THE BIBLE COMMANDS CHRISTIANS TO PRAY FOR ELECTED LEADERS... BUT HOW?

America is facing a spiritual crisis. We've drifted from the God that made our nation the greatest in world history—and we've rejected the biblical principles that produced the unprecedented freedom, peace, and prosperity experienced by this country over the last 250 years. To make matters worse, our public officials have forgotten that they are ministers of God who are called to lead our state and nation under God and according to the requirements of biblical justice. Put simply, we've ignored the biblical promise: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD!" (Psalm 33:12).

This sad state of affairs should drive us to our knees in prayer. In fact, the Bible commands every Christian to pray for their government and its leaders, both in good times and bad. But too many Christians overlook this biblical mandate altogether. They pray for their own needs and the needs of their family members, friends, and local churches—but they forget to pray for their government officials. And even when Christians understand their biblical responsibility to pray for leaders in government, they oftentimes aren't sure how to pray effectively.

Matthew Henry (author of the bestselling Bible commentary in the history of the English language) explained that the pattern set forth in 1 Timothy 2:1–2 teaches Christians how they should pray for those in authority. In this short booklet, we provide the biblical method that Matthew Henry taught—with the addition of targeted prayer prompts and accompanying Bible verses so that you can offer mighty prayers for national, state, and local leaders.

Let us as a nation join together before God—fully aware of the trials that lie ahead and the need for divine guidance.

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Idaho Family Policy Center is a non-profit Christian ministry that advances the lordship of Christ in the public square by championing God-honoring public policy, partnering with the church on cultural issues, and training statesmen to advocate for biblical values.

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IDAHO FAMILY POLICY CENTER

BIBLICAL CITIZENSHIP GUIDE TO

PRAYING FOR GOVERNMENT

It is a great privilege – as well as our responsibility – to pray for our government leaders.

BILLY GRAHAM

WHY DO WE PRAY?

We're often asked what ordinary people can do to turn our nation around. Our response is always the same. **We're convinced that our most important responsibility as Christian citizens is to pray for government leaders.**

Many Christians have limited time and resources available for biblical activism, but every Christian can and should follow the Apostle Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 to pray for their public officials:

> *First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.*
>
> 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-2

Notice that Paul tells Timothy to pray "first of all" for those who are in authority (referring to government officials). This is clearly a matter of high priority. Sadly, Christians too often neglect this divine obligation, underestimating the power of prayer. May we not forget the biblical promise: "The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect" (James 5:16).

GOD USES OUR PRAYERS TO CHANGE THE HEARTS OF ELECTED LEADERS

Scripture tells us that the hearts of kings are "like streams of water in the LORD's hand: He directs it wherever He chooses" (Proverbs 21:1, HCSB). If God can use our Spirit-empowered prayers to drive out demons and move mountains, how much more can he use our prayers to change the hearts of public officials? Is he not sovereign over all things, even the hearts of men?

God has chosen to use the prayers of his saints to advance his Kingdom and transform the world. Our leaders need God's grace, blessing, and wisdom—and it's our biblical duty to be praying for these things. Let us come boldly before the throne of grace, asking for God to guide our civil officials into right thinking and right action.

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WE'RE CALLED TO PRAY FOR GOOD AND BAD LEADERS ALIKE

It's worth noting that Paul's directive to us in 1 Timothy 2:1–2 does not discriminate between "good" and "bad" leaders. Every government leader deserves our prayers, even when they don't deserve our votes. It doesn't matter whether a public official is a Republican or Democrat, or whether they're a Christian or a non-Christian. They all need our prayers. If we have civil leaders who resist the lordship of Christ, persecute his church, and violate individual liberty, then we should be praying that God will change their hearts.

Just remember: Nothing can transform the governing philosophy of a public official like encountering the saving and sanctifying grace of Jesus Christ! Bottom line? When government is evil, we pray. When it is righteous, we pray. When it is failing, we pray. In other words, we must NEVER stop praying for our civil leaders and institutions.

WE'RE CALLED TO PRAY FOR ELECTED LEADERS TO RECOGNIZE AND FULFILL THEIR BIBLICAL DUTIES

The Bible says that government officials are "ministers" of God who are called to administer biblical justice (Romans 13:4). Likewise, government officials are called to acknowledge the God of the Bible in both their public and personal capacities: "Let all kings bow in homage to him, and all nations serve him" (Psalm 72:11). We should be praying that God transforms the hearts of our elected leaders so that they can faithfully serve Him in both their official duties and their private lives.

> *"[If] my people, who bear my name, humble themselves, pray and seek my face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land."*
>
> 2 CHRONICLES 7:14

HOW DO WE PRAY?

Paul teaches Timothy to pray for our government in four ways: petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings (1 Timothy 2:1–2). Renowned Bible commentator Matthew Henry (1662–1714) unpacked each of these categories in his *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (1708–1710). We've included his descriptions for each of these terms below. We've also included some sample prompts for each of these categories that you can use during your prayer time.

PETITIONS

Matthew Henry defines petitions, or supplications, as prayers against evil. Supplications (Greek: deésis) are specific pleas for God to prevent or stop evil from happening. We ought to pray that God either changes the hearts of our civil leaders when they don't fear God or that He removes them from positions of leadership.

