

vista

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How to Pray for Those in Authority

by Jim “Umf” Lo

The African country where I was serving was going through a time of political unrest. As a missionary, I thought, “What can the church do during this time of tension?” After thinking about it for a period of time, I suggested to some of the leaders of the Khumalo church that we should set aside certain times during the week when we would pray specifically for those who were in authority over the country. Naively I thought that everyone would agree to what I proposed; instead, I was confronted with resistance.

One person said, “I do not want to pray for the president of this country. He’s no good!”

Someone else stated, “Why should we pray for leaders who are corrupt?”

A middle-aged woman said, “You can have your prayer meetings, but do not expect me to show up!”

I was frustrated and confused by their reactions. Needing to vent to someone, I went to Annie, one of the church leaders. “What can I do to get the others in the church to pray for those in authority over this country?”

After pondering the question for a few moments, Annie said, “Help answer four questions for them: (1) Why should Christians pray for those in authority? (2) Which leaders should Christians pray for? (3) How should Christians pray for those in leadership? (4) What should Christians pray for their leaders about?”

Why Should Christians Pray for Those in Authority?

Jesus Christ is described as the great intercessor. As he hung on the cross, he interceded for all men and women. Hebrews 7:25 says that intercession continues to be his unceasing service and ministry to those who are drawing near to God through him. Christians are to follow Christ’s example of being an intercessor. We are to have a genuine concern for others, which will cause us to want to stand in the gap between people and God.

S. D. Gordon commented that “Next to worship, intercession is the highest form of service a Christian can perform. It is not the only thing, but it is the chief thing.”

The apostle Paul told us whom we are to intercede for. He wrote, “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority” (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

Simply put, we should be praying for our leaders because the Bible commands us to do so.

Which Leaders Should Christians Pray For?

The Bible does not specify for which leaders or countries we are supposed to pray. Since I am an American citizen, it has been natural for me to pray for the president of the United States and his advisors and leave it at that. However, this is not what Paul told us to do. Although the president and those who work for him are included in this charge to pray for leaders, others are not excluded. The Bible states that we are to pray for everyone—for kings and all those in authority.

When I read this verse to the African church leaders, they were utterly surprised. After a period of silence, one of them said, “The Bible is very clear, isn’t it? We are not to pray just for the leaders we like, but even those we may not like. Paul’s words are a good reminder that all leaders need God’s help, and I am not to play favorites regarding whom I pray for or do not pray for!”

I heard an American pastor preach these words: “It seems easy to pray for those in authority in countries being asked to help America rid the world of terrorism, but it may get a little sticky for us to pray for those in authority over terrorists. Many people conceive prayer as a way of protecting or uplifting those for whom prayer is intended. We miss a great opportunity if we overlook those who are enemies



to our society. The same Holy Spirit who convicts us to serve the Lord can convict evildoers to stop doing the wrongs they are doing.”

How Should Christians Pray for Those in Leadership?

Paul, when he gave instructions to Timothy about interceding for those in authority, used a strong word to get his message across. He wrote, “I exhort you.” The word *exhort* can mean “to urge by strong, often stirring argument, admonition, and advice.” It can also mean “to make an urgent appeal to do something of importance.”

When I was ministering in Cambodia, some Christians set aside every Wednesday to fast and pray for those who wielded significant influence, such as their king and queen, elected officials, appointed judges, lawyers, police officers, military officials, people in the media, business executives and managers, and political leaders in other countries. They also spent time praying for leaders in churches, teachers in elementary and high schools, and professors in the universities. When I asked them why they had set aside an entire day to do this, they replied, “Because we sense the importance and urgency of doing so. If we do not take the time to pray, what will this country and this world become? If Christians ever needed to be on their knees praying for leaders, it is now!”

What Should Christians Pray for Their Leaders About?

When I first began praying for leaders, I found myself getting frustrated because I did not know what I should pray for them. After a few moments of trying, I would give up and focus my prayers on other matters. One day I shared my frustrations with a missionary friend. To help me, he gave me a card with the following list.

Pray that our leaders will . . .

- Become saved if they are not already saved (1 Tim. 2:4).
- Seek guidance from God’s Word (Rom. 15:4).
- Rule by example (1 Peter 5:3).
- Rule their own house well (1 Tim. 3:4–5, 12).
- Submit to God (Prov. 3:6).
- Learn righteousness (Isa. 26:9).
- Be obedient to God’s commandments (Matt. 28:20).
- Have teachable spirits (Prov. 12:1).
- Be taught the way that is good and right (1 Sam. 12:23).
- Be full of the Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3).
- Endeavor to restore families (Ps. 127; Eph. 5:22–23).

- Be courageous and responsible to confront threats to the moral fabric of the nation (Rom. 11:13–14).
- Have compassionate and charitable hearts for the poor (Prov. 29:14).
- Be kept from evil (John 17:15).
- Be faithful (Ps. 101:6).
- Be people of prayer (Luke 22:46).
- Humble themselves and lead in the healing of the land (2 Chron. 7:14).

This list has become a very handy tool to help me keep focused on what I should be praying about for the different leaders for whom I intercede.

How Can We Begin Praying for Our Leaders?

God wants Christians to be in prayer for those in civil, local, state, and federal government. He also wants us to pray for leaders in businesses and churches, because all of them need divine guidance and wisdom to accomplish their daily duties.

