



Great Leaders Lead Us To Be Great

REGINA CATES

Chapter 9 of Regina Cates' soon to be published book,

The Conversation Jesus Wants Us To Have:

Appreciate That Great Leaders Lead Us to Be Great

Advanced Praise for *The Conversation*

"This book touches your soul. Regina's perspective on the honest, vulnerable, and loving characteristics of Jesus show us how Christianity should foster a "what Jesus would do" approach to loving and respecting one another. I highly recommend *The Conversation*. It is a beautiful tribute to the heart of Jesus!"

Kristen Cannata

"*The Conversation* is so uplifting! Here is a reassuring book for those who have experienced the absence of love and inclusion in the institutional church. For all who are weak and heavy-laden, Regina Cates proclaims the good news that Christ loves every last one of us unconditionally. A beautiful and inspiring work, this book is a must-read, not only for those of us who have been wounded by organized religion, but for those of us who have been complicit in the wounding of others as well."

Reverend Britt Skarda, D. Div.

Senior Pastor, Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church, Little Rock, Arkansas

"As a Jewish woman and longtime Buddhist practitioner, I wondered if there was anything in Regina's book that I would relate to. And yet as I read, I kept pumping my fist in the air and shouting "Yes!" Every word resonated deeply and supported the beliefs I hold dear. Regina tells us why, right now, it's important to lead with our heart, and what actions we can take every day to accomplish that. In light of current issues from climate change to democracy, this book will be a milestone. I'm recommending it to everyone I know."

Tina Rubin

"This book touched every part of my being with its thoughtful and loving account of how Jesus would want us to navigate the modern world. For so many years, and like so many others who have felt discarded by modern religions' bias and at times its outright bigotry and hatred, I found *The Conversation* brought me back to the basics of what Jesus taught - love and acceptance of all. Regina does a magnificent job of breaking down how truly simple it is to return to Jesus's love within our hearts so we end our judgmental and divisive ways. She invites us to explore our hearts and the teachings of Jesus to not only better ourselves but ultimately better the world."

Dawn Wilson

"*The Conversation* raises vital questions for the Christian community and the nation at large. The health of the Church today is threatened by an unholy marriage of politics and compromised religious beliefs. The historic tenets of Christianity have been lost in the radical and often ruthless philosophy of today's political system. And yet, as Regina clearly points out with penetrating examples and solid facts, that errant philosophy is using Christian faith to promote a withering and dishonorable approach to both Christian belief and government policy. This book has profound and workable solutions to the spiritual and political crises of our day. I highly recommend it."

Reverend Timothy Moody, D. Div.

Retired Christian Minister, Writer, Blogger: The Unclad Soul, Dallas, Texas

"A definitive guide to the true teachings of Jesus Christ, and all-inclusive anatomy of the Golden Rule as it should be preached and practiced. Regina Cates has written a new, practical, modern bible and must-read for Christians and non-Christians, atheists and agnostics, multi-generational influencers, and especially all ordained and lay preachers, ministers and members of the clergy."

Joyce Leddel

Foreword



This is a dangerous book! It will make you question your beliefs and rethink your values.

And, it is enlightening at the same time!

It follows an exceptional personal journey from confusion, despair, and depression to a newer and fresher world of self-discovery and grace.

It is a journey of faith--one often replicated by others as life develops and we all grow and mature.

The Inipi Ceremony in the Lakota Sweat Lodge was pivotal for Regina and becomes something of a template for her growing sense of spiritual self-realization. Empathy and integrity are a large part of that journey.

Her sharing of the times of sexual abuse are searing... and instructive. Behavior such as she endured should be reported and ended. And her many cues about how to raise strong boys into fine men and strong girls into fine women are apt and needful.

Her use of “put together words” is provocative, and each contains a teaching moment:

- crazy making
- heart-connection
- Jesus-like-love
- Jesus-like-boundaries
- like-hearted people
- love yourself awake
- self-induced apathy

Regina speaks of her “heart family,” of which I consider myself a part. I am grateful for this book and my friendship with Regina. She has become my teacher. My faith journey has been extended, as it always is, by being questioned a bit and nudged by a good friend.

