

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

June 21, 2026 *"I Think You're Wrong (But I'm Listening): A Guide to Grace-Filled Political Conversations"* *"Staying at the Table"*

I Intro.

Today is the first day of summer and Father's Day. 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 third Sunday of our series from the book; *"I Think You're Wrong: But I'm Listening"*. We hope to build unity through this. In a world that relishes division and disunity, we want to be a loud voice for the unity Jesus prayed for. 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. So to not be afraid to do life with, worship with, those who don't hold to the same beliefs we do. We want 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 fully lean into the teachings of Jesus, to 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. Last week we talked 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. Today we accept the challenge of "staying at the table".

III Sunday.

Being a parent is a challenge. No surprise huh? Janet and I struggled regularly whether an issue was a big deal or not. We would lay in bed late at night, wrestling through whether we needed to take a stand, show grace, or just let something slide. Even in playing out all of the scenarios, we struggled to get clarity, and consensus on what exactly we should do. Even if you're not a parent, you've had these struggles and conversations about friends, members of your family, co-workers, and neighbors. **When do I take a stand, say something, draw a line in the sand? And when do I let this slide because it's just not a big enough issue?**

All of that is contained in this same desire to get to work through our differences. It was working out just how to get there. We all want basically the same thing. The question is; **What does it take and look like to get past tough issues in relationships?** And; **What principles should guide us?** Janet and I discovered there was always one overarching, guiding principle that helped us navigate choppy waters where there wasn't a clear cut answer. That was; *"Always preserve the relationship"*. Sometimes that did require us to say or do something because the relationship would suffer if we didn't address it. It wasn't about never addressing issues. Sometimes it required us to recognize there were stark and unresolvable differences in our opinions. And how to get past or through them. Now we have great relationships with both our boys. Janet nor I would want to spend time with anyone else. In fact we'll be visiting our oldest and the rest of the family next weekend. Putting *"preserve the relationship"* as the overarching priority when we dealt with a variety of different issues, and potential conflicts, has preserved relationships. We, as a church, believe this is the priority of our walk with Jesus, and how we relate to each other. Everything we do here is to represent God to the best of our ability. And to do all we can to *"preserve relationships"*. We believe this has to happen both inside and outside the church. And *"Preserving the relationship"* is a commitment to *"Staying at the table"*. Even when you want to go eat at a different table.

This value, commitment, to preserving the relationship implies several truths.

1. Accepting and embracing diversity. The world was made with an intentional divine beauty of difference. But...because we tend to be fear-driven— and differences can be scary. We are drawn to sameness, similarity, more than we are to different. This is a natural survival instinct so we can know who's safe and who isn't. But a desire for sameness, lack of diversity, taken to its extreme, creates division.

2. Embracing discomfort. Becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable. I said this the very first week. Diversity will make you uncomfortable. And; That discomfort is good for you. Be curious and lean into it. *"Staying at the table"* requires us to answer this question. **How big/expansive are you willing to let your personal world grow?**

We're going to look at two different passages today. This first passage tells us; who we are to be, how we are to *"stay at the table"*, and answers the all important question— **"Why?"**

Ephesians 4:1-6. 4 Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

And the **"Why?"**

For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

1. What does staying at the table life look like? *"Staying at the table"* is a covenantal mindset rather than a contractual one. I am choosing to commit to a way of life, whether you do or not. Ask ANY couple who has been together longer than 30 years, and they'll tell you the secret to staying together is practicing this principle. This does NOT mean you have to stay in an abusive, harmful relationship. Sometimes the most loving and compassionate thing you can do in a destructive relationship, for both of you, is to separate. Separating will often *"preserve the relationship"*.

"*Staying at the table*", emphasizing "*preserving the relationship*", is always internalizing these practices. It's something you believe in AND are committed to that lowers the temperature of any disagreement. There will always be disagreements. There is the ideal, a vision always out ahead of you of what you want relationships to be. Doesn't mean you'll always nail it. There is the day to day life of dealing with the hard stuff. But that vision or desire is always out in front of you, as something to work towards. That we continually "*make every effort*" to "*stay at the table*". Here is how we do it. ***Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.***

We are being called to live fully into who we were created and called to be. There is something uniquely and divinely different about being a follower of Jesus that has to be more than fighting the 'dons'. The disagreements and differences are real. Convictions matter. We are called to reflect a life filled with these things that we often don't see in the world. We should live in a way: "*Make every effort*" that invites others to come to the table. **How often are we practicing these? ALWAYS!**

2. And "Why?" do we stay at the table? We were created and called to be one. ***"Binding ourselves together WITH peace."*** ***For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.***

Because there is only one table. We "*preserve the relationship*", "*stay at the table*", because the salvific, (big word for the work of God) is towards reconciliation and restoration. And reconciliation and restoration implies the truth we WILL disagree about things. Jesus reconciling the world to himself is acknowledging our differences. We are to join in this work of reconciliation. That's "**Why?**" WE are responsible for making a table worth staying at. We have to remember "*staying at the table*" that comes through "*preserving the relationship*" falls on us. We are the adults in the room. We are the ones who are being called to a higher standard and set an example.

