



A Parent's Guide to
**TALKING ABOUT
POLITICS**

axis

"Dear Government... I'm going to have a serious talk with you if I ever find anyone to talk to."

— Stieg Larsson, *The Girl Who Played with Fire*

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This guide will help you discuss:

- ❓ Teens' thoughts about politics
- ❓ Teens' involvement with politics
- ❓ What the Bible says about politics
- ❓ Jesus' political significance
- ❓ What Jesus says about politics
- ❓ How to start conversations about politics
- ❓ How to make a difference in conversations about politics with teens

A Nation Divided

As of 2023, America is split along many lines. It feels like no matter what opinion you hold, you wouldn't have to look very long to find someone who vehemently disagrees with you. In no space is this more true, it seems, than in politics.

Political views have become more than just ideas or even convictions; for many of us, our political affiliation represents the set of beliefs we hold to be morally necessary. By definition, then, any other affiliation begins to feel morally reprehensible. And it actually makes sense: we are, in many ways, defined by what we believe is true and untrue about the world, others, and God. An attack against our political views is also an attack about our convictions regarding truth, and further, an attack on our very identity. [According to NPR](#), people are so divided along lines of politics that they are quite literally disowning family members over their beliefs.

It may not always have been this way. But in an age where people are desperately searching for something to anchor our souls to, something to tell us who we are and who we are supposed to be, politics and *politicians* come running to answer those questions. Politics can become the source of meaning and significance that people are designed by God to crave.

Before we go any further, we would like to say that this is *not* a voting guide. We at Axis are not here to convince you of the validity of one political party over another or to give you our opinion of any political figures. In fact, this parent guide isn't really *about* politics at all, though naturally, different political topics will be mentioned.

Instead, the goal of this parent guide is to walk with you through the specific experience of discussing politics with the young people in your life—how to navigate conversations that are often difficult, distressing, and dividing. Our hope is that wherever you fall politically, you see this guide as an encouragement to pursue the heart of Christ as you seek to disciple the teens that you love.

Do teens even care about politics?

It's important to understand that a conversation with a teen about politics is not just about what party they best affiliate with or which politicians they support. [Recent studies](#) suggest that young people feel an overall sense of disappointment with Washington. This research indicates that both young Republicans and young Democrats feel that their desire to make change takes precedence over any one party or person. Because of this, we have to be aware that when it comes to talking politics with teens, we should do so without the assumption that they will accept or support traditional party lines.

The [AP-NORC center at the University of Chicago](#) found that study participants aged 13-17 care deeply about politics and the way they affect our country. Four out of five teens say America is divided, and six out of 10 say the country is headed in the wrong direction. Nine of 10 teens report having been involved in civic action like volunteering or raising money for causes they care about. It would appear that teens, despite being below voting age requirements, are far from being disinterested in politics. They care deeply about making change when it comes to issues that they're passionate about. As caring adults, one of the best ongoing conversations we can have with our teens is about how they want to make an impact on the world.

When we approach political conversations with our teens, we need to understand that the conversation is not about holding to traditional beliefs associated with the two-party system. Instead, teens see politics as the way to affect real change on behalf of the things and people they think are important. Politics are high-stakes to teens, and made all the more so by the intense polarization and cliques enabled by social media. Because of this, a discussion of politics with someone who might disagree with them is equally high-stakes. It is a discussion about what is right and wrong, what is essential to the functioning of society and the rights of every human being. It is a question of what they believe is true about the world, how it is, and how it should be. These conversations have always been present surrounding the world of politics, but for Gen Z, who feels that catastrophe is potentially right around the corner due to climate change, government legislation affecting their personal lives, and the general distress and violence around the world, it all seems much more imminently important.

Reflection Questions: What conversations have you had about politics with your peers? What topics tend to come up? What conversations have you had with your teens about politics? What political beliefs and causes are especially important to you?

What does the Bible say about politics?

The government and society of Jesus' time was obviously different from ours, but there is no denying that politics still impacted people's daily lives [even 2,000 years ago](#). First century Jewish Palestine, where Jesus lived and taught, was governed through a combination of Roman military and nobility presence and local religious leadership. Though we won't go in depth on how exactly that all functioned, it's important to mention because we need to remember that Jesus' words were heard by political people, in a political environment, and had political implications.

When Jesus used phrases like "the kingdom of God," or referred to himself as "the son of God," people would hear those as political buzzwords. There was *already* a ruling kingdom (Rome); *already* a man who claimed to be the son of a god ([Caesar](#)). Even Jesus' crucifixion was [political in nature](#)—his brutal execution method was reserved for enemies of the state.

