

A Study Guide
for
AN EVANGELICAL MANIFESTO

INTRODUCTION

What the Manifesto Is

An Evangelical Manifesto is an open declaration of who Evangelicals are and what they stand for. It has been drafted and published by a representative group of Evangelical leaders who do not claim to speak for all Evangelicals, but who invite all other Evangelicals to stand with them and help clarify what *Evangelical* means in light of “confusions within and the consternation without” the movement. As the Manifesto states, the signers are not out to attack or exclude anyone, but to rally and to call for reform.

As an open declaration, *An Evangelical Manifesto* addresses not only Evangelicals and other Christians but other American citizens and people of all other faiths in America, including those who say they have no faith. It therefore stands as an example of how different faith communities may address each other in public life, without any compromise of their own faith but with a clear commitment to the common good of the societies in which we all live together.

For those who are Evangelicals, the deepest purpose of the Manifesto is a serious call to reform—an urgent challenge to reaffirm Evangelical identity, to reform Evangelical behavior, to reposition Evangelicals in public life, and so rededicate ourselves to the high calling of being Evangelical followers of Jesus Christ.

The Goals of This Study Guide

While the *Manifesto* is a public declaration, this study guide is designed primarily for Evangelicals and for those who are deciding what it means to identify as Evangelicals. It may well be of interest to others, but the questions are phrased for readers who are Christian. If you would not call yourself a Christian, you are of course welcome to enter this discussion and to respond from your own viewpoint.

Further, this study guide is designed for both individuals and groups. It will certainly be more profitable if it is talked over with others, not merely thought about on your own, but the questions will repay serious reflection by individuals too.

Suggestions for Groups

The *Manifesto* is divided into three sections. This study guide will give special weight to the second, which is the call to reform. Ideally, a group could discuss the entire statement in six sessions of about 75 minutes each. You could meet once a week for six weeks, for example, or cover all six sessions over a weekend. You may find that the sessions have more questions than you can cover in your available time, so your group leader may want to select key questions before the group meets.

Your discussions will help you think through the Manifesto at four levels:

- Understanding (What is being said here?)
- Agreement or dissent (Is what is said here true—most of it, all of it, or none of it? Why?)
- Implications (What of it? What should this mean for my/our lives?)
- Action (If I/we embrace this vision, what needed changes and practical next steps will I/we take?)

As always, understanding should come first. We suggest that in each discussion you make sure everyone in the group understands what the authors of the *Manifesto* are saying before they express opinions about what is said. In the Internet era, with new styles of communication such as blogging, our common tendency is to offer rapid, undigested responses before we have tried to understand what other people are really saying. An ability to state someone else's position accurately and fairly, even if we disagree with it, is a requirement for good discussion and fruitful debate.

Robust and respectful disagreement is welcome, but respect is the key. Many of the points in the Manifesto touch on issues that run deep, so they need to be discussed with a firm commitment to truth, love, and humility. The signers of the *Manifesto* have published it in good faith, and most people will discuss it in good faith. It is always best to debate the ideas without personally attacking the authors or others in your group with different opinions, and to be very careful about alleging motives to the authors, unless they themselves clearly state their motives. Also, listening carefully to one another will make your discussion as fruitful as it can be.

Let your goal be for the group to deepen its understanding of truth and the way forward for us all, not for any individual or group to win an argument or settle an old score. Above all, we need to be like the people in the town of Berea, in the book of Acts, who listened carefully to what the apostle Paul said, and then checked and weighed it in light of the Scriptures before accepting it.

It is suggested that groups open and close each session with prayer, and if appropriate, have a more extended time of prayer at the end. Knowing God's mind better should be our common purpose, and seeking God's blessing in renewing power should be our fervent passion. But you should feel free to follow whatever practice best suits your group.

Session 1

REAFFIRMATION OF IDENTITY

Part One

Before you gather for this discussion, please read pages 1 through 11 of *An Evangelical Manifesto*.

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the revelation of the very being, character, and purposes of God. Please send your Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts and discussion in this gathering, so that we may know you better, love one another better, and serve you better in the world. For the glory of your name, Amen.

Questions for Discussion

The first stated purpose of the Manifesto is to address **“the confusions and corruptions that attend the term *Evangelical* in the United States and much of the Western world today”** (page 2).

