you scroll before your feet touch the floor, hoping it was somehow a dream.

Who the "wrong people" are depends on where you sit. The feeling doesn't. And many Christians carry it with an extra layer of guilt, because somebody told them that a person of real faith wouldn't feel this way.

Scripture disagrees. It gave this feeling its own psalm.

"My feet were slipping"

Psalm 73 is credited to Asaph, one of the temple musicians. It opens with the official answer, the one everybody knew: "Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure" (Psalm 73:1). Then he immediately admits it hasn't felt true.

> *But as for me, I almost lost my footing. My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone. For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.*
>
> Psalm 73:2-3

Almost, twice. Asaph is describing the moment the ground started to go out from under him.

Then he lists what he saw. The arrogant are healthy and well fed. They wear pride like a necklace. They mock and they threaten, and nothing happens to them. People hang on their every word. If you've watched cruelty rewarded and lying turn into a career, you could have written these verses.

And then the bitterest line: "Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason?" (Psalm 73:13).

God left that question in the Bible. He didn't edit Asaph down into something more presentable for Sunday.

The sanctuary

Asaph tried to reason his way out. It didn't work.

> *So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is! Then I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked.*
>
> Psalm 73:16-17

The turn happens in worship, in God's presence. The argument stayed unsettled, and the news stayed the same. What changed was where Asaph was standing.

He doesn't report that the wicked fell the next week, and maybe they didn't. What changed was how far he could see. Power that isn't anchored in God is standing on slippery ground, the same ground his own feet had been sliding on. It can vanish "in an instant" (Psalm 73:19). And then he looks back at himself with an honesty that's almost funny: "I was so foolish and ignorant—I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you" (Psalm 73:22).

Two verses earlier, Asaph names what the whole season had done to him: "Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside" (Psalm 73:21). He names the bitterness plainly, without defending it or dressing it up as righteous anger. Naming it is often the first honest step.

The next verse is the one to keep: "Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand" (Psalm 73:23). *Still.* Through the envy, the bitterness and the foolishness, the hand never let go.

"He removes kings"

When the news is bad, someone will usually quote Daniel at you: "He controls the course of world events; he removes kings and sets up other kings" (Daniel 2:21).

It's true. It's also been used in two opposite ways. Some use it to claim God put their candidate in office, as if sovereignty meant endorsement. Others use it to tell grieving people to stop caring.

Remember who said it, and where. Daniel was a young captive in Babylon, serving under Nebuchadnezzar, the king whose armies had destroyed Jerusalem. He said it as a captive, reminding himself that the empire would not have the last word. God set

Nebuchadnezzar up. God would also take him down. Neither fact made Nebuchadnezzar good.

Scripture leaves a lot unexplained here. Habakkuk asked why God allows corrupt rulers to rise. So did Job, in his own way. In Revelation, the souls under the altar are still asking, "how long before you judge the people who belong to this world" (Revelation 6:10). This guide won't pretend to answer it. It's enough to know that the question is allowed.

The longer story

Scripture is full of seasons when the wrong people held power for a long time. Pharaoh enslaved Israel for generations before anyone heard the name Moses. Babylon burned Jerusalem. By its rivers the exiles sat down and wept (Psalm 137:1). Rome crucified Jesus, and for three days that looked like the end of the story.

None of those seasons felt short to the people living in them. Many of the faithful died before they saw relief. Hebrews says as much about some of them: "All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it" (Hebrews 11:13).

That is a hard comfort, and it's still a comfort. Your life is part of a longer story than this term of office.

When the heaviness won't lift

Sometimes the dread doesn't pass with a news cycle. It settles in. Sleep goes, appetite goes, and everything feels gray for weeks. If that's where you are, please talk to a doctor or a counselor, or a pastor you trust. Getting that help is one of the ways God cares for his people, and no failure of faith.

Asaph ends his psalm with no victory parade, only this: "My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever" (Psalm 73:26).

That was enough for him to go on. It may be enough for today.

FOR REFLECTION

1. When was the last time news about who holds power left you “almost gone”? Write down the day and what you did with the feeling.
2. Asaph’s view changed in the sanctuary, not in the argument. Where is your sanctuary right now: a chapel, a trail, a chair by the window? When can you go there this week?
3. Write your own version of Psalm 73:23. Begin with “Yet I still belong to you…” and finish it in your own words.

Part Two: Two Loyalties

4. What Belongs to Caesar

It was a trap, and everyone in the crowd knew it.

Mark says the questioners were Pharisees and supporters of Herod (Mark 12:13). Those two groups rarely agreed on anything about Rome. The Pharisees resented the occupation. Herod's people owed their position to it. For one afternoon they found common cause, and it was Jesus.

