



Douglas S. Bursch

Posting Peace



Why Social Media
Divides Us and
What We Can
Do About It

Study Guide for Teachers, Pastors, and Small Group Leaders

Posting Peace: Why Social Media Divides Us and What We Can Do About It deals with how we can each be better witnesses in an increasingly divisive, polarizing online world. Anyone leading a group study of *Posting Peace* will have the tremendous opportunity to facilitate discussions and activities that are relevant, helpful, and meaningful for all participants. This study guide provides practical opportunities for individuals to apply what they are learning from *Posting Peace*. The questions and activities in this guide are geared to a general audience as well as to young adults and teenagers. This material can be used to aid book groups, small groups, Sunday School classes, private school curriculums and sermon series. Please feel free to use this study guide in whatever way strengthens your reading experience and to contact IVP for possible group discounts for purchasing *Posting Peace* at ivpress.com.

Getting Started

If you are leading a group of people to read *Posting Peace* together, you will have far more involvement and meaningful discussion if you promote the group as more than just a book discussion. Douglas S. Bursch wrote *Posting Peace* with the goal of transforming the way Christians communicate through social media. The goal of your group should be more than to simply read the book. Instead, promote your group as a way to strengthen or even transform your online communication. Let people know that each week they will apply what they've learned in their own social media contexts. They won't only be reading *Posting Peace*, they will literally be #PostingPeace throughout their own social media feeds. For example, you might promote a group with wording such as this:

Social media has become increasingly divisive and polarizing. Join us for a 6 week book study of *Posting Peace: Why Social Media Divides Us and What We Can Do About It*. In our study we will examine the ways social media divides us, what Scripture says about peacemaking and how we can practically transform the ways we communicate online. We won't just read *Posting Peace*, we will also encourage each other to engage in the ministry of #PostingPeace on a weekly basis. Please join us and sign up today.

This study guide is structured for a group that will have at least six meetings. The material can certainly be expanded or shortened depending upon the constraints of your ministry or learning objectives.

Session 1

Expectations: Participants should have read and be ready to discuss chapters 1 and 2 for this session.

Scripture Focus: 2 Cor 5:17-20

Chapter 1 Talking Points

- Many people question why social media forms us into divisive people
- Through social media many of us act like partisan, divisive talk show hosts
- Are we willing to not bow down to the partisan, divisive, polarizing spirit of our age?

Chapter 2 Talking Points

- Many internet pioneers embraced detached, non-relational ways of online communication
- Every technology both extends and numbs our natural human capacities
- The medium is the message: social media changes what we communicate and how we communicate
- The convenience of social media communication weakens our ability to process conflict and engage in the difficult task of reconciliation

Session Format

- Ask people in the group to briefly introduce themselves, share which social media platform(s) they use the most, and explain why they are taking the class. Try to limit this to only 1 or 2 minutes per person. Provide less or more time depending upon the size of the group.
- Discuss 1 or 2 questions from the questions listed at the end of chapters 1 and 2. Provide individuals a couple minutes to first write down their short answer, then provide 5 to 10 minutes for individuals to share their written answer with a group of 2 or 3 people. Call the group back together and ask if any group wants to discuss something interesting that came out of their discussion. Provide 5 to 10 minutes for this larger discussion. As a facilitator, feel free to ask follow-up questions to deepen the discussion. Make sure no one monopolizes the conversation.
- Read over the #PostingPeace challenges at the end of chapters 1 and 2. Ask people to write down which challenges they are going to participate in. Give them the option to pick one or both of the challenges in each chapter. Possibly open the group up for people to explain which challenges they are picking and why. Provide 10 to 15 minutes for this activity.
- Announce next week's assignment to have chapters 3 and 4 read with the accompanying chapter questions answered. Also ask the group to be ready to discuss the outcomes of doing their chapters 1 and 2 #PostingPeace challenges.
- Pray and dismiss.

Special Focus

Feel free to modify chapter questions or create your own questions depending upon the group's age, social media aptitude, and needs. Also provide space for people to disagree with the author's conclusions. Feel free to mention that the goal of this group is not to agree with the author or with each other but to assess how each of us can use social media in better, reconciling ways. This includes learning how to disagree peaceably.

Session 2

Expectations: Participants should have read and be ready to discuss chapters 3 and 4 for this session.

