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Uncommon Sense: A Common Citizen's Guide to Rebuilding America, 2nd Edition

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FOREWORD

When Thomas Paine wrote *Common Sense* during the American Founding era, it captured the imagination of the people. This occurred because Paine's words were *actually* common sense. They took on the major issues confronting America at the time, and they provided the obvious, effective, and most important answers and solutions—backed by a deep understanding of the principles of freedom and a commitment to the idea that regular people can make all the difference.

Stephen Palmer's book *Uncommon Sense* does the same thing. In every way, it qualifies as a 21st Century sequel to Paine's classic. Stephen addresses our major national concerns one by one, applying realistic and common-sense solutions to things Washington D.C. has made unnecessarily complex. He tackles the problems we face with a refreshing, non-partisan spirit of American initiative, innovation and a get-it-done attitude.

I can only hope people today are as willing to read and apply his words as the Founding generation was with Paine's writings. If so, it will have a huge positive influence on the decades ahead.

Stephen is a generalist in the sense that he addresses America's deepest challenges—our values, our attitudes, our strengths and weaknesses. But he is also a specialist on specific proposals that can change our national dialogue, from immigration and health care to racism and fiscal policy. Stephen writes, as did Paine, with no claim to being an expert on any of these things, but with the voice of a regular citizen who deeply cares about the world we are leaving to our children and grandchildren.

This voice makes the book easy to read, fun and enjoyable, deep and yet engaging. I started reading at 9 p.m and literally

didn't stop until I closed the last page at 3 a.m. I simply couldn't convince myself to stop — it was too good to put down.

There is an underlying idea in Stephen's book, an undergirding assumption that shows up on every page: The idea that regular people are capable of great things, that you and I can have a direct and lasting influence on the future of our nation, that we have a lot more power than we think we do or attempt to use.

This view is, certainly, uncommon. But Stephen presents it so effectively that the reader clearly understands that it is the only sensible view. Of course the people have the ultimate power.

We seldom use it. We spend most of our lives focused on other things, while we leave the future of freedom and national prosperity to our "leaders." But, even so, the power remains in our hands. Stephen not only teaches this in an inspiring way, but he provides realistic ways for us to use our power more often — and more effectively.

The account of his visit to a Native American reservation during high school will remain ever seared into my mind. These few short pages may have more to say about current immigration debates than all the published reams of books and articles combined. Those who read it will never be the same. Indeed, this one chapter is worth the price of the book, and should be read and re-read in every classroom and boardroom in North America.

Another short chapter about a speech to a large audience, and how it never actually happened — but in fact happens every day — gave me a whole new view on leadership. It is more than profound. It is downright brilliant.

In truth, the book itself is brilliant. When I first read it, I wondered at the title. Any author who aspires to write a sequel to something as world-changing as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* is either deluded and pretentious or deeply dedicated

and inspired. As I read, it became increasingly clear that Stephen is the latter.

Moreover, this book is *wise*. In an age where wisdom is seldom the goal, this is saying something. Allan Bloom noted in *The Closing of the American Mind* that in our modern world young people are taught to aspire to wealth, success, leadership and even fame, but they are seldom encouraged to seek what the great men and women of the past most desired: real wisdom. Stephen's words are, indeed, wise, and this puts *Uncommon Sense* in a genre shared by few books.

This combination of wisdom and readability make the book unique, fresh and innovative. If there is anything America needs right now—in order to gain back its once legendary leadership edge—it is innovation. Yet innovation is rare in our society, almost absent most of our schools and classrooms, and even missing in most of our corporations and other leading institutions. As long as we live on the successes of the past, American decline will gain momentum.

Uncommon Sense is one of the best manuals on innovation I've ever read. Again, I think it should be read and considered by every student and executive in our generation. This one thing would have a drastic positive impact on the American future.

Another striking element of *Uncommon Sense* is that every page is *relevant*. With the advent of the Self-Help and Leadership book section in every library and bookstore, modern readers have become accustomed to books that help us change our daily behaviors, habits and actions. In a sense, our bookstores and libraries house two kinds of books—the old, *informational* works, and the more current, patently *transformational* materials.

The old books are more difficult to read, yet full of God's and humanity's most important wisdom. In contrast, the new, current books are easier to read, often personally impactful, yet too frequently high on technique but a little shallow on principle.

