

# *Public Faith in Action*

*How to Think Carefully, Engage Wisely,  
and Vote with Integrity*

**D I S C U S S I O N   G U I D E**

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# Introduction

We wrote *Public Faith in Action* to be a practical book. Deliberation—in other words, “conversation”—is one of the essential forms of public engagement. We come together, make arguments, ask questions, put forward proposals, and so on, all with the aim of figuring out what we should do. Our culture is lacking in honest, constructive conversation. Christians are called to do better than what’s currently on offer. This discussion guide will help you make *Public Faith in Action* a jumping-off point for deep, lively, and hopefully loving dialogue about important issues facing our communities today.

One of the most important things missing from public conversations today is real listening. As you discuss the topics covered in *Public Faith in Action*, focus on listening well. Read the book with open eyes and an open mind, but more importantly, listen to the people in your discussion group with an open heart.

## How to Use the Guide

We’ve broken the book into five chunks that go well together for discussion. Each one is a “week” in the discussion guide. You can hand out the “Schedule of Readings” page to your group members, so they know what to read when. If you want to take the conversation more slowly, you can split each week into two.

Each week’s curriculum has the same structure.

### *Reflect*

It’s best to start discussion from where the people in your group are. Each week, choose two questions, one from each column, to open your conversation. Encourage honesty by being open yourself.

<b>Who’s here?</b>	<b>Who’s not?</b>
Which issues from the book do you spend a lot of time thinking about?	What experiences or perspectives that are relevant for one of the topics are missing from the group? (For example, if you’re discussing migration, is there anyone in the room who has been a migrant?)
What’s one story that has influenced how you think about one of the topics for this week?	
Which topics from this week make you nervous? Why?	What views about one of the topics don’t you like to hear?

### *Read the Book*

In this section, take some time to see if you can figure out the main points of one of the chapters from *Public Faith in Action*. We’ve provided discussion questions for each chapter in the weekly discussion guides below.

### ***Read the Bible***

Next, read and briefly discuss some relevant passages from the Bible. After all, Scripture is the most important source for Christian reflection on public engagement. We've provided suggested Scripture readings for each chapter in the weekly discussion guides below.

### ***Connect***

Now's the time for you to connect what you've read with the experiences you discussed in the "Reflect" section. This is your chance to critique the book and offer your own alternatives. We've provided discussion questions for each chapter in the weekly discussion guides below. (Note: This would also be a good place to discuss some of the "Room for Debate" questions found at the end of each chapter in the book.)

### ***Act***

In this section, we ask questions to help you apply Christian convictions to public life on three different levels: personal, local, and national. In some cases, we suggest ways you might put your faith into public action. Discuss the suggestions with your group and ask each person which ones (if any) he or she will take action on—or come up with your own alternatives!

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Every group is different, so **be flexible**. Think about your group and pick which parts of the discussion guide to emphasize and which ones to skip based on your particular goals and needs.

# Schedule of Readings

<b>Week 1</b>	Introduction; chapters 2, 4–6, 21
<b>Week 2</b>	Chapters 7–9, 22
<b>Week 3</b>	Chapters 10–14, 23
<b>Week 4</b>	Chapters 15–17, 24
<b>Week 5</b>	Chapters 18–20, 25

# Week 1

## ***Texts: Introduction; Chapters 2, 4–6, 21***

The introduction and chapter 2 lay out the basic vision of the book. Chapters 4–6 all focus on different forms of created goodness, or “wealth.” Chapter 21 discusses the importance of courage in Christian public engagement.

### ***Plan***

1. Choose two of the “Reflect” prompts from the list above and discuss them.
2. Choose a chapter to start with and follow the discussion plan below.
3. If you have time, move on to another chapter. (Repeat until you run out of time or chapters.)

## **Chapter 2: Christ, the Spirit, and Flourishing**

### ***Read the Book***

1. What are some examples of life being led well, life going well, and life feeling good?
2. Why are love, peace, and joy good candidates for summing up the three aspects of flourishing?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Matthew 6:32–33; 22:37–40; 25:21–23; and Acts 1:6–8.
2. What do these passages have to say about flourishing in Christ through the Spirit?