Scripture Focus: Jn 1:1, 14

Chapter 3 Talking Points

- Relationally detached, individualistic pursuits polarize our social media communication
- Social media promotes networked individualism where we primarily foster, pursue, and develop online relationships that serve our personal needs
- Social media increases fleeting "weak ties" relationships and weakens lasting "strong ties" relationships
- We form or abandon online relationships based on our individualistic needs being met
- We must resist social media's individualistic tendencies to form more healthy, diverse relationships

Chapter 4 Talking Points

- Online communication is discarnate, not allowing expression of important aspects of our humanity
- Social media limits our ability to use our full mental capacities to understand and navigate conflicts
- We are never fully present with each other when communicating online
- Online communication often becomes a simplistic form of advertising our identity to gain audience
- The inability to truly see people leads to non-empathetic, dehumanizing online communication

Session Format

- Have individuals share what they learned last week participating in the #PostingPeace challenges from chapters 1 and 2. Discuss the outcomes of their activity and their observations concerning how the challenges impacted their social media communication. This should take 5 to 15 minutes.
- Optional group exercise: Ask each participant to create an advertisement that tells or shows people why they would be a good person to follow online. Tell them to create their advertisement describing the words or images they would use to sell themselves as a product. For example: "You can't go wrong with having Doug Bursch as your social media friend. He is a low maintenance follow with a high return of social media value. His witty tweets will make a great edition to your Twitter feed."

Don't be fooled by the rest because Doug is your best next social media friend." Feel free to put more limits or to expand the limits of the exercise depending upon group needs. For example, you might want people to just share a picture or a hashtag that represents themselves. The goal is to get people processing how networked individualism turns people into products we embrace when helpful and abandon when no longer able to serve our personal needs. Give them 5 minutes to create the ad and another 5 to 10 minutes for people to share their ads and process how the exercise made them feel.

-Discuss 1 or 2 questions from the questions listed at the end of chapters 3 and 4. Provide individuals a couple minutes to first write down their short answer, then provide 5 to 10 minutes for individuals to share their written answer with a group of 2 or 3 people. Call the group back together and ask if any group wants to discuss something interesting that came out of their discussion. Provide 5 to 10 minutes for this larger discussion. As a facilitator, feel free to ask follow-up questions to deepen the discussion. Make sure no one monopolizes the conversation.

-Read the #PostingPeace challenges at the end of chapters 3 and 4. Ask people to write down which challenges they are going to participate in. Give them the option to pick one or both of the challenges in each chapter. Possibly open the group up for people to explain which challenges they are picking and why. Provide 10 to 15 minutes for this activity.

-Announce next week's assignment to have chapters 5 and 6 read with the accompanying chapter questions answered. Also ask the group to be ready to discuss the outcomes of doing their chapters 3 and 4 #PostingPeace challenges.

-Pray and dismiss.

Special Focus

Feel free to disregard, modify or do your own opening group exercise and group discussions. Modify these classes based on the interests and ages of those in the group. This study guide is simply provided as a helpful guide or starting point. Please study the book in a way that is most helpful for your group's needs.

Session 3

Expectations: Participants should have read and be ready to discuss chapters 5 and 6 for this session.

Scripture Focus: Rom 8:38-39

Chapter 5 Talking Points

- Some of our attempts to combat social media divisiveness are making the problems worse
- Some people confront internet polarization through becoming more argumentative rather than more relational
- Some respond to internet divisiveness through embracing extreme partisan behaviors

- Some react to social media conflict through abiding in ideologically segmented communities and relationships
- Some react to social media polarization by trying to avoid or disengage from all potential conflict

Chapter 6 Talking Points

- Every salvation story is the story of reconciliation
- We are each called to bring others into the reconciliation we have received
- We find models of reconciliation in people, such as Benjamin Rush, who brought peace to Adams and Jefferson's relationship

Session Format

-Have individuals share what they learned last week participating in the #PostingPeace challenges from chapters 3 and 4. Discuss the outcomes of their activity and their observations concerning how the challenges impacted their social media communication. This should take 5 to 15 minutes.

-Discuss question 2 from chapter 6: How does your reconciliation story influence the way you communicate online? Give 5 to 10 minutes for people to share their story in a group of 2 or 3 people. Allow another 5 to 10 minutes for each small group to report what they learned from their discussion. Give more or less time to this exercise, depending upon the fruitfulness of the discussion.

-Discuss 1 or 2 other questions from the questions listed at the end of chapters 5 and 6. Provide individuals a couple minutes to first write down their short answer, then provide 5 to 10 minutes for individuals to share their written answer with a group of 2 or 3 people. Call the group back together and ask if any group wants to discuss something interesting that came out of their conversation. Provide 5 to 10 minutes for this larger discussion. As a facilitator, feel free to ask follow-up questions to deepen the discussion. Make sure no one monopolizes the conversation.