Mike Harper, *D.Div., Retired United Methodist Minister, Fellow Struggler, Follower of Jesus*

*"I'm a little pencil in the hand of a writing God,
who is sending a love letter to the world."*

~ Mother Teresa

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I was thirteen when my father took me on a day trip to Austin. One of our stops was the Texas Senate, the upper house of the state legislature. The official proceedings captured my attention, as did one senator in particular, Barbara Jordan. She was the first black woman elected to the Texas Senate. Her record was one of public service with authenticity, empathy, and courage.

Maybe Dad hoped the experience would ignite a desire within me to someday run for office. Growing up, I remember Mom and Dad actively supported the women and men they believed were best qualified to fill leadership positions in local, state, and national government. While I did not pursue a career in government, my parents' enthusiasm did help cultivate within me a deep appreciation for the honesty and dedication of sincere public servants—those women and men who work to uphold justice for all citizens, as well as promote the common welfare of all.

Regardless of political party affiliation, dedicated public servants have a verifiable record of accomplishments that have bettered the communities they serve. These include proposing and enacting legislation to guarantee equal rights for citizens and access to dependable jobs, health care, and higher education, as well as environmental sustainability to protect community health. In addition to proactively and efficiently addressing the needs of the citizens they represent, public servants are dedicated to defending the rights of their citizens—including those rights outlined in the United States Constitution.

Government officials are required either to swear on a religious book or affirm a non-religious oath of office, which legally binds them to protect our right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They are bound to defend our freedom from unjust laws, rigged voting systems, and a tyrannical government. They have a duty to keep church and state separate to safeguard us against those who twist their religious and distorted ideas of an omnipotent being to press agendas of inequality, control, and prejudice.

Leaders of integrity are those who encourage principled excellence among their colleagues and constituents. They consistently behave in ways that reflect the values of their honorable character. They apply the same standards of behavior to their

own political party that they do to those they view as opponents. True servant-leaders know, for a system of democracy to work, our governmental representatives have to be diverse. Genuine public servants, whether Democratic, Independent, or Republican, are willing to cross the aisle to do what is best for the country and its variety of citizens. They share power equally and use the political influence they have on behalf of those citizens who are on the short end of the power stick. And they guard against anyone, themselves included, who abuse positions of power.

Wouldn't it be important to Jesus that we are conscientiously active in our governmental process by deeply caring that leaders of integrity represent us?

I believe so because when we stop to think about it, we realize Jesus was a public servant. Even though he did not serve in government, Jesus is considered one of the most famous servant-leaders in history who devoted, and gave, his life to better the lives of people. And, Christ was a living example of integrity.

He modeled unity, support, and honor. Jesus treasured justice, discernment, and forethought. He acted with humility, charity, and accountability. Being trustworthy, inclusive, and self-disciplined were also important behaviors to him. However, Jesus was not a politician. He was not motivated by fame, fortune, or power. He did not promote himself. Jesus did not serve humanity with the goal of having a religion created for him. Rather, his desire was to aid people from a place of respect, which he consistently displayed through the decency of his character as he took action. Operating from truthfulness, compassion, and honor made Christ a great leader and an enduring inspiration.

Yet, would Jesus, a person of the highest integrity, be electable in today's political climate?

I believe Jesus would question why we do not value honorable character as our most important characteristic, and as the most significant aspect of those we select for leadership positions. Which means we need to ask ourselves some tough questions about what being a great leader would mean to Jesus. And what great leadership should mean to us as admirers of Christ.

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Because it seems many of us who claim to love Jesus have forgotten, or never knew, the spiritual responsibility we have to God to value being people of honor, peace, and empathy; and the obligation we have to God to fashion a world guided by governmental leaders who inspire us to be honest, responsible, and inclusive, too.

Wouldn't Jesus ask why we seem to have thrown out the importance of respectability and truthfulness when selecting our governmental leaders?

Do we believe Jesus would disregard ethics and relevant experience in considering what makes one qualified for a leadership position?

