

## Influencing the World Around Us

**“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it.”** (Jeremiah 29:7a)

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 29:3–7

**Song:** “Make Me a Blessing”

Prison Fellowship, a global ministry to those who are incarcerated, has found the key to social reform. Its one-year program, Prison Fellowship Academy, teaches biblical principles and a Christian worldview with amazing results. Minnesota’s Department of Corrections chapter, for instance, has seen a recidivism rate of just .08% for inmates who complete the program, compared to a recidivism rate of 40% for inmates who do not.

After Israel is taken captive by Babylon, Jeremiah tells the Israelites that God wants them to both settle down in the new land and seek peace for the place of their captivity. No doubt God wants His people to be a good influence on the pagan land during their time of captivity.

To believers today, living in a fallen world may seem like being in a foreign land. However, God has placed us in this world to be an influence in the culture by being good examples and sharing biblical principles. As we live out our faith, sharing God’s truth in our generation, we will make an eternal impact on the lives of those around us.

**Father,** help me be a good influence in the world so that others may know You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

---

April 27–May 3. **David Madsen** lives in Wisconsin with his family. He teaches English at a Christian college.

## Being Good Testimonies

**Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.** (1 Peter 2:12)

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 2:4–12

**Song:** “I’ll Tell the World That I’m a Christian”

In third grade, my public school teacher had each student in the class introduce themselves. One category on our posterboard presentations was “best friend.” My teacher later commented to my mom at a parent-teacher conference that my best friend had been remarkable: I told the class my best friend was Jesus. It was a simple but notable testimony in a secular environment.

In his epistle, the apostle Peter told the believers they were a set-apart people in this world, being called out of darkness into Christ’s light. As such, they were called to testify of God’s greatness to the world around them, not only with their words but with their lives. Peter noted that the world would see Christians’ good works and turn to God because of them.

As believers, we are called to be both set apart from worldly culture and to be witnesses of Christ to a lost and needy world. As society drifts farther from biblical truth, it is imperative for Christians to stand apart from the world’s darkness and tell others about Christ. As we do, people will both take notice of our testimony and turn closer to the Lord.

**Father,** help me tell others about You that they might be saved. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## Praying for Our Leaders

**I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.** (1 Timothy 2:1)

**Scripture:** 1 Timothy 2:1–8

**Song:** “Sweet Hour of Prayer”

After the tragedy of 9/11, President George W. Bush comforted the nation by reading from Romans 8. Soon, a group of concerned citizens realized they needed to comfort the president as well by praying for him and other government leaders. Within six months, a million believers were participating in the Presidential Prayer Team, realizing the positive difference interceding for our nation’s leaders can make.

In his epistle, Paul exhorts Timothy to pray for the king and all those in authority. Doing so would result in believers maintaining their integrity and enabling them to live in peace. Paul also noted that believers’ prayers for their leaders pleased God, who wants all people to come to know Him—even government leaders.

It may not have always been easy for believers in Paul’s day to pray for their leaders—typically ungodly men who often persecuted Christians. In the same way, believers today may not always appreciate their government leaders or other authorities. However, we are called to intercede for these leaders, as it both keeps our hearts right and pleases God. After all, our prayers may be what brings these authorities to a saving knowledge of Christ.

**Father**, help my leaders to know and obey You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## A Nation's Responsibility to God

**Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; the people he chose for his inheritance.** (Psalm 33:12)

**Scripture:** Psalm 33:10–22

**Song:** “God of Our Fathers”

As first President George Washington left office after two terms in 1796, he gave his last advice to the young nation in his farewell address. Of note was his insistence against the notion that “national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.” In other words, a good society must be fueled by godly people. The nation had a responsibility to honor God’s ways if it expected His blessings.

