

ISSACHAR REPORT

PREPARING FOR POST-ELECTION
MINISTRY IN AN AGE OF CHAOS

By Gene Roncone

CONTRIBUTORS

Don Detrick
Gary Grogan
Rich Guerra
Wayne Kraiss
Steve Pike
Nick Seders
Charlie Self
Phil Steiger
George O. Wood
Terry Yancey
Josh Yancey

Issachar Report

Leading and Ministering Well in Postelection Chaos

The Church is facing perilous times. Our nation is being torn apart by political Armageddon, civil unrest, social violence, an international pandemic, and economic meltdown. The 2020 election results will only worsen our situation no matter what the outcome. Like Israel in the wake of a national, political, and social crisis, we will need men and women like the sons of Issachar “who understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chronicles 12:32 NIV).

What will ministry look like in the wake of postelection chaos? If conservatives keep the White House, what can we expect? If progressives seize control, how will ministry be different and what obstacles will present themselves? How should wise leaders prepare for different scenarios?

In order to answer these questions and help our RMMN churches “hope for the best and prepare for the worst,” I reached out to a few “sons of Issachar” living in our own time. (Their names are listed on the cover.) These seers looked into the future and told me what they saw. I compiled their thoughts, identified common denominators, took note of visionary insights, and summarized their observations in this report to address the following topics:

- **Values and Night Vision:** Seven postelection values you can expect from your Network.
- **Forecasting the Future:** What leaders see emerging on the cultural horizon.
- **Preemptive Preparation:** Five intentional ways to prepare your church.
- **Discussion Questions:** Practical sections entitled “Making it Real” that include group discussion questions. These questions can be used in your leadership huddles to discuss potential impact points, team strategy, and action items.

Anticipating the future and preparing for different scenarios are practices exemplified in biblical leaders. Noah did it (Genesis 7-9), King David did it (2 Samuel 7; 1 Kings 5:2-3), and King David’s most effective generals did it as well (2 Samuel 10:11). Solomon asked God to empower him to do it with excellence (2 Chronicles 1:10), Nehemiah did it (Nehemiah 1-5), and Jesus even emphasized this need in four of his parables (Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 14:28-30; Luke 14:31-32; and Luke 16:1-8).

It is my hope that this work will help you as a spiritual leader to prepare for the future and lead well in difficult times. At the very least, I pray it ignites the fires of Spirit-driven creativity in your own ministry.

Contending for community,

Gene Roncone
Rocky Mountain Ministry Network
District Superintendent/Network Pastor (aka “helper”)

Values and Night Vision

In this season of darkness, I have been asking God to give me spiritual night vision. As a leader, I am asking God's Spirit to help me provide the kind of spiritual support, resources, and mindset that will be required of our Network in postelection ministry. One thing is certain—change is coming no matter what party wins. Right up front and before the tsunami breaks shore, I want to be clear about what you can expect from your Network office. We know our lane and have every intention of staying within it. What is our lane? You can count on ours being:

1. **Scripturally grounded.** Scripture, not public opinion, personal preferences, or social wokeness will be our moral compass.
2. **Kingdom driven.** As a regional headquarters and service organization, our priority is ministers and local churches. We are not Republicans, Democrats, or Independents. We are children of the living God and citizens of an eternal Kingdom. That is why we will be laser-focused on seeking “first his Kingdom” over all earthly endeavors (Matthew 6:33 NIV).
3. **Gospel centered.** We do not believe political or social reform is the solution for our world or nation. Divine salvation and regeneration of the human spirit are the most effective ways to transform our culture.
4. **Morally resolute.** We will not stand down or compromise our moral, ethical, or biblical standards no matter what the social, financial, or political consequences may be.
5. **Faith focused.** We will be motivated by faith and not fear, optimism over pessimism, and hope instead of despair.
6. **Service oriented.** Our prime directive as a Network office is to serve ministers and local churches. Period. It is not to solve governmental problems, mobilize social activism, or become a political platform.
7. **Community driven.** We will strive to foster collaboration, broker peace, and encourage community among diverse churches, ministers, and ministries.

