

Engage360 Episode 143 | Curiosity, Community, and Christian Political Engagement; Kaitlyn Schiess

Hi friends, welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. I'm your host, Tim Koller. Thank you for joining us for today's conversation. Back in the 1980s, there was an FBI training situation that was leading to agents not persevering in the midst of dangerous situations. In Dave Grossman's book on combat, he outlines what was happening during the FBI training where they were putting them into simulations where agents were grabbing their weapon, discharging twice, and then reholstering their weapon. Well, when they got into combat, they were doing that exact thing. They were in dangerous situations, firing twice and reholstering their weapon. In order to fix the problem, the FBI needed to understand what the problem was, what was causing this. And in determining what was causing it, they needed someone who understood what was happening in the FBI, but they also needed someone who could get up on the balcony to get a better view of what was happening and the context around that situation. Thankfully, the FBI was able to then understand what was happening and make changes to the training that they were doing so that their agents could better persevere in the midst of very tense situations. Now, in Denver Seminary, we're not training FBI agents, but we are seeking to train Christians that can go out and engage the needs of the world with the redemptive power of the gospel and the life changing truth of scripture. And as evangelicals, it is a wonderful, and good thing to be a people of the book as we talk about it here at the seminary. This is a people who instinctively look to the scripture for direction. However, when we go to scripture, we have to ask how has our formation shaped our use of the Bible? And thankfully our guest today, Kaitlyn Schiess has been an author, a host of the Holy Post podcast and a doctoral student. She knows the evangelical dance floor. She understands what is happening in our culture, and she's also taken time to climb the balcony. She is offering a better view of evangelical formation and the use of scripture in American politics. Her newest book is *The Ballot in the Bible*, how scripture has been used and abused in American politics and where we go from here. So, Kaitlyn, welcome to the podcast.

[00:02:18] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Thank you so much for having me.

[00:02:19] **Dr. Tim Koller:** So, I'd love to talk about your new book, but before we do, I would love to hear a bit about your new podcast. You're a host on the Holy Post podcast, delightful, delightful, uh, uh, podcast. We use Sky Jethani's book with, as part of our training and mentoring curriculum here at Denver Seminary, but you are now also going out and launching *Curiously Kaitlyn*, a very focused podcast. So, could you tell us a bit about that and just give us a sense of who you are through that podcast?

[00:02:45] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah, yeah. So, I have been, um, a cohost on the Holy Post for a few years now. It's crazy to think I was in seminary when I started and now, I'm, you know, halfway through my doctoral degree. And at some point, in working on the Holy Post, we had a conversation about me doing my own show. And initially the conversation was, well, of course it'll be about politics because Kaitlyn is studying politics and thinks about politics and kind of is the person there that's like, spends the most time thinking about it. And I thought, I actually don't think I want to do a show about politics in part because I haven't written my dissertation yet. So I don't know how much of my opinions about politics I want to just be putting out every week on the internet. But also, I really wanted, I had a different heart that I wanted to put into a different project, and it was a combination of two things. I thought at the beginning, I just want to do something that helps people understand basic theological concepts in language that the average person in the church can understand. I've been in theological education most of my adult life, and so I sometimes forget what words aren't familiar to people or what concepts are new to them, but I think theology is really fun. I think it's

beautiful and I want us to find a way for that to be accessible to people, not just so that they apply it to their lives, which is great, but because I think it's beautiful and learning how beautiful God is, is something I want to be accessible to all people. So, we started thinking about that and we thought, oh, well, I mean, we, there has to be some hook. There has to be something that gets people interested in this. And it was Phil Vischer, the creator of VeggieTales, who said, well, like, what's something special about Kaitlyn? What's something kind of different that we could bring to this? And he said, well, Kaitlyn loves kids. I talk a lot on the Holy Post about how I spend time with kids in my church, and I love doing that and they teach me so much and their questions are interesting to me and their insights are really helpful. And so, we said, well, at first it was, well, maybe we just do a show where Kaitlyn talks to kids about God. And it thought, well, that could get really out of hand. We actually are going to do that for a few special episodes of just talking to kids, but what we ended up with was. What if we took the questions that kids ask, and then I find scholars to answer them and try and really hold their feet to the fire to make their answers accessible.

