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Why Christians Should Be More Involved with Politics, with Jeff McAlvey

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

In this episode of Life and Books and Everything, Jeff McAlvey joins Kevin and Justin to discuss the Christian's role in politics. Jeff worked closely with Michigan Governor John Engler in the 90s, oversaw the state appropriations process when Governor Engler was the Senate Majority Leader, and started a lobbying group after his time in Washington DC. Listen in as Kevin, Justin, and Jeff unravel some of the misconceptions around politics in America and offer advice on how church members can love their neighbors and be more politically involved in their local communities.

This episode of Life and Books and Everything is brought to you by Crossway. The Crossway book we want to highlight this week is, *When the Stars Disappear: Help and Hope from Stories of Suffering in Scripture (Suffering and the Christian Life, Volume 1)* by Mark Talbot. *When the Stars Disappear* engages the topic of suffering, not only through Reformed theological and philosophical insights but with profound biblical reflection and personal experience through the author himself.

Book recommendations

Kevin:

God's Design for the Church: A Guide for African Pastors and Ministry Leaders by Conrad Mbewe

Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life by Zena Hitz

Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels' Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism by Matthew Thiessen

Ten Global Trends Every Smart Person Should Know: And Many Others You Will Find Interesting by Ronald Baily and Marian Tupy

Justin:

What It Means to Be Human: The Case for the Body in Public Bioethics by O. Carter Snead

Self-Portrait in Black and White: Unlearning Race by Thomas Chatterton Williams

Jeff:

Absolute Surrender by Andrew Murray

Transcript

(upbeat music) Greetings and salutations. Welcome back to Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung and good to be with you again.

Thanks for listening. I'm joined by Justin Taylor. Justin, hello.

Arne, our friendly accomplice, Colin Hansen, is not with us. He is in some where parts unknown. I think he's administering the COVID test for Nick Saban.

I think, yeah, I think once he got the positive, he decided, let's just get some people within the state of Alabama, maybe some interns or something to ring up three negative tests. So Colin, wherever you are, we welcome you back. But we have a special guest who we'll introduce in just a moment and I'm really excited for this conversation.

I wanna say thank you as always to Crossway, our sponsor. They really do publish great books and they care about their authors. They care about the books that they publish.

They care about serving the church. And lots of ministries say that and I bet a lot of them mean it. But I know that Crossway really does and it really guides what they do and how they think about the books that they publish.

Today we want to mention Mark Talbot has a new book called When the Stars Disappear and it's about suffering. And Justin, I know you know Mark fairly well. Tell us a little bit about Mark and why he's uniquely qualified, perhaps, to write a book like this.

- Yeah, Mark is one of the godliest, most helpful voices that I know is a Christian philosopher at Wheaton College. He really integrates Reformed theology and philosophical analysis in his whole teaching and writing ministry. So this is actually the first of four volumes that he's doing on suffering in the Christian life.

It's not a major part of this volume, but Mark himself as a teenager fell from a 50 feet from a Tarzan-like rope and broke his neck. So he deals with disability in his own life profound suffering and offers hope for the Christian. So here's a blurb from Timothy Larson, his colleague at Wheaton College.

If you're a Christian who's experiencing suffering or who is weighed down by the

suffering of someone you love, then this book is for you. It offers profound biblical reflections that do not dodge the hard questions or try to minimize the sometimes overpowering reality of pain and loss. So if you want to read on suffering from somebody who's not just writing theoretically, but is profoundly tethered to the scriptures, then I think this book might be for you.

- It's great. I wonder, Justin, here's a publisher question for you. People always, you know, seems like they're always coming out with new books on parenting, on prayer, on suffering, maybe on marriage.

Do you get a lot of proposals in those genre? And do you find that, well, people want to write on them because people always want to read on them or is it actually hard to sell those kind of books? - I think it depends on the author and on their platform in particular when something's been so well covered. But, you know, somebody's becoming a parent as we speak, right? Somebody's getting married as we speak. So there's these, you know, somebody suffering as we speak.

So there are these perennial things, whereas, you know, sometimes books can sell even better if it's some flashpoint thing. You know, if you're writing about the 2020 election, I mean, that could explode, but it's gonna be forgotten by next year other than for historical novelty purposes. So perennial topic, I think when you're writing on something that everybody else is writing on, it becomes a little bit harder.

- Justin, you forgot to say that there are people who are crazy busy right now who need to do, just do something right now. - Yeah, that is an emerging joke, it sounds like. - An emerging, okay.

We have a special guest with us today who's well known to me, probably not to most of everyone else, but you'll be, I'm very confident, you'll be glad to hear from him, and he's just getting to know Justin here as well. Jeff, McAlvey Jeff is a ruling elder at University Reform Church. The congregation I had the privilege of serving for 13 years, and now I'm very pleased that they're served so well by my very good friend, Jason Halapalas, who's the senior pastor there now.

Jeff is with us to talk about Christianity and politics, or more specifically, being a Christian in politics, and I'm gonna ask Jeff to tell a little bit of history in just a moment, but just to know why we would invite Jeff, he's, well, he'd be the first to say, his wife is much better than he is, especially at following Jesus, but Jeff follows Jesus, and he's a tremendous elder, I know that from firsthand experience, and loves people, and loves to be involved in people's lives, and loves the church, and is a good churchman, and has spent his adult career in politics as a serious Christian, and was, I forget the exact color, were you the legislative aide for Governor Inglar? - Legislative director, yeah. - Legislative director, you were one of the key right-hand man for Governor Inglar, and now has been, for many years, a lobbyist, that swampiest of swamp creatures, a

lobbyist, I'll ask you about that in a moment, but Jeff, so glad to have you here. Thanks for being here to talk about being a Christian in politics, so tell us about those two things.

