

# Avoiding the idol of politics with a biblical approach

## TRANSCRIPT

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**NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.**

[00:00:00] **Denison Ministries:** Welcome to the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum and host for this special series that we're running right now called Politics Discerned Differently. We hope that this series is encouraging as well as equipping to you as you navigate through this unusual and historic time in our country and in the next political.

season that leads up to an election in November. Obviously, lots to think about right there, and we hope that this series has been and will continue to be helpful to you and that you'll recommend it to others as well. We not only have this podcast, but we also have a number of other resources that you can find at our website, which is denisonforum.

org forward slash You'll find articles, podcasts, and other resources that not only we, but also our friends in ministry have put together that we think could help you, help your small group, help your family, help your church help your pastor, however you want to engage those and use those resources.

Again, denisonforum.org forward slash election. And so today we're going to have a unique conversation. We're going to turn the tables a little bit and have a conversation about politics being discerned in the context of families and church families, particularly, and joining me today for the conversation is Micah Tomasella.

Micah is advancement officer for Denison ministries. He's a graduate of Dallas Baptist University, also has a background not only in local church ministry, but also in finance, real estate, and other nonprofit work, and is one of the most exciting people that you'll ever come around to meet. He is married to Emily and they have two awesome, beautiful daughters.

So Micah, welcome to the podcast. Wow. Thank you so much for that introduction. That was very, very kind. So, did I get it all correct like you said I needed to get it correct? You absolutely got it right, man. You're speaking to me very kindly today. I appreciate it. So, just for everyone to have context, Micah and I are very much kindred spirits in various ways about ministry.

Can I say it that way? Sure, absolutely. Yeah. We are. We are friends and we are separated by a few decades. So if that helps anybody to think through the conversation a little bit, I was, you know, I thought about saying I was old enough to be your dad, but I just didn't really want to go there. I mean, it might be closer to Grandpa.

Oh, easy now. Easy, easy. You're about, you're about to get into trouble, Micah. So, but we have certainly a passion for ministry. We have a love for Jesus and for our walk of faith. We're grateful to get to work at Denison Ministries and Denison Forum and to get to work in these environments. We went to similar schools, not the same school, but sister schools in many ways.

So we have some similar experiences there. We both have church local church experience. And I haven't asked you this question, but have you seen politics show up in any of your family friendships in a tense way? Yes, absolutely. I mean, I think we can look back to the 2016 election, but then I think we can even look even four years ago during COVID issues that I feel like used to not be politicized or be political issues where you would feel a certain way.

And if you feel a certain way about this topic, like COVID restrictions, for example, however you feel about that. It's probably what your political affiliation is, right? So there's been this shift that I've noticed in my family, when I've worked at churches, just in my environment as, as a millennial everything has become politicized to the point to where however you feel about even one topic politically can, Really define you in someone else's mind that you're having a conversation with, but we're all complex and there's a lot to us.

And so, yes, in family relationships in friendships and in church. And I would say it just became incredibly prevalent 2015, 2016 to now, and we've just kind of steamrolled into where we're sitting here in 2024. Yeah, it's really been odd in many ways. And it's certainly been, That way in my family you know, I can remember growing up that so I came from a large family in East Texas and we were almost always aware of politics in one way or another.

I can, I can remember like the first time I ever saw a political pin that you would put on your clothes. was when Richard Nixon was running for office. Okay. And I can remember thinking, what was that? And where did this this, you know, this stuff showed up at the house somehow. I don't even know how I was maybe 10 12 years old at this point.

But it looked like stuff you would bring in from New Year's Eve. You know, there were horns and hats and buttons and all that. It was political paraphernalia from the Nixon campaign. I remember we had very close friends that we grew up with all the kids in this family and we, I mean, we did family vacations together.

We did everything together. And when Jimmy Carter was running for president, It was clear that they were supportive of Jimmy Carter and my parents at least one of them as far as I could tell

was not and so many people may remember that Jimmy Carter was a peanut farmer from Georgia and my parents as a joke, just purely as a good hearted joke, got a Statue of Mr.

Peanut and send it over to them as a way of just joking with them about the election. And so these things were just kind of always in the air. And then, but then I, I later met and married my wife and I was part of her family for decades and we never had, there was never a political conversation there of any kind.

But like you said, in the last 10, 15 years people that are in my family and in some of my circles of friendships who never seem to have a single bit of interest in politics now have very bold, sometimes strident, sometimes angry opinions. I mean, really zero to 100, right? It's not like it was this gradual progression.

It was just all of a sudden we wake up. And everything's just different, right? Yeah. And, and, you know, and I know, I know people who have text threads where certain people are on their text thread because they can say certain things in this text thread, but they can't say them in that one. Don't know if you're seeing those kinds of things or not, but it's just really become divisive.

And even to the point now where it feels it doesn't feel danger or doesn't feel safe is like it used to feel safe to have a conversation even around the family dinner table or Thanksgiving or something like that. You know, one of the things we wanted to talk about was, you know, does it feel safe to talk about politics at church?