And so, what we've ended up creating is something that I hope is a real gift to the church. I hear from pastors all the time recommending it to their congregations, which I love. But my other kind of secondary goal in it is I really hope it encourages people to pay more attention to kids in church, to have conversations with them. As someone who used to work in children's ministry at a church and spent a lot of my weekends desperately calling people, trying to convince them to come help because we were out of volunteers. I hope the show encourages people to volunteer in their children's ministry, especially those of us who have theological education and could be tempted to think, Oh, that's beneath me. That's for someone that doesn't really know their stuff. No, those kids have hard questions and we as a whole church are better when our theology is informed both by our littlest members and by those who have devoted their lives to studying theology.

[00:05:36] **Dr. Tim Koller:** Amen. That is such a beautiful vision. And I love your heart for us being like Jesus in this because the kids wanted to be with Jesus. At my last church where I was an elder, I was encouraging us to adopt a teaching team that in order to teach to the big people, you also should have taught to the little people. And now I never got that adopted. So, it was an aspiration that was that went unfulfilled. But I love that heart that there are these. Questions that our kids have that we need to be curious about with them, and I really love that. I've got a 12-year-old and a nine-year-old at home. And so, these are those are very real things in our household are asking these kinds of questions. So, thank you for doing that work. And I think it shows a bit about the heart that's going behind even the book, the ballot and the Bible because you are helping us as a Christian community to better understand the things that have shaped us. And so, I'm curious about this book. You said that it's how Scripture should inform our political beliefs that you're seeking to answer that question. So, I'm curious, why did you feel it necessary to dedicate part of your life to answering that question? That how should Scripture inform our political beliefs?

[00:06:45] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah. I, so this book really came out of, I had no plans to write a book in the middle of a doctoral program. I don't necessarily recommend anyone do that. Um, but it really came out of, I wrote my first book in 2020 of the liturgy of politics and it, it prompted a lot of work with churches and Christian schools. And so, I've spent a lot of the last few years with people trying to figure out how do we live faithful Christian lives in our political world. And over time, spending time with pastors and college students and people in the church. There were two questions I got asked most frequently. The second most frequently asked question was, here's a Bible verse like Romans 13 or when Jesus says give unto to Caesar, what a Caesar's explain that to me, you know, is probably is often coming from someone who said, okay, I heard your whole spiel, but like, this is my hangup, is this verse like, what does this verse mean for our politics? And I love that Christians were going. Yeah. I want. to inform my whole life, and this is my hang up, help me understand this verse.

But then the number one most frequently asked question I would get after events would be some version of how do I have a relationship with my family member, with this person at my church, with my pastor, and what I started to realize was having relationships with Christians, specifically Christians who disagree with us politically, was really challenging for people and people had this intuitive sense that scripture should shape their politics, which I love both of those desires are so good, and we struggle to actually meet them in part because scripture has been so misused in our history, politically. America is not unique in that, but we have our own particular examples of that. And so, I thought, I want to find some resource that helps us not just have some answers like what passages apply to our political life. And there are other books that kind of try and do that. Go through all of scripture and say, like, what of this applies to politics?

And those can be really helpful. But I wanted us to have something that could help us discuss together. What does scripture say? To this people in this place at this time, which I think is really what political theology is. It's not just in the abstract. What does scripture say to our politics? It's here. And now, with the pressures upon us in this time and place, we have to figure out how to act. And so that will require some good hermeneutics. It will require reading our Bibles well. But it will also require some tools for how do we talk to each other about this when most of the models we've been given in the past for talking about scripture and politics with each other is essentially, here's my five verses. Here's your six. I've batted them back and forth. We've done it on social media. We've done it in tense conversations in real life. And we're not curious about what these things mean. We're not interested in, in really studying it together. And so, part of the heart too was, you know, I, churches will ask me a lot, and I love doing this. I don't want to dissuade anyone from doing this, but I get asked by churches a lot to come in and do like a politics night or a politics day and like I'll talk through, and I love doing a basic overview of political theology. But what I've learned is when you do a politics night or a politics day, people come with a lot of assumptions.

