

Notes on the book:  
**Faithful Presence**  
**The Promise and the Peril of Faith in the Public Square**  
by Bill Haslam - Former Governor of Tennessee

*This is the most on-target, honest and inspirational book I've read since diving into the realm of encouraging Christians and their leaders to become more involved in the public square. More than anything - Gov. Haslam has made crystal clear how important it is to remain faithful to God's Word, to do what we can, and to leave the rest up to Him. This book is a 'must read' for any Christian seeking public office. Ἐπιδα*

*I have shared here the 'jewels' of thought from this book along with pages and content placed in quotations. This is not meant to replace reading the book, but rather to encourage you to do so.*

red indicates of special importance to us as Christians

p. 7 "The challenge in America has always been in how we live together respectfully when all of us describe the common good, and even the purpose of government, in different ways. "

p. 8 "These times call for us to have a sound theology of political engagement so that **our politics are driven by our faith, rather than our politics shaping our faith.** "

p. 10 "We need a theology for our politics that helps our actions match our beliefs."

**"There is a way for Christians to be at the center of restoring that lost hope. And it can happen in a way in which even nonbelievers will be glad to have us engaged in the public square."**

"As our country grows more polarized and people of faith become increasingly fearful about the growing secularization of the country, this is the right time to consider what it should look like for us to be engaged in the public square. It is my hope that Christians, in being faithful to the role God has called us to, will become people who help heal the political differences that are ripping our country apart. **It is my hope that, rather than reaching out of fear of what we might be losing, we will engage as people who are committed to serving in the public square for the common good.**"

p.11 "That will mean learning to stop being people who live out of our grievances about how the world hasn't treated us right and learning to teach out of love rather than responding out of fear. In the process, we will look at how God can use our

engagement in the public square to make us more like him, whether we're running for office or learning to be an informed voter and advocate."

p. 12 "It is my hope that people of faith realize that we are the ones being called to bring hope to a world that feels increasingly divided. In these days of confusing situations, when the entire nation seems filled with contempt for the other side, perhaps we can model what Jeremiah was calling the Israelites to do in Babylon. In doing that, we can return a wounded and weary nation that there is One who came to rescue us from a life without hope. "

**p. 33 "We seem to be more worried about losing our country than we are about losing our God. .... What is needed in America today is a group of people who are different, who are walking in their birthright as citizens of the city of God - a movement powerful enough to push the country in a new direction."**

**p. 34. "Unfortunately, I have also seen how easy it is to hurt our cause by our political actions. When our politics direct our faith, rather than our faith directing our politics, we end up in the wrong place. Too many of us react out of fear and anger when it seems that the country is not going in the direction we want it to go."**

p. 36 "We don't know how to do that. We don't know how to give a defense for the hope that is in us, and we certainly don't know how to do it with gentleness and respect in a world that is rapidly changing. We have not thought through what we believe and why we believe it; we have only built a fear of what the other side might do and what we might lose. Fear is always a bad beginning place. As Nietzsche said, 'He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster.'"  
*footnote 2.*

**p. 38 "Our clearest Christian call addresses the way we conduct ourselves. The call to be different, to love our neighbor regardless of political and cultural differences, and to walk with humility and kindness is not up for political debate. Policy decisions, however, are not as clear."**

p. 41 "Our challenge is to think biblically about our politics rather than thinking politically about our faith. That is growing more and more difficult in today's politics that are driven by passionate outrage."

p. 43 "...our battle is to bring meaning and love to a world struggling with meaninglessness and despair in a way that rarely has been seen. "

...we would be weakened as a community and as a nation without the faithful presence of believers. But the danger becomes when those believers see their faith as a means to bring about the political ends they want."

Our role in the political process “has to be marked by a commitment to be more faithful to the Word of God than we are to either political party.” as per Gary Haugen: the church should be using our influence to ‘bless the world out of love rather than cursing the world out of fear.”

p. 52 “So as Christians, our call to be a faithful presence in the public area, and everywhere else for that matter, always starts with self-sacrifice-not self-actualization. For while Christians know that the story is not about us, we also have the confidence that comes from knowing that we are part of a bigger story that God is writing.”

p. 72 “I know it seems backward, but the more we humble ourselves, the more fruit God promises, even in a world that has lots its taste for humility.”