I invested twenty years pursuing a formal education. I received a high school diploma, an associate's degree, and my bachelor's. After being in the work world for several years, I returned to earn a master's degree in leadership. It was a three-year, forty-eight credit-hour executive program in public and private management, which meant I was required to have a certain number of years of supervisory, management, or executive experience to be considered for admission. Prior to receiving my master's and after, my employment history included running for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. I was privileged to manage, recruit, and train staff and allocate budgets. I wrote and implemented long-term strategic and marketing plans. As a leader, I was the face of the organization and served as liaison to other organizations. While I readily admit I do not know everything, I know a few things about what, overall, does and does not work.

Effective leaders know without open and honest communication, no trust will be built. Without trust, there will be no success for the leadership.

Organizations do not succeed, long-term, if the goals of leadership and those in positions of power fluctuate or differ from the goals of the majority of shareholders—or the majority of citizens in our democracy.

Listening to people from the lowest to highest levels is mandatory for decision makers. Without awareness of and caring about the needs of the people who make up an organization (i.e., the majority of citizens), no leadership will be effective or last any length of time.

Of greatest importance to selecting effective and trustworthy leaders is recognizing ethical, moral, and legal integrity begins at the top. Leaders of integrity raise the personal conduct of those within the organization. They are generous, have empathy for people, and are skilled at conflict resolution and peacekeeping. Trustworthy leaders enhance the credibility of the organization within the minds of those they serve. We most admire leaders who remain people of honorable character, no matter how big a challenge it is to prevent themselves from abandoning their integrity.

Wasn't Jesus the gold standard of a leader of integrity? So shouldn't his honorable character be the model for our behavior and that of all leaders?

Don't we agree that Jesus would consider great leaders to be those women and men who are the guardians of well-run, stable governments that champion religious tolerance, cooperation, and justice for all citizens?

No matter what position of authority someone holds, to be great, she or he has to be committed to honesty, empathy, respect, equality, and responsibility. In order to love Jesus, our spiritual obligation is to behave aligned with the values of integrity too.

Of course, we are not going to be perfect. Neither will our leaders be perfect. However, Christ would remind us, in order to be a great nation and world, we have to be governed by women and men of great integrity.

Which means, we cannot make Jesus-like, principled decisions about someone's integrity based on the fact that they belong to the political party we identify with. Jesus wants us to do our homework and identify genuine public servants who have a verifiable record of honest and just service to the majority of citizens. And Jesus absolutely wants us to refuse to support people whose lack of integrity is an insult to him.

Can we honestly rationalize Jesus wanting us to support people who run for office who have records of corruption, sexual misconduct, suppression of people's rights, or dishonesty?

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How can we honor the servant-leader Jesus and yet support those politicians who are bought and paid for by business or special interest groups or have personal agendas, such as limiting people's rights, or tax cuts for the wealthy, or making money for themselves and their friends?

Jesus was killed by those who did not value living with integrity. They did not value social justice. Those in political and religious power viewed Christ's honorable-servant approach to leadership as a threat to the authoritarian grasp they held over the masses. The rulers were intimidated because Jesus valued leaders who served and protected the rights of the people. No matter if it was government, religion, or challenging social norms, Jesus was not shy about calling out those who abused their positions of power over people.

Didn't Jesus make it clear the autocratic desire of his apostles to rule was unacceptable?

His need was for them to be thoughtful servant leaders. To fashion an effective democracy, we have the same need. We have to be governed by women and men of principle who are brave and bold, yet humble. They are respectful of the connection they have with those they lead. Women and men of integrity want to be held accountable for the influence they have over us.

Which means, Jesus would not believe those who work to limit the rights of people or sow divisiveness and chaos are great leaders. He would not set people up to lose so he could win. An honorable person, Jesus did not lie, cheat, or use his position for his own gain. He did not abuse people. Jesus would not deny science and fact. He would not label factual news fake. He would not cut other people down in an attempt to raise himself up. And, Jesus would not place value in or trust people who spread slander, gossip, and discord or promote bullying and dishonesty.

What kind of shallow, irresponsible, and uninformed person would I be if I allowed myself to be influenced by anyone who tears down an opponent or opposing political party?

Wouldn't Jesus demand better from me? And from us all?

During one election cycle, a man came to my apartment door campaigning for a local politician who was running for state office. The man spoke for a few minutes about the candidate's qualifications and handed me a flyer. He asked if his candidate had my vote. I told him I wanted to investigate the candidate further, to do my own research, in order to make the most informed decision. Faced with my noncommittal response, the man began to bad-mouth his candidate's opponent.