We'll get to that in a little bit. But it really starts with does it feel safe to have these conversations at home? You know, I was in a conversation about 10 days ago where somebody was sharing with me they have background and experience in counseling and they were saying that one of the things that that counselors are now seeing is couples coming into the counseling office in increasing numbers.

Because there's unresolved conflict over politics. It's not about, are we parenting on the same page? It's not about, are our finances the way they're supposed to be so that we can be, you know, comfortable with that together. It's not about intimacy's issue, intimacy, it's about politics and I'm like, that's a really interesting place to have to have counseling for.

And that's the danger of identity politics. And that's really what's taken over these last 10, 15 years. If you feel a certain way about a subject or about an issue then I can pretty much boil down and define who you are based off of how you feel about that. If you do not agree with me. You do not love me.

And so it's even deeper than politics as, as you know, and as the counselors know, people are taking this so seriously and they're boiling it down to the essence of who they are. And that's why

it's creating so many issues when politics used to be one thing we were interested in, especially in this time, three months away from the election.

It's really becoming some people's entire identities. And unfortunately it's becoming even more of an identity of Christians too as they politically affiliate. But Mark, let me ask you this, my friend, should Christians and churches care about politics? And I think we know the answer, but why can you explain a little bit more about that?

Yeah, I think absolutely we should care. We just have to be careful that we care the right way. And kind of what you were alluding to just then is that, We don't care too much, especially to the point that we care so much about this that we don't see it in its proper frame and in its proper place that part of what we're experiencing, I think, is that politics for many of us, including many of us in the church has become wrong sized or outsized in terms of its importance.

And. We, we are asking in some ways things from politics, from government, from our politicians that they were never intended to provide. I know my, my wife got into conversation with somebody and she said, you know, this person seemed to be just so, so invested in politics right now. And, and she's asked, why, why is this so significant to you?

Why are you. So focused. Why are you following this with such passion? And the person just said because it gives me hope, which I thought that's interesting. Cause that's politics. Yeah. Yeah. We both, we both kind of walked away scratching our head going, that's an interesting place to look for hope, but it's not.

It's not a wrong place to look for hope. Even though it's often frustrating and but in some ways I think that's a part of the problem is, is that we are all looking for hope. Somebody said to me just the other day, people come to church looking for hope in one way or another. And that's exactly the right place that we should be looking at our faith and particularly at our churches.

To a lesser degree, and in a particular category of topics and issues, we should look to politics as a place of hope, particularly in our part of the world and in our form of government. There ought to be a real sense of Hey, this is a good thing. And this is something that we can be a part of. It's a place we should care getting back to your question.

We should care because it's a place for us to be a witness for Christ in this environment to help people think about these things well to right size their engagement in politics, but to look beyond politics to a greater hope and to a greater promise. And to a greater kingdom. I love what Paul says to the Philippian church.

He doesn't use this terminology very much, but he uses it in Philippi because Philippi was a particularly independent city that Rome allowed to have a lot of freedom and flexibility that they

didn't convey to a lot of the places where Rome conquered. But in Philippi, they allowed it to operate with a great deal of political freedom and expression.

And Paul in that particular context is where he uses this phrase. You are citizens of heaven. And he's reminding them, Hey, great that you get to live in Philippi. Great that you have by whatever means gained enough trust with Roman authority that they'll they're giving you flexibility and they're giving you more room.

They're giving you some opportunity to self govern in some ways. That's all great. Remember, your ultimate allegiance, your ultimate king is Jesus, and your ultimate kingdom is not of this world. It's the kingdom that Jesus is bringing later. That's so good, and that's true. Let's talk about the factors for a minute from this of what's, what's led to us being in the place that we are today.

So what historical, cultural factors have contributed to the rise of people starting to mix their Their faith with their politics, Christian nationalism patriotism versus nationalism in recent years. What has contributed to that rise in the last 10, 15 years as we've been alluding to it? Yeah, I think you have to even go back further than that, Micah, just in some of the things that I've been reading and conversations I've had, even in this podcast series here overnight, we didn't get here overnight and, and that things like this move. They move over decades if not longer and it really is an application of that idea of like, how does a business fail? Very, very slowly for a long period of time and then very suddenly how does a marriage fail? Usually, you know, as my pastor used to said, more marriages fail by erosion than by explosion, but there's usually a combination.

There's usually a long number of years of erosion. That then culminates in some kind of a cataclysmic event that brings the end to the relationship. But nobody wakes up, nobody ever gets married, wakes up and says, I want to be a divorced person. It, it happens over a long progression and we could date this in a lot of different ways.

Dr. Denison talks about this in a number of different contexts. Dr. Ryan Denison, who has a degree in church history can help us with this as well. But Even this week, Dr. Denison wrote a couple of articles that reference 1960 kind of as a place for us to look at. Why is that? A couple of things happened in 1960.