Stephen's book bridges these worlds as effectively as anything I've ever read. It belongs on your special shelf along with Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, *The Federalist Papers*, *The Fourth Turning* by Strauss and Howe, *Resolved* by Orrin Woodward, *A Whole New Mind* by Daniel Pink, Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, *Rascal* by Chris Brady, W. Cleon Skousen's *The Five Thousand Year Leap*, and *The Weight of Glory* by C.S. Lewis.

Uncommon Sense is a great book. It is a moving book. It will move you emotionally and intellectually. And, most importantly, it will move you to action. In our day, when common sense is all too often most uncommon, this book simply makes sense. It needs to be read by every official in Washington and all fifty state houses. It needs to be considered by every father and mother, and passed on to their children.

Above all, though it doesn't say so on the cover, this is a book on leadership. It needs to be read and pondered by anyone who wants to lead, or finds themselves already in a position of leadership. The stakes are high: The future of North America, Western Civilization and the principles of freedom around the world are very much in doubt. The forces of decline are real and hard at work.

In this environment, where the stakes are high and regular people are the de facto leaders – whether toward triumph or mediocrity – there is a desperate and persistent need for wisdom, for innovation, and for uncommon sense. Any leader will be better armed for the challenges of our world with this book in their mind. No leader can afford to be without it.

– *Oliver DeMille*

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***Author's Note:** The following essays have been written over the course of several years. Although some of the content deals with specific dates and political events, my hope is that the principles and ideals will remain timeless.*

1



EDUCATION BEFORE ACTIVISM

"Force without wisdom falls of its own weight."

— HORACE

A few years ago I was teaching a class on the Constitution to a room full of people wholly dedicated to the cause of liberty. I started by asking the class, "How many of you agree with William Gladstone's quote that the Constitution is 'the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the mind and purpose of man'?"

Every attendee raised their hand. I told them to keep their hands raised, then asked, "How many of you have actually read it?" A few hands dropped.

"Of you who have actually read it from beginning to end," I continued, "how many have read it within the last six months?"

Still more hands dropped. I persisted. "Of those who still have their hands raised, how many of you can tell us what Article III talks about?" More hands dropped. By this time only about half of the room had their hands raised.

By the time I asked who knew the meaning of *habeas corpus* and what bills of attainder are, not a single person in the room had their hand raised. Mind you, these are the same people who had just said that they agreed with Gladstone's quote, yet very few of them could answer the most basic questions about the Constitution.

**Is the depth of your education equal
to the fervor of your opinions?**

What would you guess is the most recurring criticism I've received from readers over the years? Contrary to what you might think, it's not from people who take polar opposite positions from my views. It's from freedom-loving patriots who believe that my recommended action steps are "benign." For example, they tell me that reading classics will do little to solve our looming problems. I respect these devoted people. And I have a different perspective on what needs to happen for our Republic to be restored.

America is primed for a French Revolution scenario. Furthermore, we exhibit many of the qualities of German civilization prior to World War II. We're a highly-trained, yet poorly-educated populace. We've lost our understanding of true education. Furthermore, we have staggering discrepancies in wealth distribution. We're headed toward a lot of chaos and pain.

Plainly put, we don't have enough widespread education to sustain an anger-driven revolution. The People trying to fight Washington and other power interests right now is like replacing a strip club with a flea market. There's no use in fighting unless we have quality replacement options. It's not enough to just be mad; we must also be wise. And turning inward is the beginning of wisdom.

Confucius said it best in his classic essay *The Great Learning*:

“The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things.

“Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy.”

Not only does turning inward lead to wisdom, but it also leads to power. This is my core message: Fixing ourselves as individuals is what fixes the world. If this sounds “benign” to you, I probably can’t convince you otherwise. But I would point out that the most influential leaders, from Jesus Christ to Gandhi, have taken this approach. And they seemed to have done a pretty good job of improving the world.

There are others who say, “Yeah, we get it. But what do we actually do about it?” To those I humbly repeat, “Continue working on yourself and your education.” If our education were deep and broad enough we wouldn’t have to ask that question.

I accept that this message may disappoint many. It may seem too simplistic. It may seem to be too little, too late. To those familiar with my writing, I may sound like a broken record. But it's the light that animates everything that I do and everything I aspire to. It's the spiritual beating of my heart, the passion blood flowing through my veins, the mission muscles that give me strength to endure.