God wants us to live from the soul we are and use our soul's integrity to determine right from wrong, just from unjust, logical from irrational. Soul is the part of us that cares what Jesus would do when faced with the irresponsible, divisive, and discriminatory words and actions of anyone, including those who desire or hold a position of leadership and influence, or their representatives.

I politely and firmly told the man canvassing for the candidate, "I believe the most important work we undertake, whether it's in politics or everyday life, is to learn to deal with our differing views by behaving in courteous and fact-based ways, rather than tearing one another down."

How does the ridicule of another person or group of people feel to our heart?

Don't we need to differentiate between constructive critique, which is logical, fact-based, and respectful, versus opinion and divisive trash-talk, which offer nothing positive?

Each day we are exposed to those who attempt to destroy other people in an effort to build up their political party or themselves. They are supported by those who listen to and allow themselves to be influenced by hate speech, bullying, and slanderous attacks on someone seen as a political, religious, or social rival. Consumers of hate and facts-optional disinformation do not question the credibility of people who spread conspiracy theories or bigoted, homophobic, divisive, or xenophobic propaganda.

Rather than being devoted to facts and the integrity of a person, trash-talking public figures are addicted to the artificial attention they get from fame, and

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to the appeal of having influence and power over people. These liars and vendors of disinformation, confusion, and imaginary facts offer preposterous concepts to gain attention but nothing of value to an enlightened, responsible society.

Do we believe an honest and respectful Jesus would think purveyors of injustice, discrimination, divisiveness, and lies offer something worth listening to?

Isn't it logical to believe Jesus would ask us to support people whose public record reflects truthfulness, rather than those who have a record of attacking people or placing blame elsewhere?

No matter if the truth points out how we are wrong, misguided, or misinformed, to do right by Jesus, we need to care to be informed. In order to make decisions based on what Jesus would do, we need to be knowledgeable of the facts about the issues and the people we entrust with leadership positions, whether in government or elsewhere.

Isn't it logical Jesus wants us to have access to fact-based investigative reporting and evidence upon which to base our decisions about whom to elect to or remove from positions of power?

One of my first jobs after college was as director of classified advertising for the Columbia Missourian newspaper. Part of my responsibility was to supervise journalism students who were enrolled in the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Upon graduation, some of these young people wanted to pursue careers as investigative journalists. They chose reporting because they wanted to make the world a better place by helping expose corruption, greed, dishonesty, and phony news, and to report on matters of interest and safety to the public. In order to be well-rounded, they were required to work in different divisions of the newspaper, including advertising.

It was through the experience of working with journalism professionals and students that I came to admire the depth of integrity and honor of principled career investigative journalists. These people were not tabloid ambulance chasers. They

were not vendors of fake news, conspiracy theories, or half-truths. They did not spread gossip or vilify people. They did not intentionally mislead people because of some hidden agenda. They dug deep to uncover tangible facts, to cite multiple sources, to ensure what they reported was true and verifiable.

It is because of women and men of honesty who are seasoned, fact-finding reporters, that you and I have access to the truth. Each day countless people of honor work hard to ensure truth speaks to power. To get the facts straight. To present us with information so we can be informed about matters that concern all of us.

Don't we care to be informed of the facts upon which truth depends?

Jesus would say there is no such thing as alternative facts. Facts do not change because someone misrepresents or construes evidence or misuses books like the Bible to support their position or views. Like those who spread conspiracy theories, people who spread pretend facts have an agenda of sowing discourse, fear, and distraction and don't mind lying to do so.

Jesus would be disappointed by those who say they love him but who are deaf to this slanderous and fraudulent irresponsibility. Jesus would remind us gossip, bullying, and tearing people down is never aligned with what he taught. He would question why anyone would allow themselves to be influenced by opinionated news, propaganda, and false political attack ads that defame people. He would clearly state the practice of misrepresenting an opponent's position as dishonest. Jesus would not condone the "straw man" practice of putting words into an opponent's mouth or spreading untruths about an opponent's position on issues.

What would Jesus think about the normalization of "nasty," dishonest politics?