1. What do you see as the general perception of the term *Evangelical* and of Evangelicals today?

When polls show that Evangelicals are viewed as “hypocritical,” “legalistic,” “judgmental,” “anti-intellectual,” “negative,” and “out to impose their views on others,” what lies behind these views?

How fair are these views?

Do you know people who no longer identify themselves as Evangelicals because of such perceptions?

The second stated purpose is to clarify where Evangelicals “stand on issues that have caused consternation over Evangelicals in public life” (page 2).

2. What do people today think about Evangelicals in public life? What positive views of Evangelicals in public life do they have? What negative views do they have?

What has given rise to recent inflammatory charges that Christian conservatives are “theocrats” and even “fascists”?

The Manifesto addresses people of other faiths in a public declaration because of the challenge of “**living with our deepest differences**” (page 3).

3. What changes in the last generation or two have created this worldwide challenge of living together with our deepest differences?

How has an awareness of people with all sorts of different faiths touched your business, your local schools, or your life in other ways?

How have you responded?

4. The authors give their definition of the term *Evangelical*. Before we look at it, state how most people you know would define *Evangelical*.

How would you define the term?

What are your criteria for a definition?

The Manifesto proposes this definition: **“Evangelicals are Christians who define themselves, their faith, and their lives according to the Good News of Jesus of Nazareth”** (page 4).

5. How does this definition square with Jesus’ announcement of the good news of his kingdom?

How does this definition compare with other terms and labels? (For example, did Jesus call his disciples primarily to be *Protestant*, *conservative*, or *Bible-believing*? Or does the term *born again* cover all that Jesus called his followers to be and do throughout their lives? As you read the Gospels, is there any term that is earlier, deeper, more faithful to Jesus, and more consequential for the whole of life than this definition of *Evangelical*? *Protestant*, for instance, is a sixteenth-century term that has become largely negative today. It says what someone is protesting against and not what he or she is for. And while Jesus was certainly *Bible-believing*, that is only a part of what he taught and nowhere near the heart of the good news he announced.)

The Manifesto speaks of this definition, not just as a belief but as **“the Evangelical principle”** that is **“easy to say but challenging to live by”** (page 5).

6. What would be the ongoing challenge of *always* insisting on defining oneself, one’s faith, and one’s life by the good news of Jesus?

Why is behavior as important as believing? What is the link between the two of them in Jesus’ teaching?

7. In this definition of Evangelical, there is no mention of Christian denominations, such as Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Anglican, and so on. How do you understand the place of denominations in light of this definition of Evangelical?

- All-important
- Helpful but not all-important
- Redundant
- Other (please explain)

In light of the definition here, is it more important to be a member of a denomination or to be truly Evangelical? Why?

The Manifesto sets out seven beliefs that Evangelicals “consider to be at the heart of the message of Jesus and therefore foundational for us” (page 5).

8. As you look at these beliefs overall, are they each the direct and necessary implication of followers of Jesus “defining themselves, their faith, and their lives by the good news of Jesus”? Are they the product of controversies in certain periods of Christian history, or can you link each of them directly to what Jesus actually believed, taught, or demonstrated?
9. As you look at these seven distinctive Evangelical beliefs (pages 5–6), can you say that they are fully and clearly your beliefs?

Are they full and clear to most Evangelicals today? What makes you say that?

Where might some other Christians differ from these beliefs in significant ways?

Where would people you know from other religions differ decisively from these beliefs?

“We do not claim that the Evangelical principle—to define our faith and our life by the good news of Jesus—is unique to us. Our purpose is not to attack or exclude but to remind and to reaffirm, and so to rally and to reform” (page 5).

10. What does this say about the purpose and attitude of the Manifesto’s authors?

Closing Time of Prayer

Affirm who Jesus is and what the heart of his message is. Pray about any areas of concern or unclarity that arose in your discussion. Pray for one another.

Session Two

REAFFIRMATION OF IDENTITY

Part Two

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, the supreme privilege of our lives is to know you and to make you known. Please send your Holy Spirit to be among us, so that we may more deeply understand who you are and what it means to follow you, and so that we may live according to your example and your teaching. We ask this in your great name, Amen.