Forecasting the Future

Whether it is prophetic vision or keen predictive skills, the best leaders can anticipate challenges while they are still a dot far off on the horizon. The team of contributors was in agreement that all of the following scenarios will become our new reality no matter what the outcome of the 2020 election may be.

1. **Social unrest.** No matter what side of the power spectrum wins the White House, our culture's political, social, and economic disillusionment will continue to manifest itself in public outrage and violent protest. This will most likely generate:
 - Public rioting, violence, and disruption within metropolitan centers of our Network like Denver, Boulder, Fort Collins, Aurora, Colorado Springs, or Salt Lake City.
 - Polarization and villainization as a means for problem solving.
 - Because the presidential winner may not be known on election night due to mail-in ballots, we should expect the losing party to question the legitimacy of the election and call for legal action, civil unrest, and total reform.
 - No matter the political outcome, there will be more pronounced pressure on the church to "pick sides" and double down on some version of a "politics as savior."
2. **Religious persecution.** Intolerance and resentment of Christianity and the church will continue to intensify after the election. Religious liberties will be challenged, revoked, or trampled upon in the name of tolerance and equality. This may include things like:
 - Increased attacks upon conservative Christians, orthodox Jews, Roman Catholics, and others that reject political correctness.
 - Biblical teaching being reclassified and denounced as "hate speech."
 - More attempts by local, state, and federal government agencies to restrict or eliminate the churches' 501(c)3 status, exemption from property tax, and ministerial housing allowances.
 - Many believers will become timid at the prospect of an emerging socialist government, incompetent leaders, godless legislation, and court rulings that will undermine religious liberty.
3. **Loss of personal freedoms.** Every time the nation experiences a massive pull to one extreme of the political or moral spectrum, we experience a culture shift. In the end, the prevailing side may not be successful in dragging culture to the boundaries they had originally intended; but they will be successful in pulling the nation off what was then the center. This can result in the following:
 - Loss of personal freedoms previously thought to be provided by the Constitution.
 - Right to life minimalized and abortion rights strengthened.
 - The educational system hijacked to reflect an updated form of political wokeness.
 - Activist judges, the politicizing of justice or a restructuring of the judicial system.
4. **Conflict in the church.** God's people will continue to be divided by divergent political and social convictions. We are already seeing the people of God elevating a social and political distinctive over their spiritual identity. As a result, they will have conflicting opinions concerning the message of the gospel, the role of their pastor, the mission of the church, and how spiritual resources should be mobilized. This divergence will be evidenced in:
 - Churchgoers demanding their pastors become more politically engaged, lead the faith community in civil disobedience, or mobilize the church in social justice.

- The extreme right's wanting to repurpose and mobilize the church for political activism and civic disobedience.
- Believers continuing to be divided into camps depending on various priorities or situational interpretation of kingdom theology:
 - Patriots will want the church to lead them in civic dissent and will prefer Matthew 6:33 to read, "Seek ye first patriotic conquest and all these other things will be added unto you."
 - Activists will want the church to lead them in social justice and will prefer Matthew 6:33 to be interpreted, "Seek ye first social justice and all these other things will be added unto you."
 - Medical professionals and those impacted by COVID-19 will want the church to lead them in public health. They will prefer Matthew 6:33 to be interpreted, "Seek ye first a vaccine and all these other things will be added unto you."
 - The indifferent will want the church to lead them back to normalcy. They will interpret Matthew 6:33 to read, "Seek ye first convenience and all these other things will be added unto you."

However oversimplistic as these observations may seem, the disunity they have created unearths one alarming truth: God's people seem to lack a prevailing perspective that enables them to live out "kingdom first" priorities and navigate the spiritual realities of a world rotting from the inside out.

- Spiritual influencers will further exasperate the division by using social media to register mean, judgmental, or divisive opinions.

Terry Yancey believes this vitriolic division between believers, particularly along political lines, is Satan's tactic to distract the church from its primary focus of evangelism and discipleship in these last days.