We somewhat mark the beginning of the quote unquote sexual revolution at 1960. The reason for that, at least two reasons is, is 1960 is when birth control becomes a an available opportunity. And so now because of birth control, That's becoming, that becomes increasingly more available. People can have sex outside of marriage or within marriage with less risk of, of pregnancy and children that they didn't intend to have.

We also see at that immediate same point the arrival of pornography. I think it's 1959, right about then when Hugh Hefner founds Playboy magazine and pornography starts to become exponentially available. And will only increase up until our day. And then we also start to see that simultaneous to that or correlated to that people start moving away from their faith and we start seeing really a replacement kind of faith.

What is sometimes been called secularism. And those two things cannot be separated from each other and have only accelerated. I just finished reading a book that was written by a couple of pastors in Florida called The Great De Churching. And in this book, it's been out about a year or so. They describe how in the last 25 years, which has basically been the bulk of the time that I've been in this ministry Almost 40 million Americans have left the church.

40 million adult Americans have left over the last 25 years and we're seeing that all the research points to that. And Even though there are some churches, particularly large churches that have large numbers of people We are, we are seeing a decline in overall faith engagement within our country.

And that means that people are probably looking to looking for hope in other places. Right now, some of the reasons people left church are legitimate. There've been all kinds of reports and, and unfortunately, it breaks our heart to see stories of leadership failure within the church of scandal child abuse within the church, other kinds of abuse within the church, and some of those reasons are totally understandable, but that's not the whole story about why people have seemingly deprioritized their faith, but that doesn't mean they were In any way less interested in hope and they've gone looking for other sources.

I think some of us have gone looking for that in politics in an inappropriate way. I mean, scripture tells us that we're knit together in our mother's womb. And we know that we're created on purpose for a purpose. And so when I think about these topics that we're discussing, this is really just.

human nature, our sinful nature taking course, right? It's, it's this replacement theology, like you've said, like you've alluded to when we're not attending church, when we are in places and spaces where we're less known and where we have less places where we belong, because we've deprioritized. We look for places to belong, to have a voice, to be heard, to hear other perspectives.

And that in and of itself is not a bad thing. It's actually beautiful. It's God's design. We're not meant or built to live life alone. So when we Stop going to church when we stop prioritizing our faith when we stop running after Jesus or really in general running towards whatever your thought Theology was or is you're going to just by human nature just by the way that you were built and created Going to try to find somewhere to belong right because people are more afraid

and more lonely and disconnected in this season People as you said are less religious and faith oriented And as you mentioned earlier, Christians and people in general have wrong expectations of government and ask more of their government or for more from their government that simply a government just isn't able to provide.

Like, hope is an interesting concept, and I think that that's great. But ultimately that hope is going to come from Jesus. Yeah, so, yeah, so I'm curious, since you are somewhere in the neighborhood of 30 years younger than me what's, what's your perspective from the standpoint of, did it feel, Micah, to you, did you notice, That there was a real turning point in our culture, and you pick the time five years ago, 10 years ago, 15 years ago, like, like when you were when you were in your teens, how aware were you of politics or an election?

What was that like when you were in your twenties when you're, you know, I remember going to college and being at college. And being aware at a whole new level for the first time in my life about politics because this was the Reagan Bush era and and, and, and it just like, it's like, oh, this must be what college is like.

Now you're aware of these kinds of things on a whole new level. But what was it like in your experience over, over the last 15 or 20 years for you? And I guess what I'm saying is, is if we're going to say that there's something different now. Yeah. Does it feel different to you? Do you feel, did you feel a turn?

Of course. Of course. I mean. And perspective and hindsight allows us to look at this now. But in the moment, you're just kind of going along with things and noticing and recognizing things. But even when I'm asked that question, I think about, okay first of all, just to preface, I've always had more of a political bend than maybe most other people.

The first election that I got really invested in, I think I was eight or nine. It wasn't that in 04. George Bush and John Kerry, okay, that was really the one that I remember really deeply caring about, but maybe not really fully understanding why I care about it. Just kind of going along with like what my family thought would be the best thing, right?

And then I remember in 2008 McCain and Obama, right? And then I remember that was where I think I really kind of noticed a difference from 04 to 08, but I'll tell you what really makes all the difference now. From 08 to then 2012, and then really from, I feel, 2012 to 2016, leading into the 2016 election.

Social media, as it gained more and more traction, as we are really being asked to, when we scroll social media, to kind of bear the burdens of the world, not even the burdens of our town, even smaller, our neighborhood, our family. We're bearing the burdens of our state. Our country and our world, anything and everything at our fingertips.