I'm fed up with the Federal Reserve. But I also don't have a complete grasp on how our monetary system should operate in the 21st Century, nor do I have a solid plan for making a transition. So I don't march on Washington to scream at the Federal Reserve; I stay at home and read everything I can find on monetary policy.

I'm sick and tired of weaseling, compromising, ignorant, money-and-power-grubbing politicians. So I prepare myself to be a leader with integrity, knowledge, and wisdom. I'm dismayed by the decay of the family. But I'm further dismayed by the times when I'm angry and impatient with my wife and children. So I focus my dismay on doing all I can to improve as a husband and father.

This is what I stand for. This is the message you'll hear for as long as I have breath. And when you see me march on Washington, it won't be because I'm "mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore." It will be because I actually have real, sustainable solutions and the ability to carry them out.

Until then, I'm working on myself. Care to join me?

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A POLITICAL INDEPENDENT'S MANIFESTO

The fact that I'm politically unaffiliated makes a lot of people uncomfortable; they want to know exactly where I stand. There's a misguided perception that Independents hold an insipid, contradictory hodge-podge of middle-ground beliefs because we can't make up our minds. Just because dogmatic ideologues can't squash my holistic beliefs into their narrow box of prejudicial "truth" doesn't mean I don't live by resolute principles.

So for those wondering where I stand, here is my Political Independent's Manifesto:

- ❖ The classical philosophy of constitutional and personal liberty guides my political beliefs, actions, and votes — not one-sided party ideology.
- ❖ All man-made parties and ideologies have truth and error, and no political party has a monopoly on political and economic truth.

- ❖ Because of human nature, centralization of power corrupts people and principles. I am therefore intrinsically suspicious of all federal politicians and policies – regardless of party.
- ❖ I judge and vote for federal politicians based on how well they understand and adhere to the Constitution, as proven by their voting record, not their rhetoric.
- ❖ I judge politicians and parties not by what they *say*, but by what they *do*.
- ❖ Both Democrats and Republicans are equally to blame for our current fiscal, economic, political, and cultural problems, and for the steady decline of freedom in the past century.
- ❖ As parties, neither Democrats nor Republicans offer legitimate, deep, and lasting solutions to our deeply-embedded problems.
- ❖ Freedom is the result of treating all individuals, institutions, and entities equally before the law, regardless of race, color, gender, wealth, or status.
- ❖ Generally speaking, Democrats are the party of big government, while Republicans are the party of big business. Both approaches stratify society, intensify unhealthy class structure, and concentrate wealth and power in the hands of few.
- ❖ Ultimately, in a democratic republic, the People are to blame for any loss of freedom.
- ❖ Freedom depends far more on what happens in the minds and hearts of individual citizens than what happens in Washington.
- ❖ Our problems will be solved and our freedom restored to the extent that citizens and leaders can see beyond party platitudes, shed ideological blinders, and think holistically and generationally.

- ❖ I am far more concerned with *forms* of government, rather than *issues*. For example, repealing the 16th and 17th amendments (forms) will do far more to restore our freedom than hacking at the leaves of illegal immigration (issue).
- ❖ While Democrats emphasize compassion and Republicans emphasize self-reliance, both are equally vital in a free and healthy society. These two values are not – at least should not be – at odds with each other. Ideally, compassionate service should be performed voluntarily, not through the force of government. Regardless, it should be a high and honorable aim for all free citizens no matter what party they belong to.
- ❖ I believe in local autonomy and diversity. I support certain policies on the local or state level that would be inappropriate and unconstitutional on a federal level. Local and state governments should influence citizens much more than the federal government. It's not about being for or against government, but rather how much government for what specific purposes and at what level.
- ❖ Neither of the two major parties have a clear, coherent, and *freedom-based* foreign policy. The current mainstream neoconservative foreign policy of interventionism, nation-building, promoting global “democracy,” and waging “war on terror” is misguided, inimical to freedom, and if unchecked will ultimately lead to de facto empire. I believe that American interests are far better served and that we will be much safer and more free by dramatically scaling back our military presence in the world; by being a light to the world, not a policeman.
- ❖ Our freedom will not be restored by any party, but rather by independent-minded, liberally-educated private citizens who see and act beyond the limitations of party.

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WHY FREEDOM-LOVERS ARE THEIR OWN WORST ENEMIES

Why can't the freedom movement seem to get any traction? Why have we lost battle after battle for at least the past century?

