

Christians and Public Service

We have a role to play, and we should play it well.

CHRISTIANS AND PUBLIC SERVICE



A ReVision Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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A *ReVision* Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe
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Welcome to *Christians and Public Service*

Welcome to *Christians and Public Service*, part 4 of a 5-part series on the Christian and civil government. Other titles in the series include:

Two Swords
God's Servant for Good
The Limits of Politics
When Not to Obey

All Christians participate in civic life, even if they are not elected officials or public servants *per se*. We are called to be salt, light, and leaven in the public square no less than in every other area of our lives. But we cannot fulfill this calling if either we are ignorant of the opportunities and obligations incumbent upon us, or if we refuse or neglect to do our duty as we are able.

In this study we will review points we have made previously in this series, before going on to look more specifically about ways Christians can exert Kingdom influence within the civic life of their nation.

Like the other studies in this series, *Christians and Public Service* has been developed for individual or group use.

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May the Lord bless you as you take up this study of the Lordship of Christ, and how He works to express that through the right working of civil government.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Not Necessarily Evil

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Romans 13.3, 4

What's that smell?

In the minds of increasing numbers of Americans, all things political and governmental are beginning to smell rather foul.

When was the last time you participated in a conversation or discussion extolling the many virtues and positive accomplishments of people in public office, or of the government as a whole? The distance between Americans and those who govern them is growing greater day by day, and for many of the electorate, I fear, this is a matter of "good riddance." Doubtless the same is true of believers in other nations as well.

Which, to the extent this *is* true, it represents a colossal mistake and forfeiture of our Kingdom calling.

Governments, of course, can be evil. They can do horrible, terrible things, enact grotesque and abominable policies, and exercise oppression and the aggrandizement of power more than any institution on earth. But why does this happen? Is it because government is inherently evil? Is there no escaping the putridity and odium which are so often attached to politics and government?

Well, not if the Scriptures are to be believed. In the Biblical worldview, government is a far cry from a necessary evil; indeed, Paul insists that government is the servant of God for good (Rom. 13.4).

A servant for good

God created the world and all things in it "good," as we have seen. His design was that beauty, goodness, charity, abundance, prosperity, and wholesomeness should abound to every creature, because such things are consistent with His eternal character and will.

But the advent of sin at the fall of humankind injected a mean spirit of self-centeredness into the race of men. Unless this is checked, there could be nothing like a just social order, for every man would seek what was right in his own eyes, and the weak and vulnerable would always be prey to the wily and strong.

Governments were instituted by God to aid human beings in realizing as much of God's *shalom* as is possible in a fallen world. Paul taught Timothy to lead men to pray for rulers and governors, so that they might be able to rule in just this way, and so that the peace and justice of God might be the common possession of all (1 Tim. 2.1-8; cf. Jer. 29.7).

Governments have the power to suppress whatever is wicked, encourage all that is good, promote liberty, dignity, industry, creativity, and prosperity. But for this to be the case, governments must conform their practices to the ends and will of God. There has never been a perfect civil government in all the annals of human history, even in those places and times when the Gospel prevailed in a nation or state. Men are always prone to sin and not always keen to restrain their selfish desires.

When the power to rule falls into the hands of sinful people, God's purpose for government can become corrupted and government can be used in a manner wholly contrary to His good and perfect will.

The call to public service

This is why, as *The Westminster Confession of Faith* explains, “It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto” (XXIII.II). The *Confession* continues by saying that those who enter into the arena of public service “ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth.”

We can imagine that civil governments, manned by men and women devoted to such demeanor and focused on achieving God’s peace and justice for the people they serve, might be altogether different, in many ways, from what is, sadly, becoming familiar in our own nation.

Christians can and must accept a calling from God to serve in the public realm. Two excellent Biblical examples – Joseph and Daniel – can help us understand just how believers in public service might expect to contribute to bringing the peace and justice of God to those they are called to serve. In this series we’ll look at each of these men in order to discover what we can learn from them about serving King Jesus in the public squares of this world.