And that is what is, I think, significantly changed human nature and our desire to belong and to care about things and our sinful nature to all of that stayed the same. But now we have all this information at our fingertips, all of the algorithms on social media. I think that that's probably even the biggest change of all, whatever you consume on Tik TOK, on Facebook, on Instagram.

on x, whatever it might be, the algorithms are just going to keep feeding you what it is they think you want to see. And so then before you know it, You're backed pretty deep into a corner if you're not careful, and you're only hearing from and only being fed information from those who would tend to agree with you.

And then I think that that really creates anxiety, frustration, and some short sightedness. And a lack of wisdom because we're just, we've kind of stopped listening to another perspective and we just hear what we want to hear over and over again. So I think social media has been the catalyst for the change that we've seen from 2008 to now, 2012 to now.

Yeah. You know, it makes me think of the conversation I had with our friend Connor Jones. We did a podcast in this series about media and the influence of media. And I think, I think that is a big deal. And I think it's a, you know, social media has been around longer than than what I ever remember.

I can go back and remember the first time I was in my church office when I was pastoring a church and somebody mentioned something called Friendster. Okay. So you're going way back and that's pre Facebook. That's pre Facebook. That's, that's pre that's MySpace. So there was a thing called Friendster that then led to this thing called MySpace that then led to the MySpace.

led to, you know, and I, and I do know two people, including one of my immediate siblings who still has an AOL address for his email. So, that that tells you a little bit how of how old I am. And it still works. What's amazing is, is that it still works? And it's, you know, we're We only now seem to be starting to come to a little bit of sobriety about what this whole phenomenon of technology and particularly social media where, you know, I come from a family where we somehow learned early on maybe just because there were 10 of us in my immediate family, including my parents, that We could form opinions about anything with almost no data to work with.

We could just immediately form opinions. And social media has become an opportunity where anybody can say anything at any time to any one or supposedly, but like I said, you know, we didn't immediately know, or at least I didn't immediately know. That that when I was on social media, especially in the early days, I wasn't talking to everybody, but there was actually an algorithm that was learning me and would then start feeding stuff back to me.



Okay. And just knowing that and learning and starting getting our minds around the reality that in a technological and social media reality, You are the product. You may think you're looking for products on the internet, and certainly you are, but from the standpoint of social media, your attention is the product that they're looking for and the product that they're going to play off of because In some sense you know, Facebook, X, that type of thing, in, in some way, those companies don't really care who you vote for.

They probably at some level in their company, they care about who gets elected into Congress and into the presidency, that type of thing. But what they really care about on a day to day basis is making their company successful and profitable. There you go. And they do that by getting your attention and selling your attention to advertisers that keep their company going.

And we're just now starting to, at least in a large scale from what I can tell, get our minds around that. And that's why what we're starting to see now is a great Deal of attention to how do we reclaim our privacy in some ways, and I don't think that's a bad thing. I think I think there's some really healthy things about that.

And will help us, I think, hopefully have a better perspective on politics as well as a better perspective on everything. So, I mean, with, with that, that there's going to have to be some sort of a correction. We dove straight in, we were all engaging in social media in different ways. And then you're right here just recently, it's like, man, these algorithms and then these large companies that own all the social media companies, right?

Like one owns all of these, right? And there's this, there's this political interest, this money interest, all that. So, I mean, at a certain point we just have to course correct. And on a positive note, I do think that we're seeing that kind of across the spectrum, I wanted to ask you, can, can you define Christian nationalism and the issue in that?

And then really what's the difference between that and patriotism? Yeah. And I love the idea of patriotism, obviously, which is just being very grateful for me. I think patriotism is being very grateful for the place where God. has decided that you would be born and most for most people live out your whole life.

Most people don't want to either be required to or on their own pursue a life in a place outside of the place of their origin. Even when we talk about immigration is a big, huge issue, like you said, that people get identified simply because they have a particular view of immigration. Most of those people that are coming in, in, in dark country or, or at least a lot of them, maybe I shouldn't say most of them, but at least a lot of them are coming because they're coming out of very desperate situations, and they're looking for a better place to survive and hopefully to thrive.

But most people want to stay in their country of origin and usually in their communities of origin in many ways. And that sense of being grateful for that. And being hopeful as well as being proud, just simply proud in a healthy and holy kind of way. I'm proud that I get to be a part of this part of the world and I get to be this part of this country.

But I think the difference with patriotism as compared to nationalism is Patriotism has both deep, deep pillars of humility, deep pillars of hope, and deep pillars of honesty. That is, a patriot can say, yes, I'm grateful to be here, I'm grateful for what our country is doing well, but I'm also going to be very clear eyed and very honest about what our country is not doing well, and what we can improve upon, what we need to address, because a patriot wants everybody in that nation to flourish, not just some, and I think that may be the distinction that a person that has what I would call unhealthy perspectives of nationalism says I want it to be good for at least the people that, you know, I prefer or that I have a preference for and I want our nation to be preferenced over all the other nations of the world.

