

A photograph of a forest path with sunlight filtering through the trees, creating a warm and contemplative atmosphere. The path is covered in fallen leaves and branches, and the trees are tall and slender, with their trunks visible against the bright sky.

WHEN THE **CULTURE TREMbles**

*A Pastor's Guide to
Speaking in Crisis*

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MIDATLANTIC

When the Culture Trembles
A Pastor's Guide to Speaking in Crisis

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Introduction:

Why Pastors Must Speak When the Culture

When the world shakes, people instinctively look to their spiritual leaders. Whether it's the aftermath of a terrorist attack, the death of a public figure, or a controversial national tragedy, congregations gather on Sunday asking silent questions: What does this mean? How should I respond? Where is God in all of this?

As a pastor, your words carry weight in moments like these. To say nothing is to say something. Silence can be read as indifference, fear, or even agreement with the loudest voices in the culture. At the same time, careless words can deepen wounds, sow division, and diminish trust. That tension is what makes these moments so challenging. You know you must speak, but how you speak matters just as much as what you say.

The Call to Boldness

Scripture is filled with leaders who stepped into cultural crises with courage. The prophets cried out when injustice filled the land. John the Baptist confronted corruption, even when it cost him his life. Jesus himself entered a politically volatile environment and proclaimed a kingdom “not of this world,” knowing it would stir both comfort and controversy.

Your congregation doesn't expect you to have all the answers. But they do expect you to be present, to show them how the gospel sheds light on the confusion of the moment. Courage means refusing to hide when your people are desperate for guidance.

The Call to Caution

At the same time, boldness without caution can harm the very flock you're called to protect. James reminds us that “not many of you should become teachers” because “we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1). Words from the pulpit or the pastor's social media account aren't easily forgotten. A poorly chosen phrase in the heat of emotion can divide your congregation or distract from the gospel you're called to proclaim.

Caution doesn't mean cowardice. It means remembering that your audience includes people with different experiences, perspectives, and political leanings — all of whom you are called to shepherd. It means slowing down long enough to let the Spirit guide your response.

Why This Matters

Every crisis moment is also a discipleship moment. Your words can either inflame the anger of the culture or invite your people to look at the world through a kingdom lens. You can either reinforce division or point people toward unity in Christ. You can either leave them with more confusion, or anchor them in timeless truth.

This resource is designed to give you practical, tested steps for speaking wisely in the wake of cultural events. Think of it as a field guide you can return to whenever the headlines are heavy and your people are looking to you for clarity. Our prayer is that it will equip you to lead with both courage and compassion, offering a steady voice when the world is shaking.

Chapter 1: Take a Pause

When tragedy strikes or controversy floods your newsfeed, the temptation is to speak immediately. The world reacts in real-time; your phone buzzes with hot takes before you've even processed the headline. But the shepherd's role is not to be the fastest voice in the room. It's to be the most thoughtful, prayerful, and trustworthy.

A pause is not cowardice. A pause is wisdom. Even Jesus often withdrew to pray before making key decisions or responding to opposition. Nehemiah, when confronted with the devastation of Jerusalem, did not rush to declare his plan. He sat, he wept, and he prayed for days before acting. In practice, this means resisting the urge to fire off a post or mention something hastily in Sunday's sermon. Waiting even twenty-four hours allows you to cool your emotions, seek God's direction, and ask for wise counsel. Think of it as giving space for the Spirit to edit your words before the public ever hears them.

Some pastors fear that waiting looks like silence. But your people will respect that you've chosen reflection over reaction. In fact, one of the most pastoral things you can say is, "I've been praying and reflecting on how to speak about this." It signals that your words are the product of discernment, not impulse.

Practical ways to take a pause:

- Write your initial thoughts in a journal, not on social media.
- Take a walk or spend time in prayer before returning to your notes.
- Ask God for clarity on what your congregation truly needs to hear.
- Wait at least a few hours, if not a full day, before making a public statement.

By taking a pause, you give yourself the chance to speak with clarity rather than confusion, with faith rather than fear.

