Faith in the Voting Booth

Practical Wisdom for Voting Well

Leith Anderson & Galen Carey
“This book is food for the mind and the soul. Anyone interested in faith, politics, and policy will benefit immensely from the insights shared by Leith and Galen.”

—TIM PAWLENTY, Governor of Minnesota (2003-11)

“The apostle Paul reminds us to ‘pray for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.’ Leith Anderson and Galen Carey offer a practical reminder that as believers, we have the privilege of letting the timeless truths of Scripture guide our decisions as we select those leaders and vote on the issues.”

—JIM DALY, President, Focus on the Family

“Biblically informed voting among followers of Jesus is far too rare today. Faith in the Voting Booth by Anderson and Carey provides a valuable resource for anyone who wants to cast their vote in a manner consistent with Scripture. Carefully consider its contents and then prayerfully cast your vote.”

—PAUL NYQUIST, Ph.D., President, Moody Bible Institute

“As those who are charged to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, Christians have both a moral and spiritual imperative to vote. Part of influencing the flavor, feeling, look, and tone of our nation and indeed our world is accomplished through the prayerful and thoughtful casting of ballots at our local voting booths.

“It is with this in mind that Leith Anderson and Galen Carey’s book, Faith in the Voting Booth, is such a timely work. From the very practical matter of registering to vote to the provision of a biblical framework through which to analyze some of the hot button issues of our day, they offer a very helpful tool for any Christian who desires to honor his/her dual citizenship at the voting booth.”

—CLAUDE ALEXANDER, Pastor of The Park Church, Charlotte, NC
“The right book for a pivotal moment. Leith Anderson and Galen Carey have done a great service with this thoughtful, articulate guide. Combining religion and politics can be explosive, but Anderson and Carey offer wisdom and leadership. They are an example of how Christian faith should engage political action.”

—RICHARD STEARNS, President, World Vision U.S., and author of *The Hole in Our Gospel* and *Unfinished*

“The most comprehensive, thoughtful, and researched book ever written on living out our faith as we vote. This is NOT just some simplistic ‘Voter’s Guide.’ This falls in the category of Discipleship as a witness for Christ. The reading is compelling and rich in both biblical and historical narratives that impact our thinking both domestically and globally now and in the future. The course of history could be changed…. Take the challenge!”

—JO ANNE LYON, General Superintendent of The Wesleyan Church
Faith in the VOTING BOOTH

LEITH ANDERSON AND GALEN CAREY

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“Never discuss religion or politics in polite company.” This book discusses both.

Religion and politics are at the bedrock of human society. Sometimes they have accomplished breathtaking good, and sometimes they have perpetrated unspeakable evil. But keeping quiet won’t make either one go away. Both are here to stay. The United States is a political democracy with lots of religious people.

In May 2015 the Pew Research Center released the results of a survey asking more than 36,000 American adults (ages eighteen and older) about their religious affiliation. Christians are the largest group with 70.6%; non-Christian faiths combine together into 5.9%; 22.8% say they are unaffiliated; and a tiny 0.6% claim they don’t know or refused to answer. At the top of their analysis of these numbers the Pew researchers wrote, “To be sure, the United States remains home to more Christians than any other country in the world, and a large majority of Americans—roughly seven-in-ten—continue to identify with some branch of the Christian faith.”

Compare religious affiliations to Americans’ political affiliations. When asked which major political party they belong to, 23% say they are Republicans, 32% identify as Democrats, and 39% claim to be independents. Deeper questioning shows that most of those independents clearly tilt toward one political party
or the other even though they don’t want to declare alignment with either.

