

Obama Shares Intimate Details of Christian Prayer Life

President Obama prayed for Egypt and shared his heart about his Christian faith at the National Prayer Breakfast on Thursday.

Obama revealed that his mother, whose parents were Baptist and Methodist, grew up with skepticism about organized religion. That translated to few and far between church visits for the future president of the United States. Still, he credits his mother with “nagging” him constantly about values like honesty, hard work, kindness and fair play.

Obama’s earliest inspirations for a life of service? Faith leaders of the civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King and the Baptist leaders, Catholic leaders like Father Theodore Hesburg, Jewish leaders like Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, as well as Muslim and Hindu leaders.

“Their call to fix what was broken in our world, a call rooted in faith, is what led me just a few years out of college to sign up as a community organizer for a group of churches on the Southside of Chicago,” Obama said. “And it was through that experience working with pastors and laypeople trying to heal the wounds of hurting neighborhoods that I came to know Jesus Christ for myself and embrace Him as my lord and savior.”

Christian Faith Sustains Obama

That was over 20 years ago. Obama said his faith journey has had its twists and turns—and that it hasn’t always been a straight line. He admitted that in the wake of failures and disappointments he has questioned what God had in store for him and was reminded that God’s plans for us may not always match our own shortsighted desires. Obama said the past two

years as president has deepened his faith and driven him to his knees.

“My Christian faith then has been a sustaining force for me over these last few years,” Obama said. “All the more so, when Michelle and I hear our faith questioned from time to time, we are reminded that ultimately what matters is not what other people say about us but whether we’re being true to our conscience and true to our God. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Inside Obama’s Prayer Life

What does Obama pray about? He said many of his prayers are general: “Lord, give me the strength to meet the challenges of my office.” But as he petitions God, he said, there are a few common themes that do recur. Obama’s first category of prayer comes out of the urgency of the Old Testament prophets and the Gospel itself.

“I pray for my ability to help those who are struggling,” Obama said. “Christian tradition teaches that one day the world will be turned right side up and everything will return as it should be. But until that day, we’re called to work on behalf of a God that chose justice and mercy and compassion to the most vulnerable.”

Obama says faith that reminds him that despite being just one very imperfect man, he can still help whoever he can, however he can, wherever he can, for as long as he can, and that somehow God will buttress these efforts.

Obama Prays for Humility

The second recurring theme in Obama’s prayers is humility. In a life of politics when debates have become so bitterly polarized, and changes in the media lead so many just to listen to those who reinforce existing biases, he said it’s

useful to go back to Scripture to remind ourselves that none of us has all the answers.

"The full breadth of human knowledge is like a grain of sand in God's hands," Obama said. "And there are some mysteries in this world we cannot fully comprehend. As it's written in Job, 'God's voice thunders in marvelous ways. He does great things beyond our understandings.'"

Obama admitted he's challenged with balancing humility with the need to fight for deeply held convictions, to be open to other points of view but firm in his core principles. He said he prays for this wisdom every day.

"I pray that God will show me and all of us the limits of our understanding, and open our ears and our hearts to our brothers and sisters with different points of view; that such reminders of our shared hopes and our shared dreams and our shared limitations as children of God will reveal the way forward that we can travel together," Obama said.

Obama Wants Closer Walk with God

And the last recurring theme, he shared, is that he might walk closer with God and make that walk his first and most important task.

"When I wake in the morning, I wait on the Lord, and I ask Him to give me the strength to do right by our country and its people," Obama said. "And when I go to bed at night I wait on the Lord, and I ask Him to forgive me my sins, and look after my family and the American people, and make me an instrument of His will.

"I say these prayers hoping they will be answered, and I say these prayers knowing that I must work and must sacrifice and must serve to see them answered. But I also say these prayers knowing that the act of prayer itself is a source of strength. It's a reminder that our time on Earth is not just about us;

that when we open ourselves to the possibility that God might have a larger purpose for our lives, there's a chance that somehow, in ways that we may never fully know, God will use us well. May the Lord bless you and keep you, and may He bless this country that we love."

Did understanding Obama's prayer life inspire you?