

Praying as a Church for the World and Your City

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If God rules over kingdoms, then kingdoms are our concern; this is true for our immediate kingdoms—our nation, state, and city—as well as kingdoms all across the globe.

This truth should color our prayer lives, such that we offer requests to God for things both near and far. We should discipline ourselves to pray both for the world in general and our city in particular. What follows are a few reflections on how to do just that.

PRAYING AS A “WORLD CHRISTIAN”

Many years ago Daniel Fleming wrote a book called *Marks of a World Christian*. By “world Christian,” Fleming meant someone who recognizes that God rules the kingdoms of the world. A world Christian is someone who takes a vital interest in the worldwide work of God and prays for the unbroken advance of God’s kingdom. To put it another way, “World Christians are day-to-day disciples for whom Christ’s global cause has become the integrating, overriding priority.”

Throughout the history of the church, biblical Christians have always been world Christians. Their ministries have been like Jeremiah’s ministry, which spanned the globe. He was appointed “over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant” (1:10).

John Chrysostom (347-407 a.d.) was also a world Christian. The great preacher of Constantinople long prayed for the conversion of the Barbarians in the Balkans. When he sent missionaries to evangelize that region he said, “We have a whole Christ for our salvation; a whole Bible for our staff; a whole Church for our fellowship; and a whole world for our parish.”

MY OWN EXPERIENCE WITH “WORLD CHRISTIANS”

Personally, I lived among world Christians during my internship at Gilcomston South Church in Aberdeen, where Reverend William Still served as minister for over half a century (1945–1997). For two hours every Saturday night, 60 or 70 Christians gathered at Gilcomston to pray for the worldwide progress of the gospel. They began by praying all the way around Scotland, then through the British Isles, and then off to some other continent. Even after two hours of prayer, Mr. Still often closed the meeting lamenting that some continent or another had been left unprayed for.

Back in 1992 it was typical for a member of that church to thank God for the way he had brought down the Iron Curtain of communism in eastern Europe. From the way they prayed, it was clear they believed their prayers had something to do with the collapse of the Soviet Empire. I was tempted to pull one of them aside and say, “You know, it was a little more

complicated than that. The global economy had something to do with it, not to mention the arms race and the spiritual bankruptcy of communism. It took more than your prayers to pull down the Berlin Wall.”

I was tempted to say such things, but I knew better. Who is to say what part a praying church actually plays in world affairs? To go to Gilcomston on a Saturday night was to know what was going on in the world. The prayers of God’s people really are at the heart of what God is doing, and when the true history of the world is finally written, we’ll almost certainly discover that Christians like the ones in Aberdeen had a profound influence on world events.

GOD’S PURPOSE FOR ALL HISTORY & ALL PEOPLES

The missionary statesman David Bryant defines a world Christian as someone who believes that “God has a worldwide purpose in Christ that encompasses all history, all creation, and all peoples everywhere, especially those yet to be reached by the gospel.” Do you believe that? Do you believe God has a global purpose for all history and all peoples in Christ?

If you’re not a world Christian, you need to become one. Start by choosing a missionary or a part of the world to pray for in your family or Bible study. Obtain a copy of Patrick Johnstone’s [Operation World](#) to help you know what to pray for. (I have that app on my phone – be informed of your world – DT) Teach children how to traverse the globe in prayer. Take a vital interest in world news. Read the newspaper and listen to the nightly news with an eye and an ear for the church. Pay special attention to news from countries where missionaries you know are serving. You may not have the time to master global politics, but you can still become a world Christian.

Remember the bold claim of our Lord Jesus Christ: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18–19a).

Jesus Christ is Lord of Afghanistan and Albania. He is King of Zaire and Zimbabwe. There is no place in this world where Christ is not King; therefore, his people must be globally-minded people.

PRAYING FOR YOUR CITY . . . EVEN WHEN IT’S BABYLON

But we confess we’re globally-minded people who live in particular places of varying religious hostility. This situation may *feel* new, but it’s not.

For example, when the Jews were exiles in Babylon, they were at a loss as to how to pray for their new home. Yet one psalm should have immediately come to their minds:

Pray for peace in Jerusalem:

‘Prosperity to your houses! Peace inside your city walls!
Prosperity to your palaces!’ Since all are my brothers and friends,
I say, ‘Peace be with you!’ Since Yahweh our God lives here,
I pray for your happiness. (Psalm 122:6–9)

The language of this psalm echoes the language of Jeremiah 29:7, where Jeremiah tells the exiled Jews: “But 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 find your welfare.”

The people of God had long prayed for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem. But when they went into exile, shockingly, Jeremiah commanded them to use the same liturgy for Babylon.

PRAYING FOR THE POST-CHRISTIAN CITY

The same prayer should be offered for any post-Christian city. Notice four things about it.

First, **pray for the economy of the city** (“Prosperity to your houses!”). Pray for the “common wealth” of the city, asking God to bring justice to the poor and prosperity for everyone within the economic systems of the city.

Second, **pray for the safety of the city** (“Peace inside your city walls!”). Pray that citizens will be kept safe from harm and violence on the street. And pray that criminals themselves will be transformed by the love of Christ.

Third, **pray for the politics of the city** (“Prosperity to your palaces!”). Ask the Lord to grant wisdom and integrity to the authorities who govern the city. Pray for the restoration of virtue to public office.

Fourth, **pray for the people of the city** (“Peace be with you!”). Pray for the Lord’s blessing on all people and all people groups. Pray neighborhood by neighborhood, church by church, business by business, and house by house for the welfare of the city.

When I was a pastor in Philadelphia, **three times a year** Christians would gather in Center City to **take a “Prayer Walk” in the neighborhood** near our church, Tenth Presbyterian. We’d **walk the streets and ask the Holy Spirit to guide our prayers. We’d stop at apartment buildings and pray for the salvation of those who live in them. We’d stop at schools and pray for the teachers. We’d stop at businesses to pray for their owners. We’d stop at churches to pray for their ministers. We’d stop at the street corners and pray for the prostitutes. And we’d stop at the homes of Christians and pray for their ministry in the city.** (great tool with your children – DT)

Prayer shouldn’t be kept within the four walls of the church or the home. Instead, get out into the streets to pray for the peace of your neighborhood because the prosperity of any city comes through prayer.

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Editor’s note: This article has been adapted from Phil Ryken’s [commentary on Jeremiah](#) (Crossway, 2012). The eighth president of Wheaton College.