It's because we tend to make the good the enemy of the perfect, the pragmatic the enemy of the ideal. To be clear, it's because the most passionate among us have adopted a rigid, dogmatic, uncompromising "either-or" stance in the fight. Rather than winning hearts and minds in the trenches inch-by-inch, we drop rhetorical nuclear bombs and make enemies of potential supporters.

There's *one* critical distinction that explains this tendency and, if understood, can overcome it and make all the difference to our success: *Do we view the fight for freedom as an election-cycle battle, or as a 100-year war?*

These vastly different mindsets generate completely different strategies and tactics and produce completely different results.

If we view the fight as an election-cycle battle, the battlegrounds are primarily *political* and *governmental*. The tactics include:

- ❖ Public, energetic, and angry marches and demonstrations.
- ❖ Passionate, vitriolic, and partisan commentary that preaches to the crowd and riles the base but fails to win new supporters.
- ❖ Literal, logical, and personal argumentation.
- ❖ Directing energy primarily at getting individual political candidates elected.

But in a 100-year war, the battlegrounds are *cultural* and *educational*, and the short-term tactics above shift to the following long-term strategies:

- ❖ Personal, lifelong, classical education in the quiet of our homes.
- ❖ Respectful, thoughtful, open-minded discussion with people across the whole spectrum of belief, with the intention of winning hearts and minds, rather than simply spewing passion or proving how smart and “right” we are.
- ❖ Symbolic, metaphorical, and artful story-telling and persuasion.
- ❖ Directing energy toward reforming education, building families and communities, and becoming successful entrepreneurs (see the three choices in *FreedomShift* by Oliver DeMille).

In a 100-year war, we moderate our passion and smarten our strategy.

We heal the roots of our demise, rather than hacking at the symptomatic leaves. We work from love, rather than anger.

We reform from the outside-in and bottom-up, rather than the top-down. In other words, we focus on fixing ourselves, rather than Washington.

We understand that studying Montesquieu in our homes is far more effective than waving banners in the streets.

We spend our time and energy teaching the rising generation the depths of freedom and political philosophy, rather than debating opponents in chat rooms and on radio and TV shows.

We build successful small businesses, rather than complaining about losing jobs overseas.

In a 100-year war, idealism and pragmatism aren't mutually exclusive. We're more concerned with *direction* than *destination*. In other words, we don't reject particular policies because they're not ultimate, black-and-white ideals. Rather, we judge them based on whether or not they take us closer to the ideal, however slight the progress.

In a 100-year war, we learn and teach principles, rather than fight candidates. To be perfectly clear, we don't waste time forwarding mass emails about the status of Obama's birth certificate.

Most importantly, in a 100-year war, independent freedom lovers create an inclusive tent, rather than an exclusive club. For example, many conservatives denigrate environmentalists, or as they're disdainfully labeled, "tree-huggers."

But many of these environment-conscious, thoughtful people are also highly-conscious and passionate about local, organic food production and sustainable agriculture—which is a primary battleground for freedom.

So rather than building on common beliefs and bringing these people into the tent of freedom, many conservatives banish them with narrow-minded labels.

The Occupy Wall Street movement is also a favorite target of many conservative commentators. But wise freedom-lovers

would do well to harness their energy. The truth is that they raise a critical point that most conservatives fail to see: Vast inequities in wealth distribution and power *are*, in fact, killing America — every bit as much, if not more so, than governmental wealth redistribution from rich to poor. The government *does* favor those with capital over those with little or none, big businesses over small businesses, which creates these unfair and unsustainable inequities.

We don't have to occupy Wall Street with them, but we can at least be wise enough to recognize where we agree in order to work together toward a more free, just, and sustainable society. We can start winning more friends and creating fewer enemies. We can be pragmatic coalition-builders, rather than dogmatic clique-builders.

I'm as passionate about freedom as anyone — freedom is my mission. But passion alone isn't going to win the fight for freedom. The war will be won through wisdom.

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THE DECLARATION OF DEPENDENCE

The following is my updated version of The Declaration of Independence. It adds and highlights political philosophy of the Founders that was a given to them, but has been lost over time.

In the course of human events, it has become necessary for our People to resurrect the Political Bands once established through Divine Inspiration, because we the People failed in our Duties to God and our fellowman, and assumed among the powers of earth rights without understanding corresponding Duties, and have believed that we were entitled to the fruits of another man's labor, and have ignored the Laws of Nature and Nature's God.

