

Culture Expert: How the Church Can Discern Our Times Like the Sons of Issachar

The Bible talks about the sons of Issachar who were able to discern the times. With so much going on in our culture, we can get confused, especially if we get our news from ungodly or unreliable sources. YWAM leader Fred Markert, though, offers spiritual—and credible—insight into what's going on in our culture and what's ahead for our nation.

Markert gets his wisdom from his vast experience ministering around the world and training young people through YWAM. I had the opportunity to interview him recently for my “Strang Report” podcast (listen [here](#) or in this article), where he shared what he believes the American left and right miss in their limited perspectives.

“Two things are happening,” he says. “And we have to be mature enough to embrace both. There's a lot of good happening and a lot of bad happening. Generally speaking, on the right side of the political fence, people look at the good and highlight that and don't necessarily look at some of the negative trends. On the left, they tend to focus on the negative trends and can't see some of the good.”

Markert says that divide is hurting us as a nation, and he prays believers across the nation will be mature enough to see both kinds of trends and be willing to make the necessary compromises.

“We've lost that ability to compromise politically in our country, and the polarization that's happening really distresses me,” he says. “And it just looks like more and more polarization is in the future in our country. That's probably the greatest concern I have.”

Thankfully, Markert says, the church can play a huge role in the healing our country needs. But to be that healing force, the church must embrace and teach the values of love, compassion, unity, reaching out to our fellow man and tolerance.

Markert cites a New York University sociologist named Jonathan Haidt, who has a book called *The Righteous Mind*. Although Haidt is an unbeliever, Markert says he understands how societies work and the five fundamental values that people in our nation hold to varying degrees. Those values include care versus harm, fairness versus cheating, loyalty versus betrayal, authority versus aversion and sanctity versus degradation.

“Those on the political left and nonbelievers tend to focus on two of those five values,” Markert explains. “They focus on the care and the fairness. So they have great compassion for the underdog, whether it’s the underdog in our society, immigrants or they see that a flood across the border—they place great emphasis on care and fairness and equality. ... So they have a two-legged moral matrix out of the five.”

The church, on the other hand, tends to focus on different moral aspects.

“What happens with the church in America is we tend to really emphasize loyalty, authority and sanctity—the three other legs,” Markert says. “So things like membership in churches, loyalty to our own country, patriotism, things like sanctity and holiness matter to us. And though we do have the other two elements in our moral matrix of care and fairness, generally that isn’t preached as much from the podium.”

Because of that, Markert says one of the first things the church can do to remedy the nation’s downward trends is to make sure sermons communicate all five of the legs in our nation’s moral matrix. The church must preach holiness,

respect for authority, loyalty, caring for the community at large and fairness.

“[Fairness is] not so much equality of outcome as much as it is equality of opportunity,” Markert says. “We must really look for practical ways we can help raise people up to have more opportunities. The church I go to—the Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, Alabama—we’re very involved in the more underdeveloped parts of our city, in helping people in productive ways. We don’t just give out charity, but we also help empower people to rise above their circumstances. We serve tens of thousands every year in the worst parts of the city.”

Church of the Highlands serves through after-school programs, practical help for single moms, the Dream Center, Christ Health Center and ministries that provide medical and dental care.

“So that is really where the church needs to go to in America,” Markert says. “We need to really address some of the fairness and care issues more in our society.”

I hope Markert’s words enlighten you the way they enlightened me. Just as the sons of Issachar discerned the times of their generation, so we as believers must discern what God wants to do in our culture.

To hear more of Markert’s insights, listen to my full interview with him right here or at the top of this article. And if this article inspired you, share it with your friends and on your social media.