

**One Nation Under God**  
Andy Stanley

**Scripture:** *Philippians 2:14–15; Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 9:19–23*

*[Last spring, we were emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic and a contentious election season. I was so grieved by, disappointed in, and embarrassed by the behavior and language of high-profile pastors, Christian leaders, and non-profit leaders, especially on the right side of the political aisle. I was so bothered by it that I wrote a book. It came out this week.]*

**Graphic:** Photo of the book cover of *Not in It to Win It*

*[You don't need to purchase it. You lived and modeled it. We've talked about most of it.]*

*[You are my first audience. I never say anything in media that I've never said here before. Today and next week, I want to remind us of a couple of things as the nation gears up for another round of crazy.]*

*[Throughout 2020 and 2021, I encouraged you to write a pandemic and election-cycle story you would be proud to tell. I asked:]*

When **2020** is nothing but a story you tell, what story do you want to tell?

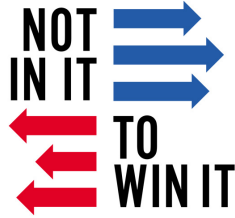
*[Is it one of panic, fear, or selfishness? Or is it a story of faith, compassion, and generosity? I reminded us that...]*

We write our stories one **decision** at a time.

Write a **good** one!

*[I feel like we did. We suspended live services. We stayed connected in online groups and met on driveways. In 2020, we had our largest Be Rich initiative ever after not meeting in person for five months. Then in 2021, we exceeded it again. We baptized people, had weddings and funerals, and gathered outside for services. We didn't politicize our church. People got mad and left. They said we caved to political pressure.]*

*[When life is predictable, it's easy to lose sight of what we value or fear most. When a tsunami of uncertainty rolls in, things get real quickly.]*



Uncertainty doesn't **alter** our value system.

It **exposes** it.

*[Our reactions to the uncertainty give us away. This is super important to keep in mind.]*

Our **actions** don't tell the whole story.

But our **reactions** most certainly do.

*[The reactions of many people to political, social, economic, and health crises exposed what's been true all along. Beneath their Bible-laced rhetoric and faith claims, there was a hidden agenda. It's an agenda people outside the church suspected all along. Christians value the same thing every ideologically driven group values.]*

Winning

*[Apparently, a lot of Christians fear the same thing every other group fears. That is...]*

**Losing**

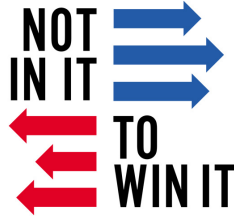
*[We fear losing influence, our voice, and our rights. That's exactly what happens when the church abandons its Christ-ordained mandate and stoops to and reduces itself to the kingdom-of-this-world aspiration of winning. We're here to win souls and hearts but not culture wars. We certainly aren't here to win elections.]*

*[In 2020–2021, churches and church leaders alienated half the souls in America through their un-Christlike rhetoric and fear-based posturing. The thing Jesus was most concerned for his people and future church was unity in their belief he was sent from God.]*

*[The church, in general, has missed an unprecedented opportunity to live and react in contrast to the world around us. Too many Christians did exactly what Paul warned first-century believers not to do.]*

**Philippians 2:14–15**

<sup>14</sup> Do **everything** without **grumbling** or **arguing**...



*[The assumption was there were reasons to grumble and argue. But why not argue, grumble, or demand our way? What's the win in that?]*

<sup>15</sup> **so that** you may become **blameless** and **pure**, “children of God without fault in a **warped** and **crooked generation.**”

*[If you grumble and argue like everybody else, people will think you're like everybody else. Paul says, if you get this right...]*

<sup>15</sup> Then...

<sup>15</sup> you will **shine** among them like stars in the sky.

*[The contrast will be so apparent that people will stop and take notice. The past couple of years, the church lost some of its shine, and Christians lost some of their shine. Let's get it back! Christians have to stop grumbling and arguing with one another, neighbors, state and local officials, and with their pastors. To use Jesus's words, we had an opportunity to:]*

**Matthew 5:16 (Paraphrased by Andy Stanley)**

*Let our light **shine** before others, that they may **see** our good **deeds** and glorify our Father in heaven.*

*[Instead, some went to war with state and local officials over the right to gather during a pandemic. They left the impression that the church would suffer irreversible harm if we couldn't meet indoors, shoulder-to-shoulder every seven days.]*

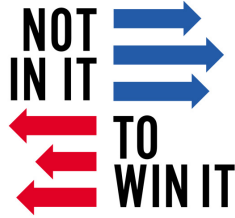
*[On social media, Christians demonized and criticized, by name, people they'd never met. We gave up the moral high ground and confirmed what the next generation has suspected for some time. Perhaps we don't actually believe what we claim to believe.]*

*[Demonizing people in other political parties has become an exercise in virtue. If you're a Jesus follower or a pastor, you have no business participating in any of that.]*

*[People say we were standing up for the truth! We would not be intimidated! We were standing up for our religious rights and fighting the good fight.]*

We were in it to **win** it!

*[This sounds good until you follow Jesus through the Gospels. Follow the apostle Paul from Greece to Jerusalem to Rome. As un-American and passive as it sounds...]*



The church is not here to **win**.