How did you become a Christian, and how did you get involved in politics? - Well, have you heard the story before, but it goes back to that wonderful wife of mine you talked about, came to Michigan State University, and was smitten by a young lady who lived on the floor above me in the dorm, began to pursue her, and she said to me very plainly, "I really like you, but I became a Christian last year, and I can't date you because you're not a Christian." I thought I was, and told her that, and she said, "Well, here's the phone number of a friend of mine, if you call him, and he says, "I'm okay to date you, then I will." That turned out to be her pastor, Kevin's predecessor, Tom Stark, and that started time when I'm meeting. We met often on mostly for 25 years, and sometime in the first year, I came to understand the truth of the gospel, and that I needed to make a decision, which I did to follow Christ at that point. - And when you were at Michigan State, were you studying politics? Did you think that's where you were headed? - No, I was actually studying education.

I was gonna be a teacher and a coach, but I had always been involved in campaigns and politics. I think Colin talked on your last podcast about moving from campaigns to public policy. Well, I began in that spot, and working in campaigns and loving that, and found my first job was in politics.

Instead of teaching, there didn't happen to be teaching jobs when I graduated from Michigan State. So that brought me on a course. And as Colin said, I soon got tired of campaigns, but found public policy was a lot more fun, and a lot more significant.

- Yeah, I can't remember what Colin said. I know, you know some of this, that when I went to Hope College, I studied political science at first, and I got involved in some campaigns. Actually, in high school before that, I won't get into that story and in college, and I thought real quickly, this is not for me.

It's for somebody, and hopefully it's for some good people. It was not for me. So what, Jeff, I promise that I wouldn't ask, and I'm not gonna ask, 'cause we don't have you on here to talk, punditry or to talk partisan politics, but, you know, so I'm not gonna ask you about specifics, but feel free in telling your story to, if you need to talk about people you've worked with or things that you've done, that by all means.

So just give us a little rundown of what you have done in politics and what you do now. And I was joking, but lobbyists is, I mean, everyone knows lobbyists are horrible people and you're a lobbyist. So tell us, what have you done and what do lobbyists do and how can you go to sleep at night? - Thank you, Kevin, for that opening.

As I said, I started out in campaigns. I actually took a year off of Michigan State to help

run a congressional campaign. That individual won, we beat a long time incumbent.

I thought that that was a signal that I should go to Washington and make a career out of politics. My father had other ideas about finishing my bachelor's. So we did not do that, and that turned out to be a great blessing.

I then went to work for a trade association for a few years. Carolyn, I got married when we were 20 as college students and had to get a job right away. Then got a job working for a gentleman by the name of John Engler who in Michigan was the Senate majority leader and after four years ran for governor in a massive upset became governor.

As you mentioned, I was his legislative director. I did that for him for about seven years and then began a lobby firm partially to be able to prove that you could be a Christian and be a lobbyist as well, which we started a firm. And part of the ethic of our firm are our commitments that underlie everything else is that we don't take any clients who we think would be offensive to anything in the gospel.

So we don't represent the alcohol or tobacco or gambling or those sorts of interests. - So what does, then I'll let Justin jump in, what does a lobbyist do? And I was just kidding 'cause I know your integrity. What, people hear lobbyists and they think you're just having three martini lunches or something and money is changing hands, but as I understand it, bills and legislation would not happen without lobbyists as something of a middle man.

So what are you actually doing as a lobbyist? - I'm building relationships with legislators, key bureaucrats, key staff in the governor's office and acting as an intermediary. I know how to communicate with those folks, my firm, the other lobbyists to my firm. We know how to communicate and what messages need to be communicated.

- I would argue almost everyone has a lobbyist. There's some group that you belong to that is represented by a lobbyist here, whether it's in, obviously, I just lobby in Michigan, the Michigan legislature, but Michigan Farm Bureau, so if you're a farmer, you have a lobbyist. If you're pro-life, you have right to life is your lobbyist.

If you-- - So their Baptists have a lobbyist. - So the Baptist have a lobbyist. - Not a Michigan, but-- - Yeah, they certainly do.

And lots of groups that would be on the progressive side have lobbyists to the League for Public Policy and other things like that. So almost every group, and it's simply a way to communicate. I understand how the legislature works, and I try and take the messages that they might be frustrated with, the experiences they're having, the statutes, they're causing them trouble, and can help them figure out where they might need to go and communicate that well.

One of my clients is the Salvation Army, which we do at a very, very reduced rate

because I believe in the ministry. They're wonderful at serving the poor, and they run the, they actually oversee the entire homeless shelter program for the state of Michigan. They're terrible communicators with state government, because, but they're really, really good at serving the poor.

They run alcohol and drug rehab programs that are marvelous. But they don't really know how to communicate, so I help them to do that. That would be one example.

- So what does a legislative director do? How much of that is devoted to crafting policy and how much of that is kind of the horse trading as the governor's office works with the legislature? - It's really the role of being the governor's lobbyist, at least it was in this administration that I was part of. But I was also involved in crafting the policy, thinking through what that would look like. I would say Kevin would remember, but he was probably in grade school, but there was a big issue about how schools were funded.

- No, I remember it very well, yeah. - Yeah, there was, how schools were funded. And so there was a seismic change where we completely took it away from property taxes at a local level and changed how schools were funded.

But much of that was then taking what the governor wanted to do and being his lobbyist in the legislature, talking about what that, what that would mean. - Try and find the key votes, understand what members would be concerned about what issues and how we would move forward. - Have you ever been tempted to go back to Washington to go to Washington for the first time? - I have not.

I get Potomac fever just when I fly there. So I know my own pride and ego and I know that Lansing is a very good place for me. - So Potomac fever being, you're drawn to it or you're repel? - No, I'm drawn to it.