Allow me to present some practical ways churches can encourage their members to pray for those who are in authority:

- Use church bulletins to introduce different local leaders to the church by giving brief biographical information about them.
- Include the names of leaders on prayer request sheets.
- Invite different leaders of the community to share in a Sunday school class or house fellowship.
- Designate a Sunday morning worship service to invite different community leaders to attend. Honor and pray for them specifically.
- Go and visit leaders where they work. As an example, a seniors' class in one church spent a morning in the municipal building, listening to different civic leaders share some of their visions and burdens.
- Use the internet to identify websites that encourage Christians to pray for those in authority.
- Set aside one of the midweek services for the sole purpose of praying for leaders.
- Encourage church members to know their leaders by name. For example, one Sunday school teacher presented his class with a list of federal government offices and had the group learn the names that went with them. He then had the class spend time praying for each one by name.
- Hang a current events bulletin board in a high-visibility place in the church; post current articles to help those in the church to know how to pray specifically. ●



Continue learning about and praising the Lord at home with your family. Here's an idea how to do that.

GETTING A BIG PICTURE

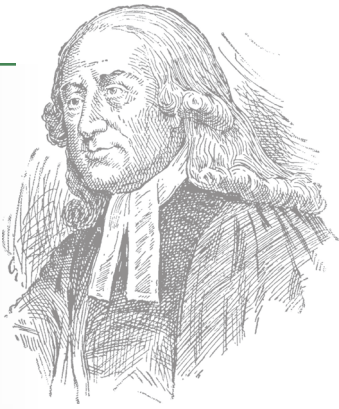
Children's prayers often revolve around "Bless Mommy and Daddy and Nana and Papa."

Gather magazines or newspapers, and cut out pictures of local, state, national, and international leaders, including teachers, elected officials, police officers, etc. Glue the photos on pieces of construction paper to use for prayer time. Select two or three to include for each morning or nightly prayer.

Older children and teens can create a prayer list to tuck into their Bibles or journals. ●



WORDS from Wesley



Ezra 1:6

Strengthened their hands—God can, when He pleases, incline the hearts of strangers to be kind to His people; yea, make those strengthen their hands, who formerly weakened them.

(Wesley, J. (1765). *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (Vol. 1–3). Bristol: William Pine.)



THROUGH THE BIBLE IN A YEAR



Monday
December 8 *Hosea 10–14*

Tuesday
December 9 *Joel 1–3*

Wednesday
December 10 *Amos 1–3*

Thursday
December 11 *Amos 4–6*

Friday
December 12 *Amos 7–9*

Saturday
December 13 *Obadiah & Jonah*

Sunday
December 14 *1 John 1–5*



SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



God's Plan Always Prevails

GOD LEAVES NOTHING TO CHANCE

Ezra 1:1–11; 2:64–70

God moves the hearts of people to fulfill his plan.

INTO THE SUBJECT

Because of their unfaithfulness, God's people had become captives in Babylonia. Seventy years later, as God promised, they would start returning home. Amazingly, God used a pagan king to start the process. Who was this king, and how did he help the returnees?

INTO THE WORD

1. Why do you think Cyrus made a proclamation allowing the Jews to return home?
2. Why do you think Cyrus felt personally accountable to God for the building of the temple at Jerusalem?
3. How did Cyrus provide practical support for the building of the temple?
4. How does it encourage you to know that God can move a king's heart (Prov. 21:1) to accomplish his will?
5. Read Ezra 1:5. Why do you agree or disagree that a congregation should not undertake a building project unless God moves the hearts of his people to do so?
6. What did Cyrus personally donate to the temple project? Why do you think he was so generous?
7. Read Ezra 1:8–11. Why do you agree or disagree that a church should carefully account for every donation?
8. Ezra 2:68–69 reports that the returnees gave freewill offerings according to their ability. Why would you agree or disagree that Christians today should practice this manner of giving?

INTO THE WORLD

Trust the Holy Spirit to move your heart to give yourself and your resources to his work.

EXTRAVAGANT BLESSING

“Any of his people among you may go . . . and build the temple of the LORD . . . and may their God be with them.” (Ezra 1:3)

Quite often, God’s intervention is so profound, his blessing so obvious, that we are humbled by his graciousness. Older adults tend to have this perspective when looking back over their lifetimes, seeing all at once the multitude of blessings that they have accumulated. Grandmas and grandpas measure their wealth in terms of the relationships they have built with their children and grandchildren. Along with the inevitable pain and heartache they have endured, God’s sovereign, intervening hand is evident in the good.

As the book of Ezra opens, we see the children of Israel given such a profound, humbling blessing. Several times, we read that God moves hearts (Ezra 1:1, 5). The people are commanded to give to the children of God (v. 4), but they also give freewill offerings (vv. 4, 6). As exiles and captives, not only are they freed, but they are also recompensed and supported in their going.

The extreme and complete turnaround is the result of God’s intervention. While the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem was and is important, what he desires both then and now is to transform lives. Ultimately, God acts in order to change hearts and to bring about his kingdom. Like the people of Israel, God is calling us. He is moving our hearts toward action, to contributing to the building of his kingdom.

—Dalene Fisher

Ezra 1:1–11; 2:64–70

**Reflect with thanks on the ways God has
intervened in your life.**

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