They flattered him first. Then they sprang the question: "is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (Mark 12:14). Say yes, and he betrays his people to the occupier. Say no, and he's guilty of sedition.

Whose image

Jesus asked for a coin. He didn't seem to have one of his own.

> *When they handed it to him, he asked, "Whose picture and title are stamped on it?" "Caesar's," they replied. "Well, then," Jesus said, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." His reply completely amazed them.*
>
> Mark 12:16-17

Most scholars think the coin was a silver denarius of the emperor Tiberius. Coins of his reign carried his portrait and an inscription calling him the son of the divine Augustus. So the coin in Jesus' hand made a religious claim of its own.

Jesus handed it back. Caesar's face is on it, so it can go to Caesar.

Then he left the second half of the sentence hanging for anyone who knew Genesis. If Caesar gets what bears Caesar's image, what bears God's? "So God created human beings in his own image" (Genesis 1:27). The coin belongs to the emperor. You belong to God.

Taxes, then, go to the government. Your conscience, your worship and your final loyalty were never Caesar's to collect.

Romans 13

If you've ever questioned a government in a church setting, someone has probably quoted this at you:

> *Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God.*
>
> Romans 13:1

It's Scripture. It deserves a careful reading, including the parts that usually get skipped when it's quoted.

Paul wrote it to Christians in Rome, probably in the late 50s, early in the reign of Nero. He goes on to describe what authorities are for: they are "God's servants, sent for your good," to restrain wrongdoing (Romans 13:4). He tells believers to pay their taxes and give respect where it's due. That's a real call to be good citizens, and it rules out treating every law as optional.

Scripture also shows other scenes. In Revelation 13, most likely written for churches under the same empire a generation later, imperial power appears as a beast that demands worship. Daniel's friends refused to bow to the king's statue. The Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh's order to kill baby boys, and Scripture says God was good to them for it (Exodus 1:17-20).

Both are in the Bible. Scripture doesn't hand us a formula for exactly where submission ends. What it does give is the place where it clearly stops. When the authorities ordered the apostles to stop preaching about Jesus, Peter and the others answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29).

If Romans 13 has been used on you to shut down every question about power, it's fair to read the rest of the Bible too.

"Fear God, and respect the king"

Peter, writing to scattered believers under Roman rule, puts the whole balance in one short line:

> *Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.*
>
> 1 Peter 2:17

Watch the verbs. The king gets the same thing everyone gets: respect. Peter uses one Greek word, "honor," for both. Fear, the reverence that belongs to the One who holds your life, is kept for God alone.

The king is a person to be honored, the way every person is to be honored. He isn't a god to be feared. Peter wrote that under Nero. It still holds under whoever holds power now.

Loving a country

None of this makes patriotism a sin. It's natural to love the place you come from: its land and people, its songs, the way the light looks in your hometown in October. You can grieve its failures and hope for its good. Jeremiah wept over his nation. Paul said he would give up almost anything for his own people (Romans 9:2-3).

The trouble starts when love of country moves into the place reserved for God. Then the flag becomes a test of faith. Questioning a leader gets called unfaithfulness, and criticizing an injustice gets called hating your country. Political loyalty has a place in civic life. Political worship is idolatry, and it doesn't matter which country or which cause receives it.

The early Christians lived this out in a way that confused Rome. They paid their taxes, obeyed the laws and prayed for the emperor. Around the year 197, Tertullian, a writer in North Africa, told the authorities that Christians prayed for the emperors to have long life, a secure empire and a safe home. They still would not burn incense to the emperor's image or call him lord.

One sentence

Around the middle of the second century, an old bishop named Polycarp was arrested in the city of Smyrna. The account of his death, written by his church soon afterward, records the conversation.

The officials asked for something that sounded small. On the road to the arena, the police captain urged him to say "Caesar is Lord" and offer a little incense. One sentence and a pinch of incense, and he could go home. In the arena, the governor pressed him to curse Christ. The account gives his reply: eighty-six years he had served him, and Christ had done him no wrong. How could he blaspheme his King who saved him?

He was put to death that day.

Most of us will never face a fire. We do face smaller versions of the same request. Repeat the slogan. Bless the movement. Call this leader God's man. Just one sentence, and everyone will be comfortable again.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Has Romans 13 or "render unto Caesar" ever been used to tell you to be quiet? Write down who said it and what they wanted you to stop saying.
2. Make two short lists: what you owe the government, and what you owe God alone. Where do the two lists blur for you?
3. Polycarp was asked for one sentence. What sentence are you being pressured to say, at church, at work or at home?

5. Citizens of Heaven, Present Tense

Philippi was proud of being Roman.

Luke calls it "a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony" (Acts 16:12). Rome had settled army veterans there, and its people held Roman citizenship, hundreds of miles from Rome itself. They lived under Roman law, followed Roman customs and were proud of it. When Paul and Silas were dragged before the city officials, the charge was that they were "teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice" (Acts 16:21).