Those are unhealthy and I would say unbiblical expressions really, really what I would call nationalism is a warped unhealthy, unholy sense of patriotism where we're no longer going to be humble about who we are. We're no longer going to be honest. About what's going on in our country and that we need to own that we need to confess that we need to at times repent of and that we need to work toward getting better.

And that's where I think the distinctions are between nationalism and patriotism. If this goes into the idea of Christian nationalism, I like the way Dr Dennison framed that in the very first one of these podcasts that we had in this series. We say Christian nationalism says that Christians should be preferenced or privileged in our country over all other faiths.

Things that could come down to, you know, you and I live in Texas football, high school football is like a religion to some people in the fall. And the idea here would be if you have strong beliefs in, in Christian nationalism, you would say we should certainly have prayers before the beginning of the football game and it should only be a Christian prayer.

And, and then some people would go even further and say it should only be a Protestant Christian prayer. It should only be. From this particular Protestant denomination, and that that starts to have the idea that Christian nationalism says it should be that way. And we should never allow a person from another segment of faith or from another faith altogether.

And that, you know, we may get emails just about that, but that's, that's getting down to the ground level of what Christian nationalism can look like. And we, we all ought to have a respectful and clear eyed understanding that yes, our country was founded by people who by and large had a Christian understanding and a Christian orientation.

Very clear research, I think, these days that not all of the founding fathers in the Continental Congress and those that we consider founding fathers, not all of them are dedicated believers in the way that you and I would define a dedicated Christian believer, but almost all of them coming primarily from Europe, if not exclusively from Europe, had an orientation around the Bible and around the core tenets of Christianity. And it was out of those perspectives that they worked and labored together to create the fundamentals of our nation.

Yeah. Yeah, that's a great point. I I've been listening to this historical podcast, goodness gracious, there's like 160 episodes. And so we started from before the revolution, before 1776, all the way up, I think we're into like the 1820s right now, like industrialization. And then we're going to lead into the Civil War and all those things.

But what I was struck by. By listening to that podcast and just remembering what I learned in school we've all had different history classes and stuff is on one hand. What I noticed was that the founding fathers fought each other in such a way that is not unlike today. I mean, to a certain extent, I mean, there were fist fights in Congress, right?

And there were full page ads taken out and there were hit pieces on this person and this and this person, political rivals, Alexander Hamilton, you know, Aaron Burr shot each other. I mean, or shot at each other, right? So that type of vitriol and, and hatred to a certain extent. What blew me away from that was that that's not necessarily new.

However, when it came down to it, somebody, for example, like Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, Hamilton wanted more of a federalist government, a large government that was in control. Thomas Jefferson wanted something that was more states rights, right? They aided each other. But at the end of the day, when it came down to what was best for the country, they They swallowed their pride and they showed their patriotism and their love for their country by working together to produce this wonderful land that we live in today.

And so that's a perspective that I felt like sometime is missing. And so even from a personal example or a personal example that I can give one way that I've been able to frame the what's the difference between patriotism and nationalism. If you go back and read and hear the stories of our founding fathers, go back and take some history lessons.

I think that we'll see the stark difference. Between patriotism and nationalism. Yeah, I think that's a great perspective. And like I said, mentioning some of those stories, it, it certainly has become fuel for a lot of things, not the least of which is a very popular play. You know, I mean, still hoping to get Hamilton tickets either.

You know, here in Dallas, Chicago, New York, you know, I've seen it on screen, but haven't seen it live. So, you know, makes for good good theater, obviously. But I think you're right. And that's

one of the things I would say ought to be a suggestion that we leave people with today, which is to take a long look.

At the nature of our country and the nature of how our politics is gone, you know, fistfights and duels are not our best hour. You know, we wouldn't say that but I've been reading a book that many are talking about right now called American Covenant written by Yuval Levine, and he talks about this that that the forces of our country are are often creating a unique form of unity based on tension rather than we all finally get to the same page.

But he talks about that in a very unique way. And talks about how the Constitution was written in that way, with the acknowledgement, the reality that there are a lot of opposing forces that are pulling in different directions. And if we see our history that way, if we see the Constitution that way, we can see that we've always had these kinds of big challenges in front of us.

And he used the word so I have been working over the last number of years, along with a couple of my siblings, actually about the fact that we have a tendency in our personalities to catastrophize that is to see any situation. As in just about its worst light, right? Okay. And that world, right?

Yeah, that we're that we're always on the edge of just completely disintegrating in one way or another. And then, so anyway, I was listening to a podcast about Levine's book yesterday where this term came out and that and Levine was the one talking on this podcast. He said, if you go back and look at our history, We've always had something of an attitude of catastrophizing about our country from the very beginning.

That we always felt like, particularly in our politics, that we were right on the edge of going over and just losing it all. And that that's maybe just the nature of what it is like to be in a democratic republic. There you go. Yes. And that sense of. We're always seeking we're always seeking to be in balance and in harmony and to try to make healthy progress as a, as a culture, as a community, as a nation.