The Guiding Question

Before you speak, ask: *Have I taken enough time to pause, pray, and reflect so that I'm speaking from clarity instead of raw emotion?*

If you can answer yes, then your words are more likely to come across as pastoral, steady, and Spirit-led — not reactive or regrettable.

Chapter 2: Craft with Care

When a crisis hits, the urge to “just say something” can feel overwhelming. After all, your people want to hear from you. But while taking a pause gives you clarity, what you do with that clarity is equally important. Once you decide it’s time to speak, you must be intentional about how you craft your words.

Why Words Matter More Than You Realize

In moments of national pain, words carry more weight than usual. A single phrase can either soothe or sting, calm or inflame. People are on edge, emotions are high, and your words won’t just be heard in the moment — they’ll often be remembered, replayed, and retold.

Think about it: how many of us still remember where we were when certain speeches were given after 9/11? Or how a pastor’s or leader’s comments about George Floyd either drew us closer to the church or pushed us further away? In moments like these, people don’t just hear what you say; they attach meaning to it. Your words become part of how they interpret God’s heart.

That’s why it’s essential to slow down, write carefully, and speak with intention.

Don’t Preach Twitter-Length Sermons

One of the biggest traps for pastors is trying to say something profound in a sentence or two. Social media encourages brevity, but brevity can also encourage sloppiness. When you cut too much, you risk cutting out nuance. A tweet-length comment may get attention, but it rarely gives clarity.

When possible, choose depth over soundbites. That doesn’t mean you need a dissertation, but aim for complete thoughts that reflect both truth and compassion.

Language That Builds vs. Language That Burns

Before you share your words publicly, ask: *Will this build up or tear down?* Will it point people toward Christ, or toward an echo chamber? Sometimes the difference is subtle — a single adjective, a slight shift in tone. Consider the difference between saying, “*This tragedy is the fault of...*” versus, “*This tragedy grieves us deeply, and it reminds us of the brokenness in our world.*” The first narrows the focus and fuels division; the

second broadens the focus and invites reflection.

The apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:29 to let no corrupting talk come from our mouths, but only what is good for building up. That instruction applies doubly when speaking as a spiritual leader in times of tension.

Practical Steps to Craft with Care

1. **Write, then edit** – Don't trust your first draft. Put your words on paper, then come back later with fresh eyes to remove unnecessary heat.
2. **Check for clarity** – Ask yourself if someone outside your church would understand what you mean, or if your words could easily be misunderstood.
3. **Avoid absolutes** – Words like *always*, *never*, *everyone*, *they*, and *no one* leave no room for complexity.
4. **Choose imagery wisely** – Analogies can help, but in tense moments, they can also offend. Make sure your illustrations don't minimize the pain of others.
5. **Think tone before content** – Sometimes how you say something matters more than what you say. A gentle tone can carry a hard truth further than a harsh tone can carry a soft truth.

The Balance of Prophetic and Pastoral

Pastors are called to both comfort and confront. Crafting with care doesn't mean watering down the truth, but it does mean delivering truth in a way that people can actually hear. Prophets in the Old Testament declared judgment, but they also pointed toward hope. Jesus spoke directly against hypocrisy, but he also knelt beside the broken.

The goal is not simply to be right, but to be redemptive. Truth without love may be correct, but it rarely changes hearts. Love without truth may feel kind, but it leaves people without a compass. Crafting with care allows you to speak truth and love in a way that strengthens the flock you're entrusted to shepherd.

The Guiding Question

Before you finalize your words, ask yourself: *Would I be at peace if this sentence was replayed on the evening news?* If the answer is yes, you've likely crafted with care.

Chapter 3: Honor Human Dignity

In the aftermath of national tragedies or cultural controversies, it's easy for public conversation to become harsh, dehumanizing, and reductionistic. People stop being people and start becoming labels: *the protesters, the police, the left, the right, the elites, the radicals*. But as a pastor, you cannot let your words strip away the image of God in others.

The Imago Dei as the Starting Point

Scripture is clear that every person is created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). That means their worth is not tied to their political position, cultural background, or moral choices. Their value is intrinsic, given by their Creator. When you speak about people in times of national crisis, you're not just speaking about an "issue." You're speaking about image-bearers. When you affirm human dignity, you remind your congregation that our ultimate lens is not political but theological. We don't first see enemies or allies; we see people made in the likeness of God.