So when Paul later wrote to the church there, he chose his picture carefully.

> *But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.*
>
> Philippians 3:20

The Philippians knew what that meant. Most of them had never seen Rome either. One early twentieth-century translator, James Moffatt, rendered the line, "we are a colony of heaven." Rome kept outposts across the empire where Rome's way of life went on far from home. Paul tells a church in one of those outposts that it's an outpost of somewhere else.

Are

Look at the tense. Paul doesn't say we will become citizens of heaven when we die. He says we *are*, now.

That matters, because heavenly citizenship is often treated like a ticket you hold until departure. In the meantime, the thinking goes, your real life is here, and here is run by whoever wins.

Paul had already told the Philippians what the present tense requires: "Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ" (Philippians 1:27). Citizenship there is a way of conducting yourself here.

Jesus taught his followers to pray the same direction: “May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). The prayer asks for the Kingdom to come here, to earth.

Foreigners at home

Sometime in the second or third century, an unknown Christian wrote a letter to an inquirer named Diognetus, trying to explain these strange people. Scholars still debate who wrote it and when. One passage has been quoted ever since.

> *They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers.*
>
> Epistle to Diognetus 5

The writer is careful. In his description, Christians live in ordinary houses, eat ordinary food, marry and raise children, and obey the laws. But they hold their country loosely, and they hold the whole world as a place where they might be at home.

If you’ve felt like a foreigner in your own country lately, or in your own church, you’re in old and good company.

Peter used the same language for the churches he wrote to, calling them “temporary residents and foreigners” (1 Peter 2:11). He didn’t mean they should hide. In the very next verse he tells them to live so well among their neighbors that even their accusers would see it.

What it looked like

The first Christians had no votes, no armies and no seats in Rome’s halls of power. They had a reputation, though.

In the third century, a plague swept through Alexandria. Dionysius, the bishop there, wrote a letter that the historian Eusebius later preserved. He described Christians who stayed to nurse the sick, and some who caught the disease and died doing it. Many of their neighbors, he wrote, fled and left even their own families behind.

A century later, the emperor Julian tried to revive the old Roman religion. In a letter usually attributed to him, he complained that the Christians cared for their own poor and for the pagans' poor as well, while the temples did nothing of the kind.

That was the early church's political witness. It looked like nursing the sick, and feeding the hungry whether or not they believed.

A present address

This doesn't mean ignoring public life. Citizens of heaven can vote, run for the school board and write to their representatives. Many will. The difference is in where they draw their identity, and in who gets to tell them who their enemies are.

It shows up in small places. In how you vote: out of love for your neighbor more than fear for yourself. In how you talk about the people you voted against. In whether you can lose an election and still sleep. In whether your church is a place where people on both sides of the aisle can take communion from the same cup.

It also means your hope doesn't rise and fall with the news. The writer of Hebrews put it this way: "Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe" (Hebrews 12:28).

Receiving. Present tense, again.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Philippi's citizens lived far from Rome and still lived by Rome's ways. Pick one ordinary hour of your week. What would living by heaven's ways look like in that hour?
2. When have you felt like a foreigner in your own country or your own church? What did that feel like, and what did you do with it?
3. The church in Alexandria nursed its neighbors. Name one place in your town where the Kingdom could look like care this month.

6. Seek the Welfare of the City

The first wave of exiles had been marched from Jerusalem to Babylon, hundreds of miles across the desert. Their king was a captive. Within a few years their temple would be ashes. And back home, prophets were telling them not to unpack.

One of them, Hananiah, announced that within two years God would break Babylon's power and bring them all home (Jeremiah 28:2-4). It was exactly what everyone wanted to hear.

Jeremiah sent a letter to the exiles that said something else entirely.

> *Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.*
>
> Jeremiah 29:5-7

Plan to stay. Seventy years, he told them (Jeremiah 29:10). Long enough that most of them would die in Babylon.

Tomatoes in Babylon

Picture it: a family from Jerusalem, kneeling in foreign dirt, planting a garden they hadn't wanted. Every seed was an admission that they weren't going home soon. Every seed was also an act of hope.

The exiles had two choices in front of them, and God ruled out both. They could have treated Babylon as a waiting room, hunkered down and refused to put down roots until the rescue came. Or they could have treated it as the enemy, plotted and raged, and prayed for its ruin. Instead God told them to pray for the city that held them captive. Its peace would be their peace.

The Hebrew word behind "peace and prosperity" is *shalom*, the wholeness of a community where things are as they should be. God told his people to seek the shalom of Babylon.