However, political affiliations and leanings don’t all turn into votes on election days. The United States may be the oldest continuous democracy in the world, but that doesn’t mean that we all vote. Typically our nation reports a 40% turnout for midterm elections and a 60% turnout of eligible voters for presidential elections. That puts the United States far behind democracies like Australia, Belgium, and Chile with compulsory voting that reaches around 90% and also less than such voluntary voting nations as Austria, Sweden, and Italy that near 80%.³

While we know that some self-identified Christians, Jews, and Muslims never show up at their church, synagogue, or mosque and that some self-identified Republicans and Democrats never register or vote, most do both. The big picture is that the United States is a nation of citizens who are religious and who vote. Since our faith and politics are deeply connected in our thoughts, relationships, and communities, they are important to think and talk about. We should want our faith to inform and influence our politics and ballots.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

Every reader is welcome even though not every reader may agree on every point in the book. Certainly there are universal values and principles for all, but we have special audiences in mind on just about every page.

If you are a Christian, an American citizen who wants to vote wisely and well in local, state, and national elections, this book is for you. If you don’t describe yourself as an “evangelical,” don’t stop reading. This book can still be for you. There is frequent
misunderstanding in the use of the word *evangelical*, and you may be surprised that a term you don’t like actually describes you better than you expected. At least read chapter 4 about “Christians and Evangelicals.”

If you are a thoughtful person who wants to decide for yourself about both faith and politics rather than being told what to believe and how to vote by someone who wants to decide for you, this book is for you. You know that television ads, social media blasts, and political posters are designed to do your thinking for you. You live a busy life and don’t have the time you would like to listen to speeches and debates, read long articles and books, or try to balance competing cable television commentators. You are reading this book to get some direction on how to figure out how to vote without being told who to vote for. You are open to ideas, especially if they come from the Bible, but you want to think for yourself and decide for yourself.

If you welcome teaching from the Bible and want to pray for God’s direction before sending a check, endorsing a candidate, or casting a vote, this book is for you.

**WHO ARE THE AUTHORS?**

You wisely want to know something about our faith and politics, the names behind the words.

Both of us—Leith Anderson and Galen Carey—are leaders of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) headquartered in Washington, DC. The NAE was founded in 1942 to form a national network of organizations and individuals who believe in Jesus Christ and take the Bible seriously. The purpose of the association is to honor God by connecting and representing evangelical Christians. Today the NAE serves millions of Christians
in forty denominations and a long list of churches, colleges, universities, seminaries, missions, publishers, businesses, and individuals. Ministries include World Relief (international relief and development agency), Chaplains Commission (endorsing military chaplains for the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Veterans Association), and departments serving and connecting to the global church, the American church, and our country’s government.

It’s important to know that the NAE is not a political organization, doesn’t endorse candidates, and doesn’t align with any political party. Think of the NAE as a national team of committed Christians who start with God, the Bible, and the church and then reach out to be an influence for good everywhere possible from churches and campuses to Congress and courts.

Leith Anderson is currently the president of the NAE, a position he has held since 2006. He also served as a longtime pastor of two churches in Colorado and Minnesota. He earned degrees from secular and religious schools, has written many books on the church and Christian faith, has been married to Charleen since he was twenty, is the father of four adult children, doesn’t live and has never lived near Washington, DC, and has never endorsed a political candidate or told others who he is voting for.

Galen Carey became the vice president of the NAE for government relations in 2009. Galen grew up in the Philippines, where his parents were missionaries, and he has carried that calling into relief and development ministries in Chicago, Croatia, Mozambique, Kenya, Indonesia, and Burundi. He and his wife, Delia, and their two sons have loved and cared for the poor and vulnerable around the world. Galen has learned how to get by in many languages, but is fluent in both Spanish and English. Most of his work now centers in Washington, where he is well known and connected to members of Congress, White House staff, and dozens of faith-based and other organizations in the nation’s capital.
WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

WHAT NOT TO EXPECT

Want to know who to vote for? Want a list of criticisms and attacks on politicians we don’t like? Want a definitive advocacy for policies and candidates of school boards, planning commissions, city councils, county judges, state legislators, governors, members of Congress, and the White House? This book will do “none of the above.”