5. **Glorification of dissent.** Hyper gridlock and political polarization will become the norm locally, regionally, and nationally. All the world will seem to be an activist of sorts, and people will wear the spirit of offense like a badge of honor. The mean-spirited tone of villainization towards ideological adversaries will become localized; and Christians will model culture in the way they register criticism, descent, and disapproval.
6. **Political eclipse.** All things will be viewed through a political lens. The politicization of all things will infiltrate nearly every area of our lives—everything from transportation; housing; food choice; preferred products; and yes, even the postal service will carry some form of political identification. This eclipse will also manifest itself through blame-casting in all sectors regarding COVID-19, national deficit, social distancing, and economic consequences.
7. **Spiritual opportunity.** In his July 30, 2020 blog, Carey Nieuwhof made the following five predictions for the Church regarding the 2020 election:
 - There will be a renewed interest in the sovereignty of God.
 - The Church will look to Christ more and to the State less.

- Living out your values will become more important than ever.
- The tone of public discourse will either get worse . . . or better.
- The work of the local church will be more important than ever.

Each one of the challenges above is an opportunity for the gospel to go forth and the church to ring relevant.

Preemptive Preparation

Practical solutions and recommendations to be considered by our ministers and churches are listed below in a way that complements the challenges above.

1. **Refocus on the Kingdom of God.** Jesus taught us saying, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33 KJV). But the church seems to lack this single-mindedness. We have allowed our culture of hyperactivism to blur the lines between our spiritual identity and our earthly citizenship. As Christ-followers, we are not Republicans, Democrats, or Independents; we are children of the living God and citizens of an eternal kingdom. That means our passion for patriotism, social justice, social health, and normalcy must pale in comparison to our passion for the kingdom. It means when we leave the presence of others, they should unequivocally and undeniably be able to come to the conclusion that we are Christ-followers more than to be able to recall our political affiliation, social convictions, or patriotic leanings.
 - **Kingdom casting.** Teaching/sermon series, blogs, and podcasts that help believers focus more on their spiritual identity as citizens of an eternal kingdom than on their current political affiliations.
 - **Raising the horizon.** Storytelling and testimonials of kingdom perspectives regarding conflict, race relations, collaboration, and problem solving will give people hope and a reason to “become the solution” in their own context.
 - **Theme shifting.** Emphasizing eternal themes like missions, heaven, the rapture, and the triumph of good over evil will help God’s people more accurately interpret our current crisis.
 - **Be the Solution sermon series.** A sermon series addressing kingdom perspectives on current topics married to local outreach opportunities that give the church an opportunity to live out the kingdom in that area could be both transformational and a powerful community witness.

Joshua Yancey said it best: “If you aren’t pleased with our current government, don’t worry. A new government is on its way that is greater than any monarchy, oligarchy, dictatorship, republic, or democracy — it is God’s Kingdom! The Book of Revelation assures us this world is passing away: “The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become

the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15 NIV).

MAKING IT REAL: Contributor Nick Seders has provided the discussion questions below. Use them to facilitate group interaction among your own leadership team to discuss potential impact points and action items.

1. Where have you seen sociopolitical conviction superseding your identity in Christ, whether in yourself or those you serve?
2. Is there anyone in your church or ministry who has approached the current crises from a kingdom perspective? How might God use that person to help you “raise the horizon”?
3. What eternal themes would resonate in your church or ministry right now? How could you emphasize those in your corporate worship, prayer, discipleship, etc.?

2. **Predetermine guiding values and set expectations.** It will be important for pastors to get out in front of these issues BEFORE the election. Waiting until the tsunami hits the shore will cause your church to exist in a cycle of reactive chaos. Instead:
 - **Stay apolitical.** Many pastors ministering in multiethnic contexts make the mistake of thinking political affiliation will enable them to be more relevant and palatable to a godless culture. Gary Grogan has pastored a large, multiethnic church through nine national elections, and he encourages pastors to lead nonpolitical churches. “As a very diverse church (60% ethnic), we stand firm on biblical justice issues; but we do not involve politics. Some would disagree; but our stance has been that while we as individuals may be called to the political process, the church is not. We have politicians in our church, and they like attending a gospel-zoned church!” said Grogan.
 - **Set and communicate boundaries.** Local pastors will need to set and communicate lane boundaries and core values your church will embrace before, during, and after the election. The following questions may help you begin this process.
 - What is in your church’s “lane” and what is not?
 - What five or six values will guide your church in responding to postelection chaos and invitations to become part of the problem?
 - What will be your church’s official position regarding politics, political candidates, or reactive responses to the headlines?
 - How will your church process requests from those within your church who represent action groups or political parties?
 - What five things will you ask your people to prioritize in postelection culture?
 - What is your church’s definition, philosophy, and boundaries of civil disobedience?
 - **Put pre/postelection values in writing.** I would suggest brainstorming with your team to create a list of values that can be shared with your church. For example, the