But our country has gotten obviously increasingly big and there's 330 plus million people now. It's always been big. Even the even the colonists realized that it was a very big piece of land. They didn't even know how big it was. They just knew it was big. They knew the 13 colonies from north to south was big.

We're pretty big and they knew it was a long way home across the ocean. So they had an awareness of that. And it's only gotten more complex. And so this, since we talk about you know, I remember being in history classes in high school, talking about America as the great experiment, the democratic experiment.

If you're conducting an experiment, you're always expecting it to get to the end and the experiment is either going to prove what you were trying to do or disprove what you're trying to do. And we're wondering, and maybe we feel this as Americans in this, this thing that we've got going as a country.

Is it our time that the experiment comes to an end and we see that it works or it fails? So we kind of live on this edge and maybe that's part of what makes us. A little bit weird and a little bit crazy when it comes to our politics. Yes, absolutely. And I think one thing that we can do, and then I want to ask you a question from this, Mark.

Is if we can get ourselves to a place where in our faith, we can say if America does crumble, whatever that looks like, there's just so many different examples of what that could look like. I don't think that we're as close as some people are so fearful that we are, but if America were to come to crumble, is God still faithful?

Is God still on his throne? I think if we can answer that question is yes. I think that we're taking big steps. From differentiating between patriotism and nationalism. If we can view God as a God of Everyone he's created all of us and loves each and every one of us and of course America is special But so is any other country and he loves us just as much as he loves someone else in another country far far away But mark, how can we how can we as believers?

Identify and confront that political idolatry in our own lives within our own communities. Yeah, I think that's such a great point to come back and you've heard people say this and I think it's true, you know, nowhere in the Bible is America mentioned. Now, some theologians would argue with that and would try to connect dots that I don't think are connected.

Yes. But we have to remember that there is ultimately going to be only one kingdom and that is the kingdom of Jesus. And he is going to be the king and those who follow and trust in him will flourish in that environment. We need to be very clear about that in our politics. And what it does in some ways, Micah, is it helps us to relax.

It helps us to have A hope that is beyond any one organization, any one nation, any one politician, any one system of government, that we can look through all of these things that we can be grateful for and a part of, but we're looking forward to a future that is beyond words for us to understand or comprehend at this point.

And that can help us to relax. But it also is a reminder you know, as again, go back to what Dr. Denison wrote recently, no matter who wins the next election, no matter what candidate or what party, there's going to be something about that candidate and something about their presidency that disappoints us.

And to realize you know, you mentioned Alexander Hamilton, Hamilton wanted George Washington to become the first king. Yep. He didn't want, he didn't want him to be a president. He didn't want him to leave after two terms, which is one of the reasons that George Washington has to be the greatest American is because.

He could have been king. He certainly could have been president for as long as he wanted to. And this is fresh on my mind because I got to visit Mount Vernon for the first time recently. Oh, great. And just the reality that, and I think it was prompted by God's leadership in his life. That he chose to do what we see in an even more perfect and incredible way with Jesus, which is to lay down power, to give power away.

And that's really the calling of Christians, right? Jesus said that the greatest among you will not be, The one at the top, but rather the one who serves. And that is the spirit of Christ. And that is the spirit of his kingdom and not the pursuit of power, but rather the, the use of power for the blessing of other people in the glory of God.

And at times the releasing of power. And we have to come back to that kind of teaching. We have to come back in many ways to the Bible. And if we're going to If we're going to, if we are guilty, and I think many of us are at various ways and various levels, we are guilty of making politics our idol.

We are asking it to provide us hope and security and clarity and purpose. That it is incapable. It's not just inappropriate. It's incapable of doing that for us because it's like when you you know, and I struggled early on in my relationship with my wife. When I started dating her, I was drawn to her for a number of reasons, including her faith.

Okay. But she started to notice that I was, I was making too much of her in that category. And she said, look, I'm, I'm not your God. God is God. I'm not your God. And, and I have, I've had other people in my life do that. They say, you know what? You're depending upon me and you're expecting and hoping things from me.

That I'm not equipped or supposed to provide in your life. You have to look to God for those things and not to me. Because if you start, you know, she had this sense of, if you expect me to be able to deliver that kind of purpose and that kind of security and that kind of hope, I am going to disappoint you.

And when I disappoint you, it could, it could eliminate or destroy our relationship totally. Okay, and the same thing applies on a much grander scale with politics or with anything else anything else That's right that you and I put in God's place Anything that we that we exalt to the place that God is supposed to have in our life is ultimately going We're gonna be deceived then we're gonna

be disappointed and then we're gonna be disillusioned And that's not a path that God has for us We should see that we are privileged to live in a free country.

We're privileged to live in a place where we can participate in our democracy. We can vote, we can pray, we can run for office. We can be a part of these things, which is great. We just have to come back and realize the limitations and boundaries that government has particular functions that God has laid out for for our, our, our livelihood and for our prospering.