Now, a decent respect for Those Who Have Gone Before requires that we Repent and repair our failing Union.

*We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created Equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain Unalienable Rights **that require the fulfillment of corresponding Duties and Responsibilities**, that among these are Life, Liberty, Property, and the Pursuit*

of Happiness – that to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the People to alter or to abolish it and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such Principles and organizing its powers in such Form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and Happiness.

We also recognize that whenever any people fail in their Duties as Citizens and Children of God, it is the Responsibility of the People to alter themselves or face the danger of being abolished, and to revive, embrace, and strictly adhere to those Eternal Principles upon which all Happiness is based.

Prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the Forms to which they are accustomed.

Yet while good Constitutional Forms are necessary, the People must continually reform their minds and hearts if the proper Forms are to endure. Government Forms are only as effective as the People are Virtuous and Accountable to their Creator.

But when a long train of neglect and apathy by the People, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to increase among the People a false sense of Security at the cost of true Freedom, and a blatant and destructive disregard for the Principles of Virtue and Liberty, it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such self-inflicted abuses and to Repent. Such is now the Responsibility of this People to

resurrect the Principles of Liberty upon which our Nation was based and to conform our lives to them.

We, therefore, the People of the United States of America, in Humility and a spirit of Dedication, do solemnly Publish and Declare, that we are DEPENDENT UPON GOD if we wish to remain Free and prosperous, and to shine the Beacon of Liberty to our Prosperity and to the world. To this end we pledge our Lives, our Liberty, and our Sacred Honor.



THE PROPER ROLE OF CITIZENS

“Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person.”

—MOTHER TERESA

I’m tired of debating political philosophy. More precisely, I’m tired of neglecting why it matters. Within the Center for Social Leadership (www.TheSocialLeader.com) community, we emphasize the U.S. Constitution as a pillar in the structure of ideal society. We speak often of the proper role of government and the dire consequences of it straying outside of those bounds.

I’ve devoured my share of Plato and Aristotle, Rousseau and Locke, Hamilton and Jefferson, Mill and Marx, Montesquieu and Tocqueville, Mises and Keynes, and other foundational thinkers. I’ve written hundreds of articles centered on the Constitution and ideal government. Freedom is my mission.

But I’ve realized that I’ve neglected a far more important principle than the proper role of government.

When I was seventeen years old, I attended a week-long educational series for youth. One of my evening classes was

dance instruction. The first night we were asked to find a partner. As my partner and I chatted, I watched a disabled young man ask girls to dance with him.

One after another, he circled the room and faced rejection after rejection after heart-wrenching rejection.

At the time I had no words to explain or even understand the tornado of emotions that tore through my soul. Choking and struggling for breath, I mumbled an apology to my partner and excused myself to go out into the hall, where I shuddered with uncontrollable sobs for several minutes.

Years later, I have words: Debating political philosophy is far less important than cherishing and serving all people as children of God.

Articles and Clauses and power charts and legislative processes are simply means to greater ends. Unfortunately, I fear we focus far too infrequently on these more important issues.

Freedom is about fatherless, shoeless, hopeless kids living in squalor, picking through moldy dumps just to ease the ache in their bellies. Freedom is about widows, whose husbands died with guns in their hands, cooking spoiled rice for their children through their tears because it's all they can give.

It's about fathers risking it all to cross borders to send a few dollars home and going to sleep in dirty shacks thinking of their daughters' eyes. It's about empty-eyed kids who can't think beyond ghetto boundaries and who won't look you in the eye.

It's about real people with real lives and real stories. It's about hurt feelings and lost dreams. It's about private desperation in souls who wonder if it will ever get better. It's about suffering. It's about smiles and hugs at critical moments. It's about reconciliation. It's about hope and aspirations and struggles and achievements.

Constitutions may provide skeletons, but love and service and human struggles are the heart, flesh, and blood of ideal societies. If we're studying the Constitution because we enjoy the mental exercise of political philosophy or the diversion of debating politics, we're missing the point.

Granted, constitutional structures are vital because they protect these things of which I speak, but are we remembering that and putting constitutional studies in context?

To borrow and rephrase the words of Yann Martel in his insightful novel *Life of Pi*, we take it upon ourselves to defend the Constitution. We walk by widows deformed by leprosy begging for a few paise, walk by children dressed in rags living in the street, and we think, "Business as usual." But if we perceive a slight against the Constitution, it is a different story. Our faces go red, our chests heave mightily, we sputter angry words. The degree of our indignation is astonishing. Our resolve is frightening.

