

Beyond winning to living well

## How can we look beyond the next thirty days and focus on our whole lives?

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

October 9, 2018



Judge Brett Kavanaugh has been confirmed to the Supreme Court. And now, people on the left scramble to figure out what to do, considering many of the rights and freedoms for people of color, women, and LGBTQ people may be in danger.

Some hold on to Michelle Obama's advice, "When they go low, we go high." Others say that you can't bring roses to a gun fight and expect to get out alive. They argue

that the reason why progressives lost the last presidential election is because we didn't go low enough.

Some hold strong for the midterms, counting on a blue wave to flood the map. Others remind us of the grave injustices inherent in the voting process, where gerrymandering, partisanship, racial discrimination, the electoral college, and class bias rob people of their vote and leave them feeling disenfranchised.

Some say the Democratic Party needs to moderate in order to pick up more independents and Trump defectors. Others direct the Party to take a hard-left turn to pick up the growing number of Socialist Millennials.

Some urge for civility, saying that people need to be able to eat out at a restaurant, without jeers and protestors. Others say that social change is often ugly, and civility is a smug tool for the privileged.

**I assume that each person's response has a lot to do with their core.** If you've taken the Enneagram, the MBTI, or a BuzzFeed sorting hat quiz that decides what Potter House you belong in, you will know that we all have different motivations and gifts. Some people are more inclined to make peace, negotiate, or study. Others are more interested in fighting, protesting, and demonstrating.

As a pastor slogging through these culture wars, I fell less concerned with what sort of method it takes to win. We need every person—the peacemakers and protesters, thinkers and demonstrators, serpents and doves. **What I worry about is what kind of *humans* we will be.**

My parents were strongly pro-life and religious Right, and for the last forty years, they never lost sight of what they wanted: a strong conservative Supreme Court. They gave money, voted, and organized for decades to that end. They set up think tanks and a whole network of home-schooling. They ran people for school board and president.

This is their day. It saddens me deeply that the court turned over with someone who had [classmates](#), begging to testify to the FBI that he was a [black-out, abusive drunk who lied under oath](#). I worry that Kavanaugh's partisanship is in no way appropriate for the Supreme Court and could lead to distrust in the one branch of government that needs some independence from politics.

But aside from all of that, the reality is that religious Right been working for decades to see this happen.

The Evangelical mistake was that they allowed themselves to be coopted, then they focused on winning—and they sacrificed every moral fiber in their movement’s means to justify that end. As a result, they may have lost the next generation.

On the left, we are optimistic and believe that the arc of human history bends toward justice. Yet, that optimism lulls us into thinking that liberation is an inevitability, that justice will have its way no matter what. We believed that with enough education people will be enlightened and vote the same way we do (not realizing how patronizing that sounds). We think that technological advances are good and we’re not suspicious about how they might be manipulating us.

Throughout Trump’s victories, progressives blamed people who live in poverty, because that fit into that world view. If progressives blamed poor people, they could pretend that Trump was an aberration. Of course, white people who live in poverty have very little power in the way that these things shake down, and Trump voters came from every corner of the socio-political spectrum. But, if we blame Trump on those who live below the poverty line, we could keep our smug ideals of education, enlightenment, and inevitability.

Now it feels like people are so focused on winning, like November is some sort of end game and they want to figure out the best tactic for the next thirty days. *Will people stay angry enough? Can we keep the fires stoked for a month so that they actually show up for a midterm election?*

I’m wondering, **how can we look beyond the next thirty days and focus on our whole lives?** How can we engage people, in the particular gifts that God gave them? How can we understand that the means and the ends are both important, because this is not about one election, but a life well lived? How can we hold to the optimism and hope in education, without falling into smug classism?

Christine Blasey Ford didn't win. Martin Luther King, Jr. didn't win. Walter Rauschenbusch didn't win. Anne Frank didn't win. Jesus certainly didn't win. But the beauty of their words, the courage of their actions, the hope in their hardship will always inspire us to live life well.