I think the power and the whole atmosphere can be intoxicating. So when I was young, but as I mentioned, Carol and I got married very young. We had children very young and so that was never really an option anyways.

- Tricia and I decided to have kids very young and to have them very old. We just have them for a really long time. My wife's not old.

- And you have delightful children too. - Well, something. - I know eight of the nine.

I have not mentioned Dana yet, but they're. - They're as delightful as your grandchildren. - Yeah, they're sort of where the same.

I was actually at the doctor the other day and he was telling me about how he has two kids and his brother doesn't have any kids and he thinks his brother's making a mistake. And he said, you know, my brother's been married for a number of years. His wife wants to have kids and he just can't do it.

And I just told my brother, I said, look, you're 43 now. Can you imagine having a kid now that you're 43 and you're gonna be 60 when I was sitting there as he's, I don't know, cracking my back or something thinking, I'm 43. You're gonna appreciate the ages.

- Stop, you're not helping me. - Yeah, that's why I'm here. Jeff, I wonder, and again, just speak broadly, not asking you to name any specific examples good or bad, but maybe DC is different than at a state level.

But I wonder over your years of seeing the sausage making as it were, do you feel like most elected officials on either side of the aisle, even if you disagree with them, are basically good people trying to make a difference, even if you think they're really mistaken in their views or do you think the whole thing looks corrupt, rotten, and you're dealing with all sorts of people that you barely can trust. - That's a very good question, Kevin. And I can say very clearly that the vast majority of people who become legislators are really decent people who really care about their communities and want to make a difference.

That's true, whether they come from the right or the left, they have completely different ideas about what that might look like, but they're very good people. And in Michigan, we have a very extreme term limit. So if you're in the house, you can only serve six years and for the Senate, you can only serve eight.

So we see a lot of turnover. Last time there's 110 members in the Michigan House, there were 48 new members. So 48 freshmen out of 110.

And I can say 90% of them are very good people, maybe even higher than that, who desire to do rights by their community and come here for the right reasons. - Do you think that's different in Washington? - I don't know. The people I know in Congress are pretty good people, whether they're Republicans or Democrats.

I do think there's probably something about when you get there for a long time that you may lose touch. But the folks I know in Congress, even the folks I know in Congress who've been there a long time from Michigan are still good people on both sides of the aisle who try and serve their constituents well. - So a question I had someone asked me years ago who was thinking of going into politics, he didn't, but he was asking, do you think there's a limit as a serious Bible-believing Christian who wants to have the utmost of integrity in how he respects and honors other people? Is there a limit how high that person can go in elected office that is, do you think that for a Christian to maintain his or her integrity, they just can't do some things, can't reach some places of power because it requires compromise at some level? - I don't think so.

I do believe that you can pursue public office with integrity. I don't think it's any different than reaching the highest level of any profession. You could be in the corporate world and there are temptations to cut corners or slander someone or do other things and

there are those temptations.

But I do think, and we've got examples of, we won't name names, but we've got examples of folks in Congress and other places who have maintained their commitment to the gospel and to Christ and still served well. I do believe that it seems to be a time in the culture where your religious beliefs will be called more into question and maybe even attacked by the other side when you're involved in campaigns or as we've seen in some hearings when you're involved in confirmation processes. - So let me ask this then we'll throw it back to Justin.

But Jeff, what you've been doing this for, I guess 30 years, maybe more, what has stayed the same and what seems different, the mood, the way things happen, the type of people involved in politics. Talk to us about the continuity and the discontinuity. - One of the biggest changes has come, I think in the folks who serve from the Democratic Party.

When I first came to work in the Michigan legislature in the 1980s, about 40% of the Democrats in the House and the Senate, they were both in the majority were pro-life. Almost exclusively they were Catholics from traditional Catholic areas of Michigan like Michigan or Mesquite or the Hamtramc area, which you will know in the Detroit area. I don't believe that there is a pro-life Democrat in either the House or the Senate today.

And that's been a significant change that on that issue, the life issue has really become much more partisan issue because of that change that's taken place. Members have gotten a lot younger, that's probably because I don't know that older. But I also think because Michigan has this unique term limits, if you know you can only have a six year career here, you're not gonna give up, you know, if you're a chemist at Dow Chemical in Midland, you're not gonna give up your career to go for six years if you know it can't be a career.

So we have a speaker of the House today who's 33 years old, he was 31 when we became Speaker of the House. We have several- - I know him. - Yeah, you do know him, it's perfect.

We have several legislators who were in the early 20s. So there is a, and I don't know if that would be true in every state or whether if you could still make a career of being a legislator, whether that is different. But it certainly is, it's a young, much more of a, in Michigan it's a young person's game and those who were at the end of their careers who seem to more run for the legislature.

- Okay, so I'm following up with one question before I lied, before I give it to Justin there.
- So you said most of the people are decent in trying to do their best, even if you disagree with them. Then you talked about the change in pro-life and pro-abortion side, I think.

So what, obviously your pro-life, and that's really, really, how many reallys can you put on there, important? But you talk often, I imagine with people who are not and legislators who are not, do you, maybe you're not even trying to convince them, but as you talk to people who you think they're, nice folks, they would be good neighbors and they don't agree on pro-life, what, why can't they be persuaded? What are they not seeing or what aren't we helping them see on an issue that seems so clear to people like us, life begins a conception, every life is precious, in the image of God, but even if you're not a Christian, every human person has worth and dignity and ought to be protected. It seems to be the people like us absolutely clear and absolutely essential, but it's not to others. What sort of conversations do you have to try to make sense of that? - Well, I think the bottom line, Kevin, it would be when I worked for Governor Engler, we were trying to push through a piece of legislation that we thought would limit abortion and we're having a very difficult time.

