

Praying Wisely For Your Country

Mike and Sharon are Americans living in Central Asia. They serve the people of that country, and our Lord Jesus.

In their *July 2009* letter to supporters they asked this:

Pray for the elections to be held on August 20th. That God would raise up a righteous man to lead the country, that people would have courage to vote, and that they would be protected from harm as they do. Pray for a fair and honest election, and that people would feel they have been treated fairly. Pray against rioting and violence.

Should we actually ask God for that? Is that a request we have any confidence God wants to grant? In other words, does the Bible sanction prayers:

For righteous leaders;

For people to have no threats to their welfare and vote;

For elections to be honest.

For people to be protected from harm, both when they vote and from their leaders.

Obviously Mike and Sharon care for the people of that country; they *want* what is best for their welfare.

But how do they or we *know* what is best for their country?

What does God want for your country, wherever you live? Are we supposed to sit by and watch things deteriorate around us? How do Mike and Sharon presume to know what God wants for their country?

These are important questions. We all live in countries. Our quality of life in them matters to us. No one relishes intimidation at the polls, and political corruption. Most people in the world want to live in peace and tranquility, be treated fairly, with freedom from riots and corruption to do what they want.

How should you pray for your country? It's a wisdom issue:
The Bible answers this question in at least three ways:

1. Praying Confidently

There are two bases for praying confidently for your country.

First, we know how to pray because God tells us in his word what he wants for nations. We're going to look at many Proverbs that speak about nations—what makes them great and what hurts them. Therefore, we are on solid ground asking God for things he has clearly revealed in his will.

Second, we ask because we know he is in control, or prayer would be pointless. He is Lord of the nations:

Rev. 1:5 Jesus, the ruler of the kings of the earth

Ps.47:7,8 For God is king over all the earth; God reigns over the nations

Ps. 22:28 the Lord rules over all the nations

Prov.21:1 The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord: he turns it wherever he wishes.

They may not do what he wants them to, but they should.

Every ruler and nation ought to be humble before God:

Is.40: 15, 17 behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales...all the nations are as nothing before him, they are regarded by him as less than nothing and meaningless.

Every ruler, government and nation exists, ultimately, at God's pleasure and for his purposes.

We often don't know what those are until decades or even centuries later.

Rom.13:1 *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*

1 Chron.29;11 *Yours is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours O lord is the kingdom, you are exalted as head over all... you are the ruler of all things...*

Daniel 4:35 *All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does what he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done.'* (pagan King Nebuchenezzar of Babylon)

Psalm 148:11 *Kings of the earth and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth...let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above heaven and earth.*

2. Praying Generally

The most general prayer folks tend to offer is probably “God bless America”. The sentiment is great but it is really too vague to carry much significance for us:

What that’s mean? How do you expect God to do that?

Would you recognize it if he did?

Are you prepared to receive blessings you may not expect?

Why should he bless our land?

Does he expect anything from our citizens for him to bless us?

Does it matter that God removed ancient Israel several times from its land for its sin?

That phrase merely begs tons of other questions. If we think it means God should protect us and grant us unlimited resources so we can do anything we want, I guarantee that is a prayer God won’t answer.

How do I know? His word tells us there are things he cares about. Therefore, the larger question is, in God's eyes, what makes a nation great?

It's not its media, movies, music, or money that makes it great. It is its righteous fiber. God wants nations to reflect his nature in righteousness.

Prov. 14:34 *Righteousness exalts a nation.*

If that is true, does it follow that wickedness is bad for nations? Without a doubt!

29:16 *When the wicked increase, transgression increases; but the righteous will see their fall.*

28:28 *When the wicked rise men hide themselves; but when they perish the righteous increase.*

28:12 *When the righteous triumph there is great glory; but when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.*

Do you know anyone who wants bad, oppressive, unrighteous government, that steals from you, lies and cheats you, abuses you, won't protect you, takes what is yours? Of course not.