The Danger of "Us vs. Them" Language

When cultural events divide people, it's tempting to fall into tribal language. The problem is that such language rarely shepherds well. If you speak as if "our side" is fully right and "their side" is fully wrong, you will inevitably alienate members of your own congregation. More importantly, you'll risk discipling your people into viewing neighbors as enemies instead of mission fields.

Dehumanizing language doesn't just harm others — it deforms your flock. They begin to see people not as potential brothers and sisters in Christ but as faceless representatives of an opposing camp.

How to Honor Dignity in Your Words

1. **Name humanity before ideology** — Instead of saying, "*The protesters are out of control,*" you could say, "*Our nation is filled with people hurting deeply, and some are expressing that pain in destructive ways.*" The difference is subtle but profound.
2. **Resist caricatures** — Avoid reducing people to the worst actions of a few. A whole movement, profession, or community cannot be captured in a single stereotype.

3. **Speak as if they were in the room** – Before you say something, imagine that someone directly affected by the event is sitting in the front row. Would your words wound or dignify?
4. **Remember Jesus' example** – Jesus saw tax collectors, zealots, and prostitutes not as categories but as people. He called them by name, ate with them, and invited them to follow him.

Shepherding a Divided Flock

One of the most difficult realities pastors face is that people in the same congregation may have vastly different perspectives. A police officer and a young Black man may hear the same words in opposite ways. A veteran and a refugee may interpret national security issues very differently. Your task is not to flatten those differences or pretend they don't exist, but to speak in a way that acknowledges complexity while affirming the dignity of every person involved. This builds trust across divides and reminds your congregation that the church is not ultimately bound together by politics but by Christ.

A Redemptive Perspective

To honor human dignity is not to excuse sin. It is to recognize that even those who commit injustice are still people whom God desires to redeem. Speaking this way doesn't minimize wrongdoing — it maximizes the gospel.

As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:16, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh." When cultural crises tempt people to see enemies everywhere, your role as a pastor is to help them see people as God does: broken, yes, but beloved and redeemable.

The Guiding Question

Before you speak, ask: *Am I dignifying every person involved as an image-bearer of God?* If you can answer yes, you're modeling the kind of gospel-centered leadership your congregation needs in a fractured world.

Chapter 4: Know Your Audience

One of the most important — and often overlooked — parts of speaking into a cultural moment is remembering *who you are talking to*. Every word from your pulpit or platform is heard by a unique collection of people with different stories, backgrounds, and convictions. Forgetting that reality can lead you to unintentionally alienate or wound those you're called to shepherd.

A Diverse Flock

Even if your congregation looks relatively uniform on the outside, underneath the surface there is real diversity:

- Political convictions that lean left, right, and everywhere in between.
- Different life experiences that shape how events are interpreted.
- Personal connections — some may know a victim, a police officer, or a community directly impacted by the crisis.
- Levels of maturity in the faith, from seasoned saints to new believers to seekers still wrestling with doubt.

When you speak as if everyone in the room sees the world through the same lens, you risk reducing your ministry to only a fraction of your people.

The Risk of Assumptions

Consider how differently your words might be heard by various groups:

- A military veteran may hear a comment about war or terrorism very differently than someone who has never served.
- When speaking about racial events, recognize that for many in your congregation these issues are not abstract — they touch lived experience, family history, and daily reality in ways others in the room may not fully grasp.
- A family who has lost someone to gun violence may interpret words about firearms through the filter of grief.
- What feels like a harmless generalization to you can sound like a direct wound to them.

Shepherding Everyone, Not Just “Your Side”

As a pastor, your calling is to shepherd the *whole flock*, not just the portion who agrees with you politically or culturally. That doesn’t mean avoiding truth. It does mean delivering truth in a way that acknowledges the presence of those who may disagree.