I was talking to our general counsel at that point, she was a dear Catholic woman and she said, "Jeff, your strategy's not gonna work, you have to change hearts." And that really is Kevin, the bottom line here, right? This is about hearts. I have some dear friends who are pro-abortion, including one of the folks who works for me who I am very fond of and I have come to understand that they believe very deeply about a woman's right to choose and as I try and peer that back gently, they don't believe that a embryo of fetus is a human life. It's to me inconceivable, I don't understand how you could hold that position, but that's, I really do believe it, it is their hearts, scripture would tell us they have scales in front of their eyes, right? - Yeah.

- It really is just a complete blind spot. - Justin? - I think one of the wraps on Republicans is that they know that they have to be pro-life in order to get elected, but once they are seated, then they don't really have a passion for pro-life issues or the will to pass legislation. They just start using evangelical or conservative Catholic voters in order to get elected.

Do you think that's a fair criticism? Is there some truths with some got truth to it or how do you think through that? - Justin, I don't know that I know because Michigan, there aren't many pro-life issues left for the legislature to tackle. We, this has been a pro-life majority here for a number of years and everything you can do under Roe v. Wade has really been done and they have not had trouble getting the votes for that. I think there has been a move, maybe one of the other changes that's happened at least in Michigan and I think probably nationally.

The Republican Party, which used to be accused of being the party that cared more about social issues than it did about other policy, now seems to be one that cares more about, they're much more libertarian. They don't wanna talk about social issues anymore. They wanna talk about economic issues and the Democrats seem now much more to be engaged in social issues and wanna talk about LGBTQ issues.

- LGBTQ, yeah right. - Yeah, LGBTQI, sorry. And other issues like that.

So there's been a shift, but I think that's almost a national movement of Republicans, a way they just don't talk about social issues as much anymore. - Justin, how did you, I mean, people listen to this podcast, no we talk about the things that we're interested in and the three of us, you and Colin, are obviously interested in sports, that comes up sometimes, books, that's obvious, but we all have some interest in politics. How did you get interested in politics? Why do you care about this, Justin? - Yeah, I always had an interest growing up and my brother who's a year and a half younger than I, we would stay up at night, we were in the same room together and we would talk about what our plans would be when we run for president someday.

And he's actually become a county supervisor and run for the Iowa House, although I have never had any political aspirations beyond the fifth grade. I did volunteer for my first campaign in middle school, an Irish Catholic Democrat in Sioux City who was running for office. And I sat there and listened to ads on the radio and tried to transcribe them in different technology days back then.

So I just always had an interest always watching things and was a Democrat and was pro-choice at that time. And as I came to Christ and mature in Christ, I shifted positions and shifted the way I view politics. But it's from an early age, I think, from my dad who is a Democrat and still a lifelong passionate Democrat and I think I inherited that in early ages, probably most kids do.

- You inherited being a lifelong Democrat? Do you wanna leave the leaves out there, Justin? - No, I did. I inherited being a Democrat and following the policies that he had. And I remember going to see the vice presidential debate when the famous line was uttered at D'Enquayle and the sort of-- - Was that in Iowa? That debate? - No, it was in Omaha, so we drove down in Oregon.

- Oh, but you drove? And you were there in the audience? - We were in an auditorium next door to the debate hall and then Lloyd Benson came through and was treated like a rock star. It was like the greatest vice presidential debate in history if you were a Democrat. So that was my early interest.

I did not become a lifelong pro-abortion proponent, but-- - As per your blog from a week or two ago, which is getting a lot of traction, well, maybe we'll get into that later, Justin. - Kevin, can I ask you a quick amount? - Yeah, yeah. - You and I've had some discussions in the past couple of years about maybe the mistake that my generation made or maybe it's not a mistake, but that we were fighting a culture war and that seems to have gone away as we tried to hold off gambling and legislate morality, the other side would say.

And you seemed to think that that had come to an end and that your generation and the generations underneath you and Justin was moving in a different direction. How do you

see that move forward for Christian leadership who still want to have an effect on these sorts of issues? - It's a really good question, let Justin follow up for my answer, because I think it's a major issue, even within the church, within churches that have the same theology, even within churches that may basically have the same sort of political makeup, there is a generational difference. Obviously, it were generalizing, but sort of 50s and over, baby boomers, the very youngest baby boomers and up.

I think in some ways it's a sense of losing evangelical Christendom, a sense of what the country was, or at least was for white Christians, it's always been a different story for minorities. And so I think there's some of that that we're losing our country and every election, therefore, is the most important election of our lifetimes. I think that sort of way of approaching things, right or wrong is very distasteful or maybe just doesn't even make sense for younger generations who feel like, "Well, whoever promised that it was gonna be "a Christian country or whoever promised." And this is just making my work harder or my church harder a constant attitude of pugilism.

That would be the critique, I think, from younger generations with a culture war mindset and who wanna say, "Look, we're tired of that." And white conservative Christians have been too aligned with the Republican Party. And there's fair critiques there, but as you and I have talked before, so Justin are not millennials, we're Gen X and then you go to millennials and now even Gen Z. They get some things right, perhaps, in wanting to love neighbor and not wanting to be overly associated with one party, but they get some things wrong. And I think one of the things they get wrong is to think, you know what? You know what the opposite of cultural Christendom? It's not, we all just love each other in seeing kumbaya and isn't this wonderful that we have the religious right out of the way and now we can just get along with each other.

That's not the opposite. Or one time someone that I know and like had written something about my age person and written about how we're two into electoral politics and these things don't really matter. And I said, "I'll just give you one example." And at that time, as you know, I was serving on the East Lansing Public Schools Sex Education Committee and the law in Michigan, as long as it changed, was you had to have a clergy representative on there.