Don't we need to heed the wisdom of U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson, who said, "Politics don't corrupt people. People corrupt politics"?

Sowing division, chaos, and misinformation are not behaviors of great leaders, or people of integrity. Nothing positive is added to our democratic

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process when we reward our representatives, or their representatives, for slandering opponents. We cannot let those with biased agendas tell us what to believe and whom to support. Name calling and attack ads are cheap political tricks. Mistaking opinionated commentary for truth only results in our being uninformed to the facts. Allowing ourselves to be manipulated by salacious, tabloid-like, click-bait, facts-optional claims about candidates, or people in general, is admitting we are not interested in fact-checking the public record, and that means we are not interested in truth.

Jesus did not lie or exaggerate. He would not find tearing people down in an attempt to build ourselves up suitable or benign behavior. Jesus would not consider anyone who bad-mouths people to be leadership material. Bullying is never moral, ethical, or acceptable to God, Jesus, or to a healthy society.

How does it feel to be on the receiving end of gossip, trolling, bullying, or slander?

Without caring about truth and respect, aren't we crucifying the values of integrity (respect, honesty, cooperation, etc.) Jesus held dear?

Doesn't character assassination say more about the person who is trash-talking than it does about the person being talked about?

Do we honestly think Jesus would make any type of decision based on negative trash-talk?

As citizens we hold much responsibility for how widespread intimidation and the vilification of those perceived to be opponents have become. Without raising a unified voice to demonize these practices within our sphere of influence, we have allowed negativity and denigration of people to seep into every part of life. The epidemic of disrespect throughout our political, social, business, religious, educational, and entertainment environments would be embarrassing to Jesus.

Jesus would ask why we believe it is acceptable to participate in, or be influenced by, or excuse maligning people as if this act were harmless, necessary, or standard operating procedure. It is

not harmless to those whose reputations are ruined as a result of defamation, fact-less opinionated news, and lies. It is never Christlike to attack those we have disagreements with or who are different from us. We cannot love Jesus and sit by, ignoring the real danger our silence has to perpetuate this damaging behavior.

Christ would tell us without hesitation: Hate speech is not free speech!

Although we may live in a free country and have a constitutional right to the freedom of speech, we are not entitled to voice, text, print, or post to social media what we want without regard to the consequences of our actions. Action without forethought and accountability are not free. There are always consequences, as our God-given gift of free will comes with a great amount of personal responsibility. Only by being accountable for our actions do we maintain our integrity as we navigate within social systems that often allow and encourage pushing acceptable boundaries to intolerable, ridiculous, and dangerous extremes.

Doesn't personal freedom and God's gift of free will require us to operate at the highest levels of responsibility?

Don't we need to stop pretending our actions don't impact people?

Isn't what matters to Jesus that we stay aligned with the values of honesty and respect so we behave as people of integrity? And identify people who don't live with integrity?

"Treat people as we want to be treated" clearly means we are charged by God with creating a world where we, our children, our neighbors, and our public servants are safe from being bullied, slandered, trolled, and ridiculed. We can create the safe and respectful attitude God wants us to extend to one another by acknowledging the ego-motivation behind all trash-talk. No matter how divisive speech is delivered, or by whom, we turn this wickedness off. When there are no supporters for people who lie and vilify others, they will have no more influence in society and will cease to exist. However, this is a goal we have to work together to achieve.

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God is asking each of us to actively bring about this positive change. We do so by refusing to participate in trash-talk. We seek out those honest people who provide the proof we need to determine a person's integrity by their consistent actions.

For our safety and security, don't we need to evaluate the greatness of someone by the way their words, actions, and attitudes align with honestly and responsibility?

And determine when they do not?

God gave us a huge gift in our ability to think critically, not in a negative or condescending way, but with the power to objectively evaluate, through the integrity and logic of soul, whom and what we see, read, or hear. From the moment a person steps onto the political scene, we are charged with making certain, through our own due diligence, a candidate's words and actions are truthful. We are to look fairly and listen carefully. We accept that these women and men will not be perfect, but they will admit their mistakes.

As we fill every position of responsibility, our job is to seek credible information about the candidate's record of behavior, upon which we can base a "what Jesus would do" decision about them or one of their political appointees. When we feel the slightest twinge of hesitation, we are to listen to the internal navigation system of honorable integrity God gave us, called soul.