Practical ways to do this:

1. **Name the range of experiences** – Say, “I realize some of you may feel angry today, while others may feel fearful, and still others may feel numb.” This shows you’ve thought about the diversity in the room.
2. **Use “we” more than “they”** – This language draws people in rather than drawing battle lines.
3. **Keep your ultimate identity clear** – Remind people that while they may belong to political or cultural groups, their deepest identity is as children of God.
4. **Avoid weaponizing the pulpit** – The pulpit is not a campaign stage. It is a place to proclaim Christ.

The Pastoral Advantage

Here’s the good news: people actually want a pastor to be different from the culture. They expect cable news to stoke division, but they long for their pastor to speak with balance and wisdom. When you show awareness of your audience’s diversity and speak in a way that respects it, you gain credibility. Your people will listen more closely, not less, because they feel seen.

The Guiding Question

Before you speak, ask: *Have I considered how my words will sound to the wide range of people I shepherd?* If the answer is yes, then you’re not just preparing a statement — you’re preparing to pastor.

Chapter 5: Lead with Compassion

When a nation reels from tragedy or controversy, people are not first looking for analysis. They are looking for comfort. They are not waiting to hear a hot take; they are waiting to hear that their pastor sees their pain. Compassion is not weakness — it is one of the most powerful tools a shepherd has when guiding people through collective grief and tension.

The Pattern of Jesus

Before Jesus explained, he often wept. When he saw Mary and Martha grieving their brother, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Before entering Jerusalem, knowing its destruction was coming, he paused to weep over the city. His ministry was not detached from human pain; it was deeply moved by it.

If the Son of God did not consider compassion optional, neither can we. Pastoral words in moments of crisis must start with shared sorrow before moving toward explanation or exhortation.

Why Compassion Comes First

When you acknowledge the hurt, you create space for people to breathe. You show them they are not alone in their fear, anger, or sadness. Compassion disarms defensiveness. It builds relational trust. It prepares the soil so that when you later offer biblical truth, people are ready to receive it.

Without compassion, truth can feel like a hammer. With compassion, truth feels like a lifeline.

Practical Ways to Lead with Compassion

- **Name the pain before the problem** – Say things like, “This is heart-breaking. Many of us feel heavy today.” That validates emotions before offering direction.
- **Use tender language** – Words like *lament*, *sorrow*, *grief*, *comfort* carry a different tone than words like *debate*, *sides*, *arguments*.
- **Include everyone in the circle of care** – Acknowledge that no matter where someone stands, there is pain in different places. “Some are grieving the loss of life. Some are fearful about the future. Some are

angry at injustice. All of that matters to God.”

- **Pray compassionately** – A prayer of lament or intercession can often carry more weight than a carefully crafted paragraph.
- **Show it in your posture** – Compassion isn’t just what you say, but how you say it. A softened voice, a slower pace, even a moment of silence can communicate care more than words ever could.
- Mistakes to Avoid
- **Jumping to solutions too quickly** – Fixing comes later. Presence comes first.
- **Minimizing the pain** – Phrases like, “It’s not that bad,” or, “Things will get better soon,” feel dismissive when wounds are fresh.
- **Centering yourself** – This isn’t the moment for “Here’s what I think.” It’s the moment for, “Here’s what God says, and here’s how He cares for us.”

A Shepherd’s Role

Psalm 23 describes the shepherd who walks with the sheep “through the valley of the shadow of death.” He doesn’t rush them through. He doesn’t yell at them from a distance. He is *with* them. That’s what compassion looks like: walking slowly with your people in their valley, pointing them toward the God who restores their souls.

The Guiding Question

Before you speak, ask: *Am I acknowledging the pain of this moment with genuine compassion?* If the answer is yes, you are leading your people the way Jesus leads his own — full of grace and truth, but never without tears.

Chapter 6: Test Your Words

Even the most seasoned pastor has blind spots. What sounds balanced and pastoral to you may sound sharp, dismissive, or unclear to others. That's why one of the wisest steps you can take before speaking publicly in a moment of national crisis is to run your words past someone you trust.

Why Feedback Matters

James 3 reminds us that the tongue is powerful — capable of setting forests on fire. In times of heightened tension, your words have even greater potential to build up or burn down. Testing your words with others provides perspective you can't get on your own.