And the law in Michigan was that you needed to have abstinence-based sex education. I said, "When the legislature flips, "that's probably gonna be changed." And I said, "That's just one small example "that at least I have something to sort of hold onto "with my kids at the time in public school to say, "This is what the law says we should have." So I think there's a naivete among younger generations who want to just wash their hands of the filthiness of all of this political talk. And we've certainly seen some bad examples of Christians and pastors and church leaders who become so aligned with one party that it becomes, that's always the danger.

When you align your hopes and dreams with a party, let alone a person, you rise and fall with that party and that person. And the church needs to transcend that. - I don't know, Justin, we've talked about this before.

How do you size it up? - Yeah, I mean, I agree with your analysis, Kevin. And I think that to some degree, it's that nobody likes to be a loser. And on the conservative side, we've been promised like if we elect Republicans, we're gonna have a strong military and we're gonna have great foreign policy.

And we've seen the kind of disasters of interventionism. We've been promised, if we just get a Republican president, they will appoint a conservative Supreme Court justice and Roe v. Wade will be overturned. And decades later, it still hasn't happened.

Nobody likes to be painted as a bigot. And we've lost the war in terms of the battle in terms of LGBTQ. And then on economics, if we kind of get someone in there who has Reaganomics as their economic policy, everything will go better.

And I think a lot of people are looking around and saying, this isn't going as well. And also the perception that we're just fighting for one or two issues and ignoring other aspects of life. I think all of those have been problematic for younger voters who tend not to think historically, think in the moment, what does this feel like? What's the perception? And then the people who tend to really be in the culture were act like warriors.

They talk loudly, they wanna win at all costs. So even for those of us who feel like some of these issues are really worth fighting for, and that we should not have politics and religion completely sealed in absolutely different categories, sometimes we cringe at those who represent that particular side, not only in terms of tone, but in terms of strategy and how they're going about their tactics. - And I think the promise of politics in a good way and the temptation of politics in a bad way is that there is a mechanism to accomplish something.

So if you look and you have 320 million people and you wish that our country viewed things differently on abortion or gay marriage, you go, okay, how do we change hearts and minds? Well, we wanna do that, we wanna preach the gospel and we wanna have institutions. That's a very long game. And you may not get anywhere, you have so many things outside of your control.

You'll just see, but you can see at least a path. We could really try to do something in the next two years or four years or six years, and we can get the right candidate and we can knock on the doors and we can get the right address. I mean, there's a path to try to make, like you said, to try to have a win in a cultural environment on these social issues at least, abortions may be a little different, but most of the social issues feels like we're just losing.

And if you can have an electoral win in the midst of so many cultural losses, then why not try for that? And I understand that and I don't think it's, I think if Christians, if every Christian today said, "You know what, I wash my hands at the culture war and I don't belong to any political party and I just am walking away from all of this to maintain my witness for Christ." I don't think that makes the country better. I don't think it makes church ministry easier, but there are certainly a number of mistakes that any of us can make in maintaining political allegiances more strongly than Christian allegiances and being more dogmatic about prudential political matters than we are about the articles of the faith and we end up with, well, it's idolatry. I wonder, Jeff, do you think, maybe it's posing as a binary when it's probably not, do you think, do you wish most Christians were more engaged and more informed on politics or do you feel like, hey, a lot of the Christians you know, you wanna tell them, just relax and spend some time with your grandkids and find a new hobby? - I wish they were more engaged.

I think we all have an obligation to be more engaged, to understand the issues, which are far more complex than media would portray it and certainly more complex than you might find in a social media soundbite about something. There are important issues that need to have a Christian viewpoint, legislators need to hear from Christians in their district who do care about issues and can articulate it, their position and their concerns or their support, hopefully without anger, with love as the gospel would advise that we would communicate things. So I would hope that they would not, that they would be more involved.

I understand the temptation to just wash your hands and say this is dirty business and this is frustrating and a pox on all their houses. But I do think it is important that we as Christians be involved. That doesn't mean you have to run for office, but you ought to get to know your candidates, you ought to get to know your local legislator or city council person or township trustee.

And as you did, Kevin, I was so impressed with what you were willing to do any slanting by getting involved in that, the issue of sex and what that would look like. That wasn't easy, wasn't fun. - It wasn't.

- But those are issues that we do need to get involved in. And there are some issues we, who sort of led the culture war, failed on that now the church has to deal with. In Michigan, gay marriage obviously is legal nationally, but we now have legal marijuana and we have, I don't know, 29 casinos.

So those are issues that, those are things that now become issues that pastors and elders have to deal with because they will have detrimental effects in the congregation. - Jeff, if I want to influence my legislator, I have an opinion on something and he or she sees things differently. What's the most effective way to do that? I've always felt like, you know, they say, call your legislator and it feels like that's just gonna be a pointless

exercise.

I'm gonna talk to some staffer who's just gonna give me a boilerplate answer and hang up and it's not gonna affect anything. Are there some strategies or some things that we should know if we're outside politics when we want to influence our legislators with a Christian perspective? - Well, obviously the closer they are to you, the easier it is. So township trustees and city council people are in county commissioners are easier to build relationships with than a congressman.

And you're right, an email to a congressman who probably is gonna end up being read by staff. So, but there are opportunities. There are office hours that many state legislators would hold and I'm often told by legislators how poorly attended those are.

So, you know, certain legislators say, "I'm gonna be at a coffee shop for an hour and they'll get two or three people." There's a wonderful opportunity to come in and engage on a dialogue, introduce yourself, tell them a little bit about who you are and the issues that are important to you. And begin that discussion. If you treat them respectfully, even if you disagree, you'll be surprised at the kind of relationship you can build.

