

## Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

June 14, 2026 *"I Think You're Wrong (But I'm Listening): A Guide to Grace-Filled Political Conversations"* *"Both/And in an Either/Or World"*

### I Intro.

We're in June, and it's basically summer. Our schedule will slow down a bit, but there are still things happening. You'll want to keep up with everything that's happening at NCC. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. This is our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family. If there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

### II Recap.

We're in the second Sunday of our series from the book; *"I Think You're Wrong: But I'm Listening"*. It is political. The work of politics is caring about things that affect people we love. But we hope to build unity through this. To be a loud voice for the unity Jesus prayed for. In a world that relishes division and disunity. Not to suppress or judge whether your beliefs, values, opinions (and we have to first admit we mash all of those together) are correct. But to place Jesus at the center of who we are, what we do, and then find unity in Jesus and not in our agreement.

This will be about being able to be fully ourselves. With all we believe, issues we have passionate opinions on, not be afraid to do life with, worship with, those who don't hold to the same beliefs we do. To create an environment where we can talk about hard things. That may even stretch the limits of our ability to get along. But to lean into the teachings of Jesus, that can help us hold what feel like conflicting issues at the same time. Let Jesus be what holds this body together, rather than everyone being the same. And I know you appreciate what a challenge this will be. The first Sunday we talked about choosing curiosity over contempt in our relationship with people not like us. Today we're talking about living in a complex world choosing Both/And over Either/Or. It's our way as your church, a community of faith, to help us as we move through this election season.

### III Sunday.

**What does the word certainty mean to you?** It's what all of us secretly, or not so secretly, long for. And we rarely find it in our world. Everything around us feels chaotic, out of control, unpredictable, and more. And we HATE chaotic, out of control, unpredictable, and more. We want certainty. We want to know what we want to know— for sure. My perfect example. And just know I get a little defensive about this. We want certainty about weather prediction. I know often weather forecasters speak a little too confidently. Which is their addiction to certainty also. But we want certainty about EXACTLY when and where it's going to rain. And that's just not possible. But that doesn't stop us from expecting it.

**Dangers of Certainty.** In our pursuit of certainty we miss the damaging pitfalls of certainty.

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**Certainty closes conversations.** I've left no space for others.

**Certainty breeds contempt.** (from last week) If I'm certain, then you're wrong. And if you're wrong then you might be dangerous.

**Certainty resists any new information.** If I'm certain, then anything you have to say is not important.

**Certainty creates rigidity.** My certainty locks me into just one way of life.

**Certainty enables and justifies harm.** Even if you state your intentions are good. Certainty feeds 'exceptionalism'. My beliefs are fundamental and unquestionable.

**Certainty mistakes conviction for wisdom.** A loud strong belief = a true belief.

**Certainty prevents humility.** Certainty is an outgrowth of pride. I alone have discovered the truth.

**Certainty silences questions.** Why be curious when I already know everything?

**Certainty confuses clarity with certainty.** If I can defend clearly what I believe, then I must be right.

**Certainty protects your ego.** But not your soul. Let that sink in.

**Certainty demands Either/Or thinking.** Where we're going to end up today.

The danger of certainty is that it relies more on the ability to figure things out than it grows our faith and total reliance on God. And the desire for certainty reduces complex things to over simplistic answers. God desires our trust more than he does our correct beliefs. Sounds really scary doesn't it? Because we want to be right. Hold on to that tension. It'll be important on today's journey. This truth forces us to make the world, and all of our beliefs Either/Or rather than Both/And.

**Background on the book of Ecclesiastes**. Ecclesiastes is a collection of wisdom writings, written like a biography, from the narrator's perspective. It investigates life, the pursuit of meaning and purpose. Then draws conclusions. The chapter we're reading says life is so complex, so mysterious, so undecipherable, that we have to learn to accept, and live into all of the uncertainties of life. The primary truth that filters all of the other truths. AND— should create a posture we take in trying to understand life, the world, and especially God. This one truth— Life is packed with paradoxes and complexity, in which opposites exist at the same time. We hate this because we don't want to figure stuff out, work to discover truths or God. We want to be handed the condensed AI version of spiritual truths in 7 easy steps. God is saying; *"If you start with the absolute truth that the great I AM (I will be who I will be) and am infinite. Unable to fit into the box of answers you want. Then you will have to trust in me rather than your own ability to put me in a box."* Where we HAVE to begin today.

**Ecclesiastes 7**. Going to plow through this chapter, hitting the high points that speak to living a Both/And life in an Either/Or world.

***7:1-6. A good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume. And the day you die is better than the day you are born. Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies— so the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us. A wise person thinks a lot about death, while a fool thinks only about having a good time. Better to be criticized by a wise person than to be praised by a fool. A fool's laughter is quickly gone, like thorns crackling in a fire. This also is meaningless.***

The contradictions are weird and intense. Sorrow AND gladness teaches wisdom and shapes us. How's that for Both/And? Sadness can lead to a deeper gladness. Criticism done well is better than praise for the wrong reasons. If I were to ask which do you prefer; criticism or praise. It's a no-brainer

isn't it? But we need both. But done wisely. Which makes the Both/And even more complicated. We have to have people in our lives that can do both. We have to have a spirit of openness and humility to be changed by both. God cares about our character growth. It will come from different places.