Sometimes they come ready to fight. I have actually found the most fruitful conversations about politics in the church in my own experience working in the church. When we are on week six of a Bible study. And we have been able to see that it is true of the people in this group that we care deeply about scripture, that we are trying to discover together what God is saying to God's people. And whoa, there it is. There's a verse that applies to our political life or it provokes a question, or it makes us think deeper about something and the trust that you've built up and the ground that you're on together, this shared ground. of we're trying to figure out what this text means together offers just so many more fruitful possibilities, I think, for figuring out how we should live in our political life than, okay, let's come on a Tuesday night and really, you know, hammer it out together, which can be good, but also can be more challenging.

[00:10:29] **Dr. Tim Koller:** I love that. And you're inviting us into a relationship, not just a set of ideas. And I love that as followers of Jesus, we are following a resurrected Lord. And scripture is a beautiful thing that we, as in the Denver Seminary, we call it, uh, like we're a people of the book. And that's a really beautiful thing. But when we fail to recognize that the fruit of the spirit is a requirement for those who are in the way of Jesus, then We are going to miss out on the opportunity to truly love our neighbor as ourself. So, I love that you're inviting us not into just a set of ideas, but also there's a relational component of this that we cannot miss. So, you had a really beautiful thing at the outset of your book, uh, where I want to actually read it to you because I was like, this is just so good. But You know, I have been in a variety of Christian communities across my faith journey, and there were times in my own journey when I looked at the Bible as a self-help guide, where I'm reading it in isolation.

I'm sitting privately, and that's a beautiful thing, like a devotional time or a quiet time or whatever people like to call that. Those are really good things. But you have this line where you say that the Bible is a gift from God to the church given for a particular purpose to shape that community into the kind of people who can fulfill their commission to make disciples of all nations and steward God's good creation, anticipating its final redemption. So, you clearly think highly of scripture and its role in shaping our community. And you say that Christians should allow our reading of scripture to be informed by both the global historic church and the world and the church in a particular time and place. So why is it important for Christians to approach, approach scripture informed by history and their local community?

[00:12:09] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah. Oh, I love that question. And it's always fun to hear your own words and go, I don't, I don't remember writing those exact words together, but those were pretty good. I like that. Um, yeah, I mean, I do think both of these things are important because we are not just brains on a stick. As the philosopher James K. Smith says, we are people that live in particular times and places and are affected by the cultures that we live in and the communities we're a part of. And I think really importantly for the American church, we don't have to reinvent the wheel. The wheel, we aren't the first Christians to face the challenges that we have faced. I felt this in 2016, I was watching a lot of people sort of assume, well, this must be the first time that Christians have really struggled with what to do in politics. We've got to come up with a new curriculum. We need a new philosophy. We need a new theology. And I was, you know, a seminary student just captivated by the resources that the church had for lots of questions.

And I just thought, well, there must be similar resources for thinking about politics. So, on one level, we need. We need the pressures, too, of the global and historic church, the places where we read something and go, that is such a bizarre way of thinking about that. And then we need to have the humility to stop and say, is this weird? Or am I weird? Like, is my expression of Christianity actually abnormal compared to what has happened in other times and places? And I need to, you know, And the feet of these folks from hundreds of years ago or a different part of the world and learn from them, because we have been shaped by the culture we're in, and we've made mistakes because of it. But we also need to learn about the particular place that we are in. The reason the book is focused on how America and in American history, we have interpreted scripture is because I think, as American Christians, we inherit certain ways of reading. We inherit certain habits. We inherit things from our particular traditions, if you're a Presbyterian or Methodist or Baptist, but we also just, as American Christians, inherit passages that we assume have more or less to say about politics.

