Identity in Christ, Identity in Crisis

Phil EuBank · Beyond the Ballot · Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Jeremiah 29:5-7; Jeremiah 29:11; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Ecclesiastes 3:11; Philippians 4:6-8

AT A GLANCE

In the final message of Beyond the Ballot, preached just after an election, Phil EuBank argues that politics sits under heaven, not over it. Using rec league, school team, and club sports, he urges Christians to let seasons end, seek their city's shalom through ordinary faithfulness, and refuse a year-round campaign that cannot fill the eternity God set in the heart.

- Win or lose, grieve the loss and do not worship the win, because politics sits under heaven and every political season eventually ends.
- God told exiles to build houses, plant gardens, and seek the city's shalom: faithfulness happens in ordinary life, not after the right result.
- A campaign without an off-season keeps everyone playing hurt; healing comes through rest, attention shaped by Paul's list, and the peace God guards.

> *"The eternity in your heart was made for a king, not a campaign."*

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

> Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 — [1]There is a right time for everything, and everything on earth will happen at the right time. [2]There is a time to be born and a time to die. There is a time to plant and a time to pull up plants. [3]There is a time to kill and a time to heal. There is a time to destroy and a time to build. [4]There is a time to cry and a time to laugh. There is a time to be sad and a time to dance with joy. [5]There is a time to throw weapons down and a time to pick them up. There is a time to hug someone and a time to stop holding so tightly. [6]There is a time to look for something and a time to consider it lost. There is a time to keep things and a time to throw things away. [7]There is a time to tear cloth and a time to sew it. There is a time to be silent and a time to speak. [8]There is a time to love and a time to hate. There is a time for war and a time for peace. (ERV)
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> Jeremiah 29:5-7 — [5]"Build houses and live in them. Settle in the land. Plant gardens and eat the food you grow. [6]Get married and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons, and let your daughters be married. Do this so that they also may have sons and daughters. Have many children and grow in number in Babylon. Don't become fewer in number. [7]Also, do good things for the city I

sent you to. Pray to the Lord for the city you are living in, because if there is peace in that city, you will have peace also." (ERV)

Jeremiah 29:11 — I say this because I know the plans that I have for you. This message is from the Lord. "I have good plans for you. I don't plan to hurt you. I plan to give you hope and a good future." (ERV)

1 Timothy 2:1-2 — [1]First of all, I ask that you pray for all people. Ask God to bless them and give them what they need. And give thanks. [2]You should pray for rulers and for all who have authority. Pray for these leaders so that we can live quiet and peaceful lives—lives full of devotion to God and respect for him. (ERV)

Ecclesiastes 3:11 — God gave us the ability to think about his world, but we can never completely understand everything he does. And yet, he does everything at just the right time. (ERV)

Philippians 4:6-8 — [6]Don't worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks for what you have. [7]And because you belong to Christ Jesus, God's peace will stand guard over all your thoughts and feelings. His peace can do this far better than our human minds. [8]Brothers and sisters, continue to think about what is good and worthy of praise. Think about what is true and honorable and right and pure and beautiful and respected. (ERV)

The argument

Politics Sits Under Heaven, So Its Seasons Are Meant to End — Ecclesiastes reads the cycle as God's design, not as failure

Phil EuBank frames the morning through youth sports, starting with rec league: a start date, an end date, a snack parent. "Nobody builds their identity on rec league sports, or at least they shouldn't." Ecclesiastes shows God built the world this way. Solomon, who calls himself the preacher, lists seasons that all happen under heaven, and EuBank's point is that "politics is one of those things that sits under, not over." So grieve a loss and don't worship a win, since the greatest wins and deepest losses are both temporary. The time to speak and the time to keep silence in verse 7 gives permission: after a long season of speaking, this may be one for listening. Convictions remain; the season has changed. Mute the campaign texts, and decide when your next season starts.

> **Insight —** *Because politics lives under heaven, its seasons are allowed to end, and you are free to choose when you re-enter.*

Exile Is an Off-Season in Which Faithfulness Means Building Ordinary Life — Jeremiah's third way between revolt and waiting it out

The school team is serious but built to fit inside a life, and its off-season is where bodies heal: "You don't get ready for the next season by just playing hurt longer." EuBank takes Israel in exile as the pattern. Some wanted to fight; others, with Hananiah, wanted to wait it out. Jeremiah's letter gives a third way: build houses, plant gardens, raise families, seek the city's

welfare. "God does not ask his people to put their life on pause till their preferred political candidates are in place." The Hebrew for welfare is shalom, a wholeness meant to reverberate even in Babylon. The coffee-cup verse, plans "for your welfare and not for your evil," uses that word, spoken to people told to settle in for seventy years. "That's grandkids."

