

At some point our disturbing dreams will be reduced to manageable memories but not today. Chaos...disbelief...anger...sadness...reflection. The persistent unrelenting questions that linger after a tragedy. Questions that dog us and evade answers. There are a lot of question marks on the minds of people in this room.

Questions about police procedures. Why do you shoot a man when you have him pinned on the ground? Many of us, mostly white folks, are quick to say, "Well there was more to it than that." What if there wasn't? Then what? How many shootings do we need to see before we are willing to ask the question, "Is there bias against young African-American men? Do we have a flaw in police procedures when confronting folks who are suspected of a crime?"

Questions about people who march and chant, "What do we want, dead cops, when do we want them, now" and "Pigs in a blanket, fry 'em like bacon."

Questions about media bias. Why do we only hear about the young black men who were shot by police while the 64 young black men who were shot by other young black men in Chicago last week barely makes the news?

Questions about my own role in this. Do I carry racism in my heart that masquerades as righteousness and is tainted by white privilege? One of the white pastors admitted that he completely missed the point of Black Lives Matter until he talked to a friend...

We don't have easy answers to these questions but we cannot ignore them. We have ignored a lot of this because it was always happening somewhere else. But Thursday night, death came to Dallas reminding us that we have a problem in this country.

"We're not okay, folks, and we haven't been in quite a while. These horrible events are not creating unrest; rather they are revealing it. Our society is weak in its middle—at the "social glue" level of local communities and civil society. And, we have a race problem. We might disagree on why, but it won't do us any good to say it doesn't exist. Here we are – and there's no way out of this except by confronting it." John Stonestreet, Colson Center

So where do we go to find answers to the problem? Body cameras won't solve it. Neither will body armor, unless it is the body armor described by the apostle Paul in Eph. 6. The armor of God is the only defense against the deadly attacks of the

evil one. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." Call me naive but the formula is pretty simple - strong church strong society, weak church weak society. Simplistic? Got a better idea?

Put on **the belt of truth**. In times like these, the scriptures cut through the confusion and offer perspective that we don't appreciate when things seem to be working right. The truth is that we live in a fallen world where hate seeks to snuff out love. If you are not tethered to truth will you go through life thinking man is basically good and this is just a blip on the radar screen when in fact violence and injustice have a pretty long history. That's why Peter says,

1 Pe. 4:12: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation."

The Bible also reminds us that sin carries consequences and systemic sin carries systemic consequences. Gal. 6:7, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." The wheels of God's judgment turn slowly but they grind exceedingly fine. The injustices we ignore today will be on our doorstep tomorrow.

We cannot revere our founding fathers and then ignore the fact that some of them were accomplices in a system that enslaved a whole race of people. What if you lived through the kidnapping and forced enslavement of your loved ones with no standing whatsoever before the law? That's ancient history right? Ok, so call me ancient but in my lifetime in Dallas, Texas, Jim Crow laws were still in effect calling for "colored" restrooms, hotels and even colored drinking fountains. We proudly wave the flag in support of a nation where "all men are created equal" but our forefathers made sure that some of those equals remained separate. As George Orwell famously observed in his book *Animal Farm*, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." Every time we have one of these shootings it reverberates with our tragic history that even supported state-sanctioned violence, in a way that many of us don't understand.

Everyone spends a lot of time trying to figure this out, trying to answer questions like, "How could this happen? What would cause someone to do this?" But of course those are rational questions applied to irrational behavior. We talk about "senseless crimes" as if some crimes are sensible. Sin is irrational and evil is

indiscriminate. Do you really think shooting the police will make them less aggressive when taking down suspects? Do you really think taunting the police or throwing bottles and rocks at them will result in their support for your cause? "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Put on **the breastplate of righteousness**. Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people." Prov. 14:34. What is righteousness? First, it is God's perfect moral standard revealed in His word. God's law reflects His character. God is love, but we look around and see hate. God is just, we look around and see injustice. God is generous and gracious but we look around and see examples of self-interest and vindictive "gotcha" politics every single day.

But righteousness also describes our attitude and conduct toward others. The righteous man/woman treats everyone with respect. Righteousness is color-blind.

Of course the bad news is that "no one is righteous, no not one." The good news is "He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Cor. 5:21. So our good news/bad news gospel message never changes.

Put on **the shoes of readiness that spread a gospel of peace**. Seek the shalom of the city. Shalom is that word which does not describe the absence of conflict but the presence of God. It is the way things are supposed to be. Police officers who are dedicated to protect and serve are dead today. That's not the way it's supposed to be. Unarmed black men who were taken down by the police are dead today. That's not the way it's supposed to be. Taking matters into our own hands, which is self-interest, will never lead to love which is selfless.