Questions for Discussion

Having stated the seven beliefs, the Manifesto quickly adds: **“At the same time, we readily acknowledge that we repeatedly fail to live up to our high calling, and all too often illustrate the truth of our own doctrine of sin.”** (page 6)

1. What is the importance of this addition, either theologically or practically, in a day of widespread Christian scandals and accusations of hypocrisy?

Instead of leaving the definition of *Evangelical* as a matter of beliefs only, the Manifesto goes on to insist on certain behaviors and certain distinctive features of Evangelicalism that flow from this definition. (page 7)

2. What would be the weakness of defining Evangelicals by a list of beliefs alone?

Are Evangelicals you know as concerned with the behavior Jesus called for as much as the beliefs he held and taught—for example, the command to “love our enemies” as much as the belief in the necessity of being “born again”? Explain.

“First, to be Evangelical is a belief that is also a devotion.” (page 7)

3. What is the significance of this first implication?

Do Evangelicals not care about truth, orthodoxy, and tradition? Or in what sense are creeds, orthodoxy, and tradition not enough by themselves?

Do you think you/your local church has a proper balance here between devotion to Jesus Christ and appreciation for truth, orthodoxy, and tradition?

“Second, Evangelical belief and devotion is expressed as much in our worship and in our deeds as in our creeds.” (page 7)

4. How does this follow directly from the definition of Evangelical? Is there a biblical basis for this point?

What historical examples can you think of where such characteristic Evangelical “worship” and “deeds” are evident, and just as important as orthodox beliefs?

“Third, Evangelicals are followers of Jesus in a way that is not limited to certain churches or contained by a definable movement.” (page 7)

5. Do you agree that Evangelicals can be found in many different churches and denominations?

Where is this diverse, flexible, and informal nature of Evangelicalism a strength, and where is it a weakness?

How does it compare with more hierarchical and structured churches?

“Fourth ... Evangelicalism must be defined theologically and not politically; confessionally and not culturally.” (page 7)

6. What happens when a movement such as Evangelicalism comes to be defined culturally or politically? How is this contrary to the calling Jesus gave to his disciples?

How do we go back to making clear to those around us that we are first and foremost followers of Jesus and his way, so that no other label finally fits us?

“Fifth, the Evangelical message, ‘good news’ by definition, is overwhelmingly positive, and always positive before it is negative.”
(page 8)

7. Why do Evangelicals currently have a reputation for being so negative and so opposed to so many things? Is it simply the way we attack what is wrong, without a balancing emphasis on grace and welcome? Or are there deeper reasons, such as an underlying insecurity as our society seems to move farther and farther from the Christian faith?

“Sixth, Evangelicalism should be distinguished from two opposite tendencies to which Protestantism has been prone: liberal revisionism and conservative fundamentalism.” (page 8)

8. Discuss each of these two tendencies with care. What do the authors see as the dynamics behind each them? Why do they call them tendencies?

Trace the way each of these tendencies can lead to extremes (to which fortunately not everyone goes).

Where do you see Christians today who have accommodated too much to the world?

Where do you see Christians who have defied the world in the wrong way?

In your experience, which of the two is more dangerous to the health of the church? Why?

“Seventh, Evangelicalism is distinctive for the way it looks equally to both the past and the future.” (page 9)

9. Evangelicals are often portrayed as conservative and even reactionary as if they are hopelessly mired in the past. Why do the authors believe this is wrong?

In what ways do the authors think Evangelicals take the past seriously without being arch-conservatives?

In what ways do Evangelicals take the future seriously but in a way that is different from secular progressives and modernists?

How has the good news of Jesus always been a force for “innovation, renewal, reformation, and entrepreneurial dynamism”?

Do your local churches and Christian groups demonstrate a good balance between a wise conservatism and an innovative dynamism? What makes you say that?

10. As you look back over the questions and themes we have surveyed in this first section of the *Manifesto*, which are the most important themes that have been highlighted for you?

What changes do you need to make in how you believe, speak, and live as a follower of Jesus Christ? What areas do you most need to pray over and discuss further?

Closing Time of Prayer

Take to God the changes you mentioned in question 10. Ask him for insight, and for his grace enabling you to change. Ask him to help you be willing to change. Pray for each other, and thank God for your group.

Session 3

REFORMATION OF BEHAVIOR

Part One

Before you gather for this discussion, please read pages 11 through 14 of *An Evangelical Manifesto*.