-Read the #PostingPeace challenges at the end of chapters 5 and 6. Ask people to write down which challenges they are going to participate in. Give them the option to pick one or both of the challenges in each chapter. Possibly open the group up for people to explain which challenges they are picking and why. Provide 10 to 15 minutes for this activity.

-Announce next week's assignment to have chapters 7 and 8 read with the accompanying chapter questions answered. Also ask the group to be ready to discuss the outcomes of doing their chapters 5 and 6 #PostingPeace challenges.

-Pray and dismiss.

Special Focus

Testimonies can be powerful and extremely emotional. Make sure you give the appropriate attention to people sharing their testimonies, especially if they share any issues dealing with hurt or abuse. Feel free to pray for anyone who needs healing or hope related to their testimony. Also, make sure

you provide a safe place for people who do not feel that they have a testimony or who are in the process of seeking whether or not following Christ is right for them.

Session 4

Expectations: Participants should have read and be ready to discuss chapters 7 and 8 for this session.

Scripture Focus: Rom 1:16-17

Chapter 7 Talking Points

- Christians are called to facilitate environments conducive to reconciliation
- Christ calls us to participate in the ministry of reconciliation whether or not others accept our attempts
- Reconciliation maintains a posture of embrace
- The Apostle Paul preached reconciliation because of his own testimony of encountering the power of the gospel
- Reconciliation occurred through the saving work of Christ, but the reception of that work unfolds through time

Chapter 8 Talking Points

- Christians should have a social media peacemaking plan with specific questions to ask themselves before posting anything online
- Is reconciliation my motivation?
- Are people my priority?
- Am I communicating truth with love?
- Where is the grace?
- What is the Spirit saying?

Session Format

- Have individuals share what they learned last week participating in the #PostingPeace challenges from chapters 5 and 6. Discuss the outcomes of their activity and their observations concerning how the challenges impacted their social media communication. This should take 5 to 15 minutes.
- Optional Group Exercise: Read a short angry or argumentative tweet to the class. It can be from real life or made up. Then ask individuals to write a response to the tweet as if their response were written by Jesus or the Apostle Paul. Have participants share and process their responses. This exercise should take 10 to 15 minutes.

-Discuss the 5 key questions in chapter 8: Is reconciliation my motivation?; Are people my priority?; Am I communicating truth with love?; Where is the grace?; and What is the Spirit saying? Examine how asking these questions influences our communication. This should take 15 to 20 minutes.

-Ask participants if they have any questions they should ask themselves or social media principles they should follow that are not addressed in the book. The goal of this exercise is to get people to personalize their social media peacemaking plan and to determine what is uniquely right or important for their own lives. This should take 5 to 10 minutes.

--Read the #PostingPeace challenges at the end of chapters 7 and 8. Ask people to write down which challenges they are going to participate in. Give them the option to pick one or both of the challenges in each chapter. Possibly open the group up for people to explain which challenges they are picking and why. Provide 10 to 15 minutes for this activity.

-Announce next week's assignment to have chapters 9 and 10 read with the accompanying chapter questions answered. Also ask the group to be ready to discuss the outcomes of doing their #PostingPeace challenges for chapters 7 and 8.

-Pray and dismiss.

Special Focus

If someone doesn't agree with the conclusions of the book or the example questions provided in the book, then challenge them to come up with their own peacemaking plan. The goal is not group agreement, but to challenge each member to come up with a peacemaking plan that truly embraces the ministry of reconciliation. If there is conflict in the group, this is an opportunity to demonstrate the ministry of peacemaking.

Session 5

Expectations: Participants should have read and be ready to discuss chapters 9 and 10 for this session.

***Scripture Focus: Titus 3:10-15; Is 58:1-10; Jn 2:14-16
(see also Mt 21:12-17, Mk 11:15-19, Lk 19:45-48)***

Chapter 9 Talking Points

-Society defines online trolls as individuals who perpetually fight with others online and delight in causing conflict, regardless of how people treat them

-The label "troll" is a dehumanizing label that perpetuates trolling behavior

-We can demonstrate love to people who troll by not allowing them to continue to sin against us

-We must each prayerfully consider social media boundaries to protect our mental and spiritual well-

being online

Chapter 10 Talking Points

- Peacemaking is not the avoidance of conflict, but the confrontation of sin and injustice with the reconciling good news of Jesus Christ
- If we seek peace to avoid conflict, privilege might be motivating our decisions
- Jesus turned over tables in the Temple to remove any hindrances from people worshiping God
- We are called to remove any hindrance to people hearing, seeing, finding and knowing the reconciling power of the gospel, even if this causes conflict
- Conflict is frequently the agent of change
- Be ready for conflict when pursuing the ministry of reconciliation