p. 73 “...Christians in the public square... we should be known for humility as much or more than we are known for our positions. To lack humility is to misunderstand the gospel. ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.; James 4:5”

p. 77 - in answering if it is difficult to be a Christian in politics and government.... “The temptation more often is to use your faith to score political points - to USE God instead of being USED by God. “ emphasis mine

p. 86 - great reminder from James: “The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. James 3:17”

p. 99 “ ...The church today can and should be people who are known for entering the public square effectively with humility rather than pride and arrogance. It is simply the only way. Ps. 1:3”

p. 110 from Martin Luther King’s sermon, The American Dream.... “ You see, the founding fathers were really influenced by the Bible. The w.....Not that they have substantiality with God, but that every man has a capacity to have fellowship with God. And this gives him a uniqueness, it gives him worth, it gives him dignity.”

p. 128 “ The idea that religious people should not bring their deepest desires and commitments to public debate is not constitutional or historic. Ours is a country that was begun by people seeking religious freedom, and the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are infused with the idea of religion as a motivating factor for the birth of the country. It is not realistic that we should act without personal conviction.

All of us bring our word views as a beginning point religious or not, to the public arena. We are all seven best by people who are not running for office for their own personal reward. Our best public servants are those who are there to serve. Christians should understand this concept because that is what we are called to do, regardless of where

we are called. We are the ones who should be trying to follow Jesus and his reminder that even 'the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve' Mt 20:28 ."

p. 157-158 "...see politics as a place where, despite all of its messiness, God has used and will use faithful people. ....a place for all of us to take seriously or role in the public arena. It does matter who we elect. Compassionate, purposeful government makes this world a better place. As frustrating as the process might be, it matters too much for people of faith to just check out of the process. Instead, with hearts set on civil and not cynical governing, we can bring humility, hope, and a commitment to getting to the best answer, not just our answer."

p. 169-170 "Postmodernism is defined as the idea that truth is subject to change and open to individual determination. The spirit of the age says what is true for you might not be true for me. .... Jesus does not tie us the alternative of deciding what may be true for you might not be true for me. 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' John 14:6 is about as far away from a postmodern statement on truth as you can get. Likewise, he does not give us the alternative of deciding who we will love."

p. 171 "He also tells us that we are to love even those we don't like and those who are on a different political side when he says 'love your enemies (MT 5:44). It's not an either-or type of situation when it comes to truth and love. It's a both-and. ....

Sadly, very few look to people of faith to help bridge the divide (between Left and Right) and solve our biggest problems. .... These times require citizens who are committed to both truth and love, not one without the other."

P. 179 From Martin Luther King: " A just law is ma-made code that squares with the normal law of the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law.

p. 182 "There is a world of difference between the state established religion and individuals using their faith as a motivation for action. If not for that difference, our country would have missed the benefit of years of sacrificial service from people who were motivated to act because of what they believed."

p. 186 - summarizes Chapter 13

From Robert Putnam - Harvard professor of public policy in his book: *American Grace...* : " In particular, religiously observant Americans are more generous with time and treasure than demographically similar secular Americans. This is true for secular causes (especially help to the needy, the elderly, and young people) as well as for purely religious causes. It is true even for most random acts of kindness." **footnote 19**

p. 191 "There is a fine line between righteousness and self-righteousness. Lesson from John 8"7 - Jesus being brought the woman caught in adultery ....

" We should be sure we are being used by God, not using God for our own ends."

p. 192 In recalling Jesus telling followers that they are to be ‘the salt of the earth... they were to do for the world what said did for meat in the days before refrigeration: keep it from spoiling. If the meat went bad, it was the salt’s fault, not the meat’s. The point is that we are the o ones who are supposed to be the preservatives in our communities and countries.” If the world is going ‘bad’, we should look first at ourselves and our involvement in the world....

p. 193 “Are we more committed to making a difference than making our point?”

p. 195 “If we are going to have a faithful presence in the public arena, we also have to recognize the limits of what government can do - and see what people of faith are called to do to stand in that gap.”

p. 197 “Matters of the heart will not be solved by legislative action.” Caring more about the hearts of the people should be the laughing hint for our presence in the public square.

p. 198 “If Jesus always starts with us, and we are the ones responsible for bringing salt and light into a world that is divided and angry, we need to develop a political theology-a theology that is clear, coherent, and biblical as our vision for our marriages jobs, and churches.”

P. 202 “Our call is to be faithful, not successful. Our call is to be used by God, not to use God for our own desires.”

*This book was published in 2021 and is a reflection by Bill Haslam on his years in public office.*