Our desire is not to tell you how to vote. And we hope you don’t want us to tell you how to vote. What this book is about is describing how to decide for yourself.

Don’t expect every issue to be addressed. Actually, don’t expect most issues to be addressed. There will be critics and advocates for important causes who will be sure to say, “They didn’t say enough about …” or “They completely left out….” They’ll be right. Short books in a generation of rapidly emerging and changing moral and political challenges will be sure to overlook a lot.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Look for biblical emphasis. We seek to introduce biblical teaching and thought as the starting point for political decisions and engagement. Expect content that is thoughtful and respectful—acknowledging the diversity and sometimes divisive differences among Christians and showing respect to all. Anticipate content that is nonpartisan—avoiding identification with and endorsement of any political party or platform. And expect a book that is durable—not just about one election cycle, but relevant to future elections and politics.

Half of the chapters deal with specific issues including poverty, diversity, marriage and families, immigration, taxes, prisons, foreign policy, and creation care. They are all major topics in the
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opening decades of the twenty-first century. They are given as examples of how Christians can understand these issues and apply the Bible to addressing them. In some of these chapters the perspectives of the authors come through. This is not to tell the reader what to think or how to vote, but to acknowledge that we have easily researchable positions seeking care for the poor and desire for reform of America’s immigration and incarceration systems.

IMPORTANT!

Most people in most of the world for most of history have had no power in politics. They couldn’t vote for their representatives or choose which wars to fight or taxes to pay. Most people have been and still are poor, vulnerable, and oppressed. Most people couldn’t imagine reading a book about how to connect politics with their faith other than to pray for God’s help.

The faith and politics of the United States of America is often referred to as the “American Experiment.” That may seem like a strange description for a form of government that has lasted more than two centuries. The truth is, we are still a young nation, and our future is neither known nor guaranteed. What and how we believe as Christians and vote as citizens is crucially important. We have both privilege and responsibility; we should cherish the privilege and fulfill the responsibility.

Remember that most Americans in the past did not have the privileges and responsibilities of faith and politics that are ours. Once upon a time in the United States, the voting booth was open only to free men who owned land. As never before, we are the land of the free, and that freedom includes how we vote. This is a book about believing and voting.
Prior to every national election, organizations on the right and left and in-between distribute “voting guides” basically telling you how to vote. We won’t be doing that. Instead, we will start by explaining how you actually cast your vote. It may seem easy, but if you have never voted in an election, it could be daunting. Since less than half of the population of the United States turns out for elections, it’s safe to assume you may have never voted. For you, this will be “Voting 101,” for veteran voters, a refresher course.

And while we will not ask you to vote for any particular candidate or ballot initiative, we will tell you how to vote. But our most important message? Vote!

Most Americans would probably like to believe that voter turnout in our democracy leads the world. Far from it. The top nations, all with over 90 percent, include Australia, Austria, Belgium, and Italy. Percentages tend to run higher in Western Europe and Canada than in the United States (around 50 percent with higher rates in presidential election years than in other election years).¹

Analysts study and debate why so many Americans don’t vote, but all should agree that those who do vote wield large influence through the ballots they cast. Yet so many citizens of our democracy have surrendered their voices. Why don’t Americans vote?

- “My vote doesn’t matter.” Believing that one vote won’t make much difference or that the electorate is so favorable toward
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a candidate a voter doesn’t like or a party a voter disagrees with leads to apathy and discouragement.

- “People like me don’t much vote.” Some groups are much more likely to vote than others. Less likely to vote are Asians, Latinos, younger men, and people with lower income. More likely to vote are whites, African Americans, older men, and people earning more than $150,000 per year.

- “Not this time. Maybe next time.” Voter turnout is much higher in presidential election years or when major offices or issues are on the ballots. Primary elections, midterm elections, and elections that are perceived as less important attract fewer voters.

- “I just don’t know.” Some of us don’t vote because we don’t know how to do it or can’t figure out who to vote for. So we just don’t try.

