

## PODCAST: TALKING POLITICS IN YOUR SMALL GROUP

Summary of *Group Answers* Podcast (Episode 162 on July 22, 2020)

<https://groupministry.lifeway.com/podcasts/>

On this episode of Lifeway's *Group Answers*, the interviewers talk to Jared Musgrove about how to navigate talking about politics (or other potentially inflammatory topics) in your small group. Dr. Jared Musgrove is Groups Pastor at The Village Church in Flower Mound, TX and co-founder and Executive Director of [communityleadership.org](http://communityleadership.org).

### Summary

Dr. Musgrove's preface comments:

- There is not the usual list of "small talk" topics (sports, new TV shows, vacations, etc.) for people to discuss right now, given the pandemic. So *expect* that politics will be the BIG topic this fall and spring, fueled by the media.
- Politics are "the new religion" for many people and can become very divisive very quickly. But remember: the goal within a small group is to *maintain Unity of Spirit in Christ*.
- Dr. Musgrove suggests 5 Small Group Ground Rules. Dr. Musgrove's rules can apply to any topic that can cause conflict or disunity.

### Ground Rules For Groups

1. **Talk face-to-face.** If you and your team want to talk politics, it's best to do so face-to-face. Recognize that each person in the group is an "embodied soul." Beware of group distribution lists and blogs — people have a tendency to quickly "fire off" or forward emails that promote their viewpoints. If someone wants to grumble to you (as the small group leader) privately about another member's viewpoint, gently suggest that the subject can wait until the group is all together. Face to face discussions build trust and cut down on backbiting and gossip, which create disunity and "disembody a soul."
2. **Respect one another.** Dr. Musgrove says that "our relationships as believers supersede our political views." This concept is worth discussing as you open the fall session. If things start to get heated, ask the group, "Does this conversation seek to practice the "one anothers" of Scripture? (Have compassion on one another, be kind to one another, live in peace with one another, etc.). As the leader, help the person who is becoming "heated" to check their motivation... are they looking for "scorched earth" or for self-affirmation? Are they more concerned with being Right or being Righteous? If you think that you, the small group leader, might be one of the guilty parties here, suggest that you nominate an advocate or apprentice when you revisit the small group agreement/covenant who will "tap you with kindness" if they hear you tending toward unhelpful or hurtful comments.

3. **Speak with honesty and candor.** If you disagree with someone’s viewpoint, it is okay to say so, but politely and with humility. “I see it a bit differently...”. If a statement is hurtful, say that it was, and be quick to forgive. Encourage the members to practice these behaviors. If you make a hurtful statement, be quick to apologize and seek forgiveness. In your covenant, we suggest adding the comment that it is okay as believers to “agree to disagree”. [A friend who works in the mid-East peace talks says that “the hardest choices are between two right things.”]
4. **Give goodwill.** Are you seeking to understand over being understood or validated? Are you seeking to be righteous over being right? Be courageous in asking this question. One good guiding principle is from St. Augustin: “does this talk or behavior increase the people in the group in faith, hope, and love?” And ask “what’s the spiritual fruit of this discussion?” Is it love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control? If it does not build us up in these things, suggest that the group exit the conversation.
5. **Be informed.** Be okay with admitting that you are not informed about a topic and that you wish to talk about something else. Recognize, as journalism schools openly admit, that there is NO unbiased news reporting. News is always filtered by the person doing the reporting, whether intentional or not. When looking for information and news, ask yourself, “is this story/article/blog telling me what happened, or telling me what to THINK ABOUT what happened?”

Last, according to Dr. Musgrove, if you have a person who continues to create disunity and disharmony, and who will not back down after a direct request to stay away from the topic, the scripture says this about those who create disharmony: “have nothing to do with that person.” Let them know after the meeting that you are asking them not to come back to the group because their behavior is creating disunity and disharmony, and making a “religion” out of their politics (or other controversial viewpoint).

And remember to remind the group about **Ephesians 6:12**: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

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The Willowdale small group leadership team suggests discussing and incorporating these concepts into your Small Group Agreement or Covenant at the beginning of the Fall, so that the rules will be in place before any controversial topics come up. This way, you will have some common ground rules. You may even wish to consider listening to the podcast together (35 minutes long and EXCELLENT). The podcast link is:

<https://groupministry.lifeway.com/podcasts/> On that page, select Podcast, then go to Episode 162 dated July 22, 2020. OR check out the *Group Answers* podcast, same episode and date.