For reflection

1. How many different opportunities for serving in the public sector can you identify?
2. As you think about the public sector and the role of government, what are some of the primary obstacles to government serving as God’s agent for good?
3. Meditate on 1 Timothy 2.1-8 and Jeremiah 29.7. What do we mean by God’s “peace and justice”? What are some ways you might expect to see that in your community?

Next steps: Reflect more deeply on 1 Timothy 2.1-8. Who are the civil authorities for whom you should be praying? Put a list together, and share it with some Christian friends, encouraging them to join you in this most fundamental aspect of your duty in public service.

Prayer:

2 No Compromise

“How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Genesis 39.9

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Daniel 1.8

Begin here

Daniel and Joseph provide two excellent examples for Christians considering a calling from the Lord to public service. These two men, separated by nearly 2,000 years, show us how one who is committed to serving the Lord can fulfill that service in the public arena, with powerful and beneficial results.

In this series we want to ferret out a few principles for Christians thinking about – or already engaged in – public service; so we’ll be looking at Joseph and Daniel as exemplars for a brief overview of the Biblical teaching about public service.

We begin with the most important principle of all: Christians who wish to enter the public arena and serve in the halls of civil government must make up their minds that all their service, at all times, will be first of all unto the Lord. As Paul put it, “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3.23, 24).

Politics and compromise

Politics and government is the vocational arena in which compromise is celebrated as a great virtue. Indeed, politicians spend a good deal of time vilifying one another because, as they claim, their opponents are not willing to compromise for the sake of the public weal.

It is true that some kinds of compromise are allowable and useful, but compromise on matters of ultimate moral and spiritual concern must never be tolerated on the part of those who are, first of all, citizens in the Kingdom of God.

Serving on God’s terms

We see this in Joseph while he served as a house-slave in the home of Potiphar.

Joseph was a good worker. Granted, he was not given the option of entering public service, at least, not at this stage in his life. But he demonstrated no resentment, did his work excellently and without grumbling, and so gained the trust of Potiphar, who often left him alone at his home.

Potiphar’s wife, on the other hand, saw other qualities in Joseph. So she tried to seduce him. But Joseph would have none of it, avowing that his first allegiance was to God. People could do to him what they will, but Joseph set his heart to obey God, and he was not about to compromise for any reason (Gen. 39.1-10).

The same was true with Daniel.

Impressed into service in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel requested not to go beyond the teaching of God’s Word, even in so simple a matter as to the diet he should follow. He knew that King Solomon warned against the enticements of royal cuisine (Prov. 23.1, 2). Doubtless, too, the instructions of Ezekiel, Daniel’s contemporary, concerning what the people of God were to eat while in Babylon, were fresh in his mind (cf. Ezek 4.9-12).

Daniel was to honor God at all costs, and not to serve on the terms of a pagan king. It was a noble beginning to many years of productive service.

Accepting a call from the Lord to serve in civil government, at any level, in any capacity, is a valid way for believers to fulfill their service to the Lord. But they must realize, going in, that all kinds of compromises may be expected of them. It is simply how the business of politics is conducted. Some of these compromises will be allowable because they do not relate to matters of principle or morality. Very often, in seeking to get things done, trade-offs, promises of mutual support, postponing best policies for the best we can get right now will be the way to proceed. As Daniel shows us later in his career, there are limits to the kinds of compromises believers can tolerate.

And no believer should ever do anything in the way of compromise that he would not feel good about before the face of God and in the hearing of his or her constituents.

And no Christian, under any circumstances or for any reason, should compromise truth or morals for political gain. Make up your mind going into public service, or thinking about those you will support in that arena, that like Daniel and Joseph, your policy when it comes to such matters, will always be “no compromise.”

