

Question: "How and why should we pray for our leaders?"

Answer: The concept of praying for our leaders is not unique to democratic nations, and it did not begin with the United States' National Day of Prayer. The Bible contains many commands to pray for our leaders—national and local, secular and religious.

Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:1–4, “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” God told the Israelites in exile to pray for Babylon: “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7). Romans 13:1 says, “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” Paul requested prayer “for all the Lord’s people” and for himself that he would speak the gospel boldly (Ephesians 2:18–20).

Prayer is important. And it seems the Bible makes special mention of praying for those in positions of authority. Such authorities include government officials (international, national, and local) and pastors, church elders, school boards, school principals, employers, and the like.

We do not pray for our leaders simply because we are commanded to. Praying for them makes practical sense. Our leaders can affect the conditions we live in and have an impact on our families, our churches, our workplaces, our cities, and our countries. When those in authority are obeying the will of God, it is easier to “live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Timothy 2:2). When evil men are in authority, our prayers for them are just as needed, as illustrated by William Tyndale’s last words as he was being burned at the stake: “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.”

Also, we do not pray for our leaders merely for our own benefit. Leadership can be a tiring task. James 3:1 says, “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” Leaders carry a degree of responsibility to their followers. They are often the targets of criticism and the go-to people in a crisis. If they are leading well, they are living their lives in service. We pray for them because we recognize the greatness of their task and because we are grateful for their willingness to lead.

So how should we pray for our leaders? First, if we are uncertain that they know Jesus, we should pray for their salvation. But whether or not our leaders are Christians, we should pray that God will guide them as they guide us. We should pray that they be wise and discerning and surrounded by helpful advisors. We know that God has placed our leaders in authority over us (Romans 13:1), and we can ask Him to use them as He will. We should also pray for their protection. When praying for pastors or ministry leaders, we can pray for them to have strength in the midst of spiritual warfare and to remain encouraged in the Lord. We can pray for their families, who often feel scrutinized and bear an extra load.

Briefly stated, we should mention our leaders before God in prayer and ask Him to have His way in their hearts, to support those around them, and to use their leadership to benefit their followers.