

[Opinion](#)

[Guest Voices](#)



U.S. President Joe Biden walks at Dane County Regional Airport, in Madison, Wisconsin July 5, the day he gave a television interview with ABC News anchor George Stephanopoulos. (OSV News/Reuters/Nathan Howard)



by Jim McDermott

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

July 15, 2024

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

On July 5, President Joe Biden [told ABC journalist](#) George Stephanopoulos that "If the Lord Almighty came down and said, 'Joe, get outta the race,' I'd get outta the race." But, he went on, "The Lord Almighty's not comin' down."

I have to say, initially his comments reminded me of that old joke about the person told that he needs to evacuate his home because a flood is coming but refuses to leave, because he believes that God will provide. As the water rises, a boat comes to pick him up, later a helicopter. Both times he insists God will provide.

Finally he drowns. Standing at the Pearly Gates, he shouts at God, "Where the hell were you?" And God says, "What are you talking about? I sent you a warning, a boat and a helicopter. "

Many of the president's allies are [turning on him](#), his polling is [devastating](#); more importantly, he exhibits increasing frailty. Truly, some might ask, what more does God need to do?

Sometimes the true gift of prayer is just to feel the grief, pain or rage that is buried within you.

[Tweet this](#)

But at the same time, it's clear that Joe Biden is a person with a real spiritual life. When he goes to Mass or quotes Scripture, there's no sense of cynicism or propaganda to it. He's not doing what he thinks will win him votes, or telling us what he thinks we want to hear. (If anything, his public embrace of his Catholic faith has often been treated as an Achilles heel used by some to try and undermine him.) As is the case in his political life, Biden's references to God rather seem to emerge from his genuine beliefs and experiences.

Taking his faith seriously, I have found myself wondering what resources we in the church might be able to provide him in this very difficult moment. And knowing that he likes to exercise, I came up with a couple Bible passages he might look to as little spiritual exercises for his life right now.

Psalm 46:10: "Be still, and know that I am God."

It's so hard for any of us to truly stay grounded. Life is just so busy. And sometimes normal prayer, like petitions to God, only further engages our brains and reinforces our sense of disconnection.

The thing that I like about this verse from [Psalm 46](#) is that it doesn't ask us to consider anything. There's no story to imagine, no idea to mull over or wrestle with. It's an invitation to just let go and let God take care of us, to rock us like a parent does a child when they're in pain.



U.S. President Joe Biden arrives to attend a weekend Mass at St. Joseph on the Brandywine Catholic Church in Greenville, Delaware, March 4, 2023. (OSV News/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)

Like any spiritual exercise, this might kick something up, some feeling or experience that makes us consider our current situation in a new way. But it could also be like a lullaby, a line we sit with and repeat in our mind slowly like a mantra, letting God

love us.

Upon winning the election, Biden quoted from the Catholic hymn "On Eagle's Wings," which has similar ideas. If the president connects with God through music, it could be equally meaningful to go someplace private and listen to that song, let it nourish his spirit.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8: "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."

In his acceptance speech Biden also quoted this passage from [Ecclesiastes](#). It's a rich set of verses, filled with different images of life: "A time to be born and a time to die"; "a time to weep and a time to laugh"; "a time to tear and a time to mend."

I've always found something very reassuring about having all the ups and downs of our lives placed together like this. Things that seem so overwhelming on their own take on a different proportion here. It could be worthwhile to simply sit with this passage, and see if doing so doesn't put things in a fresh perspective.

It also might be worth noting any terms that seem especially moving. Of the list that Ecclesiastes offers, which affects me the most when I read it? If I allow God to be the one at the wheel, what time of life do I find myself invited into right now?

Matthew 26:36-43: The Garden of Gethsemane

I have no idea how the president currently feels, but from the outside it certainly seems like the story of Jesus in the [Garden of Gethsemane](#) might speak to him. There's the painful decision before him, a terrible cross either way. There may also be the element of feeling abandoned, his friends nonchalantly sleeping while he's in such pain.

Advertisement

As with the other readings, it could be worthwhile to simply read through the passage slowly a couple times and see what kinds of emotions it stirs up. Sometimes the true gift of prayer is just to feel the grief, pain or rage that is buried within you. Strong feelings unexpressed are like bottlenecks, preventing us from connecting with God and ourselves.

It could also be that reading this story, something else stands out — maybe we unexpectedly identify not with Jesus but the disciples; or the thing that seems most important is the cup that Jesus talks about, the way that we imagine it looks, what it contains. Believing that God is always trying to speak to us in a language we will understand, in the spiritual life we try to trust our instincts. What seems important, is.

No doubt most of us have opinions about whether Biden should continue in his candidacy for the 2024 presidential election. But looking at him as a fellow Catholic going through a time of great hardship, perhaps we can step back and treat him in the way we'd hope to be treated in our own times of struggle. I pray that he may know the loving kindness of the God who made him, the God who loves him, the God who wants to set us all free.