Opening Prayer

Father, you are our Creator and the Master we want to follow in all areas of our lives. Please send your Spirit of truth and holiness among us, so that we may recognize, confess, and turn away from our faults, and live as you have called us to live. In the name of your Son, our Savior, Amen.

Questions for Discussion

The second section of the *Manifesto* is brief, but in many ways it is the heart of the entire declaration. Its overall call to reform and call for a spirit of repentance is as important as the specific charges raised.

“But if the Evangelical impulse is a radical, reforming, and innovative force, we acknowledge with sorrow a momentous irony today. We who time and again have stood for the renewal of tired forms, for the renewal of dead churches, for the warming of cold hearts, for the reformation of corrupt practices and heretical beliefs, and for the reform of gross injustices in our society, are ourselves in dire need of reformation and renewal today.” (page 11)

1. How does this call to reform follow theologically from the earlier definition of *Evangelical*?

2. What earlier periods of Christian renewal and reformation can you think of that would fall under this description? (For instance, why did the Pope call Francis of Assisi “evangelical” when he set out to follow Jesus so radically? In what sense was the Reformation rightly called “an evangelical reformation”? What about the Great Awakenings and the famous revivals?)

The Protestant reformers rejected the medieval slogan “Never reformed because never deformed.” They insisted on the principle of *semper reformanda*, and so challenged the church to recognize that reformation was not once-for-all but a constant, ongoing necessity in every generation and every heart.

3. Why did the Protestant reformers take this view?

What happens theologically and spiritually when Christians forget this need for constant, ongoing reformation and renewal?

“We confess that we have betrayed our beliefs by our behavior” (page 11). Whereas Jesus had the most stinging criticisms of hypocrisy the world has ever heard, Christians today are routinely accused of that very thing.

4. Under this first general charge are a series of specific instances where Evangelical beliefs have been betrayed by behavior. Discuss each of these instances separately and carefully. In each case, can you think of instances where such a charge of “not practicing what we preach” might be true?

In what sense are such failures hypocrisy?

“All too often we have set out high clear statements of the authority of the Bible, but flouted them with lives and lifestyles that are shaped more by our own sinful preferences and by modern fashions and convenience.” (page 11)

5. What examples of this can you think of?

It is all too easy to take our own lifestyles for granted, as that is the way most people around us are living. Think about your lifestyle from the perspective of Christians from other parts of the world, or more importantly from the perspective of Jesus' teaching. What aspects of your lifestyle might Jesus question?

“All too often we have prided ourselves on our orthodoxy, but grown our churches through methods and techniques as worldly as the worldliest of Christian adaptations to the passing expressions of the spirit of the age.” (page 11)

6. Modern marketing and management techniques aren't always wrong in themselves. But what dangers do they pose? (Consider what light do Scripture and church history shed on this question.)

If marketing and management techniques are so successful that they keep church leaders from needing to rely on God, is that a problem? Why or why not?

Based on the story of the Exodus, the early church talked of “plundering the Egyptian gold” but not “setting up a golden calf.” How do we exercise such Christian discernment when using modern insights and techniques? How do we learn to “do the Lord's work in the Lord's way,” rather than the Lord's work in the world's way?

Can you think of examples of modern insights and techniques that are so brilliantly successful that we have no need of God in practice?

7. If the Holy Spirit were to withdraw from your church or Christian fellowship, how long could it continue before someone noticed?

Closing Time of Prayer

Confess faults about which this discussion has convicted you. Confess ways you have fallen short of living what you believe. Thank God for his forgiveness. Pray for one another for the grace to change.

Session Four

REFORMATION OF OUR BEHAVIOR

Part Two

Opening Prayer

Merciful Father, you have promised that if we walk in the light as you are in the light, then Jesus' blood cleanses us from sin. Please bring our failings to light, and give us the grace to see, confess, and turn away from them. Please show us how to cooperate with your work of transformation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Questions for Discussion

“All too often we have failed to demonstrate the unity and harmony of the body of Christ, and fallen into factions defined by the accidents of history and sharpened by truth without love, rather than express the truth and grace of the Gospel.” (page 12)

Jesus prayed that his followers would be one, as he and his Father are one. There are both good reasons (the seriousness of opposition outside the church) and bad reasons (a weakened commitment to truth) for the many encouraging trends toward unity in the church. But there are still deep divisions and significant mistrust between fellow-Christians and between fellow-Evangelicals, even between those who clearly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and God.

