

How to Pray for Government Leaders Who Don't Share Your Beliefs

If you've ever struggled to pray for government leaders with whom you strongly disagree, imagine being an evangelical congressman or senator on the front lines in Washington, called by God to hit your knees on behalf of fellow lawmakers who blatantly reject the biblical values you treasure.

Or, like Mike Huckabee, being a former presidential candidate-turned-television news commentator who is sometimes compelled to vigorously confront the man who was elected to the nation's top office.

Huckabee sees no conflict in prayer and confrontation, and he finds no wiggle room in the biblical mandate to pray for our leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

"Praying for them is to recognize that God can hit a straight lick with a crooked stick," said Huckabee, the former Arkansas governor who works for Fox News and is contemplating a 2016 presidential run.

"But praying for someone doesn't require me to agree with them or to be silent when I feel the need to rebuke. As I raised my children, I prayed for each of them by name daily, but that never stopped me from disciplining them. It's because I do pray that I feel free to speak truth to power."

Praying for political foes is a way of Washington life for Rep. Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.), a devoted believer and former federal prosecutor who serves as an ace interrogator for the House Committee on Ethics, Oversight and Government Reform.

"The first thing you have to overcome is the temptation to

pray something like, 'Please let the president agree with me more often,'" Gowdy said. "You have to approach it with a humility of, 'Is this what I think, or is this what God thinks?' So you pray for the other person. You pray for their wisdom and discernment. If you really think their beliefs are contrary to Scripture, you're welcome to pray that the Lord will open their eyes, but you'd also better ask Him to open your own eyes."

In addition to the requirement to pray for our leaders, Gowdy said he's convicted by—and preaches to churches about—the commandment in Romans 13 to be subject to government authorities. Verse 2 warns that, "whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves."

Still, Gowdy added, God's commandments are supreme. "And to the extent there is ever conflict between the laws of God and the laws of man, my obedience will be to the laws of God."

Gowdy's relentless questioning of high-profile witnesses during congressional hearings has drawn nationwide attention, sometimes going viral on YouTube. He chairs the panel investigating the 2012 terrorist attack on Benghazi and has passionately challenged the targeting of conservative, evangelical groups by the IRS. His aim is to defend truth, freedom and justice against officials or agencies whose actions or policies might compromise those principles.

"I get very animated on the issue of religious liberty," he said. "I get very animated on the issue of people getting killed in other countries simply because of their faith. It's easy for me to sit there and say, 'Mr. President, what are you going to do about it?'"

But Gowdy also feels the Holy Spirit nudging him to show compassion for President Obama. In fact, he has ended each of his conversations with the president by saying, "God bless

you.”

“I didn’t say it like he just sneezed,” Gowdy said. “I said it like I really wanted the Lord to bless him, because I do.”

Not all believers respond that way, as R.T. Kendall can attest.

“I once went almost on bended knee to a very, very high-profile, well-known leader in America, pleading with him to pray for Barack Obama,” said Kendall, a widely respected Christian author, teacher and theologian. “But the person replied, ‘How can I do that? Look what he just did yesterday.’

“My response was that I prayed for years for [former Palestinian leader] Yasser Arafat. I told that person that Arafat didn’t think for one minute that I was going to become a Muslim, but Arafat loved me because he knew I loved him and prayed for him. I told the person, ‘If Obama feels that you love him, the day may come when he’ll come to you. But, at the moment, he’s not going to come to you.’”

Sometimes loving a leader means praying tough—but not mean-spirited—prayers that are consistent with scriptural principles.

Huckabee asks God to “confront [leaders] with His holiness and power; and bring them to the end of themselves so they will be compelled to lean not on their own understanding.”

It’s critical for Christians to remember that there’s no limit to how profoundly the Lord can answer prayers that are raised in alignment with His will.

“It’s absurd for believers to think that God is only capable of exercising His power when mortal leaders cooperate,” said Huckabee. “He moves as His people repent, turn from their wicked ways and pray.”

Huckabee said there was one thing he most wanted people to

pray for him when he was governor—and that he'd want prayers for if he became president: wisdom.

"Knowledge can be obtained by a good staff or by Google," he said. "But wisdom is from God."

Rep. James Lankford (R-Okla.), an ordained Southern Baptist minister who's vying for an open Senate seat in a Nov. 4 election, prayer-walks his congressional office floor daily to intercede for the president, the Supreme Court and his colleagues, regardless of their party affiliation or political bent.

He said the practice helps to center his heart on the fact that the people he debates are created in the image of God and are deeply loved by the Father who sent His Son to die for them.

"I try to live by the basic principle that I pray more than I complain, and I try to challenge other people to do the same," Lankford said.

"Our practice should match our beliefs."

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