For reflection

1. Do you agree that a Christian thinking about public service should make his or her beliefs known up front? Why or why not?
2. What might be some examples of “legitimate” compromises a Christian serving in the public sector could make?
3. What would be some examples of compromise a Christian will have to decline?

Next steps: What are some areas where people in public service might be tempted to compromise beyond what God approves? Pray for the people on your list, that God would protect them from such compromises. Compile a list of email addresses for your public servants. Begin writing to them to let them know you pray for them regularly.

Prayer:

3 Start Where You Can

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. Genesis 39.1

Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. Daniel 1.19

A stage with many tiers

Our tendency, when we think about public service, is to bring to mind those most visible public servants, our elected officials, and especially those who serve at a national level. Presidents, Senators, Representatives – these are perhaps what most of us think of when the idea of public service comes to mind.

This is only to be expected, since these are the people the national media tend to thrust before our eyes most of the time.

But the public service arena is a stage with many tiers. It includes elected officials at various levels – local, county, state, and national – as well as those who serve them and those who help to put them in office.

While every opportunity for public service can be a calling from the Lord, not all such callings are financially rewarding or involve much in the way of public visibility. Serving in a political campaign, for example, is typically the work of dedicated volunteers. Most of us who sense a call to public service are not likely to end up on the *visible* tiers of the public service arena. Yet even those who do will likely have to work their way up, beginning where they can and serving as they are able.

Effective at all levels

The lesson of both Joseph and Daniel is that effective public service can be rendered at all levels, and if we begin where we can, and are faithful, God can open further doors for broader service.

Joseph began his work as a public servant in the Egyptian empire in a rather inauspicious manner. Sold by his brothers into slavery, he was taken to Egypt and sold to an official of Pharaoh's court. Potiphar made Joseph his personal house servant, attending to whatever domestic duties were appointed to him in making Potiphar's life a little easier and more orderly.

His second position as a public servant in Egypt was a step down even from that, as the situation with Potiphar's wife landed him unjustly in prison. But even there, Joseph made the most of his opportunities for serving the Lord.

It's not entirely clear what Daniel and his three friends were impressed to do in the service of King Nebuchadnezzar. The phrase, "competent to stand in the king's palace" (Dan. 1.4), may suggest some merely token presence – a way of mollifying the captive Israelites. It was often the practice of kings to bring representatives of subject peoples into their court simply to have a presence there, in an effort to assimilate or at least placate those they had conquered. Alexander the Great was perhaps the best known practitioner of this tactic in the ancient world.

Or perhaps Daniel and his friends were to be available for some "gopher" duty on behalf of the king or his court – whatever they may have required at any moment – or as liaisons with the Hebrew captives.

Get involved where you can

Believers may seek a calling from the Lord at any level of public service, as volunteers or paid professionals, for the short-term or as a career. Those who feel inclined to such a calling should begin where they can, by contacting local political officials or looking for opportunities either for employment or to volunteer. Now that campaigning has become a year-round sport for public officials, there will always be opportunities for believers to get on board in the public service arena with a party or official, or in a post or position, in line with their particular interests and concerns.

Know your convictions, and don't fear to make them known, as your ability to "minister for good" should be the driving force for your involvement.

Seek a clear vision from the Lord as to how you might be able to make a contribution to helping government fulfill its divinely-appointed mandate.

Resolve not to compromise your convictions, and take up whatever opportunity is presented as though it were the most important thing you might do at the moment to serve the public weal.

For that is surely what it will be.

For reflection

1. Choose a politician you like. Using Wikipedia and other sources, see what you can find out about how he or she became involved in public service. In how many different "tiers" of service has this person been involved?
2. Contact a local representative of one of the major political parties. See what you can find out about available opportunities for service and what they require.
3. Do you agree that Christians should be seeking a calling from the Lord, even in the lowest tiers of the public sector? Why or why not? What might you do to encourage more Christian involvement at these levels?

Next steps: Where might a Christian in your community begin to get involved in public service? See what you can find out, then share your findings with some Christian friends. Pray together about whether God might want you to become involved in public service.