Though Jesus was undeniably received in a political fashion, it is essential to remember that Jesus was not a political figure in the way many expected the messiah to be. Jesus neither upheld the validity nor denied the significance of any contemporary governing structure. Instead, he used political language to explain an apolitical—or perhaps more accurately a *superpolitical*—concept: the rule and reign of God over the earth. When people came to Jesus with political questions, he responded by drawing the asker's attention to the heart behind their question—forcing them to consider the state of their faith rather than their political correctness or incorrectness.

Take, for example, [Matthew 12](#). The Pharisees, the religious and political leaders of Jesus' day, ask Jesus if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath, since healing is considered work. Jesus responds by telling them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Jesus neither condemns nor affirms the Pharisees' views, which concern the details of the Mosaic law that serves as the political foundation of Jewish life. Instead, he calls up a question of right and wrong. Jesus skips over the question of the law altogether and affirms the significance of human life and well-being. Though the conversation is had in a political context, and has political significance, what Jesus ultimately teaches in this chapter is not about politics at all. It is about how God wants His people to live their lives.

This idea is carried throughout the New Testament into the building of the early church after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Paul especially encourages his readers to be conscious of the places which spiritual and secular things hold in their hearts. Former senator John Danforth [says this](#) of Paul's exhortation to Christians:

'Do not be conformed to this world,' Paul tells us in [Romans 1:2]. Yet we have a strong inclination to let our politics determine our faith rather than the other way around...The various ways we come to our political opinions may have little or no connection to religion. But when we vest our personal opinions with the trappings of religion, we make religion the servant of our politics. By confusing faith and politics, we become conformed to this world.

What we know from the whole canon of Scripture is that we were not designed to live in this world as it is. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, life for all human beings was forever changed. Nothing, even the things that seemingly define and dictate our days, is permanent. When we pin our hope on these things, we close our eyes and our minds to the only source of truth.

That is why [Colossians 3:2](#) tells us to "Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth." Living biblically does not mean abstaining from any engagement with politics; it means understanding that politics are temporary, must not control our minds or hearts, and are above all subsumed in importance by the lordship of Jesus Christ over our lives.

Reflection Questions: How have you heard the Bible used in political conversations? Where else in Scripture do you see political themes? In what ways have you felt yourself being tempted to "conform to the pattern of this world"?

Why does talking about politics matter?

If you disagree with your teen on any political subject, the temptation to avoid political conversations at all costs is likely strong. No one *likes* to enter into a conversation they know will turn into a fight, especially if the subject of the conversation is something they have strong convictions about.

If we don't talk to our teens about these issues, someone else will. According to an article from the [Pew Research Center](#), teens largely get their news from social media. The data also shows that teens are savvier than we might think when it comes to sorting through and making sense of that information, but they are still influenced by what they hear and see. Add to that the function of [algorithms](#), which tailor a social media user's feed to what they've already liked or interacted with, and you see how young people are at risk of receiving a deluge of one-sided pseudo-information.

As caring adults, we have the opportunity to be the first sounding board our teens can count on to express, process, and defend the ideas they hear and learn about. If we shut them down, we unintentionally tell our teens that we are not safe places for them to come with their thoughts. Any good ideas they have might be dismissed out of embarrassment and any bad ideas may be cemented out of rebellion. The same thing is likely to happen if every conversation about politics with your teen turns into a fight about who's right and who's wrong.

It can be scary to hear stances coming from your teen that you believe to be disrespectful, antithetical to Scripture, or even blasphemous. The urge to run from the conversation or jump right into correction is natural. But there are several things to keep in mind when approaching a political conversation with your teen that can help you avoid this dichotomy:

Remember that teens are in flux. No one's ideas are set in stone, nor should they be. There are things about which we are sure—Christ's death, His resurrection, His salvation, among others—but beyond the things which are laid out in Scripture as undeniably true, there is grace for the changing of minds.

For no group of people is this more true than teenagers. Young people have had limited time to come to conclusions based on life experience. Though you as an adult may hold a political view because of the things you have seen or done, your teen will not likely be convinced of that same

view for that same reason. You and your teen might hold different political views on financial matters, for example, simply because they've never done things like pay taxes or buy property. Your teen is still learning and growing, and just because they believe something whole-heartedly now doesn't mean they will forever.