1. What divisions do you see? In your view, are they necessary or unnecessary?

Are you and your friends a force for unity in the Body of Christ or for continuing separateness? How?

“All too often we have traced our roots to powerful movements of spiritual revival and reformation, but we ourselves are often atheists unawares, secularists in practice who live in a world without windows to the supernatural....” (page 12)

In our modern secular world—the so-called “real world” of the five senses—what is unseen is taken to be unreal, so the tendency is to discount the reality of prayer, the supernatural, and such things as spiritual warfare.

2. Is the supernatural world as real to you and Christians you know as the natural world? What leads you to say that?
3. What practical part do supernatural disciplines, such as prayer, fasting, and solitude, play in your life?

“All too often we have attacked the evils and injustices of others, such as the killing of the unborn ... while we have condoned our own sins, turned a blind eye to our own vices, and lived captive to forces such as materialism and consumerism in ways that contradict our own faith.” (page 12)

4. In light of Jesus’ teaching, what is wrong with materialism and consumerism? How do they affect our discipleship?

What is the effect on others when we are selective in what we condemn and what we condone?

“All too often we have concentrated on great truths of the Bible, such as the cross of Jesus, but have failed to apply them to other biblical truths such as creation. In the process we have impoverished ourselves, and supported a culture broadly careless about the stewardship of the earth and the creative centers of society.” (page 12)

5. The cross of Jesus is properly central to the gospel, as it is to the life of Jesus in the four gospels. But do you agree that Evangelicals have tended to crowd out other truths, such as creation, in comparison? In the Christian circles you know, is there

equally rich teaching about creativity and the arts, or about a proper care for God's earth and our fellow-creatures on the earth?

6. Why do the authors think Christians should be involved in "the arts, science, the media, and the creation of culture in all its variety"?

"All too often we have been seduced by the shaping power of the modern world, exchanging a costly grace for convenience, softening theological authority down to personal preference, and giving up a clear grasp of truth and an exclusive allegiance to Jesus for a mess of mix-and-match attitudes that are syncretism by another name." (page 12)

7. Do you agree with the charges raised here? Why or why not?
8. In what sense are these problems the result of conforming to the shape of the modern world?

What would it take to be absolutely faithful to Jesus and resist the pressures of the modern world—in, say, holding to a strong biblical view of truth?

What practical problems would doing this raise for you? Do you think other Christians would understand, or would they think you were being "extreme"?

"All too often we have disobeyed the great command to love the Lord our God with our hearts, souls, strength, and minds, and have fallen into an unbecoming anti-intellectualism that is a dire cultural handicap as well as a sin." (page 12)

9. In the Christian circles you know, were you taught to value the place of the mind and to think as a Christian? Or were the emotions usually placed higher than the mind and appealed to more often?

Can most Christians you know say not only what they believe but why they believe what they believe?

If "all truth is God's truth," as the early Christians held, why are so many Christians afraid of philosophy or science?

Why does the *Manifesto* speak of this sort of anti-intellectualism as a “cultural handicap” as well as a “sin”? What do the authors mean by “the false hostility between science and faith”?

“All too often we have gloried in the racial and ethnic diversity of the church around the world, but remained content to be enclaves of separateness here at home.” (page 12)

10. There are magnificent exceptions to this charge, but how accurate do you think it is in your experience?

What do you think of teaching, such as the “birds of a feather flock together” principle, which actually encourages the segmentation of the church according to age, race, gender, and class?

How does such teaching and practice measure up to the teaching and practice of Jesus and the early church?

“All too often we have abandoned our Lord’s concern for those in the shadows, the twilight, and the deep darkness of the world, and become cheerleaders for those in power and the naïve sycophants of the powerful and the rich.” (page 13)

11. How would you describe the example of Jesus in dealing with those in power and with those who were poor?

How do most Christians measure up to this standard today? Where do we most need to change?

“All too often we have tried to be relevant, but instead of creating “new wineskins for the new wine,” we have succumbed to the passing fashions of the moment and made noisy attacks on yesterday’s errors, while capitulating tamely to today’s, such as postmodernism.” (page 13)

12. The good news of Jesus is always relevant to every age and to every human heart, but what are the dangers when a proper pursuit of “relevance” declines into a craze for trendiness and following the latest fashion?

