

Pastor Equipping Webinar: Election 2018

The FAMiLY LEADER Vice President of Church Engagement Greg Baker introduces a new initiative of TFL's Church Ambassador Network: webinars for pastors!

In this introductory webinar, Greg specifically discusses nonpartisan materials pastors can use with their churches leading up to the Election Day on Nov. 6:

[Learn more about Honoring God 2018 by clicking here now!](#)

Iowa churches light the way after devastating storm

by Daniel Sunne

On Thursday, July 19, a tornado ripped through Marshalltown with wind speeds reaching 144 miles per hour. Over 700 homes were damaged, and around 90 of them were destroyed. The Courthouse clock tower was toppled, and the main hospital, City Hall, police station, and veterans' home all received extensive damage.

Pastor Dave Martin was in his church, Faith Assembly of God, with around 15 others preparing for a block party when the tornado hit.

"The tornado just missed us by a half a block," Martin told The FAMiLY LEADER. "We were just a block and a half from the

real bad stuff.”

It was immediately apparent the town had been devastated. Seven or eight families from Faith were affected by the tornado.



The next morning after the storm, churches considered the damage and went to work. Pastor Kerry Jech with New Hope Christian Church described meeting with church staff Friday morning: “They were all out there cleaning, all of our staff just pitched in. We divided up into teams and just went out.”

Before there was even time for a coordinated plan, churches and volunteers were cleaning up debris and carrying hope into Marshalltown. New Hope Christian Church had 25-75 volunteers a day for 10 days divided into groups cleaning up the city.

Disaster relief organizations responded quickly, including Christian organizations like Samaritan’s Purse, the Salvation Army, and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief. Many operated out of churches and with church help. Faith Assembly of God hosted

Convoy of Hope, which brought in two semi loads of emergency relief supplies, including water and food as well as often forgotten necessities like diapers and cleaning supplies. And churches came or sent volunteers too, from Waterloo, Reinbeck, Des Moines, and even Nebraska and Missouri.

As organizations conquered clean up, churches tackled other community needs, such as meals for those affected by the storm. Faith Assembly of God served over 8,000 meals in 10 days, and First Presbyterian Church served hundreds of meals every evening for three weeks. Pastor Martin's church gave away quarters at the laundromat, so those without power or in shelters could take comfort in clean clothes. His church paid for \$1,000 of laundry.

Iowa State Rep. Mark Smith from Marshalltown wrote in a statement, "The light of the faith community was certainly shining brightly after this disaster. Churches offered refuge, provided meals, ensured the people in the community were safe, and turned out in mass to help with the clean-up. The efforts are continuing: Trinity Lutheran has provided space for the Mid-Iowa Community Action Agency (MICA) to distribute emergency funds, First Presbyterian offered meals, and Central Christian Church is becoming a Week of Compassion Church that will bring in teams to repair during the coming months. Second Baptist continued to hold services in their badly damaged church so that members continued to have the security of their worship center. The Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham Disaster Relief efforts arrived in town very quickly and helped so many. The Salvation Army responded as they do so often and provided services even though they, too, were victims of the storm. These are just a few of the efforts that have occurred in our community. I am so very thankful for all the efforts of our faith community!"

Rebuilding Marshalltown remains an immense task, but in clean-up and in the disaster itself, God's hand was visible.

“The entire thing, God was in the process,” said Pastor Jech. “To have the kind of weather that we did [during clean-up after the tornado], to have the people cooperating ... it goes back to what Joseph said to his brothers: ‘That which you intended for evil, God used for good.’”

[PLUS: Watch the story of the man who received salvation in Christ through the storm in Marshalltown!](#)

The Timeless Voice: Politics are not our gospel

Commentary by Greg Baker

Politics, by its nature, builds partnerships and tribes, bands of brothers who rally around a common cause. But for the believer, if we are not careful, politics can become a counterfeit of our true partnership in the gospel, a counterfeit that robs us of the life Christ has for us.

A few weeks ago, I went on an annual excursion with guys from my church that we call the “dudes’ trip.” It is always a time of fun and encouragement. On this particular dudes’ trip, we wanted to focus on true Christian fellowship, what Paul described in Philippians as a being “partners in the gospel” with one another.

