

How You Must Pray for Leaders You Do Not Agree With

We run into leaders in all aspects of life. Each one of us has a sphere of influence or a place in which we are a leader. As with every leader, some people trust us and ones who don't.

It amazes me how quickly we can become judgmental against our leaders. I recognize that some leaders give us ample reason for this. However, others are not trusted just because of the type of position they hold.

Jesus encountered this same issue as He walked the earth. In that culture, tax collectors were not trusted, just by virtue of position, much like the Internal Revenue Service here in the United States today. It has little to do with the individual and more to do with the attached cultural stigma.

The other day, the Holy Spirit impressed me to talk about praying for leadership. I was not at all excited at that prospect. How and if we pray for leaders is a volatile and subject to debate in many circles. However, God has a plan, and there was something that He wanted to show me.

In the book of Jeremiah, the people have been taken into captivity. They have been exiled to Babylon, which is ruled by King Nebuchadnezzar. As Jeremiah is sitting back in Jerusalem, looking at the ruin and missing his countrymen, the Lord gives him a message.

"This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem: 'Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens and eat the food they produce. Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to

the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare” (Jer. 29:4-7, NLT).

Woven through that Scripture are several keys to survival.

–Build homes.

–Plan to stay.

–Plant gardens.

–Keep eating.

–Marry.

–Have children.

–Multiply.

All of the above speaks to self-care and multiplication even during captivity. The people were not to grumble or complain. They were given a mission, and that was to occupy the very land they were in bondage in.

Do we fall short because we fail to “occupy” the land that God has given us?

However, it was verse 7 that really caught my attention. In verse 7, the Lord is telling them to work for and towards the city’s peace and prosperity. It didn’t matter that they didn’t like idol worship; it did not matter that they didn’t like the king or that it was not their homeland. God didn’t even ask them what their opinion was. He gave them a job to do, and that job was to work for the peace and prosperity of the city.

The other thing that caught my attention is that God didn’t tell them to do that blindly. He stated that there was a cause and effect on their actions. The truth was that their lives would be directly impacted by how they choose to live in the land, and if they decided to follow His plan.

God's plan can look very different than ours. Did you catch in the main Scripture verse that He was the one that sent them into captivity? However, even in captivity, they were to have a presence, influence and move mountains.

The people were to treat Babylon as home but not allow Babylon to consume them. Their presence was meant to be a blessing to a nation that did not recognize God but worshiped idols. The only way they could impact society was to prosper where God Himself had planted them.

We can get consumed by judgment. We can get consumed by our opinions about our leaders. I am not talking just about the top government of our land. I am talking about every level of leadership:

- Pastors who don't preach "correctly."
- Worship leaders who don't lead the "right" style of worship.
- Parents who are not perfect.
- Schoolteachers who don't teach the way we want.
- Government officials (at all levels) who do not represent us the way we want to be served.
- And on and on and on.

In any of these areas, our focus ultimately has an impact. When this word was delivered to the Israelite captives, they found out that the grumbling had to cease. They could not curse or wish ill on their captors. It is a "hard pill to swallow" to know that you need to pray for peace and not condemn. They had to come to grips with the fact that they needed to do things God's way. Why? Because then, not only would the Babylonians have peace and prosperity, but they would also.

They could not afford to condemn the government; instead, they

had to radically trust that the word God had given was a word for that moment, for that circumstance, and filled with power.

Who are the leaders you need to be praying for?

How do you work for the peace and prosperity of the city where God has planted you?

The wicked King Nebuchadnezzar ended up calling on some of these very captives to interpret dreams for him. And yes, he threw them into lion's dens and furnaces. The journey wasn't always comfortable, yet God was still faithful. In Daniel 4, after King Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind and wandered around like an animal, he finally looked up to heaven, was in his right mind and gave praise to God.

"The king's heart is in the hand of Jehovah as the watercourses: He turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1, ASV).

What does this verse tell us about praying for those in authority?

When we condemn and pray against our leaders, we are praying against the hand of the Lord turning the king's heart. Our God is strong enough to turn the heart of a leader who doesn't even know Him. Therefore, our job is to pray that God would guide them. The New Living Translation talks about the leader's heart being like a stream of water directed by the Lord. How much we need living water flowing in, through and around our leaders.

There is nothing in these verses that tells me that I have to agree with leadership. However, there is a lot that tells me that I need to pray for them whether I agree with them or not.

"Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity" (1 Tim. 2:2, NLT).

Pray what way? If we back up one verse, we find:

“I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them” (1 Tim. 2:1).

I am to:

- Pray for all leaders.
- Ask God to protect them.
- Intercede on their behalf.
- Give thanks for them.

In summary, our job is not to decide their politics once they are in office

- Our job is to ask God to help and protect them.
- Our job is to pray on their behalf.
- Our job is to give thanks for them.

Why?

- God directs their hearts (Prov. 21:1).
- Their welfare determines our welfare (Jer. 29:7).
- We are told to by God (Jer. 29:7 and 1 Tim. 2:2).

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