content listed in the above section entitled “Values and Night Vision” was the product of the Network staff spending two staff meetings brainstorming about what our churches will need, as well as what is and is not in our lane for this pre and postelection season. Posting, explaining, and reminding your church about these values will help keep your church united. It will also save you from having to vet every request and scenario independently later on. It allows you to steer the ship through the storm instead of the waves of circumstances determining direction.

MAKING IT REAL: Contributor Nick Seders has provided the discussion questions below. Use them to facilitate group interaction among your own leadership team to discuss potential impact points and action items.

1. What are your blind spots when it comes to the overlap of politics and ministry (you may need to ask a spouse or close friend to help you identify them)? How would these make leading an apolitical church difficult?
2. When political issues are addressed in your church or ministry, what tone do the people adopt—humility, aggression, sarcasm? How should that inform your prayers in the months ahead?
3. Do the people you serve have a clear understanding of the ministry’s mission and values? What would move everyone toward greater ownership of those biblical priorities?
4. If your church were to write out your own guiding values that congregants could expect from you during the next political cycle, what would they be?

- 3. Teach your people how to thrive as a persecuted minority.** My friend and historian, Charlie Self, has a different and more realistic perspective than most. As a church historian, Charlie has a 30,000-foot aerial view of Christianity. Charlie reminds us that the religious freedoms and cultural accommodation Christianity has enjoyed in America is rare in the timeline of human history. In fact, Christians have been persecuted throughout most of religious history. For example, the church in the Roman empire experienced severe empire-wide persecution in the 160s, 250s, and 300s. The Persian empires persecuted Christians in the 400s-700s. Islamic persecution of the Church was severe from the 630s all the way to the 1680s. The Japanese severely persecuted Christians in the late 1600s and 1700s with thousands of martyrs. Today Christians are being persecuted and martyred in China and the Middle East. From 1900 to the present day, more believers have given their lives for the Christian faith than in all previous centuries combined as a result of Communist, Fascist, and Islamist efforts.

However, Christians have always thrived, adapted, and flourished the most during times of persecution. American Christianity exists in a microscopic window of favor. When it comes to church history, Americans have become so accustomed to this unusual exception that we have never developed the gritty faith and perseverance of our predecessors. It would do us well to be reminded that not only has Christianity survived

under persecution, but have thrived, grown, and matured in the midst of it. Following are some ways to help your people develop the spiritual grit needed in these troubled times:

- **Engage scriptures that address a biblical perspective of persecution.** The scriptures are full of passages that reveal God's expectations concerning how Christians should coexist under persecution and cultural contempt. These scriptures include:

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10 NIV).

"That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10 NIV).

"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12 NIV).

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (John 15:18 NIV).

"Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man" (Luke 6:22 NIV).

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" (Romans 8:35 NIV).

"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44 NIV).

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" (Matthew 5:11 NIV).

"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30 NIV).

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:14 NIV).

"My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me" (Psalm 31:15 NIV).

"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8 NIV).

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4 NIV).

Integrating these scriptures through public prayer, preaching, teaching, or small group interaction will help God's people exegete our own culture in light of the Bible. Possible application could include small group discussion questions built around the scriptures

listed above. A preaching series on the overlapping principles from these scriptures that celebrates the grittiness and perseverance of Christianity would also be beneficial. In addition, it would be wise to engage your own leadership community in a discussion about how your church may experience persecution within your own geographic or social context, what capacities you will need to develop, and how you can and will respond.