Romans 12:17-21. Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD. Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads." Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

1. The way we live, both good and evil, compounds. This is the classic, don't live contractually. Evil always tempts us to respond the same. Notice the specific wording in this passage: *Never pay back evil with more evil*. There seems to be an accumulating, compounding component of evil. When you return evil with evil, it doesn't stay at the same level. Returning evil with evil doubles the size of the evil. This is a truth that we don't think about in the way we interact with others. We just think we respond in the same way they did us. But that's now how evil works. It compounds upon itself. When you repay evil with evil. Everything escalates. No one will let the other get the last jab in.

2. God is a God of justice. He will make sure that justice is served. Which means if you DO repay evil with evil, after being told not to, you too will be a recipient of the justice of God. So, God is protecting his creation, and saving us from ourselves. Remember, scripture and God's truths aren't just hard things God likes making us do. All these teachings are for our benefit.

3. And God understands our need to see justice. This is one of the most interesting passages in scripture. Apparently, there is something deep inside of us (even holy) that has to see others feel the

weight, the hurt, the pain of the pain they caused. It seems to be in our divine image of God, the desire for justice. To see those who do bad, receive the consequences of their actions. God is saying; we're not good at doing this. We let our own fallenness, unresolved issues, prejudices, favoritism, emotions, and more cloud our ability to do justice well.

But— that doesn't mean we can't scratch that itch for justice. To see someone feel the consequences from the harm they've done. Own that desire for real justice within you. The best way for a person to feel the significance of their behavior ISN'T to return evil for evil. That doesn't scratch that itch. It only feeds your darkside, escalates the battle, and increases the amount of evil. If you want to see the guilty person pay for the harm they caused. Then *"kill them with...kindness"*.

Let's talk about shame. It will be just like *"Heaping burning coals of...(WHAT?) on them? Shame!* I don't know if you're like me, but I sometimes believe that people who cause harm to others don't feel the shame of their act. And God is saying. If you think that person needs to feel shame. If returning evil with good begins the process of reconciling, and restoring the relationship, then it's a win-win. If returning evil with good didn't *"preserve the relationship"*, then God has blessed you with the divine gift of a clear conscience, and no blood on your hands. And the responsibility is totally on the other person. We need to appreciate what a genuine gift that is. You did all you could to *"preserve the relationship"*. You; *"stayed at the table"*. You kept your character intact. People will see your integrity, honor. You did all you could, and God will merit that out in the end.

IV Challenge.

There are several truths that are essential to *"staying at the table"*, doing all you can to *"preserve the relationship"*.

1. We were created, designed, and saved for unity. Unity is not uniformity. We aren't the same. We weren't made to be the same. We are created diverse, and divinely unique. Diversity is God's heart. But also unity is divine. And we are to protect and nurture it! But the bottom line truth is there is no need for unity— without diversity. Diversity will cause us to rub against each other. You may not win, feel satisfied, get to make your point, you will feel frustrated. That's an intentional design not a bug. But working through and in our diversity makes us wiser and stronger.

2. We are called to do ALL WE CAN to "stay at the table". Our job is to create a table where everyone is invited. To remember there is a space for everyone. Romans 12 said: *"Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone"*. Put more leafs in the table, get more chairs, send out more invitations. And we GET to be the ones tasked with doing all we can to preserve this divine unity. Because it allows us to create a place for all of us to live in our divine uniqueness.

3. The primary desire and motive should be to "preserve the relationship". Others first. Relationships are worth the effort. This doesn't mean you can always make that happen. Sometimes the relationship isn't salvageable. It may have to end. You cannot make the other person do something they're unwilling to do. But in wrestling with tough issues, huge disagreements, dealing with significant differences, working out issues in our community and world. We make sure we honor the dignity, personhood, value, and divine image in every person we are around. That is the heart of New COMMUNITY Church. We're all *"staying at the table"*. We are convinced doing this is worth the effort. We need to be a church that pulls out more tables, puts more chairs around the table, no matter who you are.

Come 'table' with us. July 5th fellowship. *Who u wit?* We will celebrate and recognize the divine beauty and calling of 'tabling' together.