

There was a time not so long ago when Americans debated ideas around dinner tables, not timelines. We wrestled with differences in our living rooms, classrooms, and church halls. But now? We live in the age of “I don’t believe you. Prove me wrong.” The default mode of curious conversation has turned into combat.

Scroll through any comment section and you’ll see it: people don’t log on to learn, they log on to win. They enter digital arenas, not classrooms. Social media has turned intellectual inquiry into an Olympic sport of outrage where every disagreement demands a takedown, every nuance is flattened into a meme, and every opponent becomes an enemy. That shift—from curiosity to cynicism—is quietly dismantling the very foundation of a free society: Trust.

Once upon a time, American discourse as a whole was built on questions. Our Founders argued fiercely, but the goal was understanding. Debate was an act of discovery, not destruction. “Teach me” was the posture of a citizen who loved truth more than tribe.

Today, that posture is rare. We’ve mistaken being informed for being inflexible. We say, “I’ve done my research,” but really mean “I’ve read five posts that agree with me.” We talk about “owning the libs” or “crushing the cons,” but what we’ve really destroyed is the middle ground where reason used to live. This new culture doesn’t seek understanding. Rather, it seeks affirmation. The tragedy is that the tools meant to connect us have been weaponized to divide us.

That’s the paradox of our age: we have the means to hold the world’s largest conversation, yet we’ve reduced it to a shouting match. Free markets are supposed to thrive on innovation and exchange, but our digital marketplace has become a monopoly of emotion.

We should be leading the charge to reclaim these platforms for dialogue, not diatribe. Free speech is more than the right to speak. It’s the responsibility to listen. We should want social media to be the world’s public square, not its virtual food fight. Imagine if, instead of “prove me wrong,” we started from “help me understand.” Imagine a culture where humility was a virtue again, not a weakness. That’s not naïve—it’s necessary. There’s nothing “soft” about humility. Jesus Himself—who held the ultimate truth—still asked questions, still taught through dialogue, still invited people to understand. Maybe that’s the model we need again.

Before social media, you couldn’t just parachute into a conversation armed with rage and a Wi-Fi connection. You had to engage face-to-face. There were natural filters: manners, context, tone. You couldn’t just drop a bomb and vanish into anonymity. Those days weren’t perfect, but our debates had weight. They demanded patience, presence, and perspective. Today, our culture is built for the opposite. Speed over thought. Visibility over virtue. Snark over substance. We used to shake hands after arguments. Now we block people. That’s not progress. That’s paralysis.

So, here’s my modest proposal: the next time someone says something you disagree with online, try answering with, “I don’t understand, teach me.” It won’t always work. Some people will still argue in bad faith. But if enough of us adopt that posture, we might just start rebuilding the bridges that algorithms have burned. Because at the end of the day, a nation built on freedom depends on the free exchange of ideas. Not just the loud ones. The honest ones. *(adapted from “We The People” podcast host Gates Garcia)*

*The Bible speaks to the importance of healthy communication and the dangers of unhealthy discourse. “Just say ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.” (Mt. 5:37) “Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.” (Eph. 4:29) “Rash language cuts and maims, but there is healing in the words of the wise.” (Pro. 12:18) Just as with our actions, may our words (and posts) honor Jesus! Love you, PK.*