Prayer:

4 Excellence in All Things

So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority. Genesis 39.4

And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. Daniel 1.20

Joseph and excellence

Christians who enter the arena of public service must determine that, whatever they are called upon to do, they will do it with all the excellence they can achieve, without sinning against the Lord.

We see this in Joseph, who was faithful, diligent, and reliable as a servant in Potiphar's house, so that the Egyptian official felt no qualms about putting everything under his authority.

Joseph continued to demonstrate excellence as he served in the prison. We read of him that "And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who *were* in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under *Joseph's* authority, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made *it* prosper" (Gen. 39.22, 23).

That same degree of excellence vaulted him into Pharaoh's chariot, bearing full authority to lead and manage the nation through a period of desperate drought and famine.

Daniel and excellence

We see the same in Daniel and his three companions.

Given a period of preparation for service in Nebuchadnezzar's court, they made the most of it. When examined at the end of the period, they were already heads and shoulders above all the other court servants in the task for which they had been prepared.

Daniel demonstrated a similar devotion to excellence throughout his career in the courts of Babylon and Persia. This put him on a course of continual advancement and growing influence. We read that "Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit *was* in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm." (Dan. 6.3).

Opportunities for glory

When we are serving the Lord, whatever we are doing, even the most mundane and ordinary task presents an opportunity to display something of the goodness, wisdom, grace, truth, kindness, compassion, justice, and mercy of the Lord.

Christians are called to glorify God in all our everyday activities (1 Cor. 10.31); presumably, this would mean that any routine task we might undertake in serving the public good, whether as volunteers or in paid positions, can be an arena for demonstrating the excellence of God.

How can we do this? What can we learn from Joseph and Daniel about such excellence, and how we may show it?

First, we must be careful always to seek the will and favor of the Lord, as both Joseph and Daniel did. We may not be able to interpret dreams, as these men did, but we can seek the Lord for wisdom to serve in ways relevant to the needs and opportunities that will arise before us each day (Jms. 1.5-8).

It's important to be up front about our faith and our convictions, so that those who would employ or engage us in public service know from the beginning that we are devoted to doing good, as Jesus did, and that we should not be expected to do anything other than what comports with the character and purposes of God.

And we must seek the Lord daily for wisdom, strength, and joy in serving Him in all our duties.

Then we must take up every task with relish, preparing diligently, learning all we can, establishing good working relationships with the people around us, presenting ourselves as their servants and colleagues, and doing everything without grumbling or complaining.

Let Christians who enter into public service understand their duties thoroughly and always go the extra mile in fulfilling them. Let our conversation be always edifying and gracious, our demeanor always above reproach, and our efficiency and effectiveness of the highest order in everything we do. Such excellence in all things will not go unnoticed.

The believer who enters into public service establishes a beachhead for the Kingdom of God in whatever capacity he or she becomes engaged. From our presence on that beachhead – in our cubicle, at our phone bank, as we fulfill whatever may be our daily tasks – we seek to radiate the righteousness, peace, and joy of the presence of God's Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18), so that we may honor the Lord with our labors and bring His presence and blessings into our work on behalf of the common weal.

For reflection

1. Define "excellence." Why should Christians always seek excellence, whatever their field of endeavor?
2. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 10.31. What are some examples of "everyday" tasks that people in public service have to perform? Do you agree that these can be means of bringing glory to God?
3. From 1 Corinthians 10.31-11.1, compile a list of the things Paul always tried to do which were part of "glorifying God." In what ways do these relate to your own calling in life?

Next steps: Using your definition of excellence (above), can you identify any public servants who seem to rise to this standard? Pray for the people on your list, that they might serve with excellence. Then write them and tell them you have prayed for them thus.