Daniel's lines

Daniel lived out that letter. He was taken young, given a Babylonian name, taught the language and literature of his captors, and put to work in the king's administration. He served well enough to be promoted under several kings.

He wasn't the only one. Joseph ran Egypt's grain supply for a Pharaoh who didn't know his God (Genesis 41). Esther became queen in a Persian court and risked her life to stop a massacre (Esther 4:14-16). Nehemiah was cupbearer to a Persian king. Scripture is full of faithful people working inside governments that weren't theirs.

But he drew lines. They were small and specific. At the very start, "Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king" (Daniel 1:8). Decades later, when a law was passed forbidding prayer to anyone but the king, he went home, opened his windows toward Jerusalem, and prayed three times a day "just as he had always done" (Daniel 6:10).

He worked hard for the empire and refused its idols, and he kept both commitments for a lifetime. He served and prayed, and he knew exactly where his lines were.

Under the wheel

Seeking the welfare of the city has never meant staying quiet about what's hurting it.

In April 1933, only a few months after Hitler came to power, a young German pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote an essay called "The Church and the Jewish Question." He argued that the church has a duty to the victims of the state's actions, whether or not they belong to the church. And he went further. Sometimes, he wrote, it isn't enough to bandage the victims caught under the wheel. The church may have to put itself into the spokes of the wheel itself. Much of the German church wasn't ready to hear it. He was executed in April 1945, weeks before the war in Europe ended.

Scripture had said it long before: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed" (Proverbs 31:8). That command doesn't belong to a party. Who is being crushed changes from place to place and decade to decade, and Christians across the spectrum have missed it when it was inconvenient for their side.

Not powerless

It's easy to feel that nothing you do matters against forces this big. The exiles were given small things to do: plant gardens, raise children, pray.

Your version might be smaller than you'd expect. Drive a neighbor to a doctor's appointment. Tutor a kid. Go to the town meeting and tell the truth there, gently. Vote, if you can, as a citizen of heaven. Pray for the mayor by name. Learn the name of someone who's new in town.

Do it with humility. Even our best political efforts fall short of God's justice, and the people on the other side of a vote usually love their neighbors too, in ways we may not see. Paul's instruction applies in every direction: "Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good" (Romans 12:21).

Micah put the whole job in one sentence: "No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Gardens take a long time. So does shalom.

FOR REFLECTION

1. The exiles were told to plant gardens in Babylon. What is one thing you could build or tend where you live that will outlast this news cycle?
2. Daniel served the empire and refused its idols. Where is your line? Write down one specific thing you won't do or say, whatever it costs.
3. Who in your town is under the wheel right now? Name one person or group, and one small thing you could do for them this month.

Part Three: The Neighbor Across the Aisle

7. The Poison of Contempt

You can hear it in how people talk now, maybe in how you talk.

They're all brainwashed. They're what's wrong with this country. They're not worth listening to.

Disagreement has always been part of life together, in families, in towns and in the church. The early Christians argued over food and holy days, circumcision, and which apostle they followed. What feels different now is the tone. We used to disagree with people. More and more, we hold them in contempt.

Contempt looks down. It decides the other person is beneath you, too stupid or too evil to be worth understanding. Once you've decided that, you don't have to listen anymore. You can just mock.

The same mouth

James knew how easy this is.

> *Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!*
>
> James 3:9-10

The same mouth. The one that sang a hymn on Sunday morning and the one that typed a sneer at eleven on Tuesday night belong to the same person.

Look at the reason James gives. The people we curse "have been made in the image of God." Contempt is a sin against a neighbor, and it also insults the One whose image the neighbor carries. You can't sneer at the portrait and honor the artist.

"If you call someone an idiot"

Jesus put it more sharply still. In the Sermon on the Mount, right after the command against murder, he says this:

> *But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.*
>
> Matthew 5:22

The word behind "idiot" was an Aramaic insult, *raca*, probably meaning something like "empty head." Jesus treats it as serious. He sets name-calling in the same paragraph as murder, because contempt is where the killing starts. First you decide a person isn't fully a person. After that, worse things become easier.

History is full of examples, and they never belonged to just one side.

Biting and devouring

Paul watched contempt tear through the churches of Galatia, and he reached for an animal picture: "But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another" (Galatians 5:15).

Contempt also crowds out other things. Mercy gives way to rage, and we start caring more about winning than about healing. Patience turns into scorn. Humility becomes the habit of assuming the worst about others and the best about ourselves. None of this happens overnight. It happens a post at a time and a dinner at a time, until we no longer recognize ourselves.

Jesus gave the world one test for spotting his followers: "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples" (John 13:35).

A leaking jug

The desert monks of fourth-century Egypt left behind short stories that Christians in every tradition still read. One is about Abba Moses, who by tradition had been a robber before he became a monk.