We weep for the families of 5 fallen officers. Let's also weep for the families of those shot by police. As one pastor said, "The Bible exhorts us to weep with those who weep. It doesn't tell us to judge whether they should be weeping."

This is a day when we must take up **the shield of faith** that can extinguish ALL the flaming arrows of the evil one. Racism, unforgiveness, resentment, bitterness, pride, all these projectiles from the devil's quiver can be extinguished by people of faith.

And what shall we put on our heads? How can we protect our thoughts? How do I keep fear from dominating my life? "What if it happens again? What if it gets worse? Put on **the helmet of salvation** to remind you constantly that there is a day coming when we will be saved out of this present darkness. Never tire of telling others about that kingdom that is coming where there is no injustice or evil or sadness or death.

Take up **the sword of the Spirit** which is the word of God. Because God has already addressed this situation. Listen...Ps. 46.

Our security does not rest in electing the right president or having a strong military. Our security will not be insured by the dedicated men and women of the Dallas Police Department. They will do everything in their power, including giving their lives, to protect us but as we know only too well, even body armor cannot prevent the violence perpetrated by the twisted motives of a tortured soul.

"But let all who take refuge in You be glad,
Let them ever sing for joy;
And may You shelter them,
That those who love Your name may exult in You.
For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O Lord,
You surround him with favor as with a shield." Ps. 5:11-12

Above all, let's pray. Paul concludes his instruction with a call to prayer. "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints."

The well-being of this nation does not rest upon the election of a godly president as much as it does the godly testimony of kingdom-minded people. A nation can overcome the failure of a weak president. It is much harder to overcome the failure of a weak church. So my campaign slogan is "Make the church great again." The simple truth is that if the church in America is great then America will be great. **"Unless the Church steps forward collectively to fulfill its God-given role of influencing the conscience of our culture, our country will keep spiraling downward into the depths of fear and hate. We must do better. We must unite. We must stand together and commit to one another that we will usher in a wave of change, justice, life, safety, rightness, equity and dignity for all. And above all, we must not let fear or hatred divide us. Peace, unity, love and nonviolence should be**

our rallying cry and the catalyst for change in our nation. Through this, we can seek to transform the remnants of tragedy into the foundation of a stronger, more equitable future." Tony Evans

"Be Careful What You Vote For." One of the most memorable scenes in the OT is found in 1 Sam. 8:5-22...God's people demanded a king. Samuel warned them of the consequences of putting their faith in any human leader. Nevertheless, God tells Samuel to go ahead and give them a king. Then he tells them what to expect from their king...

We have all experienced those times when we wanted something so badly that we felt we couldn't live without; things that would make our lives much better than they are. We have also experience the unintended consequences of getting what we wanted.

Those who are more concerned about the rule of man than they are the rule of God we will get far more than they bargained for.

Hope and Change

Colson - we didn't change anything. Change won't come through a presidential election. What do I have to offer the world? We are change agents

If God is not your king, you will have to find a replacement. You will have to choose between your own values or the values of some tribe you align yourself with. If we are to be change agents in society we will have to embrace four values that are clearly delineated in the Bible.

"In order to form a more perfect union" there are four biblical values that not only inform our faith but these also inform our vote. I want to show you how we can use

these four values like points on a compass to inform us not only in how to live but in how to vote.

1. Get Real (but avoid cynicism). "We live in honest relationships as we are transformed through the unchanging grace and truth of Jesus Christ."

Stay connected to the truth. As Christians our first priority is biblical truth. When we are rooted in God's unchanging word we have a standard against which to judge various philosophies and worldviews. For example, the Bible teaches that all of us are flawed and vulnerable to the lust of the flesh. The truth is that this November we will vote for someone who is morally challenged. Politicians do not always represent the best of Christian values. We are all flawed. Since we have the privilege of choosing our leaders we have to determine which flaws are more dangerous to the free exercise of our faith.

"If politics drives the gospel, rather than the other way around, we end up with a public witness in which Mormon talk-show hosts and serially-monogamous casino magnates and prosperity-gospel preachers are welcomed into our ranks, regardless of what violence they do to the gospel." Russel Moore

Getting real also means being honest which is the internal application the external truth. Be honest about candidates.

In the wake of two more police shootings that seem unjust and unjustifiable, those of us who are white should do some soul searching as ask ourselves how race informs our opinions of people. And those who are black should be asking why the outrage over these highly publicized cases doesn't seem to exist when more than 60 black citizens are shot in Chicago last weekend.

When considering a candidate, we used to ask, "Which candidate is more honest?" But politics and honesty are not always compatible. So it might be a better question to ask, "Which of the candidates is more likely to protect the free exercise of religion and to protect the right to proclaim the gospel in the public square?" The answer is not always easy but we can listen for statements that either support or deny the truth.