- “I’ve got my reasons.” Personal reasons include disinterest, busyness, anger against government, lack of transportation, and forgetting.

A FEW BASICS

Qualifications for voting in the United States include U.S. citizenship, being at least eighteen years old by Election Day, established residency where voting, and being registered by the deadline, if there is one. Some states have variations and limitations such as government photo IDs and other requirements. These seem like simple qualifications, but they become more complicated for the homeless, Americans who live overseas, and others with special circumstances. In the past, the United States significantly limited or
excluded from voting Americans who were women or minorities and those who didn’t own land. Some states currently disqualify those who have been convicted of a felony crime even after they have completed their sentences.

You can find out if you meet voter qualifications by doing some research online—a good place to start is https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote. You may also call or visit your local government center (city hall, county courthouse, state capital building, etc.).

Most elections are held in the spring or fall, but local elections can be called for just about any time to fill vacancies, pass school bonds, or change taxes. Presidential elections are always held on the Tuesday after the first Monday of November. (The earliest possible date is November 2, and the latest possible date is November 8.) Presidents are elected every four years, senators every six years, and members of the U.S. House of Representatives every two years. State and local elections often align with federal election dates, but can be scheduled at any time allowed by state and local laws. Many states offer early voting, and all offer absentee ballots for those who cannot come to the polls on Election Day.

Voters may choose to sign up as members of a political party. In some states this allows them to participate in caucuses where smaller groups of party members gather to discuss their party’s political views and choose who will be supported by their party.

Primary elections are held to choose which candidates will represent the political party in the coming general election. Membership in a political party may be required to vote in a primary election, although in some states voters may sign up just before that election.

General elections are open to all qualified voters and make the final decision on who is elected or how a government law will be decided (taxes, amending the state constitution, deciding on a referendum, etc.). After the general election, the votes are counted.
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and the winners are announced. Usually there is a time lapse of a few months before the winners actually start the official duties to which they have been elected.

All this may sound technical and confusing to a first-timer, but government officials, neighbors, and friends are usually glad to walk someone through the process. Once you have voted, it gets easier to understand and more comfortable the next time.

SIGNING UP AND SHOWING UP

The two primary actions for voting in the United States are signing up to vote and showing up to vote. Some rules on how to do both vary by states and communities. While the basic process is similar across the country, it’s a good idea to check out the specifics in your own hometown. Here is what to do:

1. **Check qualifications.** Go through the qualification checklist and call city hall with any questions.

2. **Find out if you are registered.** Some states allow registering to vote when getting a driver’s license, so some voters may already be registered and not know it. Check with city hall.

3. **Register to vote.** Voter registration is usually required in advance of voting—maybe thirty days or more.

   City hall is the place to go, or look up online “Voter Registration” with the state’s name. Some states, like Minnesota, allow voter registration on Election Day at the poll. But every state is different, and registration should be researched and handled in advance. Typically, once you have registered and remain living at your current address, you do not have to register again.
4. **Find out where to vote.** Voting locations are often in schools, church buildings, or other public buildings. Most towns have multiple locations, but you have to vote at the right one near your home, so asking in advance is important.

5. **Get a sample ballot.** Sample ballots will be just like the ballots on Election Day. The easiest way to get a sample ballot is online at the town website. You can then print it for review and practice. This preparation makes voting a whole lot easier.

6. **Research candidates and issues.** Checking out all the choices may take some time, but makes for smarter decisions. There is no requirement to vote on everything, so any voter is free to skip parts.

7. **Show up on Election Day.** Go to the nearest polling place and get in line to vote. In major elections there may be a wait. Earlier in the day works best for many people. Absentee ballots are available for those who will be away or otherwise can’t show up on the actual Election Day. Some states and towns require a good reason, and others allow any registered voter to vote in advance.

   Absentee ballots must always be submitted or mailed before the actual Election Day; advance time limits are usually longer for citizens living overseas and shorter for citizens residing in the United States. Some states also have an early in-person voting period of several days or weeks, allowing voters to go to a central location to vote in advance.

8. **Complete the ballot.** When your turn comes, you will be shown into a booth with a curtain, where you can mark your ballot. Or, in some places you move switches on a
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machine or have an electronic or other system to cast your votes. Either way, privacy is always provided. Volunteers are nearby to answer questions and to show voters how to work the voting system. Special provisions are available for voters with disabilities.

All ballots are added up after the end of voting on Election Day, and the results are announced on television, radio, the Internet, and newspapers. This reporting may take only a few hours, but complications can delay announcements of winners. In some unusual cases technical problems, tie votes, or other issues may trigger recounts and even occasional repeat elections—but these situations are relatively rare.
You may think the “how to do it” is the easy part. Or, “I knew all that … so just tell me who to vote for.” As we promised from the outset, we will not tell you who to vote for. That is your personal responsibility. But we will offer some guidance on how to make those decisions:

1. RESEARCH

Take time and do the work to be informed about issues and candidates. It’s not possible to learn everything, but use available tools (television, radio, Internet, newspapers, magazines, and conversations with helpful, knowledgeable persons) to know enough to evaluate what advocates are saying. Keep asking questions—and research the answers as if God is going to give you a quiz.

Remember that there is a surplus of false or heavily slanted information available. Never rely on a single source.

2. BEWARE

Many good and godly candidates and supporters are transparent and tell the truth. Sadly, too many are neither transparent nor truthful. We don’t need to be cynical, but we should keep up our
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guard and beware of television ads, political brochures, partisan blogs, newspaper opinions, and social media pressures.

Money has become a powerful political tool. Consultants decide how best to influence potential voters and spend billions of dollars to convince potential voters. Negative advertising can be powerfully influential even though it is distorted and biased.

3. CONSIDER

Consider which candidates best align with your values and will govern for the greatest good. Character, experience, policies, and promises are all part of the consideration.

Most voters like to choose a candidate who is like them. Veterans like veterans. Union members like union members. Athletes like athletes. Republicans like Republicans. Democrats like Democrats. Christians like Christians. It’s normal and often good to choose a candidate who is similar, because that person may best represent you. But sometimes this approach doesn’t work. Athletes who are good at their game may be poor politicians. And devout Christians may not always make wise government decisions. So consider these characteristics, but don’t let identity be the deciding factor.

4. COUNSEL

The counsel from people we trust—friends, family, pastors, church members, neighbors, Bible study group partners—can help us decide how to vote. They are all helpful for learning and choosing. Always allow the greatest influence to come from those who are godly, competent, and knowledgeable.

One way to think about where we get our counsel is to ask
WHO TO VOTE FOR

whom we would choose to disciple us in our Christian faith, be named the executor of our wills, or counsel us in a crisis.

5. PRACTICE

A helpful and practical procedure for any important life decision can be used in deciding how to vote.

- Choose who to vote for.
- Write down your choice.
- Pray daily for God to confirm the choice or not.
- Without telling anyone, live with your choice for a week or more.
- If convinced and comfortable, stick with the choice when voting.
- If unconvinced and uncomfortable, change the choice and repeat the process.

6. PRAY

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (James 1:5).

When the New Testament was written, there was no democracy, and the idea of political voting probably never crossed any Christian’s mind. But they did know a lot about facing “trials of many kinds” (James 1:2) and needing divine wisdom to figure out what to do. James wrote that they should pray and ask God for wisdom to make the right choices. This is
where we begin our journey to voting choices: we admit that we need help and ask God for direction.

There is always a temptation to first make up our minds and then pray for our choices to be implemented by God. That’s not the Christian way. We begin with submission to the mind of Christ and the will of God and ask for divine influence on how to vote. Start now—pray daily for wisdom. Be open to divine surprises.