Why is it easier to go with trends than to identify and resist the spirit of the current age?

Can you think of places today where Christians have become worldly without realizing it in their attempts to be relevant?

“We call humbly but clearly for a restoration of the Evangelical reforming principle, and therefore for deep reformation and renewal in all our Christian ways of life and thought.” (page 13)

13. The remaining part of Section Two is a series of calls for specific action in light of the earlier call to penitence. Read them carefully, and ask which of them speaks most directly to you and your church. Where do you most need to join the signers in their sense of sorrow and penitence, and commit yourself to doing something about it?

Closing Time of Prayer

Thank God for His Spirit who convicts and transforms. Confess any areas in which this discussion has convicted you. Pray for one another, for the grace to follow through in acting on what you need to do.

Session 5

REPOSITIONING OURSELVES IN PUBLIC LIFE

Part One

Before you gather for this discussion, please read pages 14 through 20 of *An Evangelical Manifesto*.

Opening Prayer

Father, you are our King. Teach us how you want us to live in the earthly nations where you have placed us. Show us the role you want us to play in the public squares of towns and states full of people of many faiths and no faith. Give us your Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and reverence for you. May we learn to live without compromising truth or limiting love. We ask this in your Son's name. Amen.

Questions for Discussion

The *Manifesto* opens the third section with an affirmation of Jesus' teaching that his followers are to be in the world but not of the world, and are therefore to be (in St Augustine's words) "resident aliens" in the City of Man (or humankind).

1. What is the basis of this idea in Jesus' life and teaching?

“Called by Jesus to be ‘in’ the world but ‘not of’ the world, we are fully engaged in public affairs, but never completely equated with any party, partisan ideology, economic system, or national identity.” (page 14)

2. What does it mean to be engaged but not equated?
3. What problems occur when Christians fuse their faith with any passing form of political ideology, economic system, or national ideology?

“Christendom” is one example of when this problem occurred previously. What do you know about the good motives and bad outcomes of the idea of Christendom?

What more recent examples can you think of?

If no individual Christian ever attains perfection short of heaven, what does that say for our chances of producing any fully Christian political or economic system on this earth?

How could we show realism, humility, and constant discernment in our attitudes toward our favored political and economic systems today?

“Evangelicals have made a shining contribution to politics in general, and to many of the greatest moral and social reforms in history, such as the abolition of slavery and women’s suffrage...” (page 14)

4. What do you know about such Evangelical heroes as John Jay, John Witherspoon, John Woolman, Frances Willard, William Wilberforce, or Lord Shaftesbury?

What do we learn from their exploits about how followers of Jesus should enter and engage public life? Where were they distinctively Christian in the manner they practiced politics, and how can we emulate them today?

“[W]e Evangelicals repudiate two equal and opposite errors into which many Christians have fallen recently. One error has been to privatize faith, interpreting and applying it to the personal and spiritual realm only. Such dualism falsely divorces the spiritual from the secular, and causes faith to lose its *integrity* and become privately engaging and publicly irrelevant, and another form of ‘hot tub spirituality.’” (page 15)

5. The Christian faith is always deeply personal, but how does a privatized faith contradict the character and claims of Jesus?

What is it in our modern world that encourages us to be content with a privatized faith?

“The other error, made by both the religious left and the religious right in recent decades, is to politicize faith, using faith to express essentially political points that have lost touch with biblical truth. That way faith loses its *independence*, the church becomes ‘the regime at prayer,’ Christians become ‘useful idiots’ for one political party or another, and the Christian faith becomes an ideology in its purest form as Christian beliefs are used as weapons for political interests.”
(page 15)

6. What exactly is the theological error behind “politicization”?

What are the practical consequences for the church when faith is politicized?

How does politicization undermine the church’s effectiveness?

How does it harm public perceptions of the church?

What examples can you think of when politicization has been harmful in the last half century?

“The politicization of faith is never a sign of strength but of weakness. The saying is wise: ‘The first thing to say about politics is that politics is not the first thing.’” (page 15)

7. Why is this maxim such a wise reminder? What are the theological dangers in elevating politics above what it should be?

What are the practical dangers of asking politics and politicians to do what politics simply cannot do?