> **Insight —** *Hope does not wait on the next result; it shows up as a house built, a garden planted, and a life lived faithfully in a city you did not choose.*

Babylon Is Wherever You Wake Up, and Your Peace Is Tied to Your Neighbor's — Providential placement, shalom three times, and prayer for the city rather than about it

EuBank refuses to let Babylon be the other party: it is "any city, any leader that isn't the kingdom of God," including the thing that just went your way. Jeremiah calls it "the city where I have sent you," God taking credit for a placement they would not have chosen. That is no endorsement of Babylon, but a reminder that neither you nor your neighbor is here by accident. EuBank notes that shalom appears three times in the verse, so your peace is tied to your neighbor's, including the one who voted the other way. God says pray for Babylon, not about Babylon. Paul tells Timothy to pray for kings under an emperor no one voted for. So pray by name for one winner you didn't vote for: "that's why it matters most."

> **Insight —** *Prayer for the people who hold power is aimed at a peaceful, faithful life and a softened heart, never at winning power back.*

A Campaign With No Off-Season Profits From Your Unsettledness — Club politics wears people down, and its incentives never reward peace

Club sports turn a season into twelve months, and EuBank, citing pediatric warnings, names the toll: overuse injury, burnout, anxiety. Politics follows the same pattern, and he locates the cause in incentives, not in one side: "Nobody in this system that I'm talking about gets paid when you feel settled." With no off-season, "nobody ever really heals. We just keep playing hurt and hurting others as a result of it." He asks what your overuse injury is: a sibling you stopped calling, a chest that tightens when the phone buzzes. He dates the permanent campaign to a 1976 pollster's memo, a strategy followers of Jesus got swept into, though they are free to live differently, as the early church called the Way did. Start small: one day a week without political news, and one friendship across the vote that you fight to keep.

> **Insight —** *What feels like the way the world just is turns out to be a system with a history and incentives, and you can step out of it.*

The Eternity in Your Heart Was Made for a King, Not a Campaign — A ballot carries a vote but not hope; Paul adds a guarded peace and a reckoned attention

Why does the club never feel finished? EuBank answers from Ecclesiastes 3:11: God "has put eternity into man's heart," and politics cannot fill it. A ballot carries your vote but not your hope, which is why the next election arrives before you catch your breath. "The eternity in your heart was made for a king, not a campaign." We live in the middle of the story and God has seen the end, a reason to stop panicking, not to stop caring. Paul, in Roman custody, promises God's peace will guard hearts, and EuBank stresses that guard is a military word, written to a colony of retired soldiers. Then comes Paul's list, where think is an accounting word, to reckon. Run your feed through it: "What you take in today will eventually leak out."

> **Insight —** *Settled allegiance to a king who is never voted in or out frees you to care without panic and to guard what enters your mind.*

Cross-references

- Jeremiah 29:10 — God's seventy-year word to exiles who had been promised a couple of years, pushing them to think in generations
- Jeremiah 30:17 — God's promise to restore health and heal wounds, read as an off-season given in exile
- Lamentations 3:22-23 — His mercy is new every morning, including Wednesday before the results came in
- Acts 19:23-27 — Demetrius's riot over lost silver-shrine sales, showing the Way was bad for business and nobody profited from the early church's peace

DEVOTIONAL

By the last game of a football season, nobody is fully healthy. Everyone is taped up, sore, managing something. Phil EuBank's whole sermon rests on what comes next: the off-season, when the body finally gets to heal, because you do not get ready for the next season by playing hurt longer. Now picture the exiles in Babylon, told by Jeremiah to unpack, to build, to plant, to put down roots in a city that had dragged them from home. It sounds like surrender until you hear it as rest: a long season in which God does his healing work and an ordinary garden becomes a witness. The shalom they planted would reach even people who did not like them. And picture Wednesday morning, before anyone checked a phone. Mercy was already there, new, ahead of the results. The ballot could carry a vote, but it was never built to carry hope, and the hunger it could not satisfy kept sending us to the next campaign. That hunger has a name in Solomon's words: eternity set in the heart, made for a king rather than a campaign. What would it mean to be allowed to come home? To sit at a table with no clock to beat, beside someone who voted the other way, with a peace that stands guard over the mind like a sentry? The season ends. The King does not. Whatever was won or lost, you are not held by the news cycle; you are held by the one who was never voted in and will never be voted out.

Reflection

- Which political overuse injury is showing up in your life — a strained relationship, a tightening chest, constant news — and what would an off-season from it look like?
- Who is one person who won that you didn't vote for, and what might praying for them by name for a month change in you?
- Where have you been asking a ballot, a feed, or a campaign to carry hope meant for the King, and what could you reckon on instead?

Closing prayer

God, thank you for the gift of knowing you and for the hope found in trusting you. No matter what just happened in this election, or in the world around us, or in the months and years to come, you have never been more in control than you are right now. You hold all of it, and we trust you with it. May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

Whatever you won or lost on Tuesday, you are free to come home to the people of God and to a God whose mercy preceded the polls.

This week

This week, choose one person who won that you didn't vote for. Say their name aloud in prayer each day, asking God to soften your heart toward them, as Paul urged Timothy, seeking a quiet, peaceful life rather than winning power back.

Return to 1 Timothy 2:1-2