What's the language that our political life has just picked up from scripture? What are the habits of reading? You mentioned quiet time. There are kind of American ways of thinking about how the Bible applies to politics, and I could really nerd out about some of the history of concordances and how that plays into all of this, but there's a particular way of thinking about, well, what's the method for asking how scripture informs our political life that we inherit?

So, we don't all need to be as nerdy about history as I am, but I do think we all need to reflect on what am I inheriting? And like we think about with our families, What is good in this inheritance that I want to maintain and what actually is wayward or fallen and I need to maybe even personally repent of or at least lament in my own history and watch for the ways that it could pop up in me now, even though I don't want it to. And so, knowing both of those kinds of lenses of history, I just think makes us. It's more attentive and more humble readers of scripture. It recognizes that me by myself with a Bible is great, but I will make mistakes. I'm a fallen human, um, and I'm a finite human, which is a good thing, but it does mean that I have limits on what I can understand in this text apart from the people of God across history and around the world.

[00:15:09] **Dr. Tim Koller:** That's beautiful. And I didn't think about connecting it to like a family history. One of the things we do at the seminary is a genogram. So, students will go look at their family history to do what you've identified. And I didn't think about it. But the ballot in the Bible is, in essence, a bit of a genogram of going all the way back to the Puritans and being able to say, here are how Puritan thought shapes even what Reagan does and how then Reagan gets cited by Hillary Clinton and many other politicians over the years.

So, until I read this, I had no idea that City on a Hill was being manipulated from what Jesus had originally said through the American political history. So, you have given us a genogram. It's very specific examples from different time periods that I found really interesting and really helpful, but I also was noting that you had some languages and I've, I've created three categories. So, this wasn't the three categories that you necessarily articulated, but I was reading through going, it seems like there are three categories perhaps that we might be able to see when we approach scripture. And one is, like we're using solid hermeneutics, we're being informed by what the original author was saying, what the original audience would have understood it to mean. And we're getting that context. So, like, hey, this is like a good hermeneutical approach. There's that second approach of like, oh, wow, I'm going to take Old Testament passages about Israel and apply them specific to me. In my country or like my specific church, because as the evangelicals, we tend to avoid church history.

And we think church history is like Jesus, Paul, Martin Luther, and my pastor. And like, we miss out on the fullness of it. So we can just totally butcher scriptural passages and do The scriptures injustice that way, but I thought you had this really great observation that like the city on the hill passage, or, uh, there was an example of Mike Pence using Hebrews 12 out of context and replacing Jesus with old glory, meaning like the American flag. And so, I don't know what to call it, but I sort of, I just wrote down sneaky application. Like there's sort of like this sneaky, subtle use of scripture that appeals to people. And it's a more subtle use of scripture that people may not recognize has wandered off course from a solid hermeneutical approach. And so as you are hearing, uh, my like three categories, am I anywhere near where I should be in thinking about the work that you've conducted or do you have thoughts more about like this sneaky application part of this that you're observing as you went through this?

[00:17:39] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah. Oh, I'm really glad to hear that because I do think part of what, you know, everyone who writes a book, then you like talk about it a bunch and you start to realize different things about it that you're like, Oh, I could have said that more clearly. Or you just think like. Oh, I forgot. I really did that, but that's kind of in there. And I think one of the most consistent things I've ended up saying to people is, I think many of us in the last few election seasons in particular have gotten a good sense for the really bad applications. Um, there's some examples even in the book that I'm like, I don't even really need to explain to you why this is bad. Most people reading this book will know this is bad. But the sneakier one, and sneaky is a very good word, is I've used some language and either I'm using it in such a vague way that people might not even catch that I'm using a biblical reference, but what they do subconsciously realize is there's some gravitas to this.