For true Christian fellowship builds something more than friendships. Partners in the gospel share way more than common interests. They become a band of brothers, war buddies in a larger, spiritual battle. Paul and Silas, Paul and Timothy, Peter and John are all examples of partners in the gospel. They were a band of brothers forged by laboring in the

trenches, shoulder to shoulder, for the lives of the saints and the lost.

Partners in the gospel are marked by their love for one another (John 13:35) and their heart for others. They warn those who are idle, and they help those who are weak. They go into the lost world and labor to bring souls to Christ. They go to war against the forces of darkness, and bring the light. They cry and mourn together. They celebrate together. And more.

This is what my wife and I hunger for in the “community” group from church that meets in our home. We want more than friends who come together periodically to read the Bible and go to services on Sunday. We want more than friends with a common interest. We truly want this partnership, and the only way we are going to get it is if we quit talking about the Great Commission, and actually go out and live it.

Politics, too, can build a band of brothers. Politics is very much a contact sport, a battle that brings people close together. For the believer, however, if we are not careful, the partisan and political divide can be confused with the “partnership in the gospel” the Bible describes. We can mistake our fervor for policy and influence with our mission to be ambassadors for a higher Kingdom. And we can confuse our political war buddies with our truer brothers in Christ.

The distinction can be difficult to discern, because our political goals are often inspired by our Christian values. It is not wrong to desire to bring justice and to defend the oppressed. It is not wrong to take up the widows’ and the orphans’ cause. These desires spring from a biblical worldview and a heart for people.

Where things often go wrong, however, is our priorities. The first misstep is when our focus on the policy makes the policy itself the end goal, rather than spiritual transformation. And

when policy is the end goal, we can slip into thinking those who share our politics have allied with the side of light, while those disagree have allied with darkness. Our ideology becomes our gospel, and converting others to our politics takes on religious fervor. And when ideology becomes your gospel, anyone who labors with you becomes your band of brothers, your war buddies, your “partner in the gospel.” It’s just the wrong gospel.

If we do not guard ourselves from this, we will give our entire lives to fighting a political battle and miss where the real battle is fought. We can neglect to encourage and build into the saints. We can neglect to witness and win the lost to Christ. As a result, we will not raise up disciples. And the net result will be we lose the “culture war” we thought we were fighting, because without Christ and His Great Commission, we will lose the culture.

Our greatest protection against this temptation is to remain grounded in the local church. The local church, not political parties or policy organizations, is the hope for the world. The local church is who has been commissioned to raise up disciples. If we give our lives to building Christ’s Church and keeping our focus on Kingdom work, we will discover our truest band of brothers, our partners in the gospel.

And here’s the revolutionary, long-term perspective: When we band together with partners in the gospel, under Christ, we will see people transform around us. We will see people’s lives change. And as lives change, they change the community around them. What’s more, if we apply this gospel-centric, life-changing, disciple-making perspective to our civic engagement, it can revolutionize our government. Revolutionize how we interact with government officials. And revolutionize how we treat both our political allies and our political foes.

So, each of us – especially those of us active in government and politics – must ask ourselves, “Do I truly have partners

in the gospel? And am banding with them to build Christ's Kingdom and His Church?" Because your true partners in the gospel are your best defense against partnering in the wrong gospel.

Greg Baker is vice president of church engagement for The FAMILY LEADER.

The Timeless Voice: Transforming an unhealthy culture

Commentary by Greg Baker

America's hyper-political culture is not healthy. Neither is it functional: As America is torn into opposing factions, the division destroys our government's ability to carry out its God-given purpose. For God instituted government as His instrument of justice, and where government fails, injustice grows.

If our government is going to carry out its God-given purpose, it needs transformation. And it needs it at a cultural, heart-deep level.

Yet there is hope! I believe that if the Church engages government God's way and with the power that only comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ, we can transform the culture – both in Des Moines and in D.C.

For too long we as Christians have been tangled in the web of partisanship, and we have allowed only select issues to form how we view elected officials. This leads to Christians

thinking of one party as light and the other darkness, while the culture concludes the Church and even God must be partisan.

When you dig past the select issues, however, you find the light/dark, hero/villain dichotomy is false. Both sides have a desire to better our nation, but different theories on how to get there. Both sides need guidance from the Scriptures on how to face the many challenges confronting our nation.