- **Fortify your income.** The first wave of persecution will most likely be of a financial nature. Phil Steiger offered these words of practical advice: “Pastors will need to help congregants begin to see giving to a church as obedience to God and ministry partnership more than a potential tax break. Pastors and church boards will also need to learn how to broaden the financial base of their church’s income—meaning leasing their building and property to appropriate outside groups.” Mark DeYmaz’s recent book, *The Coming Revolution in Church Economics: Why Tithes and Offerings Are No Longer Enough, and What You Can Do About It*, addresses this topic in much greater detail.
- **Pastoral modeling.** As the church continues to face marginalization, pastors must have a robust theology of kingdom influence while in “exile” (Jeremiah 29; 1 Peter 1-2). “We are at our best when we are not in places of direct power,” said historian Charlie Self.
- **Leveraging legal rights.** Don Detrick is convinced that no matter what party gains power, the church will need assistance in understanding and interpreting their rights as legislation changes. “It will be important for us to receive guidance on the difference between First Amendment issues and issues of public health and safety. We will need more resources about what it means to ‘do no harm’, how to separate political views from biblical values and the Lordship of Christ,” said contributor Don Detrick.

When asked how the church should respond to a national powershift, former General Superintendent George O. Wood said, “God’s people must be reminded that the Early Church flourished under the persecution of Roman emperors. God is sovereign over human history, and a suffering church is often the most spiritually powerful church.”

MAKING IT REAL: Contributor Nick Seders has provided the discussion questions below. Use them to facilitate group interaction among your own leadership team to discuss potential impact points and action items.

1. On a personal level, what do you draw from the passages above? How do they encourage you to respond to potential persecution in faith rather than fear?
2. As leaders in our churches and ministries, what can we do to encourage faith over fear—even in the face of chaos?
3. Of the strategies listed above (fortifying income, pastoral modeling, etc.), which would you like to understand and utilize more fully? Are there any others that were not mentioned but that you regard as important for your church or ministry?

4. Unite around spiritual values. I cannot recall a time in recent history when the evangelical church has allowed culture to divide them more than now. COVID-19, social unrest, and politics have fractured the church into a million islands of unyielding conviction. Overnight, pastors and churches are expected to be Hollywood producers, social justice gurus, community leaders, real-time commentators, and a spiritual version of the CDC. As independent expectations, these beliefs seem reasonable; however, their convergence upon the local church is causing polarizing division, mission creep, and irrational expectations. While culture seems obsessed with focusing on our differences, the church should focus on what we as a community of faith have in common.

- **Fast-cycle community building.** “Fast-cycle time” is a phrase used in organizational development to describe a streamlined process of running multiple production lines simultaneously, eliminating bottlenecks, and fast-tracking priority projects. The COVID-19 crisis has neutralized the church’s sense of cohesiveness and habits for nearly a year. Pastors will need to go into hyperspeed and employ fast-cycle time to rebuild a sense of community in their churches. “Careful rebuilding of our congregations after months of separation must be a priority,” said Dr. Wayne Kraiss about the race to prepare the church for postelection chaos. Our churches will have existed for over 10 months in isolation. We must make restoring a sense of community, togetherness, and shared vision a priority in order to absorb the shock of postelection chaos.
- **Model peaceful discourse.** Pastors must model, facilitate, and lead the way in civil discourse. By doing this, the church can create geographic islands of civility by facilitating public conversation. In the words of Charlie Self, “The church is strategically positioned to convene people not only for worship but also for learning and listening, partnering and practical action, and being an honest partner in community change.”
- **Spiritual priorities.** We must encourage our people to focus on the main event of the kingdom and not become distracted by the political sideshow. Steve Pike stressed the need for intense focus saying, “We need to get back to the basics of making disciples first and respond to the current reality with truth and love.”
- **Redefining results.** Pastors will need to recalibrate discipleship to focus on OUTCOMES, not programs and LIFE CHANGE, not just activity. Churches that are upward and outward focused will flourish while those that want only to return to normal will erode in their effectiveness.
- **Preach peace.** “Regardless of who wins the election, the division and hatemongering will continue. People will panic and be fearful, uneasy, overly worried, and anxious. Again, keep preaching peace and repentance and please teach on the coming of the Lord,” said Dr. Wayne Kraiss.
- **Humility.** The lack of civility, patience and forbearance on both sides of the aisle has left our nation both needful and hungry for humility. Don Detrick offers wise counsel no matter what scenario unfolds:

“No matter what happens, pastors will need to lead with empathy, not with a sense of “us vs. them” or that “our side has won.” They should lead as

servants, not as victims. Set the tone as Abraham Lincoln did in his second inaugural address delivered shortly before his death in 1865: “With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.”

- **Pray in the Spirit.** Small prayer meetings in homes of Spirit-filled believers can be leveraged to do the spiritual heavy lifting. Unleashing Spirit-filled prayer upon the division and spiritual lostness of our nation can be a powerful catalyst. Contributor Gary Grogan reminds us that our national crisis is not a coincidence: “There is a real devil who has real objectives and a veritable army. He has methods, schemes, devices, power, and strategies.”

Paul taught us that praying in the Spirit empowers believers to pray “in the dark” and brings us in alignment with God’s will saying, “He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with the will of God” (Romans 8:27 NIV). Perhaps Terry Yancey said it best: “If we pray more regularly for government issues and elected leaders than we do trying to accomplish our ETERNAL MISSION, we will have kept people ‘in motion’ but not moved forward at all on what MATTERS most. Lost lives matter!” Grogan offers simple and courageous practicality: “Postelection America calls for a Prayer Coordinator in every one of our churches.” When I asked former General Superintendent George O. Wood to weigh in on the kind of spiritual resources needed in a postelection culture, he said, “The church cannot thrive and grow without prayer.”

MAKING IT REAL: Contributor Nick Seders has provided the discussion questions below. Use them to facilitate group interaction among your own leadership team to discuss potential impact points and action items.

1. Where do you see opportunities to begin rebuilding a sense of spiritual community in your church or ministry?
2. How might you need to recalibrate discipleship efforts in order to prioritize transformation and growth in Christlikeness?
3. Do you feel that prayer has been an adequate part of your collective response to the difficulties we have faced thus far? How can it be central to ministry in the months ahead?

5. **Engage in intentional evangelism.** Instead of being sucked into circling the drain of godless culture, the church must present Christ to a world distracted by personal disillusionment, emotional instabilities, political division, and social injustice.

- **Asking the right questions.** Many things are lobbying for the church's focus, resources, and undivided attention. In a time when everyone seems to have a different answer, we must determine if we are asking the right questions. A more focused pursuit of a "kingdom first" perspective can be gained by asking ourselves the following questions about evangelistic opportunity:
 - What unique opportunities does our culture of social unrest provide for evangelism in our local communities?
 - How might the political gridlock in our nation give Christ-followers an opportunity to make Christianity more inviting to nonbelievers?
 - How can ethnic division and conflict provide an opportunity to present Christianity as a faith that unites rather than divides (Galatians 3:28-29)?
 - We live in a world full of conflict, unrest, and division. How might the peace of God (Philippians 4:7; Romans 5:1) give us an opportunity to make Jesus more inviting as the provider of real peace, eternal hope, and true joy?
 - In Acts 11, a prophet named Agabus prophesied that a severe famine would spread over the Roman empire. As a result of that prophecy, the early church began to mobilize relief efforts before the famine ever arrived. When the famine came, they were immediately relevant—not because they were smart, woke, or popular but because the Spirit led them to be a preemptive solution. How might the Holy Spirit lead us to our own cultural relevance in these troubled times?
 - How has Christianity's history of compassion during pandemics, famines, and suffering given us direction in our current crisis?
 - If my time, talents, conversations, finances, and energy could be quantitatively measured, would "seeking the kingdom" (evangelism, discipleship, service, and worship) outweigh all other options?
- **Kingdom-centered social media.** Social media is now the front door of our churches. Phil Steiger offered practical advice in this matter: "A pastor's and church's social media footprint need to keep the long game in mind. Social media is now a person's first research step when asking questions about our churches. They want us to be different, to be about the big issues, to be holy and full of integrity, and to be about truth and love; so, we need to discipline ourselves even when we may think an election has gone our way."
- **Provide nonpoliticized options.** Wise churches will place more focus on men and women ages 16-40 who will feel trapped by their disdain for President Trump, the extremes of the left, and their desire to be part of something that is not church-as-usual. This is a great opportunity for biblical and theological equipping, spiritual/social action, and a call for action-oriented apologetics where the church is salt and light.