*[By every human measure, our Savior lost. He lost on purpose and with a purpose. We are his body. Like our Savior, we are not in it to win anything. We are in it for something else entirely.]*

*[When we allow our faith to be subjugated to our political party of choice, we lose our voice, our distinction, and lose our way. We lose our opportunity to serve as the conscience of our nation, which means the nation we love suffers.]*

*[Jesus didn't come to win the way we define it. He came to lose. He invited us to follow him to a different win.]*

*[Apostle Paul understood this. Jesus's followers in Antioch understood it. They were called Christian by non-Christians. Peter understood it.]*

**It** changed the world.

*[It changes communities, families, and cultures. Many of us would say it changed our lives.]*

*[To be clear, I'm not advocating withdrawal from the political process. On the contrary, we've been called to love and care. So, we must do everything we can to create and protect a culture that fuels human flourishing. But our...]*

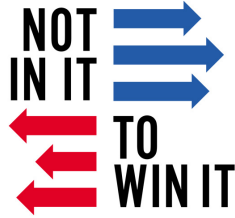
Posture  
Tone  
Approach

*[... must reflect that of our Lord. Our posture, tone, and approach have been prescribed to us. The instructions are on the label.]*

*[In his letter to believers in Corinth, Paul describes his win and strategy for winning. It's so lame. It couldn't possibly work. FYI, Paul's lame ideas, along with Jesus's lame ideas, shaped Western civilization.]*

**1 Corinthians 9:19**

Though I am **free** and belong to no one, I have made myself a **slave** to **everyone**...



*[We read the term slave figuratively. Paul lived in an economy fueled by slavery where people were owned and traded. It was slavery by poverty. Everyone was a potential slave. But in this case, he chose it. He made himself...]*

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have **made myself** a slave to everyone,

*[Even members of the other political party? A slave to people you disagree with? Seriously?]*

*[Paul decided to place himself under, to serve, and to go second. But he had an agenda. It was an others-first strategy and agenda prescribed to him by his king. Paul's agenda?]*

to **win** as **many** as possible.

*[His goal was to win people away from a generationally engrained worldview to a new way of seeing everything and everybody. How naïve! What a pathetic strategy!]*

**Submit to** and serve people as a way of **influencing** people?

*[That doesn't work! Jesus tried that. Paul continues:]*

### **1 Corinthians 9:20**

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to **win** the Jews.

*[This is confusing to us. Paul was a Jew but not in first-century terms. He was a Hebrew from Tarsus. Jesus was a Hebrew from Galilee. Paul's point is: I became like the Judeans.]*

To those **under the law**, I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so as to **win** those under the law.

### **1 Corinthians 9:21 (Paraphrased by Andy Stanley)**

*To those not having the law, I became like one not having the law, though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law...*

*[I'm under the law of a king—God's first King and his only Anointed One. We are under Christ's law. His law is to love others as he loved us. Christ's law will determine my tone, posture, and approach. We are to "one-another" one another regardless of the political views of the other.]*

so as to **win** those not having the law.



*[What a compromiser, poser, and pretender. Come on, Paul! Take a position. Don't stand in the middle. You're either hot or cold.]*

*[Afraid of losing followers? Trying to have it both ways? A lot of pastors were accused of that in 2020–2021. They were the pastors who refused to politicize their churches. A refusal to take a side was interpreted as refusal to take a stand.]*

*[We did take a stand. We took a stand against politicizing the ekklesia of Jesus. We were standing for the...]*

Posture  
Tone  
Approach

*[... prescribed by our King. We were standing against alienating half of our community by siding with one political party over the other. We chose to stand with Jesus in the messy middle rather than capitulate to divisive, broad-brush, political talking points.]*

*[What Paul writes next is one of my favorite statements in the New Testament. It's his...]*

Mission and Strategy

**1 Corinthians 9:22–23**

<sup>22</sup> I have become **all things to all people...**

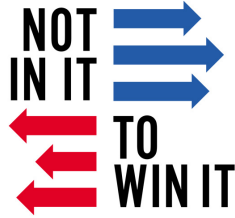
*[I've learned to build and navigate relationships with people I have virtually nothing in common. But why?]*

<sup>22</sup> so that by **all possible means...**

*[Whatever it takes, including being misunderstood and mistreated. Then Paul lays out his mission, his Great-Commission-informed mission.]*

<sup>22</sup> I might **save** some.

*[It's amazing that anything Paul wrote survived. It survived because he refused to bend to the prevailing worldviews. He was convinced that YHWH had done something new in the world, for the world, and in spite of everything going on around the world.]*



*[Paul was convinced he held the moral and ethical high ground. He didn't feel compelled to win something because Jesus had already won. Which means the world had already won. Someone just needed to tell them. So Paul set out to do just that. In his words:]*

<sup>23</sup> I **do** all this for the sake of the **gospel**, that I may share in its blessings.

*[Let's continue to be about that. When a church becomes preoccupied with saving America, it has forsaken its mission. When a church becomes preoccupied with defending its rights rather than advocating for the rights of others, it has lost its way.]*

*[As author Tim Keller writes:]*

“When the **church** as a whole is no longer seen as speaking to questions that **transcend** politics, and when it is no longer **united** by a common faith that transcends politics...

then the world sees strong **evidence** that Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx were right...

that religion is really just a **cover** for people wanting to **get their way** in the world.”  
—Tim Keller

*[Let's resist the temptation to use our faith—and to use Jesus—as a means to an end. Let's not be guilty of leveraging our faith to get our way in the world.]*

*[Every time you place your hand over your heart to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, you declare what I'm advocating for...]*

“One nation **under God**”

*[God first—our King first. Our ultimate allegiance is to our King, a better king.]*

*[Our uncompromising devotion to our better King will ultimately make America a better nation. And it will make the world a better, safer place. That's what history attests to.]*

*[Next week, we'll talk about us and specifically about what's next. Don't miss Part 2 of Not in It to Win It.]*

## **Prayer**