There's some kind of hint of divine transcendence. There's some kind of divine command or promise. And I'm getting that sense, even though I'm not cognizant of, oh, a biblical reference is being used here. City on a hill being a really good example of we, we very rarely connect it back to the Sermon on the Mount. Like you said, Hillary Clinton said Reagan's city on a hill. We're still Reagan's shining city on a hill. Um, it's that shining word has also been added. So, it really has morphed. But it still carries this weight that we might not even be cognizant of. And then there's,

like you gave the Mike Pence example, and there's others that we could think of, too, where there is explicit language, but then it kind of gets, gets pulled into a different direction.

Or even in the Shining City on a Hill example, even if you said to someone, Oh, hey, actually, that's from the Sermon on the Mount. It's talking about the people of God. It's not talking about America. Great. We've got that covered. You might not realize how imbued that language of City on a Hill has become with things that are really foreign to the biblical text. You might even, I've seen this happen, not with the city on a Hill, but with other biblical references. You might even be in a Bible study reading scripture and make assumptions about how to interpret a text that you don't realize are coming from the political context where this passage has been used.

So, you might go to the Sermon on the Mount, read City on a Hill and go, oh, Jesus is saying to the people of God, not to America, but to the people of God. We should be financially prosperous and militarily powerful and meet all of kind of modern American. Standards of success and not even realize that you've done that because that phrase has become so imbued with American ideas of what it is to be successful instead of what the Sermon on the Mount says. Just a few sentences before that. Blessed are the meek and the persecuted and the poor. A very different standard of success and righteousness. So, I, I, I totally think you're right. There's this whole other category of It's not even fair to say it's a wrong use of scripture because it wasn't even a necessarily explicit use.

It was just a sprinkling of biblical language. And this, this used to happen a lot more in our history just because people read the Bible a lot more and heard it preached a lot more. And so that language just popped up. There's a scholar who's done a lot of study of George Washington's use of scripture and a lot of his uses, people think he wasn't even trying. It's just like the King James Bible was the language that he used. And so, it came out of us today. It's more likely with a lot of politicians that it's intentional. Um, they have speech writers that are trying to find a way. And there's a good desire here. A lot of us are looking at our politics and going, there's gotta be more to life than the demands of this moment or the things we're fighting about now.

And we meet that with this little tinge of divine meaning or transcendence. And I think for Christians, then the challenge is not just to say, Oh, that's a wrong use of scripture. That's a wrong interpretation. But to ask, how has this shaped informed me and the communities I'm a part of? How do I, how do I catch those things that are less explicit? How do I catch the ways this is appealing to me? Actually, this feels kind of good. It makes me feel strong or powerful, or it makes me feel like I'm on the right team. Those are spiritual formation questions, which was another kind of element of the book is, this is about hermeneutics, but it is also very much about the kind of people we are when we come to the text.

[00:21:47] **Dr. Tim Koller:** And you do such a great job of helping us to see our own formation and to be able to ask those reflective questions that can move us to a deeper space than just, well, the Bible says, therefore, I'm going to, because that sort of knee jerk reaction is beautiful for younger believers who are looking to submit their lives to the Lordship of Jesus. Like it's a beautiful thing. And yet, as we mature, we've got to be able to approach scripture on its terms, not ours. So, we start to have to shift how we approach it. And I thought the questions you'd offered to us as a community were really good. You're moving us into humility. And I love John Dixon. He has a book called Humilitas, and he talks about how the prideful are insulated from growth because they believe they have everything figured out.

So I think part of what you're inviting us into is a humility in how we're approaching scripture. That we're not Lord over scripture. Scripture is what the Lord has given to us to shape us as a community. So, I love that you invited us into a historical understanding of scriptures and also a global understanding of scriptures, that there are things we can learn from people that are not in our time and place, not in our ethnic background. And so, if we're willing to listen, we can. We're going to understand the breadth of scripture in ways that we wouldn't if it was just Tim Koller sitting by himself in a room, isolated, doing his best to understand what this ancient book says. So, the formation aspect of this, are you hoping that as we ask those questions, that we're going to be able to engage the scriptures and our neighbor differently? Or how would you frame that?

