

GO DEEPER: FINDING TRUTH IN POLARIZED TIMES

A Reflection Guide for "Beyond Left vs. Right: How to Read the News in Polarized Times"

INTRODUCTION

In this timely episode of Making Sense of Faith, Adam Hamilton invites us to examine how we consume news and engage with information in our deeply polarized world. As you reflect on this conversation, use this guide to explore your own relationship with news media and consider how critical thinking and love can transform the way you stay informed and engaged.

3 REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Take a moment to consider your own news consumption habits:

1. **What surprised you most about Adam's description of news as a "manipulation machine"?** How do you recognize when headlines or coverage are designed to trigger an emotional response rather than inform you?
2. **Think about the last time you posted something on social media about a news story or current event.** Did you pause to fact-check, consider other perspectives, or wait before posting? What might have been different if you had?
3. **Adam talks about the danger of allowing news consumption to lead to hatred of people we disagree with.** Can you identify a person or group that you've felt hatred towards because of what you've seen in the news? What would it look like to take a strong stand on an issue while still loving them?

2 KEY INSIGHTS

1. Critical Thinking Is a Spiritual Practice

"Jesus says we're to love God with our heart, soul, and mind. The Greek word for mind is 'dianoia'—another English translation of that word is critical thinking."

When Jesus commanded us to love God with our minds, he was calling us to something more than intellectual exercise. Critical thinking—the ability to ask questions, seek truth, understand context, and consider multiple perspectives—is an act of worship. This becomes especially important in how we consume news and information.

Question: How might your news consumption change if you viewed critical thinking as a way of loving God?

Reflection: Think of a recent news story that triggered a strong emotional response. What additional questions could you have asked? What sources could you have consulted to get a fuller picture?

2. Slowing Down Is Countercultural—And Essential

"Pause and think before you post. Don't immediately post on social media your response to some news story until you've done two things: wait a little while to see if that's the whole story, and then make sure you've done your research."

In a culture that rewards instant reactions and viral responses, choosing to slow down is a radical act. Adam shares vulnerably about learning this lesson the hard way, posting too quickly about a public figure's assassination and later having to revise his words. The discipline of pausing creates space for wisdom, nuance, and love to emerge.

Question: What fears or pressures make it difficult for you to slow down before responding to news?

Reflection: Consider implementing a personal rule: wait 24 hours before posting about any news story that triggers a strong emotional response. How might this change your social media presence?

1 PRACTICE EXERCISE

The Multiple Perspectives Challenge

This week, choose one significant news story and commit to exploring it from multiple angles:

1. **Identify a story** that matters to you or that triggered a strong emotional response
2. **Find coverage from at least three different sources** across the political spectrum (for example: one progressive source like MSNBC or New York Times, one conservative source like Fox News or Wall Street Journal, and one international or independent source)
3. **As you read each source, ask:**
 - What facts are consistent across all sources?
 - How does the language differ in describing the same events?
 - What might be the motivations of the people involved from different perspectives?
 - Where do I see my own biases being confirmed or challenged?
4. **Journal your observations:**
 - What surprised you about how the story was covered differently?
 - Did gaining multiple perspectives change your understanding or emotional response?
 - What did you learn about your own biases and assumptions?
5. **Before forming a final opinion or posting anything**, sit with the complexity for at least 24 hours

QUOTES TO CONSIDER

On News Addiction: *"I find I can't sleep after I'm doing that, you know, or I wake up in the middle of the night doing the same thing...I had to say this is not healthy."*

On Finding Balance: *"There are no completely unbiased sources. Everybody has biases...We've gotta keep watching the news though. We've gotta be aware of what's happening in our world, but I think we have, for many of us, we've become over-consumed."*

On Understanding Others: *"The ability to go, I'm gonna give the benefit of the doubt, or at least I'm going to try to understand what's motivating this person, what might be the positive things that are motivating this person. It doesn't mean I agree with what they did."*

On Guarding Against Hatred: *"I think where Christians committed Christians can find themselves hating as a result of hearing the news...I have to remember, even if it's an issue that I'm really disappointed or upset about, I can speak about that thing as being wrong. I can even speak about the people who are making bad decisions, but I will not hate them."*

On Disagreement and Love: *"We can disagree and love each other. And you know what, you're probably right about some things...When I've met with people that I had strong disagreements about but we sat and talked, we found that we actually agreed on a whole lot more than we disagreed on."*

CLOSING REFLECTION

In a world that profits from our outrage and division, choosing to think critically and love generously is a revolutionary act. As you move forward this week, remember that staying informed doesn't require losing your peace, and taking strong stands doesn't require abandoning love.

Consider this challenge: What if the way you consumed and responded to news became a witness to a better way? What if your social media presence was marked not by instant reactions but by thoughtful engagement? What if you became known as someone who could disagree strongly while still loving deeply?

The world desperately needs people who can hold truth and love together, who can stand for justice while building bridges, who can be informed without being consumed. With God's help, you can be one of those people.

This reflection guide was created to accompany the Making Sense of Faith podcast episode "Beyond Left vs. Right: How to Read the News in Polarized Times." For more resources like this, visit makingsenseoffaith.com.