It can never be a replacement for God and we have to come back and let and let the spirit of God in our lives and let the word of God in our lives and let the people of God in our lives because I think the church has a real purpose in this come back and speak to us very clearly and identify. Where are we building idols, including where are we building political idols?

And let me just finish my thought, which is one way of measuring that is how much time are you spending focused on politics and what happened today in politics or this week in politics versus how much time are you spending reading your Bible? How much time are you spending in prayer? How much time are you spending with other Christians?

How much time are you spending in worship? Mark, that's a great point. And I'm glad that you said that last part before I just cut you off. Sort of, you know, I think when I look back because I always have had such a tendency personally to get really invested in politics even in high school. And then earlier on in college, I helped volunteer for certain like local campaigns, had people tell me out of, you know, out of high school and in college, Hey, you know, you should run for office one day.

You asked me that today. That is. Literally the last thing that I want to do. However, I remember a buddy of mine, my sophomore year of college told me you are spending so much time talking with people about your political ideology or what you think about a certain issue. When's the last time you shared your faith with somebody?

Oh, wow. Yeah. When's the last time you led when it came to a conversation with Jesus, as opposed to a candidate or an ideal that you're passionate about? I will tell you what, I'm so thankful for that friend. Because a shift really took place in my heart and in my life early on in college when he asked me that question.

And I think I'm growing, we always will be growing to put politics in its right place and sometimes it kind of ebbs and flows, but I had a very similar experience in a different way of understanding the place that politics and really anything else has in our lives. When it comes to our faith and when it comes to following Jesus, that is first and that is paramount.

Our priorities are not this God first family second, you know, like an Instagram bio or something like that. It's like number one, God, number two, this number three. No, it's built. We are built, we are created in God. So present with us from our faith, from our relationship with Jesus, it flows out of that.

Our politics, our family, our relationships with others, our jobs. And it is just human nature, no matter what it is. If, if in this time, we're stressing out about politics. And we're getting our identity in politics. It will shift probably to something else other than God. We are naturally looking for something else other than what is clearly the answer.

And so it might be politics in this season. It might be something totally different in the next. Yeah, absolutely. And we had to realize that, you know, the Bible over and over again calls us to live by faith. And it calls us to live by faith in Jesus. But we are because of our fallenness. We are addicted to living by sight rather than by faith.

Now faith is, is not an invitation to blind trust. You know, I, I remember my pastor used to say, if anybody, including God, ask you for blind loyalty, you'd be fooled not to look. Okay. God doesn't ask us for blind loyalty. He gives us a completely appropriate amount of evidence so that we have the opportunity to believe and trust in him, but we all know God could God could make himself so apparent, so visible that there would be no question in anybody's mind.

And the Bible says one day he's gonna do that. The reason he doesn't do that right now is because he wants us to choose. He wants us to decide to trust him. And to live by faith rather than by sight. One of the reasons we're attracted to politics, I think, is because we can see it. We can see if our candidate or party wins.

We can see if things are changing in things like the tax code or this or that aspect of government practice. Oh, that changed. So it's going to benefit me or it's going to do this or it's going to do that. We like to be able to see that our efforts create change, and we all need a certain amount of that, right?

One of the difficulties that you and I have experienced in ministry is sometimes it's very hard to see what impact you're making in a person or a family or a community's life when you're serving in ministry. Because you very rarely can do X, like teach a Bible study or preach a sermon. And all of a sudden you can see in five minutes or five days that the sin level in that person's life went down.

It just doesn't work that way. We wish it was that way. And that's one thing about politics. We feel like we can see it and measure. You know, I have a pastor friend who, He'll tell you, hey, politics is my hobby. I just love it. And I love following the intrigue of it. And there, there's a lot of amazing things.



I love going to our state Capitol. I love going to Washington, DC. I love learning the stories and. Watching those kinds of things. I wish it had less rancor in it right now. And I think I'm hopeful that we'll move to that in some healthy ways, but it's only going to happen as more and more of us realize You know what?

It has its limits and we're not going to allow it to just we're not going to allow it to destroy relationships starting with our family and in our church, and we're not going to let it define every single thing about us. And that would be maybe, as we start to get close to closing here, one of the piece of advice, you know, we're gonna be going into the holiday seasons and all of that.

If it comes down to either having a conversation about politics or creating deep breaks within relationships with either your family or friends, I say, don't talk about something else. Talk about sports, talk about faith. Like you said you don't have to have these conversations with your family.

And if it just seems like any conversation that you might bring up or that you might choose to engage because some others have brought it up would divide families in unhealthy ways, you can pick. You could choose to talk about something else. Yes. You know? Yes. And and then maybe another suggestion I would make to people.

And this would be an indication of whether or not you're Turning politics into an idol or not is can you turn it off for a substantial period of time And and be content, you know, we're talking to teenagers right now our christian parenting ministry is talking to parents about things relative to technology and social media And a lot of families are embracing ideas about hey We're gonna have a technology free day or a technology free weekend.