[00:23:15] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Someone just asked me the other night; I joined a book club at a church that had been reading the book. And they asked me, you know, what would, what's your big hope that people would take away from some of this? And I, I hadn't actually been asked that before and I thought about it for a minute and then I thought, gosh, I hope people read their Bibles more, first of all. Like I really hope people come to a chapter in the book and they go, wait, is that in the Bible? I should go look that up. Like, what even is that about? You know? So, um, but also that, that there would be in the midst of all of the misuses, which are just heartbreaking sometimes, especially, you know, there's a whole chapter on civil war and antebellum era and, and the misuse of scripture to, to harm people's lives, to justify the enslavement and abuse of human beings is heartbreaking. But there's also uses that might surprise people in the, in that, the greatest movements towards justice and peace in our country's history were motivated by looking at scripture and saying, this strange book actually prompts me to live in a very different way in light of what God is doing in creation, not even just what I might be able to do.

So, I hope that people go to their Bibles. I hope that they read them with more curiosity. Um, I love, uh, the theologian Karl Barth has an essay where he talks about scripture as the strange new world of the Bible. And you enter into it, and he has this wonderful paragraph where he's like, basically, whatever you go looking for, you will find. If you think this is an ancient dead text, sure, you'll find that. If you think this is alive, it will be alive for you. And I hope that people do that. And I love that you said this curiosity and humility are so related. If you are not humble, you can't be curious. Like you said, you know, everything already, which is again, going back to why we need kids.

We need kids to help us. Like, they have no shame about just being like, I don't know. Give me the answer here. But that's something that is, this is why Jesus says we have to be like little children. I don't think it means be like little children in never asking hard questions. It means be like little children and asking wild questions and trying to see what scripture says to us. And that's where part of the goal of the book too, is to say some folks, and I understand why. Especially folks that are kind of, have kind of been my peers in college and seminary, looked at the misuse of scripture in our politics and said, maybe we just get this whole thing out of here. Like it's been so misused.

Maybe we just, we just drop it. Um, the theologian Stanley Howard was in a book written before I was born said, we need to take the Bible out of the hands of American Christians. Like it's just been so misused. And, um, I think that's, that's a And I understand that impulse. I understand out of grief, just saying like, let's be done. And what I hope people see is maybe we need to take a second look from a, just a different posture. Maybe we need to figure out how to exercise the muscle of being surprised by scripture of going in and saying like, actually, I don't expect to find my politics reflected perfectly here. Or even the demands upon me, particularly as an individual in this book might be different than I expect them to be.

And hopefully doing that in community saying, I want my posture to be one of curiosity and I need other people who are willing to be curious with me. Then, like you said, leads to. Curiosity about each other. I mean, a lot of the folks that have come to me and said, gosh, I just can't have a relationship with this person in my church, or I can't have a relationship with, you know, this family member. I understand there's deep pain that comes there, but often what I'll say is like, learn to ask some questions. So many of us are jumping into these conversations, ready to fight, but what you might discover if you ask, like, hey, where did you learn this information with this article, you're sharing me or when did you start being concerned about this? Or why is this so important to you? I want to understand because I care about you and it's important to you. You might discover things that surprise you, you, you probably won't get answers that just align with every assumption, especially negative assumptions you've made about them. You might learn something really surprising.

And the more that we do that, I don't know that we'll necessarily come to perfect agreement on things. But I do think. We will learn together to view what we're doing as Christians, not as I have correct political opinions and I need to convince you of them, but we're discovering together. I assume that even if I think you're deeply wrong about some things, you know, something that you're indwelt with the Holy spirit. There is something that you can contribute to this that I don't have, and I need you. And I think you need me. And so, for the sake of us doing this, well, let's, let's figure out how to handle it better than we have in the past.