PRAY that God guards them from unrighteousness. The Bible says that God hates it when leaders do evil things. Pray that God will turn their hearts toward righteousness and away from wickedness, corruption, and greed.

> *"Wicked behavior is detestable to kings, since a throne is established through righteousness" (Proverbs 16:12).*

> *"But select from all the people some capable, honest men who fear God and hate bribes. Appoint them as leaders..." (Exodus 18:21, NLT).*

PRAY that God shields them from the corrupting influences of wicked advisors and bribery. Our leaders are often surrounded with opportunists who are motivated by self-interest or nefarious designs. Pray that God insulates our leaders from evil influences—and that He protects their minds from lies and deception.

> *"Remove the wicked from the king's presence, and his throne will be established in righteousness" (Proverbs 25:5).*

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

PROVERBS 21:1, ESV

PRAYERS

Matthew Henry explains that these are targeted prayers (Greek: proseuché) asking God to bring about good outcomes. We ought to pray that God guides our leaders into doing good for the people they serve.

PRAY that they will bring the needs of our nation and our state before the Lord. The Bible says that God wants our leaders to seek the Lord's assistance and protection for the communities they serve. Pray that our leaders turn to God in prayer.

> *"O my God, lean down and listen to me. Open your eyes and see our despair. See how your city — the city that bears your name — lies in ruins. We make this plea, not because we deserve help, but because of your mercy. O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, listen and act! For your own sake, do not delay, O my God, for your people and your city bear your name" (Daniel 9:18-19, NLT).*

PRAY that they will lead righteously and promote biblically sound policies. The Bible says that God wants government officials to champion the cause of biblical justice. Pray that our leaders will faithfully punish evildoers and reward those who do good.

> *"Appoint judges and officials for your tribes in all your towns the LORD your God is giving you. They are to judge the people with righteous judgment" (Deuteronomy 16:18).*

> *"[Government] authorities are God's servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God's servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong" (Romans 13:4, NLT).*

PRAY that they defend human life and stand up for the vulnerable. The Bible says that government officials should champion the rights of the defenseless and the needy—and today, the most vulnerable members of our society are the preborn, the terminally ill, and the aged. Pray that God gives our leaders courage to protect those who can't fight for themselves.

> *"Provide justice for the needy and the fatherless; uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute. Rescue the poor and needy; save them from the power of the wicked" (Psalm 82:3-4).*

PRAY that they will protect religious liberty. The first protection listed in the Bill of Rights is the freedom to share the Gospel and live according to biblical convictions. Pray that our leaders support the ability of Christian believers to worship freely, speak boldly, and live faithfully.

> *"Then he said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation'" (Mark 16:15).*

PRAY that they secure individual property rights. The Bible says that one of the primary responsibilities of government officials is to guarantee the individual right to acquire, use, and dispose of private property consistent with ordered liberty. Pray that our leaders encourage the full enjoyment of private property by punishing theft, maintaining a free market, and avoiding confiscatory taxes.

> *"Do not act unjustly when deciding a case. Do not be partial to the poor or give preference to the rich; judge your neighbor fairly" (Leviticus 19:15).*

> *"Didn't [your property] belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?" (Acts 5:4, NLT).*

INTERCESSIONS

Matthew Henry defines intercessions (Greek: enteuxis) as prayers for others. We ought to pray for God to intervene in the lives of our government officials both for their own good and for the good of the communities they serve.

PRAY that they will be receptive to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and transformed by the Holy Spirit. The Bible calls government leaders to honor God and walk in obedience to Him—both in their private lives and their public duties. Pray that God captures and revives the hearts of our public officials so that they may bear the fruit of faithfulness.

> *"So now, kings, be wise; receive instruction, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with reverential awe and rejoice with trembling. Pay homage to the Son or he will be angry and you will perish in your rebellion, for his anger may ignite at any moment. All who take refuge in him are happy" (Psalm 2:10-12).*

> *"God our Savior ... who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth..." (1 Timothy 2:4).*

PRAY that God strengthens their families. The Bible says that the families of government leaders are vulnerable to attacks because of their public positions. Pray that God blesses their marriages and protects their children from harm.

> *"Unless the LORD builds a house, its builders labor over it in vain" (Psalm 127:1).*

THANKSGIVINGS

Matthew Henry defines thanksgivings (Greek: eucharistia) as appreciation shown to God for mercies already received. We ought to express gratitude to God when government leaders honor Him and rule well.

THANK God for our godly system of government. Because our founding fathers and succeeding generations of Americans built our constitutional system and aligned our laws with biblical truth, we've experienced the blessings of freedom, peace, and prosperity.

> *"He makes nations great, then destroys them; he enlarges nations, then leads them away" (Job 12:32).*

THANK God for our godly leaders. We should thank God when our elected leaders acknowledge God, rule in fear of Him, and promote biblical justice.

> *"When the righteous flourish, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, people groan" (Proverbs 29:2).*

"Surely we can agree to pray for our leaders like the Bible instructs us.... I encourage all our people to do the same and trust the Lord with the rest."

PASTOR ROBERT JEFFRESS