

# Discussion Guide on Christian Responsibility in Politics-Part 2



*This Discussion Guide is best used for small groups. It is supported by the more detailed Discussion Notes.*

## **How Abolitionist William Wilberforce Inspires Christians to Register and Vote**

Do you feel like you're swimming upstream in this current cultural and political climate? Do you ever think that it would be easier to just "go with the flow"?"

Paul declares in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will."

### **Salmon and Christians: Both Swim Upstream**

After their birth in freshwater streams, salmon eventually make their way to the saltwater ocean. When ready to reproduce, God created salmon to do something which seems virtually impossible. They swim upstream.

The "river run" can be exhausting. Chinook and sockeye salmon from central Idaho travel 900 miles and climb nearly 7,000 feet before spawning.<sup>1</sup>

Like the salmon, Christians swim upstream in this sin-filled culture of lust, materialism, and selfishness. To prepare us for the exhausting upstream swim, God empowers us with the Holy Spirit and sanctifies us. The swim is not easy. Satan, the world, and our own sin nature presents obstacles and temptations along our journey. But it is rewarding as we lead the next generation to Christ and move to our heavenly home.

<sup>1</sup> John 2:15-17 says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

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## William Wilberforce's Conversion

One example of a Christian who swam upstream is William Wilberforce, who is credited with abolishing slavery in Britain. While at St. John's College, Wilberforce joined the hedonistic lifestyle prevalent among the students. Upon graduation, he was determined to engage in a career of politics and was elected to Parliament in 1780.<sup>2</sup>

After reading *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* by Philip Doddridge, a leading early 18th-century English theologian, Wilberforce was convicted of his sin.<sup>8</sup> In 1784, at the age of 25, he received Jesus as his Savior.

In God's providence, Wilberforce was introduced to the Reverend John Newton, whom God had saved out of the slave trade as a Captain on a slave ship. While Wilberforce's first inclination was to leave politics, Newton, perhaps best known for composing the beloved hymn, "*Amazing Grace*", convinced Wilberforce that God had placed him there to *champion* the Biblical values which had transformed his character and began to inform his politics.

## Wilberforce's Campaign to End the British Slave Trade

Inspired by his new faith, Wilberforce and other evangelicals were horrified by what they perceived was a depraved and un-Christian slave trade, and the greed and avarice of the owners and traders.<sup>17</sup> Wilberforce sensed a call from God, writing in a journal entry in 1787 that "God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the Slave Trade and the Reformation of Manners [moral values]."<sup>19 20</sup>

On May 12, 1789, Wilberforce made his first major speech advocating the abolition of the slave trade in the House of Commons, in which he reasoned the trade was morally reprehensible and an issue of natural justice. He described in detail the appalling conditions in which slaves travelled from Africa in the "middle passage" to the West Indies and America.<sup>21</sup> In a 1791 speech He concluded, "You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know."<sup>22</sup>

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The pathway to abolition was blocked by vested interests, parliamentary filibustering, entrenched bigotry, international politics, slave unrest, personal sickness, and political fear. While bills introduced by Wilberforce were defeated in 1791, 1792, 1793, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1804, and 1805,<sup>23</sup> he refused to give up, saying, “If to be feelingly alive to the sufferings of my fellow-creatures is to be a fanatic, I am one of the most incurable fanatics ever permitted to be at large.”

### Slavery Became a British Election Issue

After the abolition bill finally passed in the House of Lords by a large margin, the House of Commons voted on February 23, 1807, passing it 283 votes to 16.<sup>25</sup> Many gave tribute to Wilberforce, whose face *streamed* with tears.

Twenty-six years later, long after he resigned from Parliament due to his health, Wilberforce received news that the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 was assured.<sup>26</sup> G.M. Trevelyan described the moment as “one of the turning events in the history of the world.”<sup>27</sup>

At one point in his work, Wilberforce declared, “We have obtained, for these poor creatures, the recognition of their human nature, which, for a while was most shamefully denied ... Let us persevere and our triumph will be complete. Never, never will we desist till we have wiped away this scandal from the Christian name, released ourselves from the load of guilt, under which we at present labour, and extinguished every trace of this bloody traffic, of which our posterity, looking back to the history of these enlightened times, will scarce believe that it has been suffered to exist so long a disgrace and dishonour to this country.”<sup>28</sup>

### American Christians have a Responsibility to Register and Vote Biblically

While you may not feel called to run for elected office, you can make a significant difference by registering to vote and voting for candidates who champion Biblical values. In fact, this is a God-given responsibility!

