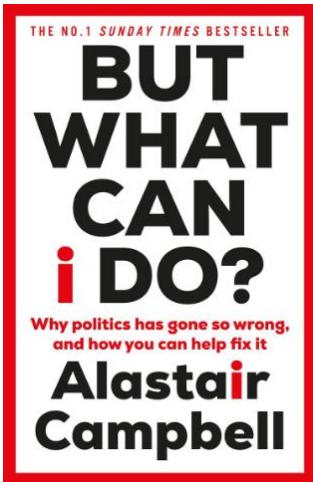


Book Review



As I was reading Alastair Campbell's latest book, *'But What Can I Do: Why politics has gone so wrong and how you can help fix it'*, I couldn't help thinking that Campbell and Jesus would have an awful lot to chat about.

But hang on, I hear you say – isn't he the chap that so famously said *'We don't do God'* all those years ago?

Well yes, he is, but think about it for a moment: They are both singularly focused on making the world a better place, are great storytellers, excellent communicators and have a bit of a reputation for being outspoken when it comes to corrupt and self-serving political leaders.

Campbell's insights into how to bring about change are drawn from his many years of experience at the top table of politics and public life. It's therefore fascinating that his conclusions and advice have extraordinary parallels with the teaching of Jesus about how we, as His followers, should be active in the world.

Campbell has packed a lot, and I mean A LOT, into one book, providing a tantalising overview of what's needed to challenge the status quo and work for much-needed change.

The book is structured in 3 sections: In Part 1 **'Why Did It All Go Wrong'**? Campbell mirrors the Men of Issachar in the Old Testament who were said to *'understand the times ...and so knew what to do'* and structures his argument using 3 P's (a technique used by many preachers...): Polarisation, Populism and Post-Truth. There is much food for thought in this section, but there were times when I, as a regular listener to *'The Rest is Politics'* Podcast, was itching for Rory Stewart's gentle intervention: *'Hang on a minute, can we think about that a different way?'*

While Campbell emphasises the book is for people of all political persuasions (and I definitely agree with that), I suspect this section will be a more comfortable and amusing read for those on the left of politics. But for those who aren't, don't let that dissuade you from continuing to Part 2, **'How You Can Help Fix It'**, as that's where the book delivers the goods.

In this middle section, Campbell wisely avoids telling the reader what issues to focus on. Rather he continually cheers his readers on to action with practical advice so they can make a difference in the areas that concern them. Over these 8 chapters, he draws out the qualities, actions, skills and attitudes needed to bring about change, using a variety of examples to illustrate his points. Leadership skills? Observe the range of personalities and attributes of Football Managers. Teamwork? Look at how a restaurant kitchen operates. Communication skills? Consider Zelensky, the Ukrainian President and how he maintains momentum and uses humour to maximum effect, and so on.

Many of the themes in this very practical section have biblical echoes: Don't be a bystander; hope is essential, especially to resist cynicism; perseverance, a word Campbell invented that combines perseverance and resilience; qualities not qualifications are what counts; learn confidence; keep your eyes wide open about the cost of becoming involved.

The final section, **'Taking the Next Step'** is bursting with practical advice on communication, campaigning and becoming involved in politics and I defy anyone not to find at least 2 or 3 takeaways to put into action straight away. I certainly did.

This section also speaks to a concern often raised by Christians considering involvement in politics: that of compromise: *'How can I become involved if I don't agree with everything the party stands for?'* On this Campbell observes: *'...provided you know what you believe and believe it deeply, it is possible to compromise on ideas and policies without compromising on values'*. A nuanced distinction perhaps, but an important and helpful one.

My sense is that the book will have particular resonance with younger readers who will take the principles outlined and apply them with digital expertise to the current cultural moment, especially, but not only, to social media.

In conclusion, this is a very helpful handbook for anyone frustrated with the current state of affairs in politics or who wants to use their experience and skills to make a difference in our world. And for Christians, I believe Campbell's observations provide encouragement that our faith has more to offer in the political sphere than perhaps we may have previously thought.

Review by Pat Finlow, May 2023

Title; *But What Can I Do? Why politics has gone so wrong and how you can help fix it.*

Author: Alastair Campbell

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