Psalm 33 reminds us that God’s truth endures to all generations. The psalmist notes that nations, as well as individuals, receive God’s blessing as they acknowledge this truth and honor Him. God’s eyes are on humankind, and He considers our works, for which we will be held accountable. Finally, the psalmist says that military might cannot save from enemies; only those who trust in the Lord can receive His mercy.

Christ came into the world to save people. But even nations have a responsibility before God to honor Him and obey His commands. As believers strive to influence our nation by sharing biblical truth with those around us, it is important to remember that a nation is only as strong as its reliance on the Lord.

**Father,** help my nation to honor and obey You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## True Citizenship in Heaven

**But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.** (Philippians 3:20)

**Scripture:** Philippians 3:17–21

**Song:** “When We All Get to Heaven”

When I lived in Southern Texas, my family often crossed the nearby border to visit the shops, restaurants, and street vendors of Mexico. But whenever we visited our neighbors to the south, we always made sure to carry our identification with us. After all, crossing back into our home country was easy as long as we had proof we were U.S. citizens.

In writing to the Philippians believers, the apostle Paul warns about false professors of the faith. These pseudo-believers are really Christ’s enemies, having their focus on the things of this life rather than on the things of God. Paul tells the Philippians that the end of such people is destruction. In contrast, Paul says that true believers are citizens of heaven.

Living on this earth, it is often easy for us to become entangled in the things of this life and feel too “at home” in the world. But our true citizenship is in heaven, and our hope is that one day we will go home to be with Christ for eternity. With that in mind, we can enjoy the blessings God gives us in this life as we hold onto the promise that someday soon we will be truly home.

**Father**, help me remember that my true home is with You in heaven. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

## God's Transforming Message

**The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.**  
(Jonah 3:5)

**Scripture:** Jonah 3:1–5

**Song:** “Change My Heart, O God”

Romania in early 1989 looked grim for believers: the nation's communist and atheistic leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, brutally persecuted Christians by imprisoning and killing them, bulldozing churches down. However, by the end of 1989, Romanian Christians led a revolution that overthrew Ceausescu, bringing religious liberty to Romania that proved to be the catalyst for a spiritual renewal that swept the land.

After disobeying the first time, Jonah finally submitted to God's call and went to Nineveh, a large pagan city. Jonah pronounced judgment on the wicked people, telling them God would overthrow them in 40 days. Amazingly, the entire city believed Jonah's message and repented before God. Despite Jonah's lackluster performance, an entire culture was transformed by God's message.

Sharing our faith in a decadent and godless world may not seem worthwhile. The culture is increasingly hostile to our faith and resistant to hearing the gospel. However, God cares about the people in this world, just as He cared about the Ninevites. Although we may be hesitant to carry out His command to preach the good news of Christ to a needy world, we may find that, in doing so, God's message can reach farther than we could ever imagine.

**Father**, help me to share my faith and to have a good attitude doing it. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

## Power to Transform a Culture

**“And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left?” (Jonah 4:11)**

**Scripture:** Jonah 4:6–11

**Song:** “Make Me a Servant”

When missionary Paulinus first brought Christianity to England, King Edwin of Northumbria was one of the first kings to embrace it. After Edwin became a Christian, the English people as a whole began to embrace the faith, which soon transformed the national culture and set it upon biblical principles.

After Nineveh repented and turned to the Lord, Jonah was angry at God’s mercy. God soon prepared a leafy gourd to shade Jonah but then quickly destroyed it and sent a strong blast of sun and wind on Jonah. God used this scenario as an object lesson: Jonah was glad for the gourd’s growth and angry at its destruction, and he should have been equally glad for Nineveh’s spiritual awakening and been grieved about its possible destruction. One man delivering God’s message resulted in the transformation of the city.

Sometimes believers can be unenthusiastic about sharing their faith, despite its potential to change lives. However, we can see those around us impacted for Christ by simply giving them God’s message, imperfect though we are. The key is to remember the power isn’t in the messenger but the message: God wants to save those who don’t know Him.

**Father**, give me compassion for others. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.