That the lesson of my being here, and I'm a Republican, I was a Republican, I've been nonpartisan, but you can't get that our tattooed off my forehead. It's, you know, once you're, you're identified that way, you still are. But many of my dearest friends are Democrats and we disagree on almost every issue, but we've been able to get a dialogue on some issues that we've been able to make progress on.

What we did on school finances, I mentioned, when Kevin was a young man, was done because of great relationships we had between Republicans and Democrats and could work together. - And how do you get people, gets maybe not the right word? 'Cause so much of what you're saying, Jeff, is it's a relationship business. And I imagine some people are really good at politics because they know how to schmooze and they know how to glad hand people.

But you wanna have real relationships. So how do you walk that fine line? You really wanna love people, care for people, even if they disagree with you, but you're also trying to get something done. So how do you build relationships in an authentic way that doesn't just feel like, I'm trying to have a relationship so I can get something from you? - Well, I do it by, I try and ask myself almost every day, are the conversations I have, are the relationships that I interacted in today, are they pleasing to the Lord? Do they serve to promote the gospel even if they weren't a gospel conversation? And I think all of us need to ask that question.

Did we treat people with respect, even as we disagreed with them? Did we stand up for righteousness while we're doing that as well? So much of it is treating people with respect, listening to them and caring about them. I always thought lobbying is a lot like

building a relationship that you would do if you're trying to share Christ, right? You wanna get to know them, you wanna understand who they are, what's important to them. And that's part of what I do here.

I wanna know about people's families. I wanna know why do they feel so strongly about this? Or why did they decide to give up what they were doing and come to Lansing and work? And that same is true of young staffers. Why'd you decide to be involved in politics? Or how did you get this job? And as I disagree, it's a struggle for me 'cause I can be a passionate person.

As I disagree with a legislator who might not see my point of view, I'm trying to be forceful but also respectful in honoring of their position. As I think it's very clear in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 that we are supposed to honor those who are officials in our government. So I try and do that in the way that I relate to them as well.

- Have you ever been tempted at various points to think I'm in the room with really important people? Or I have, I don't know if you had cell phones back then to have the governor on your cell phone. And what was that like for Carol who's as kind and loving as a person can be and doesn't strike me as being a political animal but probably had to go with you to fancy shindigs and make small talk. And sometimes people paid attention to her and sometimes they overlooked her.

How did you find that for you and your wife dealing with quote unquote important people? - It was a struggle for my ego and my pride at some point. That's ultimately why I left the governor's office. I still loved what I was doing but I became convinced through prayer and talking to some of my brothers who I held dear that it was becoming too important to me and I needed to let that go.

It was very hard for Carol and some of those instances 'cause she doesn't have a lot of political interest and there were sometimes, as you said, when people were very kind to her and sometimes when people ignored her, we tried to pray before every one of those that we would be lights for Christ and where we went and what we did. We are very fortunate to have a group of people who were praying for us. When I went into the governor's office, there was an elder in the church who committed to me that he would pray for me on a regular basis that I would have a strong witness in what I was doing and I don't think you could overestimate how important that is and it was never the most important thing to me.

What we were doing at University Reform Church was always more important and those were always my friends that on weekends I spent time with, I didn't live the political life as many people did and I think that was the balance that I needed to have and that I started everyday with scripture, that I was trying to soak myself in the word before I went into that job but which we ought to do, no matter what our job is, right? - Yeah, that's really good. Just go back to one other thing. Part of what makes politics so

combustible in this country is we have for all intents and purposes a two party system.

It's different in some place like the UK. It's not just the Tories and labor but lived Dems or they had UKIP. I don't know how there's very much of that around or Scottish nationalists and because the abortion issue, at least my friends in the UK say, it's just not, it's just gone.

I mean, it's just you're lucky to find anyone who's going to publicly align with a pro-life position even though Roe v. Wade gives to the United States much more liberal abortion laws but just public opinion and the political mood, it's very different and so, you know, it's one thing they always say when I go to the UK is it's just you find people in the churches who align with all sorts of parties and they're not just two of them and so that makes it very difficult in the United States at times 'cause it feels like every election is a binary choice and you're this team or you're that team, you have that jersey or that jersey. So my one punditry question, do you think it's ever possible that there's a viable third party or do you see on the other side of Trump, whether it's now or in four years or whether people love it or not, that parties realign or do you think, yeah, for the rest of your lifetime, it's the elephants and the donkeys ruling the day. - I don't pretend to be a great pundit on this but I do believe that we have a two party system.

You know, if you'll, well, you guys were puppies back then but in 1988 Ross Perot ran and he spent a lot of money and he got-- - 92. - I wasn't 92, I'm sorry, you're right, right. - Yeah, we were puppies but we were paying attention.

- Yeah, well, I was actually at the debate where Ross Perot was so I showed what year that was but I was raising children and you tend to forget things when you're raising a bunch of kids but you know, he spent lots of money and really had, you know, he got 18% of the vote, maybe it wasn't even that high. But so I just don't think that's a possibility going forward and I do think that parties and things change faster than you think in 1976 when Jimmy Carter won and the Republicans were in disarray, there was really a thought here that this party, the Republican party will be down for a decade and obviously, you know, the Reagan Revolution started four years later. You know, the same country that elected Barack Obama in 2008 it's time for change and there was rejoicing across the country eight years later, elected someone completely opposite.

So like any prediction that this would be the end of the Republican party is probably premature but I will tell you someone who knows the Republican party, it's in disarray and this has been a president who has not valued building party structure as most have. So it will be interesting to see what happens when his time is the titular head of the party is over. - Jeff, I have a quick question for you.