Prayer:

5 Ready with a Word of Truth

“How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Genesis 39.9

Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, “The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.” Daniel 2.27, 28

Our primary citizenship

The Christian who takes up a calling in public service must never lose sight of the fact that he or she is, first of all, a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

Seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness is *always* the first order of business every day, for every follower of Jesus Christ, in every relationship, role, or responsibility (Matt. 6.33). This does not mean that we all must be preachers, or that every conversation must somehow be turned into an opportunity for bearing witness to Jesus Christ. Jesus commanded us first to “be” His witnesses (Acts 1.8), which we will do if we pursue excellence without complaining or compromise in everything we are tasked to do, in whatever our role or position might be.

Moreover, if we work hard to make our conversations with others edifying, gracious, and characterized by civility and respect, we will soon enough find that opportunities for talking about the Lord Who has called us to this way of life will begin to present (1 Pet. 3.15).

Making the most of the opportunities

We want to be ready with a word of truth whenever a door of opportunity starts to crack open. Such opportunities may come to us in one of two ways, either with respect to our work, or as a response to our lifestyle and demeanor.

People will notice excellence in the workplace. Most will appreciate a co-worker who is eager, diligent, efficient, uncomplaining, and willing to do more than is expected.

At the same time, people will notice as we treat them with respect and civility. By learning and using people’s names, keeping our conversation and demeanor above reproach, showing ourselves to be helpful, encouraging, and affirming toward others, we can expect to raise the curiosity on the part of some of our colleagues as to what it is that makes us different.

Whenever such opportunities arise, we must be ready with a word of truth.

A word of truth: Joseph and Daniel

Again, such a word of truth may be of one of two kinds: either a suggestion directly related to our work, or a witness concerning the hope that is within us. We see each of these in Joseph and Daniel.

Joseph’s first opportunity to speak a word of witness arose when he was invited to participate in sinful behavior. Joseph made it clear, when the invitation to sin was proffered – over and over again – that he would not compromise his convictions.

Daniel’s first word of witness came during a moment of crisis. A frustrated and angry king had determined to do away with all his counselors, including Daniel, since they seemed unable to give him sound advice.

But Daniel stepped forward, as an act of faith, to offer a solution, even though he had no idea what that solution might be. Only as he sought the Lord in prayer did the Lord's word for him become clear. Then he was able to share confidently with King Nebuchadnezzar what the Lord had made known to him.

Two observations

Now let's note two things about these first opportunities to bear witness.

First, neither Joseph nor Daniel was actively seeking such opportunities. They were not planting tracts on the desks of their co-laborers. They did not display a copy of Scripture in some conspicuous place, or decorate their chariots with "Yahweh is My Way!" bumper stickers. "Praise the Lord!" was not the punctuation mark at the end of their every sentence. And they did not feel the need to preach to or pass judgment on those with whom they were called to work.

They merely lived and worked with excellence in all they did. The Lord was able to take it from there.

Note also that their introducing a word of truth into the situation was specifically related to the situation itself. They intended to show the relevance of their faith to the moment or need at hand, the common concern of everyone involved. They did not simply launch into a testimony or Gospel harangue; rather, they kept focus on the situation at hand and the people involved, and brought their faith to light accordingly.

And when it comes to injecting a word of truth into the public square, this is especially sound wisdom.

For reflection

1. What do we mean by saying that our witness for the Lord might relate either to contemporary issues or personal situations? Can you give some examples?
2. Re-read the last section in this essay (under the heading, *A word of truth*). Do you agree with the observations here? How do these words counsel you concerning your own witness for the Lord?
3. What can keep Christians, in any area of endeavor, from being ready with a word of truth to speak when a door of opportunity opens? How can we better prepare for these opportunities?

Next steps: Do you know any Christians who are active in public service? Contact each of them, and let them know you're going through this study. Ask if they would like you send them a copy.