Politics is “downstream” from many cultural centers (such as universities and Hollywood) that are more influential than politics.

8. How do cultural centers like Hollywood influence people’s lives as much as, or more than, politics do?

In your experience, are most Christians as committed to engaging the universities and creative centers such as Hollywood as they are to engaging politics? Why do you suppose that’s the case?

“Second, we Evangelicals repudiate the two extremes that define the present culture wars in the United States. There are deep and important issues at stake in the culture wars, issues on which the future of the United States and Western civilization will turn. But the trouble comes from the manner in which the issues are being fought.”
(page 16)

9. The *Manifesto* distinguishes the substance of the issues in the culture wars from the manner in which they are being fought. Why does it claim that the issues themselves are vital but the manner of the conflict is dangerous?

“In particular, what we as Evangelicals lament in the culture warring is not just the general collapse of the common vision of the common good, but the endless conflict over the proper place of religion in public life, and therefore of the freedom to enter and engage public life from the perspective of faith.” (page 16)

10. What examples of culture warring over religion and public life can you think of?

What are the different views of history and constitutional interpretation that fuel these clashes?

“We repudiate on one side the partisans of a *sacred public square*, those who for religious, historical, or cultural reasons would continue to give a preferred place in public life to one religion which in almost all current cases would be the Christian faith.” (page 16)

11. Because of the First Amendment, no religion in America may be established. Why does the *Manifesto* argue that even a government *preference* for any one religion is unwise in a society as pluralistic as ours today?

What groups can you think of that openly argue for giving one religion a preference?

What Christian groups do not argue for a preferred place but are viewed or attacked as if they did?

“Let it be known unequivocally that we are committed to religious liberty for people of all faiths, including the right to convert to and from the Christian faith. We are firmly opposed to the imposition of theocracy on our pluralistic society. We are also concerned about the illiberalism of politically correct attacks on evangelism.” (page 16)

12. What theological grounds would you cite in defense of religious equality for all?

Why is this simple, positive, absolute commitment to religious liberty so important in today’s world?

How is it different from purely negative principles such as banning “hate speech” and “hate crimes”?

How does “the right to convert” follow from freedom of conscience? Why do the authors of the Manifesto view the widespread liberal attacks on evangelism and “proselytizing” as illiberal?

“We repudiate on the other side the partisans of a *naked public square*, those who would make all religious expression inviolably private and keep the public square inviolably secular. (page 16)

13. What groups advocate a naked public square?

Which of them are truly secularist in philosophy (they do not believe in God, gods, or the supernatural)?

Which of them are “legal secularists” (who may or may not believe in God, but for constitutional reasons want to keep faith strictly out of public life)?

Why is this position said to be “even less just and workable” than that of the sacred public square?

“Nothing is more illiberal than to invite people into the public square but insist that they be stripped of the faith that makes them who they are and shapes the way they see the world.” (page 16–17)

14. This is a very strong statement against the proponents of the naked public square, but how does it follow directly from the inalienable right of freedom of conscience and of the First Amendment’s guarantee of the “free exercise” of religion?

What would be the secularist liberal’s response to this challenge?

“In contrast to these extremes, our commitment is to a civil public square—a vision of public life in which citizens of all faiths are free to enter and engage the public square on the basis of their faith, but within a framework of what is agreed to be just and fair for other faiths too. Thus a right we assert for ourselves is at once a right we defend for others.” (page 17)

15. In many people’s minds, civility is a wimp word today that is anything but a republican virtue and a democratic necessity. What Christian injunctions, such as “loving our enemies” and “speaking the truth in love” would give strength to help recover this important virtue?

Is civility grounded in a positive understanding of religious liberty for all, or is it simply the result of fear of “a war of all against all”?

How do you think we can simultaneously respect people’s right to believe what they believe, yet disagree with their political proposals robustly but civilly?

Closing Time of Prayer

Pray for Christians in public life, that they might fulfill their callings with courage and civility, living in a manner that Jesus would approve. If you or others in your group are active in the public square, pray for yourselves in this regard. Ask God to show you how to avoid either privatizing or politicizing your faith.

