

We Grieve for Afghanistan—and We Also Pray

The world watched in horror this weekend as the United States hurriedly pulled its military out of Afghanistan. As U.S. planes took off from the airport in Kabul on Sunday, Aug. 15, Taliban fighters captured the capital city and occupied the abandoned government palace after conquering more than a dozen other cities.

Thus ends a sad chapter in Afghanistan's history—and in the history of American foreign policy. A 20-year "war on terror" has ended. It cost the United States more than \$1 trillion, but the human toll since 2001 was worse. America lost 2,448 servicemen in the conflict, along with 3,846 other Americans. More than 20,000 U.S. soldiers were wounded, and Afghanistan lost an estimated 66,000 soldiers and 40,000 civilians.

Afghanistan's president, Ashraf Ghani, fled the country on Sunday. But Afghan citizens were less fortunate. Many of them rushed to the Kabul airport in full panic mode, and some tried to board planes unsuccessfully, desperate to escape the brutality of Taliban rule.

A few Afghanis actually clung to the undercarriage of a U.S. plane as it was taking off. One now-infamous video showed two people falling from the plane as it ascended.

How do we respond to the horrors of war? American politicians and journalists are busy pointing fingers at previous presidents, or at President Biden—who strangely waited until Monday to address the nation about the crisis. But people of faith know that our job is not to assign blame but to pray for peace.

Here are a few ways the Christian community should pray for this chaotic situation:

1. It's OK to grieve. When I don't know how to pray, sometimes I just cry. The prophet Jeremiah wrote: "For the mountains I will take up a weeping and wailing ... because they are laid waste so that no one passes through" (Jer. 9:10). It's okay to weep over injustice or human pain. Cry for the people of Afghanistan who have lost loved ones, homes, businesses and hope of a better life. And weep for U.S. veterans who lost limbs or suffer from PTSD because of their service.

2. Pray for freedom to replace tyranny. One of my favorite psalms is Psalm 37, which reminds us that wicked men will not prosper forever. "Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there" (Ps. 37:10). Terrorists and criminals may gain the upper hand at times, but they never stay in control. God will always uproot wickedness. Afghanistan is one of the biggest exporters of illegal drugs in the world. Pray that the Lord will deliver Afghanistan from evil and establish a peaceful government.

3. Pray for women and girls who are especially vulnerable. When Afghanistan was under Taliban in the 1990s, girls were forbidden to attend school, and women were forced to wear burkas. Women were required to have male chaperones just to walk on a street. Makeup was forbidden; a woman caught wearing fingernail polish could be beaten; and women accused of adultery were executed publicly. Afghan women today fear a return to these harsh rules. Pray that God will raise up voices to defend human rights.

4. Pray for protection for followers of Jesus in Afghanistan. It is illegal for a Muslim to convert to Christianity in Afghanistan, and that law will likely be harsher under Taliban rule. Nevertheless, the number of those who follow Jesus, and the number of churches, has been growing there.

Reports are circulating that Taliban warriors have already begun targeting Jesus' followers and churches. Leaders are

confirming that Taliban soldiers are going house to house to demand allegiance to Islam, and those who refuse are beaten or killed. Some church leaders have already been martyred. Pray that the suffering church will grow stronger in the face of martyrdom. And pray for angelic protection for these brave believers and that they feel Jesus' presence deeply.

5. Pray for a visitation of the Holy Spirit in Afghanistan.

All of the might of the United States military could not stop the Taliban from gaining the upper hand. But our trust is not in weapons or armies. We remember Psalm 20:7: "Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord our God." God can do what man could not do. Pray for a miracle of transformation!

We must remember that in the year 1900, there were no Christians in South Korea. By 2010, 29% of the population identified as Christian. Pray for a similar miracle in Afghanistan. Pray that the gospel will spread through podcasts, videos, radio and other means. Pray for special boldness for those called to preach and plant churches in Afghanistan, even at the risk of their lives. And pray that the people (including Taliban soldiers) will encounter Jesus Christ in supernatural ways—through dreams, visions and miraculous encounters.

We pray together: Father, you don't want anyone to perish. We ask You to save and heal Afghanistan. Let the Afghan people know that You care for them. Let freedom replace dictatorship. Let kindness replace brutality. Let light replace darkness. Let the Afghan people know the joy, peace and love of Jesus Christ. Amen. {eoa}

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