

Evangelical Grassroots Activist Sums Up 'Tone' of Trump Meeting: 'Amazing Grace'

Amazing grace. That was the tone of Donald Trump's meeting with more than 1,000 evangelical leaders in New York on Tuesday, hosted by Dr. Ben Carson and sponsored by United in Purpose and My Faith Votes. Tamara Scott and I attended together, from Iowa. As I read the tweets during the day from blogger/activists who weren't there, making statements like "Jesus wasn't mentioned," or "a Little Birdie said" I thanked God for what really transpired.

The meeting began with singing praises to God—songs like "Ten-Thousand Reasons," "How Great Is Our God" and "Amazing Grace," and continued throughout the day. Pastor Jim Garlow opened in prayer, asking that if there be any coronation today, that it would be King Jesus!

Those in attendance came because they sincerely wanted to hear what Donald Trump had to say—directly to evangelical leaders—on issues crucial to the future of our families and our nation. I'm sure there were people there with agendas, on both sides; there always are, at any meeting. But the *tone* of the meeting was polite, sincere, respectful and Christ-honoring. Evangelical leaders were doing exactly what should be done—building relationships with the candidate, fostering communication and understanding, and thus earning the right to advise and mentor this man who could become our next president.

It was humbling to be present among longtime great Christian leaders like James Dobson, Tony Perkins, Bill Dallas, Jim

Garlow, Mike Huckabee, Ben Carson, George Barna, Rick Scarborough, David Barton, David Jeremiah, Franklin Graham, Ralph Reed, E.W. Jackson, Bill Federer, Gary Bauer, Kelly Shackelford, Bob McEwen, James Robison, Carl Lentz, Alveda King, Penny Nance, the Benham Brothers, Joseph Farah, Ken Blackwell, Eric Metaxas and newer leaders and activists like Lila Rose, Leslie Unruh, Marsha Blackburn and Marjorie Dannenfelser as some of them conversed with Mr. Trump on issues of importance to us all.

Throughout the day, various speakers shared statistics, history and the potential of this election if we can get Christians to the polls. The main substance of the event, however, was the discussion with Donald Trump, moderated by Gov. Mike Huckabee, and a post-lunch analysis of Mr. Trump's responses by a panel of leaders. Here are some brief summaries of Mr. Trump's in-depth remarks from my notes (and I would have taken much more extensive notes had I known I would be asked to share an analysis):

- We don't have religious freedom, and it the direct consequence of President Lyndon Johnson's amendment that has resulted in pastors and churches being afraid to preach what the Bible says. The people on the street have more power than the pastors to say what they want. "That has taken a lot of the power away from Christianity," Trump stated. "My greatest contribution to Christianity, and other religions, will be to allow you to speak openly."
- He spoke of his childhood, pointing out that the world has changed, from one in which going to Sunday school was automatic for nearly every family, to one in which only a small percentage of Americans still do. He wants to return our value system to those strong values we once held.
- He has pledged repeatedly to appoint pro-life SCOTUS justices. He reiterated that there could be as many as

five appointed by the next president, but very probably three at the least. [James Dobson noted that of the 50,000 questions received in advance of this meeting, the No. 1 question regarded religious liberty.] Mr. Trump said he will work to protect religious freedoms, through his power and his appointments, so that our citizens will once again be able to freely live their faith, coaches will be able to pray with their teams again, and people will be able to give heartfelt greetings, like Merry Christmas, without repercussion.

- On appointing SCOTUS justices, Trump said the Federalist Society is the gold standard for judges and he also seeks counsel from the Heritage Foundation and Jim DeMint. He has repeatedly vowed to appoint pro-life judges and even given us a list. With Hillary, he said, there won't be *any* pro-life judges; they'll *all* be pro-choice.
- He said our country will end up becoming a Venezuela if Hillary gets elected.
- Job creation, he said, is what will help eradicate the violence and poverty in the inner cities. He will make job creation a high priority.
- He said he is 100 percent for Israel and always has been. "We need to use the Iran deal as a study of what *not* to do," he said. "We gave them everything!"
- Trump described the Second Amendment as being "under siege." He said that Hillary Clinton is going to try to abolish the Second Amendment if she becomes president and he will protect it. He noted that the NRA endorsement given to him is the earliest endorsement they've ever given a presidential candidate in the history of their organization.
- Building a wall at the border: Trump said he has 16,500 endorsements from border control guards and agents. He personally asked some how important the wall is and they told him it's utterly important, both for stopping drugs and the influx of illegals.