As difficult as this might be to accept, this is also true of you as an adult. Though you might not be in the same space of frequent and rapid change as your teen, it's still worth it to ask yourself which beliefs of yours might change were you in different circumstances, or had gone through different experiences. Keeping an open and teachable heart when it comes to even our sturdiest political beliefs and encouraging our teens to do likewise ensures that there is always room for the Holy Spirit to convict us and draw us closer to the truth.

Remember that these conversations can get intense. Though it's likely not a good idea to *tell* your teen that their political passions might be the result of fluctuating hormones which may contribute to passionate and intense emotions, it's not a bad thing to remember. [This article](#) from *Psychology Today* explains that teens' limbic system, the emotional part of their brains, is disconnected from their non-limbic system, which is responsible for things like decision-making and impulse control. In other words, your teen is feeling huge feelings, all the time. Nothing your teen cares about is small or insignificant to them. So the passing of a law that might feel inconsequential to you (for example, [the senate bill to repeal daylight savings time](#)) could feel huge to your teen.

Few things feel worse than someone telling you your feelings don't matter. Although objectively your teen's feelings might be disproportionate, a teen is going to feel so much more loved if you approach them with empathy and understanding than if you try to get them to "see reason".

Let discipleship trump correction. There are few people in Scripture whom Jesus corrected more than the Pharisees. All throughout the gospels the religious leaders are the subject of Jesus' critiques.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because their hearts and motivations were self-focused and godless. Even as they prayed, tithed, and held themselves to the standards of the law, they weaponized their "good" behavior against others, attempting to earn favor with God at the expense of those they considered unworthy.

When we read Scripture, we like to think we are unlike the Pharisees, but we have all been in their place. Pride is the temptation to put aside our awareness of our sin and need for God's grace in favor of having all the "right" views and doing all the "right" things.

We can get so hung up on fighting on God's behalf in the battle of American politics that we forget it is not a battle He is in danger of losing. It is not His battle at all. The only war God has ever waged is against evil, and it was won once and for all in Jesus' death on the cross. We do not need to immediately jump to "fix" all of our teens' beliefs we think or even know to be at odds with what Scripture teaches. In light of what God has already accomplished, conversation with our teens is often about playing the long game.

As Jesus made clear when he called the Pharisees "[whitewashed tombs](#)," someone can profess all the right ideas and still have no relationship with God. That doesn't mean that we are to love God and do whatever we want; far from it. But we must be convinced that right belief and behavior is the natural outpouring of closeness with God, not the means to get it. If we love our teens, every conversation—not just conversations about politics—will be opportunities to share with them the truth of the character of God. When we and they know Him, and trust Him, we can stand behind our lives with the conviction that we are on the right course; not because we have worked to be there, but because He has guided us to it.

Reflection Questions: How does your teen think about politics? What are the causes and beliefs they care about? What influences shape your personal politics: friends, family, your faith, the media? Some combination of those four, or something else? What political sources does your teen interact with?

How do I have a productive conversation about politics with my teen?

So now that we've discussed why politics matter and why it's important to talk about them, how do we actually start the conversation? As daunting as it may seem, here are some ways to start these conversations.

Ask questions. Because of the overabundance of information on any and all political stances, it might be easy to assume that you already know what you need to know about your teen's political beliefs and why they hold them. However, there are rarely simple reasons for why people believe the things they believe, and your teen's convictions may run deeper than you even know.

Instead of engaging with your teen by only telling them things that you think and know, ask them to explain their beliefs in more detail. Sometimes the way someone explains something can give a lot of insight into what they think is true about that thing. Further the conversation by asking questions that get beneath the surface of political jargon and buzzwords; questions about why your teen cares about a particular issue, what changes they would like to see happen in society, or how they think they can make an impact on their world.

Asking your teen questions will demonstrate that you're not looking to tear them down. You're genuinely interested in them and want to be a safe place for them. Another benefit of asking lots of questions is that it models a posture of curiosity and interest.

A teen who is regularly asked for their opinion and taken seriously when they share it is much more likely to come to you with their own questions when they have them.

Learn on your own. Something you can do to develop conversation, as well as to show your teen you care about them, is to spend time learning about the groups and causes they think are important. Educate yourself with the purpose of understanding your teen, not with proving them wrong. Look for information from both sides of the aisle, to help cultivate an awareness of any debate around the issue, as well as to make sure you can spot anything overblown or even flat out false (try resources like [allsides.com](https://www.allsides.com), [theflipside.io](https://www.theflipside.io), and [ground.news](https://www.ground.news)). Another thing you

can do to help start conversations is to be proactive about asking your teen to send you articles and videos about their beliefs, and engage with any content they share with you.