Think of it like a pilot doing a pre-flight check. You wouldn't fly passengers without making sure the plane was safe. In the same way, you shouldn't carry your congregation through a turbulent national moment without checking to ensure your words are ready.

Who Should Test Your Words?

- **Trusted Advisors:** Elders, mentors, or fellow pastors who know your heart and will give honest feedback.
- **Diverse Voices:** If possible, run your draft by someone who doesn't see the world exactly as you do. They can highlight how your words might land differently across your congregation.
- **Wise Friends:** Sometimes a spiritually mature friend can hear what you've written and notice tone issues you didn't catch.

The key is to choose people who love you enough to be candid, not just polite.

How to Test Your Words

- **Write it down first** – Don't just think it through in your head. Words sound different out loud than they do in your imagination.
- **Read it aloud** – Tone becomes clearer when spoken. What seems firm on paper may sound harsh in your voice.

- **Ask specific questions** – “Does this sound compassionate?” “Could this be misunderstood?” “Do you think this points people toward Christ or toward a side?”
- **Be open to feedback** – Don’t get defensive. If someone says, “This part could hurt people,” treat that as a gift, not a threat.
- **Refine accordingly** – Edit, cut, or reframe. Often, the best statements are the result of multiple revisions.

The Danger of Going Solo

Some pastors believe testing their words is unnecessary. They think, “*I know what I want to say, and my heart is in the right place.*” But history is full of examples where one poorly chosen sentence undid years of faithful ministry. Intentions don’t erase impact. What you meant and what people heard can be very different things.

Testing your words with others doesn’t show weakness — it shows wisdom. It demonstrates that you value your people enough to ensure you are shepherding them well.

A Better Outcome

When you allow others to test your words, you step onto the platform with greater confidence. You know that what you’re about to say has been weighed, prayed over, and sharpened by trusted counsel. That kind of preparation allows you to focus not on worrying about mistakes, but on shepherding your people in real time.

The Guiding Question

Before you speak, ask: *Have I tested my words with someone I trust to help me see what I cannot?* If the answer is yes, you’ve taken an important step toward protecting both your flock and your own ministry credibility.

Chapter 7: Anchor in Scripture

When a major event shakes the culture, it's natural for people to look first to news anchors, commentators, and social media for perspective. But as a pastor, your role is different. You are not just another voice in the cultural conversation — you are a voice pointing people back to God's Word.

Why Scripture Must Lead the Way

The Bible is not silent on human suffering, injustice, violence, or tragedy. From Genesis to Revelation, God's Word speaks into the brokenness of the world. If you rely solely on your own analysis or emotions, your words will sound like everyone else's. But when you anchor your response in Scripture, you give your people something steady in the storm.

As Psalm 119:105 reminds us, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." In dark and confusing times, God's Word provides both guidance and hope.

Avoiding the Trap of Proof-Texting

It's tempting to grab the first verse that seems to fit a situation and quote it as if it explains everything. But proof-texting can come across as shallow or dismissive. Quoting Romans 8:28 ("All things work together for good...") too quickly after a tragedy may feel like skipping over the depth of grief.

Instead, look for passages that invite lament, express compassion, or point to God's character. Scripture should not be used as a slogan, but as a window into God's presence in the moment.

Biblical Models for Crisis Moments

- **Nehemiah** wept and prayed before speaking, but then anchored his words in God's promises (Nehemiah 1–2).
- **The prophets** confronted injustice by reminding the people of God's covenant faithfulness.
- **Jesus** often quoted Scripture in tense situations, not to win debates but to reveal the Father's heart.
- **Paul** encouraged suffering churches by pointing them back to the hope of the resurrection.

Each of these examples shows us that God's Word is not just an add-on — it is the foundation of faithful speech.

Practical Ways to Anchor in Scripture

Start with the text, not the headline – Before writing your response, spend time in prayer and Scripture. Let God's Word shape your perspective first.

