

Christ's Disciples Must Determine Their Wartime Path

Surely all of us may choose to cultivate a mindset of love, to pray for all people caught up in the current crisis and for God's kind of peace, and to seek to find our own sense of security in God and God alone.

Meanwhile, back in the United States, thousands of families fear for the safety of their loved ones in the military. In Iraq, mothers and fathers who have lived under the tyranny of Saddam Hussein hunker down in their homes with their children. They are too poor and powerless to flee the coming battle and can only hope they survive. Fathers and mothers and all others in both nations pray that God will keep their loved ones safe.

The larger world is in disarray. Alliances, agreements and relationships the United States worked hard to start and develop over the past 60 years are strained, perhaps broken. Whatever goodwill we enjoyed from the rest of the world in the aftermath of 9/11 is gone. Old powers and alliances have reawakened in Europe, the same ones that led to worldwide wars twice in the 20th century.

Other lesser powers such as Iran and North Korea play with nuclear possibilities. Regardless of the opinions we may hold about how the world has come to this point, we know in our hearts that the world is changing, and we fear it is on the verge of becoming more dangerous than has been the case in many decades.

We are hammered by opinions from the left and the right, by hawks and by doves, by those who would have us embark on a new kind of mission to build democratic nations even if force is necessary, by those who would have us retreat into Fortress America, and by those who would have us bind ourselves to international consensus.

When we try to make sense of it all, we discover how little we know. Who among

us can claim an intimate knowledge of the cultures that make up Iraq and the history that resulted in its current state, let alone the ability to reach into that culture, straighten it out and set it on course toward a healthy future?

Even when we turn to the Christian theory of just war, we soon discover that we do not have enough information to fill in the blanks and determine if the current crisis meets the ancient criteria. And who among us dares to claim to be so wise as to foresee all possible consequences of such a war and its aftermath?

More might be said, but my concern is to help Christian believers find a path in such a time. My suggestions are offered in humility, for I do not claim to know all the answers to all our questions. I have sought to determine what we, the disciples of Christ, might do with a sense of certainty in a time like this, with confidence that our actions are right in the eyes of God. On the basis of scripture, the long experience of the greater church and my own reflections, I offer the following suggestions.

Cultivate a Mindset of Love. In time of war, we find it too easy to learn hatred. Resist the temptation to hate even those who hate us. If you find yourself slipping into a frame of mind in which you lump an entire people into one category labeled “the enemy,” and if you catch yourself starting to say, “What kind of people could allow Saddam Hussein to rule over them?” stop and remember, “There but for the grace of God go I.”

Had you or I been born in Iraq, we might well be boarding our windows and crouching in a basement with our families, praying and hoping the coming violence somehow passes us by. Remember that Jesus Christ wept over Jerusalem, over those who rejected him, and recall his words from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Even as Jesus did what he had to do, he loved those who hurt him. We are called to cultivate such a mindset of love.

Pray. Our church has been praying for military personnel and their families. This is the right thing to do, and we shall continue to do so. In our better moments, we

have also been praying for the people of Iraq. This, too, is the right thing to do.

If war must come, for the sake of all pray that it be swiftly concluded.

Pray as well for the leadership of our nation and for the leadership of all nations, especially those in the Middle East and Europe. Nations historically make policy on the basis of perceived self-interest; pray that national leaders may learn to seek and follow a higher kind of wisdom. Pray that God fashion something good from the current crisis. And pray that we of the church be given wisdom enough to know how to minister not only now but in the days to come, regardless of the shape those days may take.

Dare to pray for peace, the kind of peace only God can provide. Forget not the vision of the Psalmist: "He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shield with fire."

Find rest in God. Surely the words of the Psalmist ring true: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." Times such as these invite us to renew our dependence upon God. We are reminded that wealth, power and privilege cannot save us from life's dangers. And perhaps we may begin to grope our way back to a child-like dependence upon God, who alone is sufficient to our needs, whether we live or die.

I recognize there are other actions each of us may choose to take. I am concerned with what the entire family of God might do with integrity. Surely all of us may choose to cultivate a mindset of love, to pray for all people caught up in the current crisis and for God's kind of peace, and to seek to find our own sense of security in God and God alone.

[Mike Smith](#) is pastor of [First Baptist Church](#) in Murfreesboro, Tenn.