The false dichotomy also leads us to false assumptions about the hearts of elected officials themselves. The truth is, some officials are hardened towards discussing the Lord or His Scriptures, while others are open – and we have found that political identification has little effect on who is soft and who is hardened against the Lord. What's more, when you share the Scriptures and God's desire for a personal relationship with them, it is amazing how the most unexpected people open up to discuss matters of faith.

In complicated issues like healthcare, mental health, the foster system, and immigration, one side could not possibly have all the answers. We need to encourage a culture where both sides of the aisle will listen to one another and earnestly search the Scriptures together to learn what God has to say.

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The Church of Jesus Christ is so much bigger than partisan and ideological battles. The Church is not here to serve any party or candidate. It is here to bring the transformative gospel of Jesus Christ everywhere it goes – *including the halls of government.*

The world left to its own devices will never do this. For

America's partisan bickering to end, for righteous legislation to pass, for our government to restore its rightful role of justice, we need the Church to bring the Great Commission to the halls of government. I believe if we lay aside partisan politics and engage government with the gospel and the timeless truths of the Scriptures, we will see partisan walls come down and people of all political parties work together towards biblical justice.

The Church can lead the way in transforming this culture. We can do this by broadly and biblically speaking to many issues, rather than only a few. We can do this by teaching all people about God's redemptive love, regardless of party. We can do this by building genuine relationships with governing officials that incorporate both the personal and their unique role as a leader in our land.

For the past three years we have been bringing pastors regularly to the Capitol in Des Moines to get to know Iowa's legislators and members of the executive branch. What God has done has been incredible! We have seen partisan walls come down as we work to bring the Scriptures and the gospel to all people, regardless of political party.

We have seen the culture begin to change in Des Moines, and I believe we can see it change in capitol buildings all across this nation. Our nation and our government need it, and the Church holds the power to do it through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" – John 1:5.

Greg Baker is vice president of church engagement for The FAMILY LEADER.

The Timeless Voice: Civility is more than manners, it's the gospel in action

Commentary by Greg Baker

We were blessed to have a woman in our office recently who shared a message on the power of our tongue. According to the book of Proverbs, “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21).

Our speech has the ability to build others up or quickly tear them down. What's more, our speech is closely tied to the gospel we preach.

If we as Christians are going to be a witness in this culture, we must change the way we speak – not only about one another, but also about the world around us.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29).

In order to make this biblical command the pattern of our lives, however, we must first change the way we view people. How we view others in our hearts will influence how we speak to them or about them: “From the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

The woman who visited our office shared with us the lyrics to a beautiful song that challenged me in how I view people. It is called “See Me Beautiful” by Red and Kathy Grammer:

See me beautiful.

Look for the best in me.
It's what I really am
And all I want to be.
It may take some time,
It may be hard to find,
But see me beautiful.

See me beautiful
Each and every day.
Could you take a chance?
Could you find a way
To see me shining through
In everything I do
And see me beautiful?

Though sin has marred each of us, God's love looks past that, and He sees our beauty. He loves us and desires to redeem us. The gospel boasts a beautiful message of God's love for us, in spite of who we are, to the point of putting our punishment on His Son all so He could be in relationship with us.

As Christians, we must see people as God sees people. We must begin to view people as made in the image of God. We must look past the sinful exterior and ask God to help us see who He created them to be. If we are willing to do this, we will begin to understand that the people around us are not our enemies, but fellow creations of God, desperately in need of His loving, redeeming grace.

When we see people this way, it will change our speech. We will begin to speak the truth in love as God commands and as Jesus demonstrated. We can begin to have conversations that heal and more clearly communicate the gospel.

"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so" (James 3:9-10).

It doesn't take long to see the culture that the untamed tongue has caused. We can look anywhere to see the damage of slander, lies, and bullying. Kindness and grace seem to be completely absent from Washington, Wall Street, and even on Main Street. We cannot seem to disagree without demonizing and belittling.

Brothers and sisters, let's stop using our speech as a weapon and engage in the Great Commission. Let's begin to see all people through the lens of eternity, the eyes of Christ, and with the heart of gospel-bearers:

"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:16-20).

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The Timeless Voice: Make the gospel great again

Commentary by Greg Baker

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all

these things will be given to you as well” – Matthew 6:33.

We are often called to patriotism and love of country. “Make America great again,” we are told.