Session Format

- Have individuals share what they learned last week participating in the #PostingPeace challenges from chapters 7 and 8. Discuss the outcomes of their activity and their observations concerning how the challenges impacted their social media communication. This should take 5 to 15 minutes.
- Optional Group Exercise: Have participants write down a non-online related conflict that happened in their life that was difficult to go through but ultimately helped them grow as a person. Have them share in small groups and/or with the larger group depending upon the size of the class. Use this to talk about how online conflict can be redemptive. This should take 10 to 15 minutes.
- Discuss 1 or 2 questions from the questions listed at the end of chapters 9 and 10. Provide individuals a couple minutes to first write down their short answer, then provide 5 to 10 minutes for individuals to share their written answer with a group of 2 or 3 people. Call the group back together and ask if any group wants to discuss something interesting that came out of their discussion. Provide 5 to 10 minutes for this larger discussion. As a facilitator, feel free to ask follow-up questions to deepen the discussion. Make sure no one monopolizes the conversation.
- Read the #PostingPeace challenges at the end of chapters 9 and 10. Ask people to write down which challenges they are going to participate in. Give them the option to pick one or both of the challenges in each chapter. Possibly open the group up for people to explain which challenges they are picking and why. Provide 10 to 15 minutes for this activity.
- Announce next week's assignment to have chapters 11 and 12 read with the accompanying chapter questions answered. Also ask the group to be ready to discuss the outcomes of doing their #PostingPeace challenge.
- Pray and dismiss.

Special Focus

If someone in the group brings up an issue of online bullying that seems dangerous to their mental health, please follow up with them after the class to make sure they are getting the support and resources necessary to maintain healthy boundaries or to deal with the trauma of social media harassment.

Session 6

Expectations: Participants should have read and be ready to discuss chapters 11 and 12 for this session.

Scripture Focus: Mt 6:9-10 (see also Lk 11:2)

Chapter 11 Talking Points

- We must not minimize the social media problems we currently face
- To transform culture, we need to be intentional in all our online encounters
- Our online responses should be thoughtful, intentional, and contemplative
- We should use social media to foster meaningful connections with diverse peoples
- Reconciling online communication is self-giving, other-focused, Christ-motivated
- All of us have unique goodness to bring to our social media interactions

Chapter 12 Talking Points

- Make room for the witness of Christ in your social media presence
- The ministry of peacemaking makes room for Jesus
- God will provide each of us with specific insights to make room for his presence in our social media communication
- Pray, practice mindfulness, tear down dividing walls of hostility, focus on the relationships entrusted to your care, build new relationships, strengthen old relationships and allow God to engage your prophetic imagination to change our online world

Session Format

- Have individuals share what they learned last week participating in the #PostingPeace challenges from chapters 10 and 11. Discuss the outcomes of their activity and their observations concerning how the challenges impacted their social media communication. This should take 5 to 15 minutes.
- Discuss 1 or 2 questions from the questions listed at the end of chapters 11 and 12. Provide individuals a couple minutes to first write down their short answer, then provide 5 to 10 minutes for individuals to share their written answer with a group of 2 or 3 people. Call the group back together and ask if any group wants to discuss something interesting that came out of their discussion. Provide 5 to 10 minutes for this larger discussion. As a facilitator, feel free to ask follow-up questions to deepen the discussion. Make sure no one monopolizes the conversation.
- Read the #PostingPeace challenges at the end of chapters 9 and 10 and also read the 7-day #PostingPeace challenge at the end of the book. Ask people to write down which challenges they are going to participate in. Give them the option to pick one or both of the challenges in each chapter. Also ask if any participants will be doing the 7-day challenge. Open the group up for people to explain which challenges they are picking and why. Provide 10 to 15 minutes for this activity.
- Pray and dismiss.

Special Focus:

Provide extra time for members to pray for each other. Pray with faith believing that every person will embrace the ministry of peacemaking in a way that will transform their lives and the lives of those they meet online. Provide opportunity for people to stay in touch online if this seems right for the class.

TRANSFORM YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA LIFE

Ask yourself these simple questions daily:

- Am I making room for **Christ** in my online interactions?
- Am I committing to the ministry of **#PostingPeace**?
- Am I examining my **true motivations** for my online interaction?

Your answers have the **power** to change the **world**.

#postingpeace



Douglas S. Bursch is copastor of Evergreen Foursquare Church in Auburn, Washington. A former newspaper columnist and talk radio host, Doug has produced and hosted over 1,200 Christian radio broadcasts. He is the producer and host of the Fairly Spiritual Show radio program and podcast.



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