Choose passages that match the moment – In times of tragedy, Psalms of lament (like Psalm 13 or Psalm 46) may be more appropriate than passages about victory. In times of division, passages about reconciliation (like Ephesians 2) may be more helpful.

Explain, don't just quote – Take time to connect the Scripture to the present situation. Help people see how God's Word speaks to today's pain.

Let Scripture set the tone – If your chosen passage is heavy, let your tone reflect that weight. If it's hopeful, let your words carry that light.

Keep Christ at the center – Every part of Scripture ultimately points to Jesus. Let your words remind people that he is their hope, even when the world feels hopeless.

The Difference It Makes

When your people leave a sermon, read a post, or hear a prayer that is grounded in Scripture, they leave with something more than just your opinion. They leave with God's truth planted in their hearts. Over time, that builds deeper trust in you as their pastor — not because you always know what to say, but because you always point them to the One who does.

The Guiding Question

Before you speak, ask: *Am I anchoring my response in God's Word, or just in my own words?* If the answer is yes, you're doing more than addressing a moment — you're shepherding people toward timeless truth.

Chapter 8: Acknowledge Complexity

In moments of cultural crisis, everyone wants quick answers. The media pushes instant analysis and rewards going viral, and people in your congregation may look to you for an instant and definitive statement that makes sense of it all. But here's the truth: most national tragedies and controversies are complex. They don't fit neatly into one sentence, one viewpoint, or one solution.

As a pastor, one of the most faithful things you can do is admit that complexity exists.

The Temptation to Oversimplify

Oversimplification feels safe. It lets you sound decisive, it reduces anxiety, and it gives people something solid to hold onto. But it can also distort the truth. Real issues are rarely as black-and-white as we'd like them to be. When you minimize complexity, you risk minimizing people's pain and losing credibility with those who know the situation is more layered.

The Power of Humility

Pastors often feel pressure to "have the answer." But humility can be more powerful than certainty. Saying, *"I don't have all the answers, but I know God is with us"* is not weakness. It is honesty. And honesty builds trust.

Paul captures this well in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully..." Our limited perspective is a reminder that we are not God. Acknowledging complexity reflects that humility.

Practical Ways to Acknowledge Complexity

- **Name what you don't know** – Don't be afraid to say, "We don't yet know all the facts," or, "I can't speak to every angle of this."
- **Hold multiple truths at once** – You can affirm that injustice is real *and* that not every person in a system is guilty of it. You can grieve with victims *and* pray for those accused.
- **Avoid slogans** – Simple phrases often erase the depth of what people are feeling. Instead, use language that invites reflection rather than ends it.

- **Point back to God's sovereignty** – When answers are incomplete, remind people that God's wisdom is not. His knowledge of the situation is deeper than ours.
- **Model patience** – Encourage your people to wait for more information before forming final opinions, just as you have waited before speaking.

A Shepherd's Advantage

Your congregation doesn't ultimately need you to provide a perfect analysis of current events. They need you to model what it looks like to trust God when things are confusing. By acknowledging complexity, you invite your people to wrestle honestly with questions while anchoring themselves in Christ.

In a world of instant experts, pastors who admit complexity and lean on God's wisdom stand out as authentic. And authenticity carries more long-term influence than quick certainty ever could.

The Guiding Question

Before you speak, ask: *Am I acknowledging the complexity of this moment, or am I oversimplifying to make myself sound certain?* If the answer is yes, you're shepherding your people with both humility and wisdom.

Chapter 9: Distinguish Public from Private

Not every thought you have as a pastor needs to be spoken from the pulpit or posted online. Some reflections are meant for close friends, some for staff or elders, and some only for your prayer journal. One of the wisest disciplines you can develop is learning the difference between what belongs in public and what belongs in private.

The Danger of Saying Too Much in Public

In an age of constant communication, it's easy to feel pressure to comment on everything. Social media almost demands it. But public platforms amplify your words beyond your immediate flock. A sermon clip, a tweet, or even a short Facebook post can be shared, screenshot, and spread far outside your congregation.

What you intended as a pastoral reflection for your people may be interpreted as a political statement by others. And once it leaves your lips or your keyboard, you no longer control how it's received.