But while we should love our city, state, and nation and desire what is best for our neighbors, we must also remember this is not our eternal home.

I love Des Moines, and I love America. I am so thankful that this is where God has placed me. I love showing off my city to visitors and sharing with them all Des Moines has to offer. I want what is best for my city and my country. It brings me joy when they are both doing well.

I must remember, however, this world is perishing, including my nation and my city. All of these things are temporary and will someday come to an end (Matthew 24:35). It is the Kingdom of God that will reign forever, not the kingdom of man. If I put all of my effort into merely building this nation without building God’s Kingdom at the same time, my labor will be in vain. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7, we must learn to make the most of our place in the world without becoming engrossed in it, because this world in its present form is passing away.

This world is also no longer my home. I have been adopted by God, and because of this I am no longer a citizen of this earth. Rather, I am a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20). Heaven is now my home, and, as a co-heir with Christ, the world to come is my inheritance.

The greatest thing we can do for the nation God has placed us in is be His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20). This world needs us to speak truth to the dying, to be the aroma of life (2 Corinthians 2:16). When hope is placed in Wall Street, Washington, a 401k, or even the American dream, what Americans really need is God’s ambassadors to share the true hope they can have in Christ and His coming Kingdom. God’s Kingdom is greater than any nation, political party, career,

denomination, sports team, or other worldly thing that divides us.

Put the Kingdom first. Put the Kingdom first by serving your neighbor. Put the Kingdom first by investing more in the next life than your 401k. Put the Kingdom first by serving Christ's Church more than your career or hobbies. Put the Kingdom first by campaigning for the gospel more than for a political candidate. Put the Kingdom first by holding and proclaiming the truths of the Cross higher than the American flag. Put the Kingdom first by allowing the Bible to form your worldview more than any worldly ideology. Then your labor will never perish and will never be in vain.

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" – 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Greg Baker is vice president of church engagement for The FAMiLY LEADER.

The Timeless Voice: We have a higher hope than U.S. law

Every day we see the problems facing our country – drug abuse, violence, crime, education woes, and so on. And though we often point the finger at external circumstances, the root of each of these problems is the sinful heart of man. No one is immune from sin, and we can see its fruit all around us.

Throughout history, people have tried to control and contain this sin through laws. A just society must. Yet laws alone

fail to resolve the root problem. Laws can provide guidelines and restrictions, but they cannot change the heart of man. Man-made laws will continue to fall short of the solutions we really need as long as we continue to fall short of holiness.

We can see the shortcomings of the law most especially as we look at ancient Israel. The Israelites were blessed by perfect law from the Holy God. Yet, Israel still faced enormous problems in their own nation. Their hearts were still wicked, and so the problems persisted.

The perfect law was unable to do what only God can accomplish, to give God's people new hearts. God promised this inner transformation to Israel through the Prophet Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Only after this transformation would Israel have the power to obey the law.

If God's perfect law could not sanctify Israel, then certainly, our laws cannot sanctify America.

That is not to say we should ignore the legislative process entirely. As Paul explained, the law is a guide and a moral teacher (Galatians 3:24). Without the law we would not know we need a Savior (Romans 7).

The problem arises, however, when we put our hope for cultural transformation into worldly solutions. We cannot put our focus, our passion, or our hope into changing laws. It cannot become our "gospel." Rather, we must focus on the only true and lasting change, a transformed life through the salvation of Jesus Christ.

True transformation will only come by witnessing the gospel and one-on-one discipleship. America will be transformed one person at a time. Yes, it is more work than just passing a law,

but it is the example that Christ set for us. When we all do our part as the body of Christ, we will be amazed at how much impact we can have in our communities, state, and nation.

If we are to engage in legislation, let us use it as a tool to witness the gospel. Let us use law to point to people's need for a Savior and a deeper transformation that can only come through Christ. Let us lead people to the One who has power to bring hope, life, and love – the power to make all things new.

As the famous hymn says: “My hope rests on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.”

The Timeless Voice: We bring a “tough teaching” to the Capitol

How is bringing the gospel to the Iowa Capitol like Paul bringing the gospel to Athens?

Greg Baker, vice president of church engagement for The FAMiLY LEADER, explains:

The Timeless Voice: This war isn't political, but spiritual

Commentary by Greg Baker

Our world is not as it should be. Sin has and continues to bring havoc to our world and the people living in it. Satan continues to work through lies to bring more and more people into bondage. Our world is full of his strongholds, in which he has taken so many captive.

