

## **The Values Around Us**

The patriotic elements of our society are steeped in the values set before our country at its founding. Historically, we as a nation have fallen far short of fulfilling those values, yet that makes them no less worthy of pursuing.

Take, for example, the Preamble of our Constitution: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” This defines the democratic nature of our country, the pursuit of improvement, justice as a central element of our society, peace at home, protection from external threats, caring for our fellow citizens and environment, and caring for future generations.

These values should not be taken for granted, overlooked, ignored, nor discarded as unattainable. Instead, these values should be defended and not forgotten, starting in our daily conversations. We may disagree on policies and laws on how to ensure these values are upheld and followed, but ultimately, they should guide our pursuit to address the challenges before us.

Like those in the Preamble, the values Jesus challenges us to uphold include love and caring for our fellow citizens (as each is made in the image of God), the pursuit of peace and avoidance of violence, care and protection of the environment, and honesty and fairness in seeking justice.

We are connected to one another through these values—we’re connected as Christians, we’re connected as Americans, and we’re connected as citizens of the world. To have more successful civil discourse, we must keep these values in mind when engaging our fellow brother or sister.

We do acknowledge we may face situations where our values differ from those we are speaking with. What to do when faced with someone whose values are different from ours? Do we sit and talk with those whose values we do not share? Yes—if possible.

That does not mean that discussion with someone who holds negative or harmful values is always appropriate, nor does it mean that civil discourse is the only or proper form of engagement. It also does not mean, for the sake of civil discourse, that we should place ourselves in a physically or emotionally unsafe space.

Civil discourse is about enhanced understanding—it is not about giving credibility or merit, or accepting differing viewpoints as our own, or suppressing conviction or passion. Though some may disagree on this point, it is important to understand what alternative values may guide others' views of the world, where those values come from, and how they guide someone's opinions and actions.

When we have shared values, enhancing our understanding through civil discourse with those who have values different than our own leads to an improved ability to describe the world around us with greater accuracy, deeper truth, and more potential. Differences in values are often deeper and harder to overcome than disagreements in opinions or perspectives that are rooted in the same values.

Civil discourse across disagreement but with shared values is typically easier than civil discourse with someone who has different values. Most conversations around policy and legislation involve disagreement in the *how* of fulfilling values not in *what* the values are.