**7:13-14. Accept the way God does things, for who can straighten what he has made crooked? Enjoy prosperity while you can, but when hard times strike, realize that both come from God. Remember that nothing is certain in this life.**

GOD MADE THINGS CROOKED?! Lock in REALIZE and REMEMBER. **REALIZE**- is to be open and learn in the moment. *"I just realized."* **REMEMBER**- you'll have a lifetime of realizing new things. The contradiction is that it seems we can learn from both the bad and good times in life. Which we often know...but not till later... after we're through the bad times. **Anyone here pray for bad times? Anyone here pray for good times? Anyone here pray for bad times and good times?** That seems to be the message in these verses. There is better good coming out of really bad times. Which means when you're in a bad time ask; *"What do I need to learn?"*

**What if we lived into that truth from the beginning?** To become a community that accepts and understands others, we accept and understand that each other contains good and bad. Resolved, unresolved. When we **REALIZE** even if we see bad in others, we also can find good in them too. Then we'll **REMEMBER** that truth the next time we encounter someone not like us.

**7:15-18. I have seen everything in this meaningless life, including the death of good young people and the long life of wicked people. So don't be too good or too wise! Why destroy yourself? On the other hand, don't be too wicked either. Don't be a fool! Why die before your time? Pay attention to these instructions, for anyone who fears God will avoid both extremes.** Will be prone to chasing an extreme, so **DON'T BE TOO GOOD OR TOO WISE!! ? What does that even mean?** We really need to unpack the Both/And in this passage. This is going to sound weird...so hear me out. **Do you know anyone who seems to be extra saved? ? They're extra Jesus'd?** That doesn't mean they have a deep, mature, abiding and meaningful relationship with God. It means they seem to have everything figured out, and have an answer for everything. It's always Either/Or for them. And everything they talk about is hyperspiritualized. There is this vibe of 'self-righteousness'. They don't seem to have an awareness of their own faults, or especially the mystery of God. Wisdom learns to navigate the tension between our conflicting natures. We see this played out in the issue of 'truth and grace'. We tend to live in truth OR grace. Because it often feels like these two exist in tension. We can't wrap our minds around how to do both at the same time. But Jesus did them well. It shows us people are complicated. Live with that understanding of the tension and felt contradiction of truth and grace. Most of us learn to navigate being hurt deeply by others, only by coming face to face with our own shortcomings, and how we have hurt others. THIS is how we learn to continue to be a community of faith that can navigate the complexities of differences and relationships. Learn to live in the tension of the in-between– Both/And.

**7:19-25. One wise person is stronger than ten leading citizens of a town! Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins. Don't eavesdrop on others—you may hear your servant curse you. For you know how often you yourself have cursed others. I have always tried my best to let wisdom guide my thoughts and actions. I said to myself, "I am determined to be wise." But it didn't work. Wisdom is always distant and difficult to find. I searched**

***everywhere, determined to find wisdom and to understand the reason for things. I was determined to prove to myself that wickedness is stupid and that foolishness is madness.***

The contradiction seems to be that in our search for wisdom and knowledge, be very careful of falling into the trap that we've figured things out. Saying; *"This is all truth about everything"* Humility, living Both/And, comes from the humbling knowledge that we are both justified, and imperfect– forgiven and still failing. All at the same time. And fully loved in both/and. In the last couple of verses the writer realizes and admits that trying to find wisdom is difficult. Living a life trying to get all the right answers (live Either/Or) but in what feels like an honorable search, just didn't work. Think about this: **What do you not know, understand, that would help you live how you believe God is calling you to live.? Do you feel like there is some missing little piece of information, secret formula, that if you just learned that one thing would then suddenly live exactly how you believe God wants you to live? Any of you feel like you're missing wisdom, knowledge?**

We have to honestly, humbly admit we already know how we're supposed to live. We both know and don't know why we keep doing what we know we shouldn't do, and why we don't do the things we know we should do. **So, what's keeping us from doing that?** That is the contradiction of Both/And - Either/Or we live in. It should be within this simple, and so complex truth, that we learn to extend the same grace towards others.

***7:27-29. "This is my conclusion," says the Teacher. "I discovered this after looking at the matter from every possible angle. Though I have searched repeatedly, I have not found what I was looking for. Only one out of a thousand men is virtuous, but not one woman! But I did find this: God created people to be virtuous, but they have each turned to follow their own downward path."***

Old U2. *"I still haven't found...what I'm looking for."* The wisdom learned in searching is the deep wisdom that there is always something you don't know. Especially when you look at God, the world, each other, from *"every possible angle.."* People are complex. Things are complex. Understanding God is complex. We have to learn to live into a Both/And world, even though we desire Either/Or. Living in this tension will be very difficult. Because we do have values, beliefs, and truths we hold onto. But how do we live into those, treat others, is knowing we don't know everything.

#### **IV Challenge.**

Let me challenge you. **When you're convinced that God can only... are you sure about that?** The basic truth and understanding in this truth is that things and life are much more complex than we often will admit. And God is much bigger and infinite, and humility is what should grow within us. And especially towards our relationship with others. Here is our final N.T. challenge.

**Philippians 4:5. Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is near.**

Wisdom navigates the tension between Either/Or. It recognizes the existence that two things that feel like opposite sides can exist at the same time. And that happens within us also. **How do I know? How many of you believe something different than you did a few years ago?** Be leary of people who say they have all the answers– It's Either/Or. Especially you!

Final question. **What would change if you gave up the need to be certain and embrace God's calling to be faithful? To fully trust IN God and not our ability to figure it out?** In an Both/And world we are called to be faithful. Depending on God, not ourselves to figure it all out. Daily just constantly following God's lead. Again, as I ALWAYS say. This is where REAL growth happens.