### ***Connect***

1. Does the idea of flourishing really capture the heart of Christ’s and the Spirit’s missions?
2. Where do you see flourishing in your life, your local communities, or broader culture?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* Write out a description of what you think a flourishing world would be like. Allow God to speak into it. Where does your imagination depart from a picture of flourishing focused on Christ?

*Local:* Commit to praying regularly for one local area, community, or group to flourish.

*National:* Do public figures present visions of human flourishing or just lists of problems? If the latter, what do the lists of problems imply a flourishing world would look like?

## **Chapter 4: Wealth**

### ***Read the Book***

1. What is “wealth”?
2. Why does *Public Faith in Action* treat wealth as (potentially) good?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Genesis 1:26–31; Isaiah 65:17–21; Matthew 6:24; and Matthew 19:16–26.
2. What do these passages have to say about wealth?

### ***Connect***

1. What distortions of the value of wealth do you see in your life, in your local communities, and in broader culture?
2. How would the virtue of courage affect your approach to wealth?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* Track your spending for a week or a month. What does it say about what you think real wealth is?

*Local:* What local forms of wealth do you tend to overlook (e.g., the beauty of the natural world or public goods like roads or museums)?

*National:* In what ways is the public conversation focused on distorted forms of wealth creation?

## **Chapter 5: The Environment**

### ***Read the Book***

1. What is the argument for the environment having value apart from its usefulness for humans?
2. How is dominion different from ownership?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Genesis 2:4–10, 15; Isaiah 35:1–2, 5–9; and Romans 8:18–23.
2. What do these passages have to say about the environment?

### ***Connect***

1. What do you fear you would have to give up if you took care for the environment seriously?
2. Do you find the idea that the environment has value apart from its usefulness for humans convincing? Why or why not?
3. How would the virtue of courage affect your approach to the environment?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* Use an online personal carbon-footprint calculator (like the ones at [epa.gov](http://epa.gov) and [nature.org](http://nature.org)). Commit to one new environment-positive practice, like walking or biking to work, eating less meat, not using plastic shopping bags, or adjusting the thermostat.

*Local:* What are ways your church could demonstrate care for the environment? What local groups are currently taking the lead on care for the environment?

*National:* What values tend to trump concern for the environment in public discussions?

## Chapter 6: Education

### *Read the Book*

1. How is education distinct from knowledge acquisition, training, and schooling?
2. What are important contexts for education?

### *Read the Bible*

1. Read Deuteronomy 6:6–9; Proverbs 1:1–7; and Luke 2:41–52.
2. What do these passages have to say about education?

### *Connect*

1. Does the vision of education as formation resonate with your story and context?
2. How would the virtue of courage affect your approach to education?

### *Act*

*Personal:* Whose education can you contribute to?

*Local:* Research school funding policies in your area. Are they just? How might they be improved? How does your church approach character formation?

*National:* What kind of policies would support widely available, quality education?

# Week 2

## **Texts: Chapters 7–9, 22**

Chapters 7–9 focus on specific economic issues and the ways that good things (work, wealth creation, and finance) tend to go wrong. Chapter 22 discusses the importance of humility in Christian public engagement.

## **Plan**

1. Choose two of the “Reflect” prompts from the list above and discuss them.
2. Choose a chapter to start with and follow the discussion plan below.
3. If you have time, move on to another chapter. (Repeat until you run out of time or chapters.)

## **Chapter 7: Work and Rest**

### ***Read the Book***

1. What’s the difference between rest as rejuvenation and rest as celebration?
2. What kind of work is an important part of human flourishing?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Genesis 1:31–2:3; Mark 2:23–28; Acts 20:32–35; and Ephesians 4:28.
2. What do these passages have to say about work and rest?

### ***Connect***

1. What are the obstacles in your life to resting well? What are the obstacles to working well?
2. How would the virtue of humility affect your approach to work and rest?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* Start keeping a set time of Sabbath rest, if not a whole day each week, then maybe some hours each day.

*Local:* What local practices promote bad relationships to work and rest (e.g., is there a lot of demand for 24 hour businesses)? Are there ways local communities could organize to provide opportunities for meaningful work to those who currently lack them?