[00:27:40] **Dr. Tim Koller:** I love that. It's such a beautiful vision of being in community together, because if we are coming in with that combative stance, the backfire effect is a very real thing. And we're going to entrench people further. But if we're willing to come in with that humility. And curiosity. Now we can actually find that common ground. I've been on a William Ury kick, so he's the getting to yes. Uh, he was on Carrie Newhoff's podcast. Not that long ago. Great conversation. And, uh, his new book possible. I just am starting and it's, and it's delightful and I love it. As someone who has spent decades and decades in negotiation, he was like, Actually, the key to this is being able to go in, not in a reactionary place or a combative place, but to find the common ground.

So, you have a position. Here's my position. And he's like, Okay, but behind that you have interest. So, what are the interests? And I hear in what you're saying, hey, there are, there are interests behind the position. So, whether someone's coming out as a staunch such and such political position, you can either fight that position, or you can get curious about the interests behind it that caused them to hold that position. So, in Christian community, we've got the opportunity to go to scripture and to, you know, to study it together, to be in community, loving our neighbor, and even, uh, miraculously through the Holy Spirit, loving even our enemy. So, the scriptures are inviting us into this relational, this relational community. But you've highlighted really well in your book, like you've said, uh, you know, civil war is the theological crisis that you cite that material throughout and do a great job exemplifying what was going on in that time period. The civil rights period. I loved that chapter. I just finished Jonathan egg's book, uh, King, a life about Martin Luther King jr. And such a great representation in your book of the, the, the good and some of the, the negative, as we see that movement taking shape and then. The give under Caesar chapter. Absolutely fascinating. I loved it as more recent history. Like I'm going like, oh, I remember that. Oh, that's fascinating. But you then transition into Jeremiah 29. And so, I found it compelling. And Timothy Keller was a person that helped me understand that is gospel and life work. You cited inside the book as a helpful resource. What was it about Jeremiah 29? That began to shift your thinking and might offer us some hope as we engage in this political theology.

[00:30:03] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Yeah, I mean, I was in college, I think, which I was a student at Liberty University in the lead up to the 2016 election. So at an institution where this question of faith and politics was in your face, we had politicians on campus, we had national media on campus, and it was in that context that I was first introduced to via a few things, including Tim Keller, not only this passage, which I'm sure I had read before. In fact, I recently realized it was actually the first sermon I ever preached when I was like early in college, interning at a church. Didn't remember that, but it is, I'm writing a dissertation now on similar themes. So, you just like never let go of those same things.

Um, but I was introduced to, not just that passage, but to the idea that here was a picture of our life in a political world. And what I have, even since writing the book, have seen more clearly is it seems like even in this passage to this, this Jeremiah 29 passage for people who aren't familiar in the middle of the wild book of Jeremiah, which I is probably my favorite book of the Bible, a letter to the exiled people of God, after he has spent many chapters telling them judgment is coming, please repent. Eventually judgment is coming regardless. Give yourself over to it. And no one has listened. And his instructions to this exile, this justly exiled people, people who are receiving punishment for, Their sins against God, their idolatry, their injustice. But now we're living under the rule of a foreign nation that hates them and won't make their lives easy.

His instructions are to build houses and plant gardens and have families and to seek the peace and prosperity of the city into which I have brought you. Pray for it because in its flourishing, you will find your flourishing. And what I love about that passage, but as a challenge for us is many of us, even if we want to root our understanding of Christian life and politics in that passage. We pick one side or the other to emphasize, we either pick the plant gardens and build houses and have families, the internal stuff, build a flourishing community, don't care as much about the Babylonians that are oppressing you build the best community that you can build. Or we emphasize the seek the peace and prosperity of the city part and say, get out there, seek the peace of the, of the city, get involved in the politics of it.

They couldn't do that quite as much at the time, but we can get involved in the politics of it. And we need both halves of this. We need this internal cultivation, this spiritual formation in community in order to be the kind of people who can seek the peace of the city without it destroying our souls. Um, because there are real, there are real threats. We can go into politics armed with the best theology, think we'll do a really good job, not like any of our ancestors, we'll do great. And we miss that we need that internal work to be the kind of people who can do it well. Even the rest of that chapter, it's kind of a pet peeve of mine.