Yes, I've done it, too. In fact, I've spent much of my life doing it. But I weary of debating the proper role of government. I'd rather *live* the proper role of citizens.



STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

During Stalin's rule of the Soviet Union in the 1950s, Nikita Khrushchev was the leader of the Communist Party. After Stalin's death, Khrushchev visited the United States and gave a press conference. He was given a written question from a reporter, "Today you talked about the hideous rule of your predecessor, Stalin. You were one of his closest aides and colleagues during those years. What were you doing all that time?"

Khrushchev glared at the audience, his face reddening in anger. "Who asked that?" he roared.

Silence from the audience.

Once again he bellowed, "Who asked that?"

Dead silence.

After a long pause, Khrushchev said quietly, "That's what I was doing."

I scratch my head and wonder about the reporter who was bold enough to ask the question, but too afraid to stand up and own it.

A few years earlier, a Protestant pastor in Germany named Martin Niemöller was released from a Nazi concentration camp after seven years of imprisonment and wrote,

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out

Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil,” wrote Edmund Burke, “is that good men do nothing.” “The world is a dangerous place,” said Albert Einstein, “not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.”

I hope to live worthy of the phrase I want chiseled into my gravestone: “He stood steadfastly against the tide.”

And when I pass to the other side, I’d love to have a chat with August Landmesser. A former member of the Nazi party, Landmesser came to oppose Hitler’s regime after fathering children with a Jewish woman. A picture snapped in 1936 at a crowd in Hamburg, Germany shows his brave rejection of the Nazi doctrine:



Landmesser was found guilty of “dishonouring the race” under Nazi law. He and his wife, Irma Eckler, were jailed by the Gestapo, their children separated and sent to an orphanage. August was freed from prison in 1941 but was soon drafted into the war. He was later declared missing in action and was presumed dead. But because he stood and was counted among the dissenters, he has not gone missing from the pages of history.

Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” A picture hanging in my office shows the anonymous rebel in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square standing up to a line of tanks on June 5, 1989, protesting China’s communist rule:



People like August Landmesser and the unknown Tank Man provide inspiring examples to emulate. Yet defying tyranny, standing steadfastly against the tide in our day is done by much simpler, less public actions.

We stand up and are counted when we turn off the TV and pick up a good book instead. When we choose to not click that racy link. When we stop buying the plastic, processed junk sold as “food” and the pills peddled to mask the symptoms of the diseases caused by the junk we eat. When we reject the flimsy argument that we’re “throwing away our vote” and vote on conscience and principle. When we conquer fear and start a business. When we toss credit card offers in the trash.

There may come a day when our grandchildren ask us about the debt, taxation, pollution, widespread obesity and disease, and other problems they’ll undoubtedly be burdened with.

“You saw it all happening,” they’ll say. “What were you doing all that time?”

I hope our response is not silence.

Top 25 Recommended Books for Uncommon Citizens

1. *The Federalist Papers* by Hamilton, Jay, and Madison
2. *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville
3. *LeaderShift* by Orrin Woodward and Oliver DeMille
4. *FreedomShift* by Oliver DeMille
5. *The Coming Aristocracy: Education and the Future of Freedom* by Oliver DeMille
6. *1913* by Oliver DeMille
7. *A Thomas Jefferson Education* by Oliver DeMille
8. *Resolved: 13 Resolutions for Life* by Orrin Woodward
9. *Rascal: Making a Difference by Becoming an Original Character* by Chris Brady
10. *The 5,000 Year Leap* by Cleon Skousen
11. *The Law* by Frederic Bastiat
12. *The Second Treatise of Government* by John Locke
13. *The Conscious Creator: Six Laws for Manifesting Your Masterpiece Life* by Kris Krohn with Stephen Palmer
14. *Up From Slavery* by Booker T. Washington
15. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe
16. *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo
17. *Magnificent Obsession* by Lloyd C. Douglas
18. *The Brother's Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky
19. *As a Man Thinketh* by James Allen
20. *The Mainspring of Human Progress* by H.G. Weaver
21. *The Richest Man in Babylon* by George Clason
22. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*
23. *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom
24. *The Virginian* by Owen Wister
25. *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization* by Victor Davis Hanson