*National:* There’s a lot of talk about “jobs” in the news these days. What’s missing, from a Christian perspective?

## **Chapter 8: Poverty**

### ***Read the Book***

1. What are the different facets of poverty?
2. What does poverty have to do with flourishing?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Psalm 72:1–4, 12–14; Proverbs 31:8–9; Zechariah 7:8–10; Luke 4:16–21; and James 2:1–5.
2. What do these passages have to say about poverty?

### ***Connect***

1. Is the biblical case for caring for the poor and fighting poverty really as strong as *Public Faith in Action* says it is?
2. How would the virtue of humility affect your approach to poverty?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* Listen to someone who is poor. Have a real conversation, but try not to do much of the talking yourself.

*Local:* What are some of the particular issues faced by the poor in your area? What is your church doing to combat poverty?

*National:* Insist that your representatives debate how best to combat poverty, not just how to serve the middle class.

## **Chapter 9: Borrowing and Lending**

### ***Read the Book***

1. What are the positive purposes of borrowing and lending?
2. In what ways might lending be harmful to the borrower?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Exodus 22:25–27; Deuteronomy 23:19–20; Matthew 18:23–35; Luke 6:34–36.
2. What do these passages have to say about borrowing and lending?

### ***Connect***

1. When have you engaged in distorted borrowing or lending?
2. How would the virtue of humility affect your approach to borrowing and lending?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* In some way, big or small, lend this week without expecting anything in return.

*Local:* Research local alternatives to gigantic financial corporations. Find the payday loan businesses in your area. Take note of what neighborhoods they're in.

*National:* What sort of impact would your dream public policies have on the national debt? Are there policies you support in principle but aren't willing to pay for?

# Week 3

## **Texts: Chapters 10–14, 23**

Chapters 10–14 form a block focused for the most part on issues of vulnerability that emerge over the course of a life. Chapter 23 discusses the importance of the virtue of justice in Christian public engagement.

## **Plan**

1. Choose two of the “Reflect” prompts from the list above and discuss them.
2. Choose a chapter to start with and follow the discussion plan below.
3. If you have time, move on to another chapter. (Repeat until you run out of time or chapters.)

## **Chapter 10: Marriage and Family**

### ***Read the Book***

1. In what sense are marriage and family “subordinate to singleness for the purposes of the gospel” (p. 84)?
2. What is *Public Faith in Action*’s argument for supporting legal recognition of same-sex marriages even if you believe same-sex sexual relationships are illicit?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Genesis 2:18–24; Deuteronomy 11:8–9; Matthew 4:21–22; 8:21–22; 19:29; 23:9; and 1 Corinthians 7:8–9, 25–40.
2. What do these passages have to say about marriage and family?

### ***Connect***

1. What are some historical transformations of marriage and family relations that might be relevant to your discernment about marriage and family issues today? What more would you have to learn about those transformations to discern well?
2. How would the virtue of justice affect your approach to marriage and family issues?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* Set aside time to pray for your family, whoever you consider them to be.

*Local:* How can you and your communities support families raising children in your area?

*National:* Which policies and cultural trends weaken families? Which ones would contribute to flourishing families?

## Chapter 11: New Life

### *Read the Book*

1. What are the basic convictions that should underlie Christian engagement with issues of childbearing and new life?
2. Why does the question of when a fetus becomes “unborn human life” matter?

### *Read the Bible*

1. Read Psalm 139:1–18; Ecclesiastes 11:5; Isaiah 49:15; Jeremiah 20:14–18; Hosea 13:16; and Amos 1:13–16.
2. What do these passages have to say about care for new life?

### *Connect*

1. What place does the idea of choice have in Christian reflection on childbearing?
2. How would the virtue of justice affect your approach to issues around childbearing and new life?

### *Act*

*Personal:* How can you be of material, emotional, and spiritual support to those you know who are going to have or have recently had children?

*Local:* What kind of policies do the institutions you’re involved in have for expecting parents and new parents?

*National:* Advocate for mandatory paid family leave.

## Chapter 12: Health and Sickness

### *Read the Book*

1. How do health and sickness impact flourishing?
2. What are the three distortions of care for health?

### *Read the Bible*

1. Read Ezekiel 34:1–4; Matthew 25:36, 39–40; and Mark 1:29–34.
2. What do these passages have to say about caring for our health and the health of others?