Prayer:

6 Little by Little

*“Whom will he teach knowledge?
And whom will he make to understand the message?
Those just weaned from milk?
Those just drawn from the breasts?
For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept,
Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little.”* Isaiah 28.9, 10

Wielding the Word

I need to say a few more words about Joseph and Daniel and their example of wielding the Word of truth in the public square.

We have already seen that these men led with their lives. They made their convictions known early on and they lived and worked in a manner consistent with their professions of faith. They didn't push their beliefs on others; however, when the opportunity arose to connect their faith with a particular situation or need, they did not hold back. Again, they spoke the Word of God to the *immediate situation* and were content to let their witness extend no further, at least, not at that moment.

However, in each of these men we see a determined effort to bring more of God's truth to bear on their work as public servants, and to give more expansive and consistent witness to the Lord and His purposes.

Each of them did this gradually, here a little, there a little, each time making sure that the integrity of their lives and the excellence of their work provided a solid backdrop for their witness.

The work of the Lord in public service?

Further, each man was able not simply to testify about his faith, but to implicate and involve the people he served in the work of the Lord.

We see this, for example, in Joseph's interpreting the dreams of his fellow prisoners, and also in his hearing and interpreting Pharaoh's dream and telling him that God had shown him, Pharaoh, what He, God, was planning to do with the nation of Egypt (Gen. 41.25ff.). Joseph pointed out that God had been working in and speaking through Pharaoh, as if they were partners in some grand and mysterious plan.

The same is true of Daniel. In chapter 2 he explained to Nebuchadnezzar that God had revealed to *him*, the King of Babylon, what He, God, was planning to do in the latter days.

In a sense Daniel made Nebuchadnezzar a spokesman for the Lord by revealing and interpreting his dream. Daniel's friends further involved the king with the Lord in chapter 3 when, by their bold and uncompromised witness, they led Nebuchadnezzar to become an advocate of the Lord, and not just a mouthpiece for him.

In chapter 4 Daniel's confrontation with Nebuchadnezzar had the effect, over a seven-year period, of turning the prideful king into a fervent believer in the Lord, who published the praises of God throughout his entire empire.

Patience and persistence

All this bearing witness to the Lord, both on the part of Joseph and Daniel, took many years, was consistently grounded in and attached to immediate public and personal concerns, and was accomplished little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept. It never became the focal point of their work as public servants; rather,

their opportunities to bear witness to the truth arose naturally in the context of their daily faithfulness and diligence.

Christians serving in the public arena should prepare for a lifetime of bearing witness to the truth of the Lord. They must be far-seeing and patient; ready to speak a relevant and appropriate word, but neither preachy nor judgmental in their witness; and always careful to maintain integrity and excellence as the context from which they essay to speak on behalf of the Lord.

They should become informed, as much as possible, concerning how the Word of God speaks into matters of public policy, paying special attention to ways the Scriptures might shed light on matters of pressing concern.

They should consult with other believers – friends, pastors, writers, and thinkers – to help them understand their work as public servants from the perspective of a Christian worldview.

And they must not be reluctant, in casual conversations with co-laborers or supervisors, to comment on the relevance of Biblical teaching to matters of the moment.

The key is to be believable, relevant, gracious, and patient, and to try to make the most of every opportunity for living and speaking a Word of truth into matters of public policy. As Mordecai said to Esther, regarding speaking truth in the public square, believers serving there must be persuaded that God has put them there for just such times (Est. 4.14).

For reflection

1. Being a witness for Christ is a process and not an event. Explain the difference:
2. Meditate on Acts 1.8 and Matthew 28.18-20. Comment on “be” and “as you are going” with respect to your witness for Christ:
3. Suggest some ways that believers and their churches might support Christians serving in the public sector in their ongoing witness for the Lord:

Next steps: Every Christian participates in public service in some capacity. Prayer, communicating with public officials, participating in the political process, and voting are just a few ways that can involve every one of Christ's followers as His witnesses. In which of these areas of public service are you planning to become more involved? Talk with a pastor or church leader concerning how you might better prepare for this work.