Session Six

REPOSITIONING OURSELVES IN PUBLIC LIFE

Part Two

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, your kingdom is a realm of justice, peace, and well-being, and we are citizens first of your kingdom, and second of the earthly nations you have given us to live in. Send your Holy Spirit among us to make us representatives of your kingdom in our world, to discern and seek the common good of all, to treat those with whom we disagree as you would treat them, that your name may be honored on earth as it is in the heavens. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Questions for Discussion

“[W]e are especially troubled by the fact that a generation of culture warring, reinforced by understandable reactions to religious extremism around the world, is creating a powerful backlash against all religion in public life among many educated people. If this were to harden and become an American equivalent of the long-held European animosity toward religion in public life, the result would be disastrous for the American republic and a severe constriction of liberty for people of all faiths.” (page 17)

1. What, historically, is the role of corrupt or oppressive state churches in creating the marked anti-religious, secular mood of Europe?
2. How did the First Amendment help the United States to avoid this?

How has this difference lessened in the US over the past generation?

Why is an exclusive and intolerant secularism as dangerous to religious liberty as is religious extremism? What examples have you seen recently in America?

“[W]e are troubled by the fact that the advance of globalization and the emergence of a global public square finds no matching vision of how we are to live freely, justly, and peacefully with our deepest differences on the global stage.” (page 17)

3. Here the Manifesto addresses a problem that is only just emerging. What is meant by the notion of a “public square”?
4. How has the Internet contributed to the emergence of a “global public square”?
5. What examples can you think of where people elsewhere in the world heard something said about their faith and responded violently, even though the original speakers did not realize they were speaking to the world?

The *Manifesto* marks out two extremes in the emerging global public square: the “progressive universalists,” whose position leads to conflict; and the “multicultural relativists,” whose position leads to complacency and turning a blind eye toward evils and injustice.

6. Do you agree that these are dominant tendencies today? Why, or why not? What evidence can you give?
7. Why do the authors argue that the Christian faith should never be a form of coercive “universalism”?

“We also warn of the danger of a two-tier global public square, one in which the top tier is for cosmopolitan secular liberals and the second tier is for local religious believers. Such an arrangement would be patronizing as well as a severe restriction of religious liberty and justice, and unworthy of genuine liberalism.” (page 19)

8. Apart from the wishes of certain secularists themselves, how do other factors such as education make for this two-tier public square, with secular liberals in the top tier?

9. Why would this not be truly “liberal” or a genuine “civil public square”? What would be the best arguments to make such liberals rethink their position and be more liberal?

“As stated earlier, we who sign this declaration do not presume to speak for all Evangelicals. We speak not only to ourselves, yet not to ourselves. We therefore invite all our fellow-Christians, our fellow-citizens, and people of different faiths across the nation and around the world to take serious note of these declarations and to respond where appropriate.” (page 19)

10. The authors of the *Manifesto* address seven specific groups from whom they hope to have a response. In your view, is today’s culture warring so bitter and divisive that any hope of a civil response would be forlorn? What makes you say that?

Which of the groups addressed are the most likely to respond positively?

What difference would you hope the *Manifesto* and its spirit will make to the tone of debate in American public life, or in your home town, or in the Christian circles in which you move?

11. Looking back over your discussion of *An Evangelical Manifesto*, how do you respond now to the overall call and its urgency? How seriously do you assess the crisis of Evangelicalism?

Do you see hope for renewal and reformation or have you concluded that Evangelicalism is beyond such hope?

12. What are the main implications of the *Manifesto* for you? What will you pray about most urgently?

What specific actions will you take in your own life?

For example, will you:

- Adopt the *Manifesto*’s simple definition of *Evangelical*, help clarify the confusions surrounding the term, and strive to be more faithful to its challenging meaning?

- Assess the damaging consequences of the present culture wars, and work to restore liberty and civility in public life, so that Evangelicals are seen to be a prime force for religious liberty for all and for civility?
- Join the worldwide movement to bring care, peace, justice, and freedom to those millions of our fellow-humans who are now ignored, oppressed, enslaved, or treated as human waste and wasted humans by the established orders in the global world?
- Seek above all to fulfill the high and Evangelical calling of followers of Jesus and, in the words of St Richard of Chichester, to “know him more clearly, to love him more dearly, and to follow him more nearly”?

Closing Time of Prayer

Talk to God about the implications of the *Manifesto* for your own life. Ask him for the clarity to see and the courage to do what he is asking of you. Pray for courage and strength for one another. Thank him for your group.