What would you say to the evangelical person who watches Fox News every night and is kind of invested in the ins and outs of daily politics and, you know, the latest headline, they will vote every election. They might get into a Twitter or a Facebook war with a

family member who disagrees but they don't do anything in terms of local politics. Why do you think that is that we're, we tend to be more interested in national politics than local politics and we think that, you know, getting on social media or watching the news is political involvement.

Would you give any counsel to somebody who operates along those lines? - I do think it's important to be involved. It's probably easier just to opine. We haven't even talked about social media and what effect that has had and we could spend a whole hour talking about that.

But you can make more of a difference, as I've said before, in local politics. And as a Christian, I would urge folks to do that. Get to know who your local elected folks are.

They're interested in meeting you, more interested than you'd think, even if they disagree with you and try and build a relationship there and then pray for your, those in government, as scripture tells us to, pray especially for Christian politicians that they would take seriously their personal holiness. These are jobs that are full of temptations and I've seen too many Christians fall in that. I heard you talk on your podcast last week about leaders who have fallen.

It happens too often here as well that people run on agenda of coming here to change things and they run on their faith. But seemingly when they get here, personal holiness is not a priority to them. So when you're looking at candidates, try and determine that if they're a Christian.

What's that mean to them? And how does that impact their daily life? But also pray for those who are here, that they would be faithful. And there are many faithful believers who are in politics. There's a Bible study here in Lansing of legislators and I know that there is good fellowship and study that goes on amongst them.

But don't forget local politicians, they're important and they're gonna rise up. And that tends to be the training grounds where folks who end up in the state house and the state Senate and then in Congress come from as well. - Last question and then we'll talk about some books or see if you have a last question Justin.

But I imagine Jeff that a lot of people who listen to this podcast are probably number of Christian leaders and pastors. So let's just think what word would you give to pastors and don't use this previous pastor as a good or bad example? But what advice would you give to a pastor as he relates and leads his congregation and relates to politics? Give us both some good and bad. What would you hope a pastor wouldn't do under this whole topic in leading a flock in what do you hope he would do? - Well, I'd hope as my dear pastor Kevin DeYoung taught me in his 13 years here that we always look to the scriptures, that's where our answer comes from.

There has been, I think Justin alluded to it earlier, there has been at least a strain of Christianity where there is a connection between being a Christian means being an American and being a Republican. And I don't think that does us or the gospel any service. So preach the gospel and talk about what the gospel says about how we are to act as citizens in a democracy.

There are issues where I do believe pastors do need to speak abortion would be one of those where you need to not be afraid to speak. But don't swerve off your course of preaching what the Lord has called and put on your heart to preach to the book that you're preaching through, to go into a special area that you think needs to be addressed at that point. And I would certainly hope that they would not get into partisanship and that can be very dangerous and divisive.

And it is our hope that many would come to know Christ as their Lord. And I pray frequently that many of those will be Democrats, but the Lord will work and bring revival among his church and many of the folks who come in the door will be people who are Democrats. - Yeah, I mean, that's really good.

And I try to, I mean, as someone who's interested, I feel like it's a blessing and a curse to be interested. Sometimes I envy my brothers in ministry who don't pay any attention to social media, don't, you know, they're gonna vote or, but they just, they're not into it. And I think that seems sometimes healthier and simpler.

Of course, we've been talking about that's not always the answer. So I feel like sometimes I wish I weren't as interested, but, you know, I have been for a long time. And so I think of that sort of word, Jeff, and I think any pastor listening out there, I think you put myself here need to examine your own heart is right now compared to politics, compared to this coming election, is the gospel more interesting, more important, more eternal.

All three of those, 'cause pastors are gonna say, of course it's more eternal, and in a cosmic sense, more important. So it may be even the first, is it more interesting to you? We don't want pastors getting kind of bored with Christology, Soteriology, Exegesis, and other expositional sermon. What I'm really into this week is what's going on in the political sphere.

That's a danger and it does not serve a local congregation when a pastor, you know, be interested in it, be informed, but the most important thing you need to do this week is to feed the flock with the word of God, and you need to find your soul happy in Jesus and communicate that. Justin, any last question before we just wrap up with a few books? - No, we're ready to move on to the books.

(gentle music) - No, no particular category, but Justin and Jeff, if you have anything, just this is life and books and everything.

We've done life and everything. So here are some books. So I just grabbed a few that I've finished recently.

I don't know why I'm holding them up because you can see it, but our listeners can't. Conrad and Beyway is a new book, *God's Design for the Church, published by Crossway. A Guide for African Pastors and Ministry Leaders.*

I did a blurb for that. I see Justin, it didn't make the back. Mark Devers did, but oh well.

It's a very good book. And even though it says a guide for African pastors, any pastor can benefit from this. And Conrad is one of my favorite preachers, and he's a delightful person.

We had him at our church to preach, was that this year? It seems like a lifetime ago that people were coming from other continents to visit. And I had him over for dinner, and I'm excited for this book. Another book that's been getting some attention, published by Princeton Press, it's called *Lost in Thought, The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life* by Zina Hitz.

Have you seen this, Justin? It's a very good book. It's well written. She tells a lot of her personal story in the beginning, and then the rest kind of moves through literature and philosophy.

And it's, I mean, it's part in understanding of why the academic life matters. But more than that, it's not just really for academics, it's about the value in thinking and the life of the mind. And that it's not just for academics.

In fact, it's better when it's for all sorts of people and to find beauty and pleasure in it. She's writing from a sort of a Catholic perspective comes through at times. And let me mention two other books, Matthew Thiesen has a book, *The Baker Publish, Jesus and the Forces of Death, The Gospels Portrayal of Ritual and Purity within First Century Judaism.*

Really fascinating book. I don't think I agree with every last argument in it, but the basic argument is we have too quickly dismissed Jesus encounters with ritual impurity and have made him out to be like one of us and just didn't really care about that Jewish category. When he goes through case after case, leprosy, death, sacred time, and he shows how this category of ritual impurity was hugely important in First Century Judaism.