Satan masquerades these strongholds as convenient, easy, safe, entertaining, and overall good escapes from the difficulties of life, but they are the complete opposite. These so-called easy escapes don't only trap you, they enslave you.

As the world looks for earthly solutions to do these issues, we as Christians must bring the hope of Christ, His gospel, and His Church. Only through Christ can people truly be set free.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free" – Luke 4:18.

America today is full of spiritual strongholds. Abortion masquerades as an easy, harmless solution that in reality ends in death of a child and guilt for parents. Drugs and alcohol disguise themselves as mental escapes that actually result in addiction and enslavement. Gambling promotes easy money and entertainment that instead ends in addiction, bankruptcy, and the highest suicide rate of any other addiction. Pornography promises pleasure, but ends with an addiction stronger than cocaine. All of these are just a small handful. Satan will use

just about anything to take someone captive. His end goal is simple. It is spiritual death, and he will use about anything to bring it.

Christians and moralists have taken the battle against these strongholds to Capitols all across the world, only to find some of the most difficult opposition. Sometimes the opposition makes no worldly, political sense, but when you look at it spiritually ... it makes a lot of sense. Difficult partisan issues like tax cuts get through the legislative process all the time, but issues such as life often don't. That is because these issues are not political, but spiritual. It is a satanic stronghold that must be broken, not with worldly political weapons, but spiritual ones.

Sometimes the opposition makes no worldly, political sense, but when you look at it spiritually ... it makes a lot of sense.

In the mid-1800s believers across the nation entered a spiritual war against the stronghold of slavery. Politics did not lead to the end of slavery in America; the light overcoming the darkness did. Satan's lie of some people being inferior to others and considered property was exposed. Day after day pulpits and Christians in the nation spoke the truth against the evil one's lies.

God's people also petitioned the heavens. Some strongholds, Jesus said, can only be defeated through both fasting and prayer (Matthew 17:21).

President Lincoln understood this, and on March 30, 1863, Lincoln called America to fasting, prayer, and repentance: "I do by this proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30th day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. And I do hereby request all people to abstain from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite, at their several places of public worship and their respective

homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord, and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.”

President Lincoln knew that he was in the middle of spiritual war. He understood that repentance had to come before slavery could be abolished: “It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”

Apostle Paul explains this in 2 Timothy 2: “Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape for the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

If America is going to see these strongholds tumble, God’s people must quit playing politics, realize they are in a spiritual war, and learn how to engage in battle. They must claim their identity in Christ, put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6), and engage in the battle of the heavenlies by fasting and praying.

Then God’s people must go. They must go and raise up disciples by preaching the gospel of repentance that leads to salvation and teaching people everything Christ taught us. Only when the Lord’s people get messy and intercede for people will we as a nation come to our senses and escape the devil’s traps.

As moral legislation faces difficulty in legislatures across the nation, let us not take up arms in the political battle, but in the spiritual one. Let’s preach the gospel in the Capitols, and on the streets of our nation. Let’s petition the Lord in fasting and prayer to forgive us our national sins. Let’s fight this stronghold with the truth of God’s Word and the conviction that life is found in obeying the Lord. Let’s shine light into the darkness and set captives free.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not

overcome it" – John 1:5.

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The Timeless Voice: Billy Graham's final crusade

The Timeless Voice: What distinguishes Christians at the Capitol?

TFL's Vice President of Church Engagement Greg Baker asks the question, "What is it that separates Christians from the rest of the world?"

It isn't political party or good deeds or even good intentions. But rather, Greg explains, it's a death penalty issued 2,000 years ago that makes all the difference:

[Discover more about The Church Ambassador Network's unique work at the Iowa Capitol by clicking here now.](#)

The Timeless Voice: Repentance is pointedly personal

The FAMiLY LEADER Vice President of Church Engagement Greg Baker was convicted recently when asked, “Greg, are you preaching repentance?”

Repentance, Greg realized, is intensely personal and can be divisive. People might not *like* you if you call them to repentance.

But in this video, Greg explains why it’s so important not to shy away from repentance when sharing the gospel ... even when sharing at the State Capitol: