

Why The President Needs Your Prayers

HERE ARE SEVEN AREAS FOR TARGETED INTERCESSION FOR OUR NATION'S LEADER.

Not long after the multiple tragedies of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush was asked what he would like Americans to be praying. His reply was revealing. He said, "That there's a shield of protection, so that if the vile ones try to hit us again, that we've done everything we can, physically, and that there is a spiritual shield that protects the country."

Clearly, Bush is a man who understands the power of intercessory prayer. He recognizes that there is a realm beyond the seen, a spiritual realm, that influences human events. He knows that prayer has power in this realm and that a praying people erect a "spiritual shield" that can withstand attacks of every kind.

This may be why our president has called his nation to prayer as much as any chief executive in American history. He is known for impromptu prayer meetings in the Oval Office and for welcoming the prayers of visiting clergymen.

He is a man who knows that without God he is nothing. As he once told some visitors to the White House: "You know, I had a drinking problem. Right now I should be in a bar in Texas, not the Oval Office. There is only one reason that I am in the Oval Office and not in a bar. I found faith. I found God. I am here because of the power of prayer."

Both because Scripture commands it and because the leader of our land requests it, American Christians should pray regularly for President Bush—perhaps now more than ever. We

are heading into an election year, our young men and women are fighting on far-flung battlefields such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and our economy is in question.

In addition, our nation is spiritually in the balance, and though the subject of religious faith seems to be of fresh fascination to Americans, wickedness is also increasing and cults are making unprecedented advances. We must pray—and pray as never before—for George W. Bush.

It is important that we check our motives for prayer. Often when Christians pray about political matters, we tend to pray our own agendas rather than the will of God.

For too long the church has been the Republican or the Democratic Party at prayer. This is beneath us. We are called to be the prophetic people of God.

We must renew our faith that God governs in the affairs of men, that He guides the hearts of rulers and that He does as He wills with the peoples of the earth. We must seek to know God's will and, through prayer, make it a reality on Earth just as it is a reality in heaven.

This means more than praying for a certain political agenda or candidate to prevail. It means employing the power of prayer to fulfill the will of God on Earth.

How should we pray for George W. Bush in this critical season of our nation's history? Here are seven areas of strategic focus:

1. We should pray for a deepening of Bush's spiritual life. As you can read in the book *The Faith of George W. Bush* (Charisma House), the president has had to "do spiritual growth on the run." He got serious about his Christian life just before helping his father with his race for the presidency in 1988.

Immediately afterward, George W. became the owner of the Texas

Rangers. Within a few years, he became the governor of Texas and the president of the United States, all without seasons set aside for spiritual growth. He has had to get to know his Lord in the press of events. True, he prays and reads both the Bible and Oswald Chamber's *My Utmost for His Highest* (Discovery House) nearly every day, but there is certainly much ground to be made up.

We should pray the words of Ephesians 1:17, that God will give Bush a "spirit of wisdom and revelation" (NKJV) so that he can know Jesus better. We should pray for a fresh hunger for God's Word and for strong Christians to surround the president and challenge him.

2. We must pray for Bush to have a pure heart. The president is about to enter an election season that promises to be bruising. He is going to be attacked viciously. Critics will treat his faith as political window dressing, his policies as failures and the president's intelligence as sadly lacking.

It would be natural for Bush to fight back in bitterness. But there is a higher realm for him, and we should pray that he finds it. He has to be willing to look honestly at criticism and see his critics as the unpaid guardians of his soul.

Yet he also has to know what criticism is false and how to discard it without holding rancor toward anyone. Bitterness will only diminish him. We should pray that Bush allows God to examine his heart, draw him to repentance, help him forgive others and set a guard over his mouth.

3. We must pray for Bush to hear wise counsel. The president has many people giving him advice. Some of it is good, and some of it is disastrous. The Bible tells us that in a multitude of counselors there is safety and that when a country is in rebellion, it has many rulers with many visions (see Prov. 11:14; 28:2). We must have one ruler, and he must know the difference between the wise and the foolish advice he

gets.

We should pray that Bush has wise counselors and that he knows the leading of the Spirit himself. He has shown repeatedly that he hearkens to his inner voice, but we must pray that his hearing becomes more acute and that he knows how to test what he hears against Scripture and against the wisdom of God.

4. We must pray that Bush knows how to handle public attention to his faith. When asked who his favorite philosopher was, the president said, "Jesus, because He changed my heart." In a thousand similar statements, he has been bold to affirm his faith.

But his advisors are concerned about his openness. Bush's critics see his faith as political and shallow, and his fans sometimes unwittingly present him as a pawn of preachers. As one religious leader told the press when he emerged from the White House, "This president is with us. He will do whatever we say." The president's advisors cringe when they hear such reports, both because they are untrue and because they make him vulnerable to criticism from his political opponents.

We have to pray that the president's advisors don't force him to downplay his faith so much that he loses who he really is. At the same time, he needs wisdom to be able to tell the truth in a way that will not give his critics ammunition.

We need to pray that Bush will be a bold man of God who is wise in the public presentation of his faith. After all, he is not Preacher in Chief. He is the president and a man of faith. Determining how to live out these dual roles is a challenge for him, and we should pray that he seeks God for the path to follow.

5. We must pray that Bush knows how to handle the mixture of faith and public policy. Many of the issues before the president are theologically charged. One such issue is the status of Israel and his support for a Palestinian state.

Another is abortion. Others include social welfare, gay marriage and political ethics—all issues that involve conflicts between values and theology. For each of these, the president has to consider first his own beliefs and then those of the people he serves.

We have to pray that Bush doesn't lean on his own understanding but acknowledges the Lord in all his ways. He needs insight beyond what he now has to confront these issues.

Some of his decisions may cost him politically. He has to know the mind of the Lord and have the courage to sustain the political fallout. It is easier to withstand opposition when you know you have done the right thing. Let's pray the president does the right things as God sees it.

6. We must pray for a strengthening of George W. Bush's marriage. Clearly, the president loves his wife. During his father's presidential campaign, George W. insisted on never being gone from home more than one night at a time. He once was on a plane with a congressman and a senator, both of whom were gossiping about how they kept their girlfriends from their wives and the press. Bush listened for a while and suddenly said: "I sure am lucky to have Laura. Let's toast Laura." So, the two adulterous national leaders joined Bush in toasting Laura, the librarian from Texas.

The pressure on a presidential marriage is immense and beyond understanding by those outside the White House. We should pray for the Bushes to have an even more tender heart toward each other. We also should pray for them to know how to find time for each other and how to maximize the moments they have together. Wouldn't it bring a unique blessing on our land for our president to actually model not just marital fidelity but marital joy to a nation with such tragic divorce rates?

7. Finally, we must pray for Bush to do the will of God without political restraint. The president once told a group

of religious leaders who gathered in his office: "I'm not after the am here, and I am in this room sharing concerns because someday I am going to stand before God, and I want to hear Him say, 'Well done!' I hope that's why we're all here."

This desire to please God seems to be very much at the core of Bush's heart. He may soon find, particularly if he is allowed a second term, that he will have new opportunities to do God's will against the threat of political backlash.

We should pray for the president to have courage—the kind of boldness fueled by faith that enables him to defy opposition to do what he knows is right. He will need to keep his vision fixed on the eternal, on hearing God say "well done" when he has finished his life.

He will also have to be so numb to the stinging opinions of men that he will be free to rise above political expediency in pursuit of greater vision. We should pray these things so that Bush achieves everything he has been positioned to accomplish. We want to be able to say of our president what was said of David in Acts 13:36—that he fulfilled everything God intended for his generation.

We are living in a unique moment in history. Events that will shape generations to come are being determined at this very moment. The most powerful man in the most powerful nation on Earth is George W. Bush, and much of the story of our time will be decided by his actions.

We do not want God to count it as a sin against us that we did not pray for the leader of our land and his impact on the world. May the Lord make the church in America the House of Prayer she is called to be, and may the story of our generation be rewritten as a result.

Stephen Mansfield is a former pastor and the author of *The*

Faith of George W. Bush (Charisma House).