

Traveling the Via Media

Class 3: Braver Faith

Practical Skills for Loving Across Difference

Where We Are

Class 1:

WHY the Via Media matters
(History)

Class 2:

HOW it works theologically
(Scripture, Tradition, Reason)

Class 3:

WHAT specific skills help us practice it
(Braver Faith)



Traveling the Via Media

Traveling the Via Media

Finding Love and Unity Amid Differing Viewpoints



Led by Father Tom Reeder

<https://ccpvb.org/traveling-the-via-media/>

The Challenge

We understand why the Via Media matters. We know the theology. But how do we actually talk with someone we disagree with in a way that honors them and keeps the relationship alive?

That's where Braver Faith comes in.

Braver Faith teaches us concrete skills to:

- Listen to understand (not to refute)
- Speak in ways people can actually hear
- Honor the image of God in others, even those we disagree with



The Foundation: Imago Dei



Genesis 1:27

"So, God created humankind in God's own image, in the image of God He created them."

God made every human being in God's own image, including people you disagree with.

This is the starting point for everything Braver Faith teaches.

*Not agreement. Not approval.
But recognition of their humanity.*

The Golden Rule

"Treat others the way you want to be treated."

Think about this: In a conversation with someone you deeply disagree with, what would you want from them?

You probably want them to:

- Listen to you
- Try to understand your point of view
- Not interrupt or mock you
- Acknowledge something you said

The Golden Rule says: Give them exactly that.

The Four Horsemen of Polarization

Four things to AVOID because they violate both Imago Dei and the Golden Rule:

Stereotyping

Treating someone as a type rather than a person

Dismissing

Ignoring what they say as not worth considering

Ridiculing

Mocking or making fun of them

Contempt

Showing they're beneath you or not worth respect



A Moment of Honest Reflection

Before we talk about skills, we need to ask ourselves:



- Do I ever stereotype people with different views?
- Do I dismiss what they say without really listening?
- Do I ridicule or mock them (even in my head)?
- Do I show contempt toward them?

This isn't about shame. It's about awareness. We all do these things sometimes.

The good news: These are patterns we can change.

Three Core Skills for Braver Conversations

Skill 1

Listen to Understand

Not to refute. Not to prepare your response. To genuinely understand.

Skill 2

Listen So They Feel Heard

Paraphrase. Acknowledge. Listen for the values underneath their views.

Skill 3

Speak So They'll Hear You

Use "I" statements. Share your story. Find agreement first.



Skill 1: Listen to Understand



The Core Shift

Traditional Debate:

Listen mainly to find what you can refute.
Goal: Win.

Dialogue:

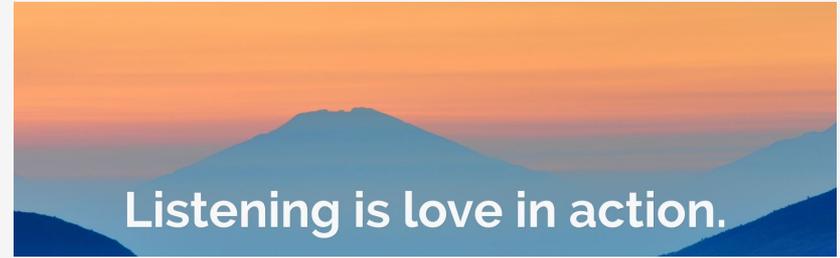
Listen to genuinely understand their view.
Goal: Connection.

Remember: You're not listening if your main interest is convincing them they're wrong.

Skill 2: Listen So They Feel Heard

Practical Techniques

- Paraphrase back what you heard.
"So what I hear you saying is..."
- Acknowledge before disagreeing.
"That's a fair point, and here's another perspective..."
- Listen for values underneath views.
What do they actually care about?



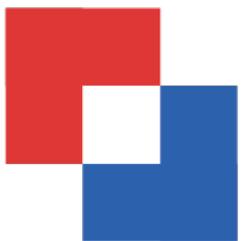
Skill 3: Speak So They'll Hear You



The Bible reminds us: "A soft word turns away wrath."