MAKING IT REAL: Contributor Nick Seders has provided the discussion questions below. Use them to facilitate group interaction among your own leadership team to discuss potential impact points and action items.

1. Take a moment to celebrate! To what evangelistic efforts has God already granted success? Consider whether there is more to do in that area or if He is leading you elsewhere.
2. How does your use of social media speak to the digital community? Remember, this pertains not only to your church or ministry page but also your personal accounts.
3. How might your own leadership community respond to the questions listed in the “Asking the right questions” section above?

Concluding Thoughts

Pastoring has never been harder than it is today. I can hear the whisper of weariness, discouragement, and crisis fatigue calling our pastors to complacency. Knowing kites rise highest when they are against the wind, I fear some may miss the prophetic moment for which they have been born. Allow me to close this report with a few words of encouragement for our ministers.

First, God is honored by your efforts, not just the outcome. Between COVID-19 and the chaos of social unrest, you have never canceled, rescheduled, or scrapped so many ministry activities. Programs you prayed over and planned have been canceled. Major initiatives and precious momentum have been lost. It is important to remember that God is just as pleased, honored, and glorified by your motives and sacrifice than the outcome. Our Western culture can at times be so results-oriented that we forget it is our offering to the Lord and not the visible outcome that, as Paul said to the Philippians, is a “fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (Philippians 4:18 NIV).

Second, COVID-19, social unrest, and a stalled economy have not taken anything God cannot restore. In the Old Testament, Amaziah spent a considerable amount of money trying to protect his nation’s borders. God called him to abandon these costly efforts and trust in a supernatural solution. Disappointed by the prospect of wasted resources, he asked God, “But what about the hundred talents I paid for these Israelite troops?” The man of God replied, “The LORD can give you much more than that” (2 Chronicles 25:9 NIV). In the New Testament, Paul assured the Ephesian believers, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20 NIV). The takeaway is that nothing has been taken from us that God cannot restore. Whether it is the momentum your church lost; the staff conflict that robbed your team of unity; the opportunities that disappeared into thin air; or the Easter, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, or fall outreaches that rang hollow, God can “give you much more than that.”

Third, now is the time to recommit to community. By that, I mean your ministerial community and peers in our Network. Being created in the image of God means you were hardwired for community. It is part of your spiritual DNA. That also means that if we were made for community, then we are most incongruent, inconsistent, and unnatural when we exist in

isolation. When we deprive ourselves of relationships, we cannot function as the people God created us to be. I think that is what God meant when He said, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18 NIV). Paul taught that being part of Christ is inseparable from being a member of the community of faith. He said, “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12 NIV). By this, we know that relationships are the channel God uses to grow and mature us into the people He wants us to be. This crisis will chew you up and spit you out if you try to tackle it alone. “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity” (Proverbs 17:17 NIV). There is no other time in our Movement’s history that peer relationships, sectional meetings, and face-to-face peer relationships are more needed.

Last, you were born for this moment! God is not surprised by COVID-19, riots, racial tension, or these perilous times. He created, called, and commissioned you to take your place in this divine intersection. All the days of your life “were written in [his] book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:16 NIV). You have a rendezvous with destiny, and you are God’s man or woman for the moment. Like Esther of old, “You have come to [the kingdom] for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14 NIV).

Too much is at stake for you to adopt a “wait-and-see” approach. Consequently, take heart, my friend. Shake off disappointment, steel your spirit, and lead well. You are of the tribe of Issachar, and history must find you ready and prepared for what can be your finest hour.