A brother in the community had sinned, and the others called a meeting to judge him. Moses didn't want to come. When they pressed him, he arrived carrying a jug with a hole in it, full of water, leaking behind him as he walked. They asked him what he was doing. He told them his own sins were running out behind him where he couldn't see them, and here he was, coming to judge someone else's.

The story says they forgave the brother.

Jesus made the same point with a log in the eye (Matthew 7:3-5). Contempt depends on not seeing your own back trail.

Contempt for the church

There's one more form of contempt this guide has to name, because many readers will know it from the inside.

If a church hurt you, if it chose a party over you or called your questions rebellion, the hurt is real. You don't have to pretend it wasn't. Naming harm is not contempt.

But it's possible to leave a place full of contempt and carry the contempt out with you. The people still sitting in those pews become the brainwashed ones now. It's the same posture, pointed in a new direction.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer saw the trap. In *The Cost of Discipleship* he wrote, "Judging others makes us blind, whereas love is illuminating." Judgment narrows what you can see. Love lets you see the person who's actually there.

Seeing the face again

Contempt usually needs distance. It thrives in comment sections and on cable news, where the other side is a category rather than a face.

That's why the cure tends to be small and close. Learn one person's story. Ask why they believe what they believe, and then listen to the answer. Pray for them by name. Remember that they're somebody's child, and that God made them on purpose.

You can still think they're wrong. You just can't think they're nothing.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Finish this sentence honestly: “People who vote ____ are ____.” Then read what you wrote as if someone else had said it about you.
2. Abba Moses carried his own sins in a leaking jug. What would be leaking out of yours?
3. Choose one person you’ve held in contempt, in public life or in your own family. Write down one thing about them that is true and good.

8. Truth With Love Still in It

Once you've set contempt down, you face the opposite temptation: to go quiet. Keep the peace, change the subject, never say anything that might cause a scene at Thanksgiving.

Paul had a better way in mind.

> *Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.*
>
> Ephesians 4:15

In Greek, "speak the truth" is a single word, a verb you could almost translate as *truthing*. It covers more than what you say. It's a way of living truthfully, and Paul attaches "in love" to it like a hand to a wrist.

Two ditches

Most of us drift toward one side of the road or the other.

Some are bold with the truth and quick to correct, and slow to weep. Their theology may be sound, but people come away bruised. Others overflow with kindness and never say the hard thing. Their warmth comforts, but their silence lets harm go unnamed.

John describes Jesus as "full of unfailing love and faithfulness" (John 1:14). Older translations say "grace and truth." He was full of both, and never let one leak out to make room for the other. He wept over Jerusalem, and he overturned the tables in the temple. He told a rich young man the hardest truth of his life, and Mark says that as he looked at him, Jesus "felt genuine love for him" (Mark 10:21).

None of us will hold that balance perfectly. It still helps to know which ditch you tend to drift toward.

One table

Go back to the strange crew from Chapter 1. Matthew the tax collector and Simon the zealot ate at the same table for three years.

Jesus never asked them to pretend their history didn't exist. He also never let it decide who sat where. He ate with tax collectors, and the religious leaders complained that he was "associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!" (Luke 15:2). He also ate with Pharisees, more than once, and told them the truth at their own tables (Luke 7:36-50; Luke 14:1-14).

He kept company with both sides, and he told both sides the truth.

Why it's so hard

When you've been wounded, kindness feels like surrender. When you're angry about a real injustice, gentleness can feel like betraying the people who were hurt. And winning an argument feels good, at least for an evening.

Jesus knew all of that from the inside. He was mocked, lied about and beaten. While soldiers were still nailing him to the cross, he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). He prayed that in the moment, not years later.

We won't manage that on our own strength. The good news is that we aren't asked to. The same Spirit who raised Jesus gives "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23), and they grow slowly, like the fruit they're named for.

Gently and humbly

When truth does need to be said to someone, Paul describes how:

> *Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.*
>
> Galatians 6:1

Gently. Humbly. Paul's aim is to help someone back onto the path, which is a long way from proving them wrong. And the last sentence keeps the speaker honest. Before you correct anyone, it helps to ask a few plain questions. Have I prayed for this person, not only about them? Am I speaking for their good, or so I can feel vindicated? Would I be willing to hear the same thing said to me?

There's a difference between a critic and a friend. A critic tells the truth and walks away. A friend tells the truth and keeps showing up.

"All that you can"

Paul gives one more instruction that's easy to read too fast: "Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18).

All that you can. The verse admits that some peace isn't in your power. Other people make their own choices. You can offer peace that nobody accepts.

That matters for people who've been hurt. Loving someone across a divide doesn't mean giving them unlimited access to you. If a relationship has turned abusive, distance can be wise. Love can pray for someone at a distance, wish them well and leave the door open, without walking back into harm.