7. LOOK TO THE BIBLE

The Bible is God’s book that is designed to deliver the wisdom we pray for in all areas of life, including deciding how to vote. “You have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:15–16).

A repeated theme in this book is to start with the Bible and apply the Bible in making political choices. This may not make sense to non-Christians, but it is our priority as followers of Jesus. On some topics, such as poverty, the Bible has extensive specific directions. On all topics the Bible is the foundation for our values, thinking, and actions—even on topics about which the Bible does not specifically speak. When tempted and pressured by politicians and their advocates, keep going back to the Word of God to see what it has to say. And pray that you will interpret politics by the Bible rather than interpret the Bible by politics.
8. DECIDE

Now it’s time to decide. Make the choice. Commit the decision to God. Trust God that your choice is what it should be and that God will use it for good. Get ready to turn the choice into your vote.

Imagine Jesus with you in the voting booth asking, “How did you decide?” and know that you have a good answer to explain your decision.

9. VOTE

On Election Day, go to your polling place and cast your vote. Be grateful for the right to vote and confident that you did your best to be a good Christian steward and a wise American citizen.

10. KEEP PRAYING

As you walk away from the voting booth on Election Day, keep praying. Ask God to use your vote and the votes of others to accomplish his purposes in our nation. Pray for God’s blessing on whoever is elected, even if they are not those for whom you voted. Tell God you believe he is sovereign and you will trust him to use the election for good.

11. FOLLOW UP

We live out our Christian values regardless of who wins or loses. We share these values with others, including those who are not Christians. We may help the poor, love the immigrant, care for
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God’s creation, pay our taxes, support strong marriages, speak for the unborn, promote religious freedom, show respect to those who are different, seek justice for those in prison, and advocate for all created in God’s image within politics and outside politics. This is more than an election cycle involvement; this is a Christian lifestyle.

Voting is not the end. It isn’t even the beginning. The Bible doesn’t specifically mention voting or tell us to vote. Voting is simply one expression of living out our Christian faith in loyalty to Jesus Christ and in conformity with the teaching of the Bible.

Follow-up can influence the votes of others and can insist on accountability for elected officials to keep the promises they made when elected.

FAITH AND COURAGE

John F. Kennedy won a Pulitzer Prize for his bestselling 1957 book Profiles in Courage. The book tells the stories of eight U.S. senators, most before the Civil War, who took stands and cast votes that helped shape America and save the Union. Most of their names are now unfamiliar. Many of them suffered political losses and defeats for doing what they were convinced was right. They brought careful thought and political courage to American government.

We face serious challenges that require courageous leaders who are willing to look beyond the next election and seek the long-term health of the nation. We need leaders who will focus on governing, not thinking about how to get reelected. By voting for candidates who are statespersons, not just politicians, we support leaders who will be the next profiles in courage.

How we vote demonstrates our faith and courage. As Christians, everything begins with our commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior
and Lord. As Christians, we seek to live and vote with the Bible as our guide for belief and behavior. Then our faith joins with our courage to vote for candidates and policies that will bless others rather than just ourselves.

We are God’s agents to help shape America for good. Be faithful. Be courageous.

Vote.
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Practical Wisdom for Voting Well

By Leith Anderson and Galen Carey

Voters today too often default to one side of the political spectrum or the other. Candidates avoid discussing issues, and election outcomes are influenced by slogans and television ads. In Faith in the Voting Booth, Leith Anderson and Galen Carey show how better informed, faith-directed voting is both possible and desperately needed in our country today.

This book, by National Association of Evangelicals leaders, will help you clarify your own positions in light of your faith before you enter the voting booth. Anderson and Carey show that biblical wisdom is surprisingly relevant to today’s complex political issues, and how each voting decision should be thoughtfully and prayerfully approached.

Get Your Copy of Faith in the Voting Booth Today! Save 20% at FaithGateway when you use coupon code ZN20

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