

# A Day at the White House

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Monday, May 24, 2004, was a momentous day for me. I received an invitation from the White House to join eight religious journalists for an on-the-record interview with President Bush that was to take place two days later. Of course I readily accepted.

Once there, the other journalists and I gathered with the president around a mahogany table in a formal conference room in the West Wing. I sat across from the most powerful man in the world, knowing this was a moment I'd remember the rest of my life.

When the interview began, I quickly saw that the president was allowing each journalist around the table to ask a question in turn. The first few questions had to do with policy, and the president rattled off answers as if he were at a news conference.

As he talked, however, I caught a glimpse of his humanness. Not that I didn't know he was human—and vulnerable. I'd read our book *The Faith of George W. Bush* several times during the publishing process. But it was a powerful experience to look directly into his steel-blue eyes and see his personal side.

I sensed the Holy Spirit telling me to listen with my heart to perceive what the Lord was saying through this man whom I believe He put in office and whom we'll endorse for a second term.

I asked: "Your election in 2000 was one of the most unusual in American history. Some would say you were lucky. In light of your faith, how do you view the closeness of the election?"

Bush said that while waiting for final election results he spent a lot of time outdoors at his ranch and was quite calm. He said he and Laura tried to prepare themselves so that if he won he'd be ready to serve. He made some other observations as well, about the electoral college versus the popular vote, and we'll report that in a subsequent issue along with his comments about Iraq, faith-based initiatives and the cultural war our nation is in.

For now here are some observations I made about Bush the man:

\* Bush is definitely a man of faith. He talked openly about reading The One Year Bible through every other year and a half and reading Oswald Chambers every morning, which, he said, "helps me understand how far I am on my walk."

He said he prays all the time—not just at a set time. He prays that God's light will shine through him "as best as possible, no matter how opaque the window."

The president is mindful, he said, "of the proper use of faith" in a political context. "You can't fake your faith, nor can you use your faith as a shallow attempt to garner votes. ... The best way for faith to operate is ... to let the light shine," he said.

\* He's a man of tenacity and firm resolve. "I believe there's a clash of ideologies," he said, referring to radical Islam. "America must be firm in our resolve. ... I will not yield."

\* He's a humble man. In responding to Russell Shaw, a Roman Catholic writer, the president—a Methodist—spoke respectfully of Pope John Paul II. He said he has been “in awe in [the] presence” of the Catholic pontiff.

\* He's a realist. He said winning the upcoming election is not a given. Then he talked about how great his family life and his relationship with his wife are. If they weren't strong relationships, he said, he would never put them through the rigors of a campaign.

When it was my turn, I added a personal note to my question, telling the president I pray for him every day. He responded in humility, calling it a “great gift for which I am most grateful.”

Bush also said that when he works the “rope lines,” greeting well-wishers as he travels the country, every two to three people say they are praying for him. He said that is “an incredibly sustaining part of the job of president ... and it has made being the president ... a lot easier.”

So I'll close by urging all our readers to pray for President Bush. Whether you agree with his policies or intend to vote for him or not, we are commanded by the Word to pray for those in authority over us. He's in a pivotal position at a pivotal time in history. Let's pray that he will follow God and that God's will will be done.

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