### *Connect*

1. In what ways do you worship health?
2. If you were using the convictions discussed in this chapter as a yardstick for current proposals about health care policy, how would the proposals measure up?
3. How would the virtue of justice affect your approach to issues of health care?

### *Act*

*Personal:* Consider donating to an organization that does evidence-supported international health work or volunteering with a group that supports your neighbors’ health.

*Local:* Look at a map of your area and identify any food deserts, places where fresh foods are hard to get. Brainstorm together ways improve them.

*National:* Insist that your representatives support increased efforts to combat diseases like malaria that disproportionately afflict the poor.

## **Chapter 13: Aging Life**

### ***Read the Book***

1. What are some of the reasons that culture today runs the risk of neglecting the elderly?
2. What is the significance of the diminishing capacities of elderly people in terms of our responsibilities toward them?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 20:29; Isaiah 47:5–7.
2. What do these passages have to say about care for the aging?

### ***Connect***

1. In what ways have you seen a community care well for the aging? When have you seen the aging left uncared for?
2. How would the virtue of justice affect your approach to the elderly?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* Take time to listen to someone older than you. Find out what the challenges are in her or his life.

*Local:* How does your church relate to the elderly? Think of some ways you could do a better job welcoming and caring for older churchgoers.

*National:* How could social insurance programs for the elderly be improved? What policies or leadership at a national level would encourage local care for the aging?

## **Chapter 14: Ending Life**

### ***Read the Book***

1. Why do the authors argue that Christian moral assessment of removal or withholding of life-preserving treatment should be different than Christian moral assessment of euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide (PAS)?
2. What convictions underlie a Christian stance toward death?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Genesis 9:6; Exodus 20:13; and Deuteronomy 32:39.
2. What do these passages have to say about end-of-life issues?

### ***Connect***

1. What, if any, relevant concerns do the authors leave out in their argument against PAS and euthanasia?
2. What can Christians do to witness to the two facts that (1) biological death isn't the worst thing that can happen to us and (2) human earthly life is nevertheless sacred?
3. How would the virtue of justice affect your approach to end-of-life issues?

***Act***

*Personal:* Pray for those who are doing chaplaincy, hospice, and other end-of-life care.

*Local:* Organize a local community to support a nonprofit hospice care facility in your area.

*National:* If you're convinced, tell your representatives that you oppose legalized PAS and euthanasia.

# Week 4

## ***Texts: Chapters 15–17, 24***

Chapters 15–17 address topics that raise questions of security, primarily of a domestic scope. Fear plays a major role in most public deliberation about these questions. Chapter 24 discusses the importance of the virtue of respect in Christian public engagement.

### ***Plan***

1. Choose two of the “Reflect” prompts from the list above and discuss them.
2. Choose a chapter to start with and follow the discussion plan below.
3. If you have time, move on to another chapter. (Repeat until you run out of time or chapters.)

## **Chapter 15: Migration**

### ***Read the Book***

1. Why is “welcome” a crucial category for a Christian stance toward migration?
2. What role should economic interests play in faithful engagement with migration?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Deuteronomy 10:16–20; Psalm 146:9; Matthew 2:13–18; 25:34–46; and Ephesians 2:19.
2. What do these passages have to say about migration?

### ***Connect***

1. How are appeals to security and preservation of a society’s way of life being used in public discourse today? How should we assess those appeals?
2. How would the virtue of respect affect your approach to migration?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* Listen to migrants’ stories—online if need be, but in person if possible.

*Local:* Figure out who in your community is welcoming refugees and join with them. Ask what kind of support is needed and propose that your church or another group you belong to provide as much as it can.

*National:* Advocate for immigration policies that prioritize those in need over those with profitable skills.

## Chapter 16: Policing

### *Read the Book*

1. What is the positive purpose of policing?
2. What are some common distortions of policing?

### *Read the Bible*

1. Read Amos 5:10–15; Matthew 5:43–45; and Romans 13:1–7.
2. What do these passages have to say about policing?

### *Connect*

1. How do conversations about race and policing make you feel? Where are your views on the subject being driven more by fear than by love of neighbor?
2. How would the virtue of respect affect your approach to policing?