- Trump lamented that our military has been totally depleted. We have a very depleted military; we're going to bring them back to full strength and equip them with state of the art equipment to give them the ability to win. I want the greatest fighting force in the world, and I never want to have to use it."
- He decried our nation's modern inability to negotiate with the enemy, and to win wars. "Prior to Vietnam, we never lost," he said. "Now we never win. We've given things away to Iran through pure stupidity. We should have never negotiated until we got those prisoners back." He places a high priority on returning our nation to its longtime position of strength.
- Regarding his call for a temporary ban on Muslims entering the United States, Trump said when he announced his plan to stop the influx, he was met with everything—support, opposition, both extremes. He then noted that if he had said something like that about Christianity or Christians, it would be a whole different ballgame. There wouldn't be any opposition to restrictions because Christians are being persecuted in this nation while Muslims are being protected. "We can't let that happen anymore," Trump stated emphatically.

In a nutshell, I would say that Mr. Trump's overall responses covering a wide variety of issues followed a pattern of bringing sanity back to a nation that has traded it for political correctness, returning strength and respect and prosperity to a nation that has lost it, and establishing protection for a citizenry that has been made vulnerable to attacks from its own government as well as from foreign invaders. Basically, a return to the Constitutional Republic created by our Founding Fathers.

So, Mr. Trump "gets it." He proved to evangelical leaders this week that he knows what our country needs. Everyone there was well-aware that he is not a clone of us, and we all had

concerns from our biblical perspectives because in all honesty, most of us originally had sought out candidates whom we believed mirrored our biblical convictions. I'm a Christian who believes what the Bible says about repentance being integral to salvation. I'm praying for Mr. Trump, that God will draw him close to Himself. I've been praying for him since the summer of 2015 when he told the entire world that he'd never repented. That's not any different, however, from most presidents we've had. I'm praying that God will grab his heart and make him into an apostle Paul, but even without that transpiring, Donald Trump still "gets it," and he is listening to us and agreeing with us.

He came from a generation of people who attended church regularly, taught their children right from wrong, and had no "politically correct" influences forced upon their lives. He is making it his goal to return our nation to those values, complete with even the smallest things like saying Merry Christmas without fear.

Without talking to all 1,000 attendees, I can't speak for them, but in my conversations with both friends and strangers, I saw a genuine warming to the candidate as we got to know him better and hear his heart. The question on everyone's mind was: "Will this man be any different than Hillary?" After hearing Donald Trump's heart for America, and trying to envision Hillary Clinton's answers in the same type of forum, the conclusion in my mind, and many other minds, is a resounding yes, totally different! While he isn't the ultra-conservative that I am, he very much exhibited a solid commitment to the type of conservatism that the evangelical leaders and pastors in attendance require.

Ken Blackwell expressed similar sentiments: "Donald Trump is familiar enough with the Bible to choose the path of conviction over the path of convenience. There's no chance for me to vote for Clinton, so by default I will vote for Trump. But my voting is insufficient. He needs me to get 10 more

people. That was what I came here to grasp—whether or not I was satisfied that he would be the candidate that I would go out and spend my political capital on, to get 10 more votes from those who might be on the fence. This meeting was as much about the work that we have yet to do, as opposed to the work in progress that is Donald Trump.”

Jim Garlow made my day when he “nominated” Gov. Mike Huckabee for vice president. He also hit it on the nose, making a very telling point in which we all need to search our own hearts: “Once believers lock in on a candidate, they will try to lock others out for turf control.” I believe Pastor Garlow exposed the most dangerous mentality that can arise among evangelical leaders: Everyone needs to realize that this is about America, not personal turf control.

Ralph Reed cited four of Trump’s statements that are crucially important to evangelicals:

1. He’s pro-life and believes in protecting the sanctity of life.
2. He believes that traditional marriage and family are the foundation of our society and civilization.
3. He’s strongly pro-Israel and believes our special relationship is crucial to Israel’s survival and America’s prosperity.
4. He will protect our religious freedom. He’s fed up with Christians and others of faith being assaulted by courts and the media because they simply take a stand for their faith.

Eric Metaxas shared insights from his new book, *If You Can Keep It—The Forgotten Promise of American Liberty*, and cited the endless number of miraculous stories throughout history of God’s hand upon America, using all kinds of people and circumstances, believers and unbelievers, to accomplish His will.

Franklin Graham echoed similar sentiments when, after telling the group that Donald Trump offers substantial hope for America whereas Hillary Clinton offers no hope whatsoever, Rev. Graham did this: He acknowledged that we will never have a perfect candidate, and he compared Trump to great biblical leaders who had fallen into sin at various points in their lives, like Moses and King David, yet were used mightily by God to protect and lead the nation He had chosen them to lead.

It made me wonder, as I've watched Donald Trump inexplicably winning state after state by record numbers: Are we watching the hand of God upon Donald Trump at this moment in history? I'm not alone in my wondering, and if the sentiment at this meeting was any indication, I have a lot of godly company in my assessment that we have got to vote for Donald Trump in order to defeat Hillary Clinton because the freedoms we will lose with her at the helm will obliterate our ability to accomplish the very thing that is our mission in life—to preach the gospel of Christ and make disciples. {eo}

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