I didn't include very much of it in the book for time's sake and space, but the rest of that chapter is about discerning between true and false prophets. That is the task for us is to say, who is rightly discerning what the people of God should do here and now. And just as it was true in Jeremiah's time that with all of our biases, with our sin, we struggle to figure out who is correctly leading us. What is the right thing for us to do? It was true then, and it's true now. And I think the challenge for us is to say, we're holding this. Tension between the internal and the external, and we're constantly asking for the Holy Spirit, the gift that we now have that they didn't to help us discern who is rightly guiding us, who is rightly leading us, um, not just in our politics, but within the church, who's helping us see what we should do and recognizing some people will lead us astray. There are, there are temptations for us to act in ways that wouldn't be faithful. And we've got to have this internal and external in order to do it well.

[00:33:39] **Dr. Tim Koller:** I love that the interior world overflowing into the environment that we're in. One of my mentors some years ago encouraged me to memorize Romans 15, 13. And so that

made the God of hope. And I was like, wait, what? And fill you with joy and peace. As you place your trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. And that was like this, whoa, that's, that's not part of how I understand the Christian life to be. I just need to acquire more head knowledge. And yet, and what you're doing in the ballot in the Bible is you're, you're actually helping us to anchor. to the sovereignty of God, anchor to the reality of the Holy Spirit indwelling us, helping us to anchor to the resurrection of Jesus and to approach the scriptures with far more humility and far more curiosity about the people around us.

So, this has been a gift for me to read. So, thank you for creating this and building this. And I am hopeful that more people will go out and pick up the ballot in the Bible. It is a very worthwhile read. And you've answered all the questions related to who we should vote for and which scripture verses that we can clobber other people with you. You've provided all of that. Yeah. Uh, but sincerely, I'm, I'm thankful that. This was a resource that gave us a balcony view of the history and the context of what's going on around us. And so, as we wrap up our conversation, and I'm so thankful you were willing to spend time here on Engage360. I'm curious, are there any closing thoughts you'd like to leave us with related to this text or our presence inside the American community?

[00:35:07] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** I think the last thing I would say is just, like I said before, we should read the Bible more. We should read it in bigger chunks. We should read it in community more. It's awkward to be in a small group and say, we're reading five chapters. We're just going to sit through and hear the whole arc of this story, but I think it's really worth it. And part of why it's so important is not just, I love the Bible. We should read it more. But there are places in scripture that we don't think of as politically relevant texts that nevertheless should be shaping our public life. I think Christianity has great gifts to our public life that include things like how scripture describes human communities, best functioning, that we should bring to our policy advocacy, but scripture also says a lot about the kind of people we need to be to be of real service to our communities. And what I wish we would do sometimes is just like, let's have a. Have a political Bible study. And then most of the passages are like about the fruit of the spirit, about temptations towards power, about the fact that Christ is coming to return and redeem all things. And, and we need all of that. We need the whole council of scripture, not just for our spiritual lives, but for our public lives as well.

[00:36:13] **Dr. Tim Koller:** That is beautiful. I love that articulation and that vision of what it looks like for us as a Christian community to be faithful to steward what the Lord has entrusted to us faithfully. So may the Lord bless you, Kaitlyn in your doctoral work and in your work with the Holy Post and in Curiously, Kaitlyn all of these things are such a beautiful gift to our community and as an Engage360, as a Denver Seminary community, thank you for joining us on this podcast.

[00:36:37] **Kaitlyn Schiess:** Thank you for having me. This was so much fun.

[00:36:39] **Dr. Tim Koller:** Well, friends, we're grateful that you've chosen to spend some time with us. If you get the chance, please leave us a rating or review wherever you listen to podcasts. And please send any questions or comments to us at podcast@denverseminary.edu. In addition, visit denverseminary.edu for more information and resources about Denver seminary such as events, degree programs, including our theology, justice, and social advocacy program, and other episodes of Engage360, including full transcripts. We're grateful for your interest, support and prayers until next time, may the Lord bless you.