Charles Finney, a prominent minister in the early 1800s, succinctly declared, “The time has come that Christians *must* vote for honest men and take consistent ground in politics or the Lord will curse them ... God cannot sustain this free and

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blessed country which we love and pray for *unless* the Church will take right ground.”<sup>29</sup>

David Barton insists far too many God-fearing individuals have neglected their responsibilities as national voting stewards, and the impact of that neglect is both dramatic and measurable. In the four elections from 1992-2002, Christian voter turnout declined by almost *40 percent*.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Influence of Christian Voters in the 2002, 2004, and 2006 Elections**

In 2002, there was a two percent increase in Christian voter turnout above the 2000 numbers. Exit polling showed 41 percent of voters in that election identified abortion as an important issue affecting their vote: 23 percent said they voted a pro-life ticket, and 16 percent voted a pro-abortion ticket. The result was evident: of the 54 freshmen elected to the U.S. House in 2002, 36 were pro-life (67 percent) and of the 10 freshmen elected to the U.S. Senate, eight were pro-life.<sup>31</sup>

In 2004, Christian voter turnout *increased 93 percent* over the 2002 numbers, primarily because it was a presidential election year. In this cycle, 42 percent of voters identified abortion as an important issue: 25 percent voted pro-life and 13 percent pro-abortion. The 2004 elections sent 40 new freshmen to the U.S. House, of whom 25 were pro-life (63 percent) and nine new freshmen to the U.S. Senate, of whom seven were pro-life.<sup>32</sup>

In those two elections when Christian voter turnout increased, a total of 94 freshmen were sent to the House, of whom 61 were pro-life (65 percent) and 19 freshmen were sent to the Senate, of whom 15 (79 percent) were pro-life. The result was the *prompt* enactment of three stand-alone federal pro-life laws: The Unborn Victims of Violence Act, the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban, and the Fetal Farming Ban.<sup>33</sup>

Sadly, in 2006, the trend *reversed*: Christian voter turnout *fell* by 30 percent! Not surprisingly, exit polling on the percentage of voters who considered abortion an important issue also dropped. The result was of the 54 new freshmen sent to the U.S. House in the 2006 election, only 17 were pro-life (31 percent), and of the 10 freshmen elected to the U.S. Senate, only one was pro-life.<sup>45</sup> The *Baltimore Sun* described the results of that election as one producing the most *pro-abortion* Congress in the history of the Republic.<sup>34</sup>

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To make matters worse, in the 2016 and 2018 elections, approximately 42% of self-described Evangelicals did *not* vote. Indeed, our greatest enemy is our own complacency.<sup>37</sup>

Proverbs 14:34 is a *sobering* reminder: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.” Charles Finney, a great preacher, said, “The church must take the right ground in regard to politics. ... Christians must so their *duty to their country* as part of their *duty to God*. God will bless or curse a nation according to the course that Christians take in politics.”<sup>38</sup> Let that sink in.

## What is Your Christian Responsibility in the Civic Arena?

1. **Pray for our elected officials.** I Timothy 2:1-3 says, “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior.”
2. **Register to vote.** Monday, October 5<sup>th</sup> is the *last day to register to vote.*

### You are eligible to register to vote if:

- You are a United States citizen.
  - You are a resident of the county where you submit the application.
  - You are at least 17 years and 10 months old, and you are 18 years of age on Election Day, Tuesday, November 3, 2020.
  - You are not a convicted felon.
3. **Vote on the first Tuesday in November** for God-honoring candidates who will legislate God-honoring policies and appoint God-honoring judges.

Franklin Graham said, “The year 2020 will mark a defining, watershed year in the long and storied history of our great nation. Will we continue to protect the freedoms of Christians to live and abide by their Biblical convictions?”<sup>51</sup>

### Discussion Questions:

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1. How do the challenges of salmon swimming upstream compare to the challenges that Christians face in today's culture?
2. After William Wilberforce's conversion, why did he decide to stay in Parliament as part of his heavenly calling?
3. What can we learn from Wilberforce's unapologetic perseverance in his repeated attempts to abolish the slave trade?
4. What are some *primary* issues from The Ten Commandments that should animate Christian voters?