Wouldn't Jesus want us to refuse to support people whose actions reveal they are a bully, or corrupt, or that they defame rivals in an attempt to build themselves up?

It doesn't matter whether the job is secretary of state, tax assessor, school board member, mayor, judge, or president of the United States. The integrity of our soul is not biased along political party lines or position of leadership responsibility. Integrity of soul is only focused on making certain someone we support is worthy of the backing of Jesus too.

I believe Jesus would question the allegiance of anyone who ignores hateful, dishonest, and divisive behavior. If there is something we see or hear that feels deceitful, illogical, or unjust to our

soul, we can rest assured it is. When these types of negative twinges arise in our heart, we owe it to ourselves to do a rapid reversal and shut the door on the candidate. We can be certain the person is unqualified for a leadership position, as our soul is a powerful detector of corruption, bigotry, and the inclination to abuse power.

Doesn't it make sense Jesus wants us to use critical reasoning to gather credible information about whom to entrust with or remove from positions of power and influence?

Don't we make Jesus proud by making decisions based on evidence and logic rather than emotion?

We cannot allow ourselves to make excuses for unethical and irresponsible people, no matter how they promise to make our lives better, safer, or richer. Our lives do not become easier or more fulfilling when people suffer injustice and inequality. When those, who do not value living with honesty, equality, and responsibility are given, or take, power, their culture of misconduct contaminates whatever and whomever it touches. When anyone, or any group of people, in a position of influence consistently demonstrates the worst of themselves, and we ignore the fact of their actions, we are not behaving aligned with the integrity of Jesus. That means people who love Jesus are to support women and men who behave, think, and speak like Christ.

For instance, integrity-driven people who truly love and honor Jesus do not use the Bible to weave a "divine vessel" theology around a political candidate, and certainly not around anyone whose history is void of the honorable character of Jesus. Similarly, genuine lovers of Christ do not attempt to use the Chinese philosophical concept of a mandate of heaven in an attempt to legitimize the circumstances under which their chosen "ruler" is allowed to hold office. This philosophy states good rulers will be allowed by God to rule, and dictatorial, unjust rulers would have their mandate revoked. No genuine democracy has a ruler. And not one leader considered by history to be great was corrupt, unjust, amoral, or abused their position of power.

God gave you and me power over the choices we make. That means God is not in control of our country or world politics. If God were in control,

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people of honorable integrity, like Jesus, would be serving in governments around the world. Peace and love would rain down. Therefore, we, the citizens, are charged by God to identify and support true leaders of integrity, Christian and non-Christian alike, who consistently behave respectfully, like Jesus.

To honor Jesus, we must fervently dispute attempts by some Christians to rationalize why God would use any bully or wrongdoer as a divine instrument. I believe Jesus, and God, would agree with John Fea, a professor of evangelical history at Messiah College in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, who states that twisting the Bible in this way “is the theo-political version of money laundering, taking Scripture to ... clean [up] your candidate.”²

Jesus brought a message of living with integrity, the divine action of love that has the power to bring the world into the peaceful balance God desires. This truth remains, no matter how twisted the rationalizations become to justify God would ever use an oppressor to represent Christ and Christianity. Let God’s grace as demonstrated through Jesus’ integrity be the guide, for every person who calls themselves Christian or an admirer of Christ, on how we are to conduct our religious, political, and social lives.

To genuinely love Jesus, we need to appreciate the vital importance of honesty and respect in helping us to clearly see, predict, and prevent an outcome that gives ruthless people a voice, power, and influence. We need to believe negative behavior the first time we witness it. We have a duty not to give the benefit of the doubt to those whose words and actions prove they are dishonest or disrespectful.

To honor Jesus, we demand his integrity from anyone who desires to hold any leadership role in our government. Because only when we share a mutual devotion to living aligned with integrity will we come together to find common ground, based on fact, truth, justice, and accountability, all of which a democracy requires. Therefore, as citizens, we need to choose public servants who are honest and transparent, to abolish the egocentric quest for political power and the pressing of biased and dangerous agendas.



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The Conversation Jesus Wants Us To Have.

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