Three Contexts to Consider

- **The Pulpit** – Your words here are the most public and carry the most authority. Use them sparingly for national commentary, and only when it clearly serves a discipleship purpose.
- **Social Media** – This feels personal, but it is often more public than the pulpit. People who have never met you may stumble across your post, interpret it without context, and judge your ministry by it.
- **Private Conversations** – Some of your most powerful pastoral work will happen here. In a one-on-one setting, you can offer nuance, ask questions, and provide comfort that wouldn't be possible in a public setting.

Practical Guardrails

- **Ask the audience question** – “Who actually needs to hear this thought? My congregation as a whole, or just a few people privately?”
- **Check for discipleship value** – Will saying this publicly help shape my people toward Christ, or is it just me venting?
- **Consider permanence** – If this post or sermon quote lived online forever, would I still stand by it?

- **Save some words for private spaces** – It's okay to reserve your raw emotions, unfiltered thoughts, or processing questions for trusted friends, mentors, or your own prayer time.

The Benefit of Restraint

You don't need to speak on every issue to be faithful. In fact, your congregation may respect you more when they see you choose your moments carefully. Distinguishing between public and private communication gives weight to the times you *do* speak publicly — because people know it wasn't impulsive.

A Biblical Model

Jesus himself modeled this distinction. He often spoke plainly to the crowds, but he reserved deeper explanations for his disciples in private (Mark 4:34). Some truths needed the intimacy of a smaller circle. The same can be true for you.

The Guiding Question

Before you speak, ask: *Does this belong in public, or would it be wiser to keep it in private?* If you can answer with clarity, you'll protect both your people and your ministry from unnecessary harm.

Chapter 10: Call to Prayer and Unity

When cultural events shake the world, most people instinctively run to opinions, arguments, or blame. But the church is called to something different. In moments of uncertainty and division, one of the most powerful things a pastor can do is call people back to prayer and unity.

Why Prayer Matters in Public Crises

Prayer is not a way of avoiding the issue. It is a way of inviting God into it. When we pray, we remind our people that the ultimate solution to the world's problems will not come from political leaders, cultural influencers, or social movements — it will come from the God who rules over history.

Calling your congregation to prayer does three important things:

- It directs their eyes away from endless commentary and toward God.
- It reminds them that God cares deeply about human suffering and injustice.
- It provides a constructive step forward when people feel powerless.

Why Unity Matters in Divided Times

Cultural tragedies and controversies often deepen cultural divides. It's easy for those divides to creep into the church. If left unchecked, brothers and sisters in Christ can start seeing one another through political or cultural lenses instead of through the cross.

Jesus prayed in John 17 that his followers would be one, just as he and the Father are one. Unity is not optional; it is central to our witness. A church divided along the same lines as the culture has little hope of showing the world a better way.

Practical Ways to Call for Prayer and Unity

- **Lead a corporate prayer** – Model lament, intercession, and hope. Invite your people to pray with you, not just listen.
- **Give simple steps** – Encourage people to pray daily for the situation, for those hurting, and for God's will to be done.

- **Use “we” language** – Remind your people that *we* are in this together, not split into camps.
- **Host a prayer gathering** – Sometimes giving space for communal prayer, silence, or worship is more powerful than another sermon.
- **Name unity as a gospel witness** – Say clearly: “Our unity in Christ is more important than any earthly divide.”
- **Encourage practical unity** – Invite people to serve together in response to tragedy. Shared mission often deepens shared love.

Moving From Commentary to Constructive Action

Your people don’t just need you to analyze events — they need you to show them how to respond in a Christlike way. Prayer and unity are not passive; they are active responses that reshape how your congregation navigates crisis moments.

Instead of leaving people with “something to think about,” leave them with “something to do together.” When the church lifts its voice in prayer and lives in unity, it becomes a countercultural witness in a fractured world.

The Guiding Question

Before you speak, ask: *Am I pointing my people toward prayer and unity, or just adding to the noise?* If you can answer yes, you are leading your flock in a way that not only addresses the moment but strengthens the church for the future.

