

5 Ways to Pray for Government Leaders You Don't Agree With

The substantial majority of readers of this site do not care for Barack Obama's presidency. This assertion is to understatement something like a kitchen faucet is to Niagara Falls.

Yet Christians are not given the option of letting their disagreement with their political leaders prevent them from praying for those leaders. The apostle Peter wrote that believers are to "submit yourselves to every human authority for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme, or to governors, as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and to praise those who do right. ... Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:13-14, 17).

Similarly, Paul wrote to Timothy, "Therefore I exhort first of all that you make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for everyone, for kings and for all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior" (1 Tim. 2:1-3).

Who was emperor when Peter and Paul wrote these words? None other than one of the most notorious political leaders of history, Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, known generally simply as Nero.

What kind of ruler was Nero? He murdered his mother and both of his wives, for starters. But his grotesque brutality far transcended his immediate family. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, after fire had consumed roughly half of Rome and his popularity was in free-fall, Nero decided to blame the fire on Christians. Tacitus records that, among other things, the early Roman followers of Jesus "were covered

with the skins of wild animals and then torn apart by dogs, some were crucified, some were burned at torches to light as night" (The One Year Christian History, p. 322).

Thankfully, none of America's political leaders—local, state or federal—can claim such infamy. This does not diminish the wrong that they have done or continue to allow. For example, the silent cries of more than 56 million unborn children aborted since 1973 echo through the corridors of power. Yet we are called to pray for those in authority; God's Word says it, and Christians must do it.

How, then, should we pray for those in authority over us, whether they be persons we respect or with whose political judgment we agree, or persons whose character and official policies we cannot endorse?

We should pray for their health and safety. As recorded in Ezra 6:10, the pagan king Darius asked God's faithful people in Jerusalem to pray for his life and the lives of his sons. In light of the recent intrusion in the White House of a man armed with a knife, we certainly can pray that the Obama family and all those in power, whether in Washington or the county courthouse or anywhere in between, would be protected and upheld in good health.

We should pray that they would execute justice. Honoring and protecting those who live decently and productively and punishing those who do wrong are the fundamental duties of the state (Rom. 13:3-4; 1 Pet. 2:14). We should ask the Lord that those in authority would fulfill them well.

We should pray that they would follow the Lord's ways and repent if they don't. The horrific reign of Manasseh over Judah and his later repentance (2 Chron. 33:1-20) should remind Christians that for those in government leadership, personal character and political actions are entwined. Yet Manasseh should also remind us that even evil men, when they

repent sincerely, can be used by God to restore what they have ruined.

Pray that they would govern with wisdom for the “welfare of the city” (Jer. 29:7), not for personal gain or for the advantage of a favored few. Their concern must be for the well-being of all.

That God would accomplish His purposes through them regardless of their willingness to be used by Him. Proverbs 21:1 tells us that “the king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will.” We can petition the Most High to work through even those who are resisting Him to fulfill His purposes.

It’s noteworthy that God is unimpressed by political power, including those who think they can defy Him. Consider some passages of Scripture about how the Sovereign Lord of all views such persons: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, ‘Let us tear off their bonds and cast away their ropes from us.’ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord ridicules them” (Ps. 2:2-4).

“Certainly the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; He takes up the coastlands as a very little thing. All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him as less than nothing and meaningless. It is He who sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants are as grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens as a curtain, and spreads them out as a tent to dwell in. He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth meaningless. Scarcely shall they be planted; scarcely shall they be sown; scarcely shall their tree take root in the earth, when He will also blow on them, and they will wither, and the whirlwind will take them away as stubble” (Is. 40:15, 17; 22-24).

Terms like derision, laughter, “brings to nothing” and “as meaningless” make clear that God is not especially threatened by those who believe they can unseat His omnipotent and eternal rule. We should not be either.

Daniel 4:17 reminds us that “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.” The Hebrew word translated as “lowliest” probably refers to persons of humble origin. In other words, God can raise up a shepherd boy like David, a backwoods workman like Abraham Lincoln, or the son of a ne’er-do-well Kenyan economist like Barack Obama to accomplish what He wants, whether they want Him to or not. God’s people must never forget, and should always take great comfort, in that truth, even as they work actively for public policies pleasing to their Eternal King.

Rob Schwarzwald *serves as senior vice president for the Family Research Council. He oversees the Communications, Policy and Church Ministries teams and manages the Policy.*