Prayer:

7 Beachheads for Blessing

Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king. Daniel 2.49

Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, “Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know any competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock.” Genesis 47.5, 6

Seeking God’s peace

It is important that Christians who take up a calling in any of the arenas of public service keep in mind at all times that God’s purpose for civil government is that it might do good in bringing His peace and justice to the governed.

Governments do not exist as a means for personal advancement. Government serves the needs of the governed, working to ensure a just, peaceable, free, and fruitful society, where opportunities for advancing personal wellbeing are available to all.

Since God is good, and His Law is good, and since the Good News of Jesus is good, Christians serving in the public sector will want to keep everything they do within the framework of these parameters.

By thus seeking the Kingdom of God through the arenas of public service, believers may expect to contribute to the benefit of society and its members.

Paul wrote that the Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. He continued, “For he who serves Christ in these things[e] is acceptable to God and approved by men.” (Rom. 14.17, 18). The more consistent believers are in seeking the Kingdom of God through the opportunities presented to them in the public sector, the greater will be the impact for good to which they can contribute.

A blessing for our neighbors

In that respect, Christians who work in public service represent a beachhead for blessing to all their neighbors – both their colleagues and co-laborers as well as those served by their labors.

Civil government is a good and legitimate institution, ordained by God for the purpose of channeling His blessings to all people, believers and nonbelievers alike. When Christians are involved in public service in the ways we have been considering in this series, they carve the channels and lay the conduits for the goodness of God to flow through their work to the people they serve. Whether their labors be large or small, every contribution of good work establishes a beachhead from which the blessings of God’s Kingdom can break out to others.

Enlisting our friends

But, like Marines hunkered down on the beach of an enemy-held island, Christians serving in the public sector could use some reinforcements.

Both Daniel and Joseph understood the importance of making a place for like-minded others to join them in their service to God and country. Joseph had his whole family transplanted into the land of Goshen. The Israelites became a source of great productivity and wealth to an ungrateful nation and its tyrannical rulers.

Daniel made it possible for his three friends to assume places of significant service in the Babylonian empire. Their presence made his own work more effective and enhanced his witness for the Lord before the Babylonian king.

In each of these cases, Joseph and Daniel inspired other like-minded believers to join them because of the integrity of their lives, the excellence of their work, and the prudence and graciousness of their witness to the Lord.

We should expect it to be the same for us. Christians serving in the public sector should keep alert to opportunities to connect with other believers in public service, that they might pray for and encourage one another, study issues and policies together, and discuss the ways Scripture and the Biblical worldview might be brought to bear on matters of political or social importance.

At the same time, they may assist and reinforce one another in their witness for the Lord, and perhaps help recruit other qualified and called believers into vacancies in their area of endeavor.

Christians are beachheads for the Kingdom of God wherever they serve, and this is as true in the arena of public service as it is anywhere else. What God requires of all of us – like Joseph and Daniel – is faithfulness in serving Him.

For reflection

1. What do we mean by the idea, “beachheads for blessing”?
2. Meditate on Matthew 6.33 and Romans 14.17-19. What is the Kingdom of God? How do Christians seek that Kingdom?
3. Meditate on Matthew 6.10 and Daniel 2.44, 45. How would you be able to tell if the Kingdom of God was beginning to have a greater presence in your workplace? Do you have anything to contribute to this?

Next steps: Make some copies of this study for several of your friends. See if they would be willing to join you in working through it. Share a copy with your pastor and several church leaders.

Prayer:

Questions for discussion

1. Summarize the approach to serving in the public square outlined in this study.
2. All believers participate in the public square. It's not a question of *whether* we should, but *how*. How do the principles outlined in this study apply to believers as members of the electorate?
3. Comment on the principle of "little by little" when it comes to bearing witness for the Lord.
4. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study about your own participation in the public square?
5. How are you planning to incorporate that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship to help us extend our ministry and resources to others. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.