Conclusion: The Pastor's Steady Voice

Every national crisis creates a wave of fear, confusion, and division. In those moments, people don't need their pastor to be the fastest commentator or the sharpest analyst. They need their pastor to be steady. They need someone who sees beyond the headlines, who listens carefully, who speaks with conviction rooted in Scripture and compassion.

Your role is not to solve every problem. Your role is to shepherd. That means showing up, speaking wisely, and pointing people toward the God who holds all things together. Sometimes that looks like lamenting with them. Sometimes it looks like reminding them of God's promises. Sometimes it means calling them to unity and prayer. But in every case, it means being faithful with the voice and influence God has entrusted to you.

Pastoral credibility is not built in moments of calm. It is tested and strengthened in moments of crisis. Each time you respond with humility, compassion, and biblical wisdom, you show your people what it looks like to follow Christ when the world is shaking. Over time, that consistency creates deep trust.

So the next time you see a headline that stops you in your tracks, or you hear the news of another national tragedy, remember: you don't have to be perfect. You don't have to have all the answers. You only need to do what you are called to do: be present, prayerful, and faithful. Your steady voice may be exactly what your people need to steady their faith.

Appendix: Crisis Communication

Checklist for Pastors

Step 1: Pause and Pray

- ☐ Have I taken time to calm my emotions before responding?
- ☐ Have I asked God for wisdom and clarity in prayer?
- ☐ Have I waited long enough to avoid a knee-jerk reaction?

Step 2: Clarify My Intent

- ☐ Why am I speaking on this? To shepherd, not to score points.
- ☐ What do my people truly need from me right now? Comfort, guidance, perspective?
- ☐ Will my words point them toward Christ or toward a side?

Step 3: Craft With Care

- ☐ Are my words clear, thoughtful, and free of unnecessary heat?
- ☐ Have I avoided inflammatory or absolute language?
- ☐ Have I removed sarcasm, exaggeration, or slogans that oversimplify?

Step 4: Honor Human Dignity

- ☐ Am I speaking about people as image-bearers of God, not as labels or enemies?
- ☐ Would I say this if someone directly affected were sitting on the front row?
- ☐ Am I avoiding caricatures or broad assumptions?

Step 5: Consider My Audience

- ☐ How will this land with people who see things differently?
- ☐ Am I speaking in a way that shepherds everyone, not just those who agree with me?
- ☐ Have I acknowledged the range of emotions (anger, fear, grief, confusion) in the room?

Step 6: Lead With Compassion

- ☐ Have I named the pain before offering explanation?
- ☐ Am I validating emotions rather than minimizing them?
- ☐ Do my tone and posture reflect care and empathy?

Step 7: Test My Words

- ☐ Have I written them down and read them aloud?
- ☐ Have I shared them with a trusted advisor or mentor for feedback?
- ☐ Did I refine based on what I heard?

Step 8: Anchor in Scripture

- ☐ Have I rooted my response in God's Word, not just my opinion?
- ☐ Am I using Scripture in a way that brings clarity, not as a shallow proof-text?
- ☐ Does this passage align with the tone of the moment (lament, comfort, hope, or correction)?

Step 9: Acknowledge Complexity

- ☐ Am I honest about what I don't know or can't explain fully?
- ☐ Have I avoided oversimplifying a layered issue?
- ☐ Am I modeling humility as I point people to God's sovereignty?

Step 10: Choose the Right Venue

- ☐ Does this belong in the pulpit, online, or in a private conversation?
- ☐ Am I prepared for these words to live online forever if shared?
- ☐ Would this comment shepherd better in one-on-one settings than in public?

Step 11: Call to Prayer and Unity

- ☐ Have I invited my people to pray, lament, and seek God together?
- ☐ Have I reminded them of their unity in Christ above earthly divisions?
- ☐ Have I given them something constructive to *do* beyond listening?

Quick Filter: One-Minute Test

Before speaking, posting, or preaching, ask yourself:

- Have I prayed?
- Am I calm?
- Does this honor people as image-bearers?
- Does this point people toward Christ?
- Would I be at peace if this was replayed on the evening news?

If you can answer “yes” to each, you’re ready.