And far from Jesus just saying, "You know what, we don't care about that anymore." He actually presented himself as the one who healed those impurities and was a kind of healing contagion such that if the woman with the bloody issue even touched him, his force of healing was stronger than her power of ritual pollution. And it's a quick read for an academic book and I've found it provocative. And then last book by Ronald Bailey and Marian TUPY.

Tuppy, "10 Global Trends Every Smart Person Should Know" and many others who will find interesting. It's of the genre of factfulness which came out a couple of years ago. It's kind of a coffee table book.

I wish it was a little bigger and it's actual physical size because the print can be hard to read but it actually doesn't have 10 global trends. That's just a seller for the book. It has I think 78.

I mentioned several of them actually came up in my sermon this week as I was preaching on Genesis 4 about the culture of Cain and how we see in the line of Cain great cultural and civilizational accomplishment by God's common grace but ultimately it's empty without true worship. And so I use some of these trends to show and remind us that in the midst of a constant barrage of bad news we can feel like we must live in the worst possible times when actually objectively, we live in the most prosperous, healthiest, most profitable, advanced time by far. And so this book has all sorts of statistics about income and how literacy in 1820, global literacy was 10%, now it's 90%.

Those living in extreme poverty 200 years ago was 84% of the population. Now it's under 10% how global wealth per capita. If you plotted it on a line from the time of Christ to the 19th century, it would be almost a completely flat line.

And then in the last 150 years almost a straight hockey stick going up. That's how much wealth has been created in the world. So it's a fascinating book.

You can put it on your coffee table and flip through and convince people that you're one of the smart persons who knows these trends. - One of the fun things about Rosling's book is that he developed a survey, the Factfulness book in which he would have a group of monkeys press buttons to try to determine the answers. And then he would compare that to various demographics of people taking the same quiz.

So the monkeys actually did about as well or maybe even better than journalists when you ask them about the global poverty rate and how many young girls are not being educated these days. So even if you're a journalist and should be in the know, you might not do better than a monkey in terms of those global trends. - So Justin, any books you've been into lightly that you wanna mention? - Yeah, next time let's let me go first and then you can go afterwards because you always see him like somebody seems like they don't read anything following Kevin DeYoung who reads a book of day it seems.

But two that are on my proverbial nightstand. One, I just received this weekend, Oh Carter Snead who is at Notre Dame, what it means to be human, the case for the body in public bioethics. Roman Catholic author, obviously, but he's making the argument that public policy in terms of bioethics has a lot to do with your definition of who a human being is.

And if you have the assumption of expressive individualism that what really matters is your freedom and your authenticity and treating the human being as a disembodied will where will and expression or everything that has profound effects on what we think about abortion and on euthanasia and other things. And so he's arguing that we are embodied people and there's natural limits to the human body and that makes us vulnerable and it makes us dependent upon other human beings. And I'm just, you know, the introduction of the first chapter into it but it looks like a really strong book.

Another one, quite different listening to it on Audible is by Thomas Cheddarton Williams. I think it came out last year, self-portrait in black and white, family fatherhood and rethinking race. And Williams is an American who lives in France, married a woman from Paris, his father is African American and his mother is Caucasian.

Several years ago he wrote a piece for "New York Times" op-ed or "New Yorker." I can't remember which saying that when he has his own child, he will consider that child, no matter what it looks like to be African American, then he had his first child who is blonde haired, curly blonde hair, bright blue eyes, white skin. And just the whole thing is sort of a memoir of reflections on himself as a father, his own family and arguing that the idea of kind of strict racial categorization just does not make sense in the modern world. So, fretting from a liberal perspective but I think also challenging a lot of popular conceptions on race.

So, halfway through that and finding it interesting and provocative and somebody who, all of my wife and children are adopted and a mixture of various races, it's interesting to think about what it means for race in the modern world. - He's a very thoughtful, reflective reader and writer. And so, yeah, I like him, I haven't read that yet.

Jeff, any books, emotional books, politics books, anything you're reading that you think would be worth mentioning. - I was challenged by a previous pastor of mine to have dear, dead friends that you read. You worded it better than that, Kevin.

But so, I've always been a fan of Andrew Murray and I am reading through his absolute surrender right now, which is a challenging, last night it was that concept of dying to self. So, I'm trying to think through that. But also reading lots of novels and other fun things too.

- Good. Jeff, thank you so much for taking time out of all your political machinations to be with us. You're one of the good guys and one of my dear friends.

So, thank you for being here with us and Justin. Glad that you could get to meet Jeff and vice versa. Jeff, you may not know that Justin is a Big Ten fan, Nebraska corn husker, who unfortunately-- - Big week for all of us.

- Yeah, play Ohio State. - Yeah, at now what I saw, yes, it's big. - Yeah, then Wisconsin

after that.

So, the Big Ten is putting it to Nebraska for-- - Yeah, they're punishing them. - With Nebraska. Kevin and I are Michigan State fans.

And so, we start with Rutgers, which was, is it hopefully a nice soft ball for our new coach, but then we have Michigan right away too. So, but it is exciting in the midst of all this to have some normality with Big Ten football starting. - Yeah, the third game of the season, we play the 85 betters, so.

- Nice. - Very good. All right, well, thank you, men.

And I look forward to having Colin back next week. And I believe we have another yes to talk about his book. And we'll have to come back and find out who that is.

So, until then, or if I got and enjoy him forever and read a good book.

(gentle music)

(buzzing)