If the Christian worldview is true, then Christians should be able to contribute more positively than anyone else to the political process. St. Augustine said that those who are citizens of God's kingdom are best equipped to be citizens of the

kingdom of man. I think he was right.

2. Get Moving (but avoid elitism). "We challenge each other to discover and act on God's next step for our lives." Don't get stuck with respect to your understanding of reality. Study the issues. Study the candidates. Listen to those you don't agree with. Keep cultivating your understanding of God's perspective.

In his new book, *How Would Jesus Vote*, Darrell Bock doesn't answer the question. However, he does interact with various issues in order to

Texas Tech video...

3. Get Together (but avoid tribalism). "We gather as diverse generations, ethnicities and backgrounds to live and love in unity." in America, the people are the leaders! Here, at least, we express our obedience to God by exercising our rights and privileges as citizens.

A democratic republic such as we have in America is perhaps the most difficult form of government to maintain. As he emerged from a meeting of the Constitutional Convention, a woman asked him, "Mr. Franklin, what sort of government have you given us?" Franklin replied, "A republic, madam, if you can keep it."

Franklin and the other founding fathers understood the peril of apathy. If citizens don't get involved, elected representatives quickly begin to express their own interests or the interests of those who are willing to pay them money and attention. Apathy and greed soon give way to corruption and injustice which give way to tyranny and misery.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. Margaret Mead

"Give me a hundred men who love God with all their hearts, and fear nothing but sin, and I will move the world". John Wesley

Our ultimate goal is not small groups but community. A small group is merely a means of experiencing community.

SB1146 was a Senate Bill before the California legislature that was intended to protect the rights of LGBT students at all California colleges and universities. This functionally eliminates the religious liberty for students of all California faith-based colleges and universities who integrate spiritual life with the entire campus educational experience. As many as 42 faith-based institutions of higher education in California could be impacted. Some examples of how the bill would impact faith-based institutions include:

- Faith-based institutions in California would no longer be able to require a profession of faith of their students.
- These institutions would no longer be able to integrate faith throughout the teaching curriculum.
- These institutions would no longer be able to require chapel attendance for students, an integral part of the learning experience at faith-based universities.
- These institutions would no longer be able to require core units of Bible courses. Athletic teams would no longer be able to lead faith-based community service programs.

Because Christians got involved with the political process, the bill was amended. It **no longer affects these areas of academic and religious life**. The author of the bill has made it clear that he is not interested in addressing these questions. If Christians had remained silent on this issue I guarantee you it would have passed unchanged.

4. Get Out (but avoid activism). "We go beyond these walls to transform our homes, communities and world." The foundation for making government work well is the informed engagement of its citizens. Good citizenship means pursuing the common good not just what's good for me.

Prison ministry

Replace fear with faith. "Public opinion, in its raw state, gushes out in the immemorial form of the mob's fear. It is piped into central factories, and there it is flavored and colored, and put into cans." **H.L. Mencken, Notes on Democracy**

So many people are dominated by fear today. Fear of terrorism, fear of immigration, fear of a stock market collapse, fear of the Zika virus, fear of those who are not afraid. So the thought of building a wall that would protect us from

things we fear actually seems rationale to those with irrational fear. Britons just opted out of the European Union out of fear that they were losing their sovereignty as a nation. No one knows what the long-term consequences are of this decision. We know that in the short term the stock market took a dive. the British pound initially lost more than 10 percent of its value,
That's the problem with fear. It often causes us to make unwise decisions that ultimately result in bringing about the very things we fear.

The pages of the OT are filled with examples of God's people entering into unwise alliances out of fear of losing their national identity. As a result, they lost their national identity.

Last year I had a tense conversation who accused me of being a fool for planning to reach out to Syrian refugees. My question was, which is a safer approach to refugees, to hate them and marginalize them or to love them, engage them and help them in their quest to live in a safe place where their children can have the opportunities that our children have?

I return to the words of King Jehoshaphat, "Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be established." Amen God and He will Amen you!

God calls us to care about something bigger than safety, something more important than individual rights. Agreeing to follow Jesus means carrying our crosses and giving up our very lives ([Luke 9:23, 24](#); [Matt. 10:38, 39](#)). So whether we're headed to the polls or to the office, our choices must be marked by faith and not fear. Faith in the good news that God is for us and will not forsake us. Faith that life is about more than economics and our time here on earth. Faith that God himself is interested in the final revelation of his kingdom on this planet, and that he will one day make all things right.

We serve God best by putting our faith in his promise to bring about his redemptive reign in his kingdom without end ([Luke 1:33](#); [Heb. 11:6](#)). We have the blessed opportunity to say no to fear, to humbly love our neighbors, and to stand firm when it feels like the earth is splintering and shaking.