When You Speak:

- Use "I" statements, not truth statements.
"In my view..." not "The fact is..."
- Share your personal story or experience.
- Find something to agree with first.
- Then offer a different perspective.



Braver Angels

We're taking a stand against toxic politics.

Will you join us?

Braver Angels is leading the nation's largest cross-partisan, volunteer-led movement to bridge the partisan divide and strengthen our democratic republic.

New Here? Get Started!

Attend Our 2026 Convention

www.braverangels.org





Braver Faith

Connecting people of faith so that our communities may flourish.

Braver Angels is a civic organization that develops educational tools to build bridges between people divided over politics. We also partner with religious groups who use our tools in the context of their own religious traditions. For people of faith, civil discourse often begins in recognizing the image of God and/or the inherent dignity in our conversation partner. As a result, our approach should involve mutual respect. Respect, not agreement, is an essential key for a healthy discussion.

[🔗 Workshops](#)

[🔗 Join a Community](#)

[🔗 Events](#)

[🔗 Our Team](#)

[🔗 Resources and Recommendations](#)

[Subscribe](#)



Braver Faith Hosts Live Workshops where you:

- Learn why you might be polarized (and how to recognize it)
- Practice the skills in real dialogue with others
- Experience being listened to by someone who disagrees with you
- Build relationships across political differences

How You Can Respond: Pray, Learn, Act



Pray

- For those you disagree with.
- For yourself—for humility and openness.
- For our nation and leaders.
- For the strength to apply your faith to political interactions.

Learn

- Attend Braver Faith workshops
- Study different viewpoints
- Read perspectives you normally avoid
- Practice the skills we discussed

Act

- Practice with someone you disagree with
- Share your commitment with others
- Join or attend a Braver Faith workshop
- Model the skills in your family

Getting Past the Parking Lot

We often talk about these principles at church and then leave them "in the parking lot" when we go home.

Braver Faith is about getting them past the parking lot and into your daily life.

As you leave today, ask yourself:

- Who is someone I need to really listen to?
- How can I practice one of these three skills this week?
- How will I remember to treat them as if they're made in God's image?

APPENDIX: A Difficult Issue Close to Home

(The Israel-Gaza Divide: A Marriage Example)

Tom: "I'm deeply troubled by the October 7 attacks. Israel has a right—and a responsibility—to defend its citizens. A nation can't allow terrorist attacks to go unanswered. And I worry about Israel's security long-term."

Tom: "I hear that you care about Palestinian dignity and self-determination. Those are important values. You're right that Palestinians have suffered. I've been learning more about what life is like for them. I may not agree on all the solutions, but I respect that you're motivated by a genuine desire for justice and peace."

DeeAnn: "I hear that you're genuinely concerned about Israel's security and that you see their military response as necessary self-defense. Those October 7 attacks were tragic. And... I also care deeply about innocent lives. I'm equally distressed about Palestinian civilian casualties. Can we acknowledge that both peoples deserve safety and dignity?"

DeeAnn: "The Palestinian people have a right to self-determination. They've been stateless for decades. A real solution requires Palestinian statehood in Gaza and the West Bank. And the humanitarian situation for Palestinians is severe."

APPENDIX: A Difficult Issue Close to Home

(The Israel-Gaza Divide: A Marriage Example)

What Braver Faith Looks Like Here:

- ✓ Each person stated their genuine convictions clearly
- ✓ Each person paraphrased and acknowledged the other's concern
- ✓ They found shared values (both care about safety, dignity, justice)
- ✓ They didn't pretend to agree, but they honored each other's humanity
- ✓ They stayed in relationship despite real disagreement

The Challenge

You know the history. (Class 1)

You know the theology. (Class 2)

You know the skills. (Class 3)

Now what will you do?

Will you practice the Via Media?

Will you attend a Braver Faith workshop?

Will you commit to loving across difference?