We're gonna put our phones down And that's not very easy to do But taking a technology or a social media fast can be one of the healthy, healthiest things that you, your teenagers and your family can do. Can you do that with politics? If, if this is something that you're really focused on, could you not go and consume something about political news for a day or for two?

And if you're, if you really struggle with that, it may mean that you're looking to politics too much. It's a great suggestion and it's a really good barometer for us to be able to test. When we're talking about this subject or almost anything else, if you're addicted to Whataburger, if you're addicted to fast food, Mark and I love Whataburger, you know, and so, maybe take a little bit of break and see, are you okay?

And then I think what you'll realize is that you're going to be just fine without it. But I'd be remiss if we didn't talk about this last thing here, Mark, because I think oftentimes we look to the church and we should look to the church and our pastors for discernment in these subjects about politics, how to vote, how to interact with people who view things differently.

How can the church and those who are in church leadership, those who are pastors who are listening, but then a lot of us who are just church members, what can the church do and how can the church do better to equip the saints for the work of the ministry in this way when it comes to politics? Yeah, I think that's a great question.

Maybe a great place for us to end as well, because I do think that there's at least three different perspectives that pastors and churches take with this. Some say, you know what, we're not talking about any of that. We're not, it's, we're, when you walk in the doors of this church or you're in this, your small group or whatever, we just don't have any of those conversations.

Others go to the complete other extreme and do what I also think is, is unhealthy and and inappropriate, which is they're going to tell their people, you know, This is how you should vote for policy. These are the people you should vote for. And they're out on the front lines endorsing candidates.

I don't think that's a healthy perspective. I think it's somewhere in the middle. And I think the main thing, and this is really a big you will for all of this information that we're trying to create podcasts and articles and that type of thing. That's on this website that is available to people is we want them to be equipped.

We want them to take. Their faith and their and the fruit of the spirit of love, joy, peace, patience and kindness, goodness, self control and take those into all of these conversations. There are, if any of us is thinking you know what? Yes, I love Jesus and I want to be a healthy Christian, but this is politics.

And so politics is different. And so we're going to carve this out and I can behave however I think I need to behave in politics to achieve what I think is the right goal. winning an election or whatever the case might be. And it doesn't matter how I get there. That is a completely unholy way to think about this area in any area of your life.

You can never turn your faith off and not be a Christian for a moment or for a period of time while you engage in politics or you engage in business or you engage something else. If you're a Christian, you're Christian 24 seven, 365, every minute of every day. And, and the goal, the opportunity here is. To take your faith, and that is a way of saying taking Jesus into every one of these conversations and realizing that the most important thing is that your testimony that points people to Christ is as important on this side of the election, and it needs to be just as important on the other side of the election.

So how do you conduct yourself? As a follower of Christ full of humility and hope as one of our friends says in their small group material Full of humility and hope i'm going to bring my relationship with christ and the truths of the bible as I understand them into every conversation

every situation And i'm not going to be so arrogant as to tell somebody that they Have to vote for this person or that person or this thing or that thing i'm going to encourage them To take their concerns their questions and their decisions and bring them to God in humble and hopeful faith and say, God, you show me What i'm supposed to do and how i'm supposed to participate And if we can follow that I think that's the work and the testimony of the church Some people are going to say that's too far other people are going to say that's a cop out And and a bailout.

I think that's the calling because that famous admonition, this too will pass, will apply here. Yes. This, we, we will move past this election. We will move past whoever becomes president. And one of the benefits of being 30 years older than you is having that, that perspective even deeper that God's been faithful in the past.

God will be faithful in the future. and God will take care of us. No matter what happens. That's another great, beautiful verse out of the first chapter of Philippians. Paul says to the church there, whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the name of Christ. That's the goal for us every day, every moment.

So I think we got to land it there. Yes, absolutely. I think so. This has been such a good discussion. There is a part of us. There's this duality that takes place. Where? We want, maybe not even consciously, we operate differently, like we might be different at work than we are at home. We might be different when we're engaging with somebody politically on social media than we are in conversations with friends.

Let's seek to bring it all under the banner of Christ when it comes to our heart and our minds. Submit it all to Him. Renew our minds. In Jesus, and let's earnestly seek God about what areas in our lives are we living differently? Are we not living like Christ? And I think if we take that inventory politically, some of us might be living just an entire, like on an entirely different planet than how we are.

We're almost acting different than who we are, and we're definitely acting different than who we are. We're called to be. But Mark, this has just been such a great discussion. I appreciate it. Hey thanks for taking the time to be with me, Micah. And I want to thank our audience for listening to us today.

And we hope that you'll be more equipped and I said, encouraged as you participate and navigate through this current political season and keep your eyes focused on Christ. Thank you for being a part of the conversation. If this has been helpful to you, please rate, review us on your podcast platform and share this with family and friends so that they can be a part of the conversation as well.

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