29:2 *When a wicked man rules, people groan.*

God desires that people in nations have freedom to worship and live in peace.

1 Thess. 4:11 *and make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands...*

1 Tim.2:1-2 *First of all, I urge that entreaties and prayers and petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity*

Ps. 125:5 *let Israel have quietness and peace*

3. Praying Specifically

Proverbs speaks of nations in terms of three categories: its laws, its leaders and its people.

a) laws

One of our culture's misunderstood ideas is, you can't legislate morality. But legislation IS morality. Whatever is legislated is to be enforced as law that governs citizen's actions, supposedly for everyone's welfare.

I think what people mean by that is, one of two things:

Either, don't force your laws on me, especially the ones I don't like.

Or it means, you can't make people obey laws.

With that assertion we completely agree.

And what can laws do?

While they don't change hearts, which is one reason why America doesn't have laws forcing you to be a Christian, our founders created a law system giving people freedom to be Christians, or not.

What about the other concern: don't force your laws on me. We have to maintain, every land needs laws or anarchy ensues. The only question is, who determines what is good law? In other words, anytime a culture says what is right or wrong, it needs to appeal to some authority to do so.

Is there a source of laws that transcends lands and time?

Our founding fathers said there are fixed laws that are always right because they come from a Lawgiver, God, who never changes.

Proverbs 14:34 bears that out.

Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is a disgrace to any people.

God alone has the right to define sin and righteousness.

b) leaders

How should you pray for your leaders? Pray that they do what God wants them to do, and for the right reason.

Right reason?

God puts them there; they are accountable to him

Rom.13:1 *For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*

Just because they are in power doesn't mean God approves of their policies.

He may have them there for other purposes. They are accountable to seek God's purposes.

Ps.2:10 *Now therefore O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling.*

What should they do?

Governments are not the answer to good cities, but they can hinder them from being good. They should simply ensure that people can live with freedom of conscience to pursue their faith.

The government can't cram religion down people's throats. Not true religion, as only God can make a person a Christian. What we pray for is the freedom to exercise our religion. The church is the enduring community. Nations come and go. Entrance into the everlasting kingdom is through the church.

They must protect their nation by understanding and ensuring justice:

29:4 *the king gives stability to the land by justice, but a man who takes bribes overthrows it.*

28:5 evil men do not understand justice. But those who seek the Lord understand all things

28:15-16 Like a roaring lion and a rushing bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people.

A leader who is a great oppressor lacks understanding, but he who hates unjust gain prolongs his days.

29:12 If a ruler pays attention to falsehood, all his ministers become wicked.

Justice, of necessity, requires the punishment of evil doers

Rom.13:3-4 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same, for it is a minister of good for you. But if you do what is evil, be afraid, for it does not bear the sword for nothing, for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.

1 Peter 2:14 ...submit to the king or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

Pray your leaders are this, or that they be removed.

Pray for God to raise up leaders who honor him.

Ask God if you should enter the political realm.

Tell your leaders your concerns.

Most insiders will tell you that the currency in government is power. Power corrupts.

Pray for leaders to be humble because power corrupts: this is a temptation even for the most godly people in history. King David failed to heed:

Dt.17:18f he shall read it all the days of his life...that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment

c) people

1 Tim.2 tells us we should pray for righteous laws and good leaders.

Should we do more than pray?

Yes!

We should live to bless our cities.

Governments are limited in what they can do for people's spiritual wellbeing.

Mike and Sharon's newsletter ended with these words:

Although we do believe God uses the military and raises up leaders for his purposes, we also know that the situation in our country will never really change or become good until the hearts and lives of people change. Only the prince of peace can bring true peace and justice and righteousness.

The church needs to have a vision to bless its city.

Prov.11:10 When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; And when the wicked perish, there is glad shouting.

Prov.11:11 By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted. By the mouth of the wicked it is torn down.

Jeremiah 29:7 And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.