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<sup>1</sup> Beach MH (1984). "Fish pass design - criteria for the design and approval of fish passes and other structures to facilitate the passage of migratory fish in rivers" (PDF). Fish Res Tech Rep. 78: 1–46.

<sup>2</sup> Barkey, Paul, *On This Day: A Daily Guide to Spiritual Lessons from American History*, Ag Press, Manhattan, Kansas, p. 341.

<sup>7</sup> 28 "Powerful quotes by William Wilberforce: A collection of William Wilberforce quotes and sayings on Christianity, character, devotion, duty, slavery, giving, gratitude, slave trade, wealth etc.", accessed march 14, 2020, <https://quotes.thefamouspeople.com/william-wilberforce-3227.php>

<sup>8</sup> Pollock, John (1977), *Wilberforce*, New York: St. Martin's Press, p.37.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, Christopher Leslie (2006), *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, pp. 380-382.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, Christopher Leslie (2006), *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, p. 386.

<sup>11</sup> "Powerful quotes by William Wilberforce", <https://quotes.thefamouspeople.com/william-wilberforce-3227.php>

<sup>12</sup> (2007), *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner*, London: Harper Press, p. 116, 119.

<sup>13</sup> D'Anjou, Leo (1996), *Social Movements and Cultural Change: The First Abolition Campaign Revisited*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter, p. 97.

<sup>14</sup> "Middle Passage", Wikipedia, accessed March 14, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle\\_Passage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Passage)

<sup>15</sup> Hochschild, Adam (2005), *Bury the Chains, The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery*, London: Macmillan, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, Christopher Leslie (2006), *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, pp. 26, 341, 458–459.

<sup>17</sup> Pinfold, John (2007), "Introduction", in Bodleian Library (ed.), *The Slave Trade Debate: Contemporary Writings for and Against*, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, p.10, 13.

<sup>18</sup> "William Wilberforce: Anti-slavery Politician", accessed March 14, 2020,

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/activists/william-wilberforce.html>

<sup>19</sup> Pollock, John (1977), *Wilberforce*, New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 69.

<sup>20</sup> Piper, John (2006), *Amazing Grace in the Life of William Wilberforce*, Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Hague, William (2007), *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner*, London: Harper Press, pp.178-183.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "William Wilberforce: Anti-slavery Politician", accessed March 14, 2020,

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/activists/william-wilberforce.html>

<sup>24</sup> Hochschild, Adam (2005), *Bury the Chains, The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery*, London: Macmillan pp. 304-306.

<sup>25</sup> Pollock, John (1977), *Wilberforce*, New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 211.

<sup>26</sup> "William Wilberforce", Wikipedia, accessed on March 14, 2020,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Wilberforce#cite\\_note-78](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Wilberforce#cite_note-78)

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<sup>27</sup> Christopher Hancock, “The Shrimp Who Stopped Slavery”, *Christian History*, accessed March 14, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-53/shrimp-who-stopped-slavery.html>

<sup>28</sup> Aquinas wired, “William Wilberforce: His Voice and Pen Broke the Chains of Slavery”, August 24, 2013, accessed on March 14, 2020, <http://www.chicagonow.com/quark-in-the-road/2013/08/william-wilberforce-his-voice-and-pen-broke-the-chains-of-slavery/>

<sup>29</sup> Charles G. Finney, *Revival Lectures* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming Revell Co., reprinted 1970), Lecture XV, pp. 336-337.

<sup>30</sup> Barton, David, *The Bible, Voters & the 2008 Election*, Wall Builders, Aledo, Texas, p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas F. Shaller, “Despite Exceptions, New Congress is the Most Pro-Choice Ever,” *Baltimore Sun*, February 28, 2007

<sup>35</sup> Barton, David, *The Bible, Voters & the 2008 Election*, Wall Builders, Aledo, Texas, p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Grandison Finney Quote, accessed on March 14, 2020, <https://libquotes.com/charles-grandison-finney/quote/lbd4j8z>

<sup>39</sup> Franklin Graham, “2020 – A Nation on the Brink”, January 1, 2020, <https://decisionmagazine.com/2020-a-nation-on-the-brink/>