### *Act*

*Personal:* Listen to people of color tell their stories of interactions with the police—in person if possible, online if not. If your police department has regular meetings or briefings open to the public, go to one.

*Local:* How does your local police force relate to different groups in your community? Find statistics. If relevant, consider organizing a community petition for your police force to demilitarize its equipment.

*National:* Support legislation requiring standardized records of police uses of force.

## Chapter 17: Punishment

### *Read the Book*

1. What is the authors' argument against the death penalty?
2. What should the goal(s) of legal punishment be?

### *Read the Bible*

1. Read Isaiah 53; John 8:3–11; and 1 Peter 2:13–14.
2. What do these passages have to say about public issues related to punishment?

### *Connect*

1. How does the proposal of nonretributive punishment strike you? What reasons can you give for your reactions?
2. How would the virtue of respect affect your approach to issues of punishment?

### *Act*

*Personal:* Take an implicit bias test online (e.g., the “Project Implicit” test available at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>). Write down your response to the results. Consider their implications for fairness in the legal process.

*Local:* Investigate what percentage of local government funding comes from fines and fees imposed for minor violations.

*National:* Advocate for the abolition of for-profit prisons.

# Week 5

## ***Texts: Chapters 18–20, 25***

Chapters 18–20 remain with topics that raise questions of security, but they move the focus to a more international scope. As with week 4, fear plays a major role in most public deliberation about these questions. Chapter 25 discusses the importance of the virtue of compassion in Christian public engagement.

## ***Plan***

1. Choose two of the “Reflect” prompts from the list above and discuss them.
2. Choose a chapter to start with and follow the discussion plan below.
3. If you have time, move on to another chapter. (Repeat until you run out of time or chapters.)

## **Chapter 18: War**

### ***Read the Book***

1. Why does the command to love our enemies have anything to do with war?
2. Why should Christians seek peace even with enemies?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Isaiah 2:1–4; Hosea 2:16–20; Matthew 5:43–45; and Luke 3:10–14.
2. What do these passages have to say about war and peace?

### ***Connect***

1. Which of the criteria of a just war would your country’s current or recent wars meet? In what ways would they fail to meet them?
2. How would the virtue of compassion affect your approach to issues of war and peace?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* Pray daily for peace.

*Local:* Organize a service of mourning for those killed or injured in wars your country is participating in.

*National:* Tell your representatives that your vote goes to those who only support just wars.

## **Chapter 19: Torture**

### ***Read the Book***

1. What is the authors’ argument for a blanket prohibition on torture?
2. How do the authors deal with the possible costs of a blanket prohibition on torture?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Matthew 26:57–68; 27:1–2, 11–56; and John 19:1–30.
2. What do these passages have to say about torture?

### ***Connect***

1. What sources have shaped your sense of whether torture “works”?
2. Can we really afford to rule out torture in all cases?
3. How would the virtue of compassion affect your approach to torture?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* Honestly examine your feelings about torture. Are there people you *want* to be tortured? Confess where fear or anger overwhelms your commitment to the God-given worth of human beings.

*Local:* Consider organizing a service of lament and repentance for our complicity in torture both domestically and abroad.

*National:* Support the work of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

## **Chapter 20: Freedom of Religion (and Irreligion)**

### ***Read the Book***

1. What is a proper Christian stance toward persecution?
2. Should Christians care about freedom for other religions? Why?

### ***Read the Bible***

1. Read Matthew 5:10; 7:12; 28:19–20; and Acts 1:6–8.
2. What do these passages have to say about freedom of religion?

### ***Connect***

1. What religious communities are most at risk of having their freedom restricted in your local and national contexts?
2. How would the virtue of compassion affect your approach to freedom of (ir)religion?

### ***Act***

*Personal:* Pick a country (maybe your own) where there is ongoing religious persecution and pray regularly for its people.

*Local:* Explore ways to build relationship between your Christian community and other local religious groups.

*National:* Speak out against rhetoric that privileges Christian religious freedom while seeking to deny freedom to other groups.