



As this 4th of July week draws to a close, consider the words of Psalm 127 addressing the nation of Israel, but words that can easily be applied to America, a country begun with the idea of freedom, surviving a revolution and a civil war and becoming the most powerful and influential nation on earth.

“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” (vs. 1) In many ways, to receive God’s blessings, a person, a church and even a nation must live a life that God can bless. Often people seek blessings from God without turning their lives toward the God they want blessings from.

How can we help turn our nation toward God?

How can we be a part of helping our church stay focused on God’s purpose?

How can I turn my own heart toward God and look for God’s blessings?

GPS for Families

GrowPrayStudy.org/family

Joshua gave the Israelites a choice, “Choose this day whom you shall serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Read this scripture to your family and discuss what Joshua meant by those words (refer to background in the July 7 GPS).

Think about what it means for your house to serve the Lord. Create a list of ways you can serve God with your family, your home and your heart. Some examples might be: pray each day for our country’s leadership; demonstrate your gratefulness for freedom; vote in all elections; discuss elections as a family; use your home as a gathering spot to build relationships with your neighbors and community; pray for your church to stay focused on God; make a list of the things we are grateful for because we live in this free country; pick a country who does not live in freedom and pray specifically for those people; take care of the things you have because many have much less; give generously to those who are in need; raise money for one of our ongoing ministries to other countries.

While it is important to remind ourselves of the blessing of living in a free country, it is also important to remember that the blessing is not in the freedom but in what we do with it. It is how we use it to bless others and how we use our homes and hearts to serve God.

MESSAGE

“Is There Still a Country to Build?”

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 7:24-27

*Rev. Mike Ramsdell, Senior Pastor
miker@firstmethodistmansfield.org
facebook.com/mike.ramsdell1
www.mikeramsdell.com*

“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”

(Psalm 127:1,2)

Benjamin Franklin’s request for prayers at the Constitutional Convention 1787

“The small progress we have made after 4 or five weeks close attendance & continual reasonings with each other-our different sentiments on almost every question, several of the last producing as many noes as ays, is methinks a melancholy proof of the imperfection of the Human Understanding . . .

In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings? In the beginning of the Contest with G. Britain, when we were sensible of danger we had daily prayer in this room for the divine protection.- Our prayers, Sir, were heard, & they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending providence in our favor.

I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth- that God Governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?”

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

God, I want to thank you for the privilege and responsibility of living in America. I have been blessed richly because you have been so generous with this country. I am grateful. God, I ask you to bless this country — who we are, what we have and how we as a nation reflect you in the world. I know we need grace, so grant us grace. I know we need wisdom, so grant us wisdom. I know we need protection, so protect us. I know we must serve you, so lead us in that service. Help me to be a person, my church to be a family and my nation to be a country that you can bless. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Today is the 4th of July, the day Americans celebrate our independence, a day considered the birthday of America when the Declaration of Independence was signed, although the Revolutionary War did not officially end until 1783 and the Constitution was not adopted until 1787.

Americans celebrate this day in all kinds of ways — hot dogs, fireworks, celebrations and sometimes patriotic and music celebrations. The question is, “Does an American who is a Christian have an additional responsibility?” In Joel, we have a passage that speaks of a different kind of celebration, one that calls for the people to repent and pray. In Joel’s time, Israel had fallen far from what God had intended, and the prophet calls for the people to gather and seriously seek God for restoration of the dream that God had for Israel when it was birthed.

Does God still have a dream for America?

.....
.....
.....

This verse is the guiding Bible verse for the annual National Day of Prayer and is a fitting word for this 4th of July week. There are few nations in the world where the founding idea was as simple as one word, “liberty.” This wonderful idea of freedom has always been the signet value for America. Yesterday, more than 300 million people celebrated Independence Day, the birth of not just a nation but the birth of a dream — liberty for all. In many ways this value still guides the nation. But liberty — freedom — has its risk; we can each use freedom for good or for ill. Galatians 5:13 records, “Use your freedom to serve one another.” If anyone chooses liberty as a selfish value, freedom is lost. But if one chooses liberty as a selfless value . . .

As you pray, pray for ways to serve your country.

.....
.....
.....
.....

When Paul writes to Timothy, the Church is young. And this new Church was learning to live in the world, to interact with it, to follow and live for Christ by biblical values and faith and, yet, understand itself in the context of the world. During this 4th of July week, what is our responsibility as we live out our Christian faith in the nation called America? The Bible says here that we should pray for all people (even non-Christians); it says we should pray for all those in high position (even those we might not have voted for); it says we should even pray for kings, those who have authority over us (even if they don’t lead the way we think they should).

Pray for the president.

Pray for other leaders, local and national.

.....
.....
.....

The people of God had entered the Promised Land, it was finally theirs after 400 years of captivity in Egypt, 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and the conquering of the land beyond the Jordan. Israel was born. The question is, would this land be theirs or would it be God’s? During this 4th of July week, let’s think about the choice that Joshua gave those people, the same choice God gives each of us, “Choose ye this day whom you shall serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Why might the best thing we can do for our country is to be faithful to God? How does my choice to live as a Christian reflect true patriotism?

Does America belong to me or does it belong to God? Do I belong to God?

.....
.....
.....
.....