For most of us, though, the problem is closer to home. It's the cousin we've stopped calling, the old friend we unfollowed, the neighbor whose yard sign we read every morning with a clenched jaw. With people like these, "all that you can" is usually more than we've tried.

A gentle answer

It rarely starts with a debate. It starts with a question you don't already know the answer to. *What worries you most about where things are going? Who taught you to care about that?* Then you listen long enough to hear the fear or the hope underneath.

"A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare" (Proverbs 15:1). You may still disagree when the conversation ends. You'll be disagreeing with a person, and you'll both still be at the table.

FOR REFLECTION

1. When politics comes up, which ditch do you drift toward: truth without love, or love without truth? Write down a recent example.
2. Think of one relationship strained by politics. Write a question you could ask that person that you genuinely don't know the answer to.
3. Romans 12:18 says "all that you can." Is there a relationship where you've done all you can? Is there one where you haven't tried yet?

Part Four: Practice

9. Practices From the Whole Church

Christians have lived under every kind of government there is: emperors, kings, dictators, democracies and occupying armies. Along the way, different branches of the family worked out habits for keeping their loyalty straight. None of them owns the problem. Each has something to teach.

The practices below come from Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant believers, and from the Scriptures they all share. Think of them as a pantry, not a program. Don't try them all. Choose one and try it for two weeks. If it doesn't fit, set it down and try another.

Practice	Rooted in	Time	Good for
A News Fast	The Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-10)	One day a week	Anxiety, outrage, doomscrolling
Five Names	1 Timothy 2:1-2; prayers for those in authority in Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant worship	10 min, weekly	Bitterness toward leaders
The Old Confession	Romans 10:9; the creeds	Seconds, any time	Fear when the news is bad
An Examen of Allegiance	Catholic (Ignatius of Loyola)	10 min, evening	Noticing what has your heart
One Name, Daily	Matthew 5:44; Stephen (Acts 7:60)	2 min, daily	Contempt
A Declaration of Allegiance	The early baptismal vows	30 min, once	Remembering whose you are
One Bridge	Jeremiah 29:7; Luke 15:2	Once a month	Division in family, church or town

A News Fast

Choose one day a week and take a break from political news and political social media. Not forever, just one day. If a full day is too much, start with one evening.

Put something in the empty space. Read a psalm. Take a walk. Call someone you love. Before bed, write down what surfaced in the quiet.

The Sabbath command was given to people who had been slaves. One day in seven, nobody could make them work. A news fast is a small way of saying the same thing: the outrage machine doesn't own you. "Be still, and know that I am God!" (Psalm 46:10).

Five Names

Paul told Timothy to pray "for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity" (1 Timothy 2:2). He wrote under Nero. Around the end of the first century, the church in Rome wrote a letter to the church in Corinth, now called *1 Clement*, that includes a long prayer asking God to give rulers health, peace and wisdom. The church kept praying it under emperors who were hostile to it.

Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and many Protestant churches still do this. Orthodox liturgies pray for the country and its civil authorities. The Catholic Mass includes intentions for public authorities. The Book of Common Prayer prays for all in authority, and many Protestant congregations pray for leaders by name.

Write down five leaders: national, state and local. Include some you voted for and some you didn't. Once a week, pray the same prayer for all five: for their good, and for wisdom, honesty, courage, mercy and a turning toward God. You can still long for justice; Scripture is full of that prayer. This one asks for their good, the way Jesus taught us to pray for enemies. Notice which names are hardest to say.

The Old Confession

One of the earliest Christian confessions fits in a single breath. "If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). In an empire where Caesar was called lord, that was a politically loaded thing to say.

Use it as a breath prayer. Breathe in on *Jesus*. Breathe out on *is Lord*. Say it when a headline tightens your chest, or when you can't sleep.

Once a week, say the Apostles' Creed slowly. Notice who it names: Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate." A Roman governor has been named in Christian worship for centuries. For Christians, his enduring place in worship comes from the man he sentenced.

An Examen of Allegiance

Ignatius of Loyola taught a short evening prayer for reviewing the day with God. This version turns it toward loyalty.

1. Be still. Remember that you're in God's presence.
2. Give thanks for one gift from the day.
3. Look back. What voices shaped your mood today? What did you feel when you read the news?
4. Ask: where did fear, anger or contempt have more of my heart than Jesus did?
5. Ask for what you need tomorrow.

On most nights it'll take ten minutes. Some nights it'll take two. Either is fine.

One Name, Daily

Jesus said, "love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!" (Matthew 5:44). Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed for the men stoning him: "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" (Acts 7:60).

Choose one person you struggle to love, a public figure or someone in your own life. Each day for two weeks, pray for their good: health, growth, blessing. You don't have to feel warmly. You only have to ask God to give you his heart for them, and see what changes.