In addition to learning about political issues from the news, spend as much time as you can in Scripture, getting well acquainted not only with what it says about our behavior, but with God's heart for us. Don't get so caught up in questions of who is and isn't "correct" that you forget the source of all our knowledge of reality is found in the Word of God. While it can be repeated by politicians, it does not come from them.

Truth comes from God alone, and while certain things in politics may align with that truth, Scripture must be the starting point for deciding our political views, not the other way around.

Don't be afraid to change your mind. This is a hard one for almost everyone. When we believe we are right about something, we usually believe that for a reason. Whether that's because it speaks to our passions, because we have put time and energy into learning about it, or because our community has taught us that it is true, our convictions come from deep places, and are tied to our relationships and experiences.

For many things, it's essential that we hold onto those beliefs and convictions and stand behind them with our words, actions, and character. But for other things, there is not only grace for holding differing opinions from others, but for changing your opinion altogether. A quote [attributed to German theologian Rupertus Meldenius](#) says this: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." There is freedom within our faith to believe and even be deeply convicted about a wide variety of things. That is not to say that there are not clear lines between right and wrong. We must hold fast to the truth of Scripture and never deviate from what God has told us is good. But humans are imperfect, and there are many different opinions people hold which don't contradict the clear truth of the gospel, yet do contradict with each other. And there are times when you are confronted with a lie that you have believed to be the truth. There is freedom and grace in the community of believers to learn that you are wrong.

It can be extremely hard to hear correction from others, to accept that correction, and even harder to change our thoughts and behaviors based on the correction. That difficulty can be exponentially magnified when that correction comes from our teens. But remember that God can use any source to reach us, and often uses the ones that seem most unlikely. Be open to the idea that your teen may be just the person God is using to bring you closer to Him.

Lead with love. Often, what we say is not as important as how we say it. Proverbs 16:24 says this: “Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.”

It can be easy to champion our political beliefs in order to demonstrate what we believe rather than letting ourselves be defined by the Word of God alone. We must practice self-awareness of the ways in which we put politics over Scripture, and to strive not to let those habits become set within us. However, at the same time as we participate in this regular self-examination, we have to be aware that not everyone is. Even as we submit to the correction of the Holy Spirit and practice self-evaluation to make sure our convictions are in line with the words of Scripture, we must have grace for those who hold beliefs contrary to ours and refuse to buy into the culture of hatred and vitriol that our country has fallen prey to.

Remember that people don’t disagree with us because they are necessarily understanding us and disagreeing with the truth of what we are saying. Sometimes, they can’t hear it as truth in the first place. [Matthew 13:15](#) says: “For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes—so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.”

Violent words and anger don’t win people over. Kindness and empathy do. That doesn’t mean compromising on what you know to be right, but it does mean reaching out to others with open arms, rather than with a defensive stance.

When you talk to your teen, no matter how difficult and painful the topic of conversation is, do so with the purpose of modeling to them the love of Christ, who came for people in need, people who were suffering, people who *didn’t* understand the truth—not for the people who thought they already did.

Reflection Questions: What are some concrete questions you can ask your teen to start a healthy conversation about politics? What are some unhealthy ways you think about and interact with politics that might need to change? How can you use a conversation about politics to show the love of Christ to your teen?

In God We Trust

2 Timothy 1:7 [says](#), “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” Whether we are living for the approval of others or out of a desire to protect ourselves, when we do this we are losing sight of the fact that God is sovereign over the American government. So when you have these conversations with your teens about politics, remember that you are not really talking about politics. You are lifting your mind, and helping your teen to lift theirs, to the things above, the things of the Kingdom of God that was established before any earthly government and will last forever after. You are teaching them to walk the tightrope well, assured that God never fails those who place their trust in Him. No matter how hard these conversations are, don’t give up. You never know which discussion—about politics or otherwise—God will use to light up your teen’s heart for His purpose.

Reflection Questions: Where do you see yourself trusting in things that aren’t God? What can you do to place your trust back in Him? How have you experienced God’s sovereignty over politics? How can you be intentional about communicating God’s purpose for your teen to them when you talk about politics?

Invitation to Generosity

If you like what you learned in this Parent Guide and want to help us continue to make great resources to serve parents like you, consider making a gift at axis.org. Thank you!

Sources Used in This Parent Guide

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