A Declaration of Allegiance

In many early churches, people being baptized publicly renounced evil before they confessed Christ. In fourth-century Jerusalem, Cyril described candidates turning to the west to renounce Satan, then to the east to confess. Orthodox baptisms still include the turn. They were saying out loud who they belonged to.

Write your own short declaration. You might start this way: *My hope isn't in any party, leader or nation. My hope is in the Lord who reigns forever.* Then add what you are turning from and what you're turning toward, in your own words. Keep it where you'll see it: on the fridge, by the bathroom mirror, as your phone's lock screen.

One Bridge

Once a month, take one step toward someone across a divide: political, cultural or personal. Choose someone you can safely be in contact with. If a relationship has been abusive, leave it out of this practice; praying for that person from a distance is enough. Invite them for coffee. Send a kind word. Help with something they need. Listen to their story without correcting it.

If you can, share a meal. Jesus was criticized for the company he kept at the table, and he kept it anyway. The exiles in Babylon were told to seek the welfare of the city that held them captive. A table is a small place to start.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Which one practice will you try for the next two weeks? Write it down, with a time of day.
2. Which of the five leaders on your list was hardest to pray for? Why do you think that is?
3. Two weeks from now, come back to this page. What changed, even slightly?

A Benediction

You may have come to these pages tired of the noise. The noise will still be there tomorrow. This guide was never going to switch it off.

Week after week, in churches all over the world, Christians still say Pilate's name. They say it because of the King he sentenced, the one who stood in front of him and refused to fight on his terms. Pilate is long gone, and so is the empire that sent him. The Kingdom that "is not of this world" is still being received.

Scripture says where all of this is going:

> *"The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever."*
>
> Revelation 11:15

Until then, plant your garden. Pray for the people in charge. Tell the truth, gently. Keep a seat at your table for someone who votes differently. And go in peace.

> *Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.*
>
> Jude 24-25

Notes

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CHAPTER 1

John 18:36. "Of this world" translates the Greek *ek tou kosmou toutou*, literally "from this world."

Luke 6:15. Scholars differ on whether "zealot" in Jesus' day meant zeal for the law in general or membership in the later revolutionary movement against Rome.

CHAPTER 2

Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, Book IV, chapter 4, trans. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1871). The pirate's reply is paraphrased. The story is older than Augustine; Cicero tells it in *On the Republic*, Book III.

Augustine on the value of earthly peace: *The City of God*, Book XIX, chapters 13-17.

CHAPTER 3

Psalm 73 is credited to Asaph in its heading. Psalm 73:10, describing people who take in every word of the arrogant, is paraphrased.

CHAPTER 4

Most scholars identify the coin in Mark 12 as a silver denarius of Tiberius, whose coins commonly read "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, Augustus." The identification is likely but not certain.

Romans is usually dated around AD 57. Revelation is most often dated to the 90s, under Domitian, though some scholars argue for the late 60s.

1 Peter 2:17. The same Greek verb, *timaō*, "honor," is used for "everyone" and for "the king." "Fear" is reserved for God.

Tertullian, *Apology*, chapter 30 (c. 197), in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3. Paraphrased.

The Martyrdom of Polycarp, chapters 8-9, in J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan, 1891). Polycarp's reply is paraphrased. His death is usually dated to about 155-156; some scholars prefer a later date.

CHAPTER 5

Philippi was resettled as a Roman colony with army veterans after the battle of Philippi (42 BC) and again after Actium (31 BC).

James Moffatt, *The New Testament: A New Translation* (1913), Philippians 3:20.

Epistle to Diognetus, chapter 5, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885). The author is unknown, and estimates of its date range from the second century into the third.

Dionysius of Alexandria, letter preserved in Eusebius, *Church History* 7.22. Paraphrased. Dionysius describes Christians nursing fellow believers, and their pagan neighbors fleeing the sick.

Julian, *Letter to Arsacius* (c. 362), preserved by the church historian Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.16; also Letter 22 in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, Loeb Classical Library (1923). Paraphrased.

CHAPTER 6

The first deportation to Babylon, which included King Jehoiachin, took place in 597 BC; Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 586 BC. Hananiah's prophecy is in Jeremiah 28.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question" (April 1933), in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 12, *Berlin: 1932-1933* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009). The wheel image is paraphrased. Translations vary; a common English rendering speaks of not only bandaging the victims under the wheel but putting a spoke in the wheel itself.

CHAPTER 7

Matthew 5:22. The NLT notes that the Greek uses an Aramaic term of contempt, *raca*.

The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975), Moses 2. Retold. Some retellings replace the jug with a basket of sand. That Moses had been a robber before he became a monk comes from tradition.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1959), from the section on Matthew 7:1-12.

CHAPTER 8

Ephesians 4:15. "Speak the truth" translates a single Greek participle, *alētheuontes*.

John 1:14. The NLT's "unfailing love and faithfulness" renders the Greek words that older translations give as "grace and truth."

CHAPTER 9

1 Clement, chapters 59-61 (c. 96), in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9. The prayer for rulers is in chapter 61.

Prayers for civil authorities appear in the litanies of the Orthodox Divine Liturgy; in the Universal Prayer of the Catholic Mass (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 70); and in the Prayers of the People of the Episcopal Church's *Book of Common Prayer* (1979).

Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, §43. The Examen of Allegiance adapts his pattern.

Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Lectures* 1.2-9 (fourth century).

Check-In Questions and Prayer Prompts

Take these slowly. Write in the Faith Journal or on the lines below. What matters is that each question gets an honest answer somewhere.

1 Where did you first learn that your faith was expected to come with a politics attached?

Write down who was there and what it cost you. Then write what you wish someone had said to you instead.

PRAYER PROMPT

"Lord, I didn't choose this fight, and I'm tired of it. Remind me who I belong to."

2 What has your political hope taken from you?

Look back at the "takes" in 1 Samuel 8. Name what you've handed over to the news, a movement or a leader that you would like back.

PRAYER PROMPT

"God, I wanted a king who would fix things, and I stopped asking You. Here is what I'd like back."

3 Where is your line?

Daniel served the empire and refused its idols. Write one specific thing you won't say or do for any party, leader or church, whatever it costs. Keep it short enough to remember.

PRAYER PROMPT

"Jesus, You're my King. Give me the nerve to keep this line when keeping it gets expensive."

4 Who have you held in contempt?

Write their name and one true, good thing about them. Then write what it would take for you to see a face there again instead of a category.

PRAYER PROMPT

"Father, You made this person on purpose. I don't feel that yet. Help me see what You see."

5 Which practice from Chapter 9 will you try for the next two weeks?

Write it down with a time of day, like Sunday afternoon or before you open the news. Then come back in two weeks and write what changed, even slightly.

PRAYER PROMPT

"Lord, I'll try this one small thing. Meet me in it, and keep me from turning it into another way to keep score."

A Blessing for the Road

May the God who sees the wanderer find you wherever you are tonight.

May Christ, who never needed you to have it all together, meet you in the questions you're still carrying.

May the Spirit steady your feet when the noise gets loud, and quiet your heart when the world won't.

Go gently. Tell the truth. Love the ones in front of you.

And when you fall, and you will, may grace be the first thing you find when you get back up.

You're Always Welcome Here

If this helped, don't carry it alone. Write your answers in the Faith Journal, free and private. Share this with someone who's wandering. And come find us at faithoverfactions.com, on Substack, Facebook, Bluesky, and Instagram.

Faith Journal

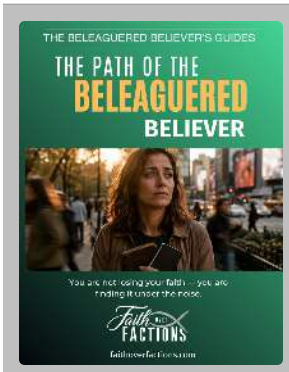
This piece online

The porch light is always on.

Take Something for the Road

You don't have to walk this alone, and you don't have to pay to keep going. Here are a few companions for the journey. Four are free. No email address, no catch.

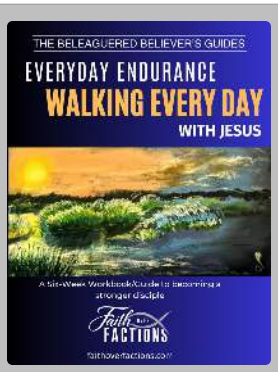
THE BELEAGUERED BELIEVER'S GUIDES



The Path of the Beleaguered Believer

"You are not losing your faith, you are finding it under the noise." For the one who keeps getting up.

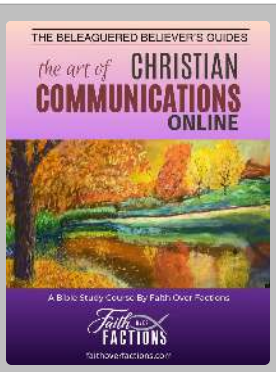
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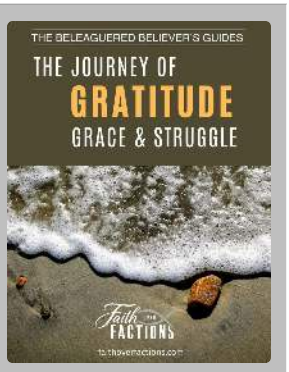
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