



A Moment's Pause: The Bible helps Obama wind down

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INTERVIEW

'I Am a Big Believer in Not Just Words, But Deeds and Works'

By Lisa Miller and Richard Wolffe | NEWSWEEK

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Barack Obama talked to NEWSWEEK's Lisa Miller and Richard Wolffe about how faith plays into his everyday life. Excerpts:

NEWSWEEK: Do you and Michelle talk to your girls about having a God? Jesus?

Obama: Well, we do, but we don't have a systematic course of study for the girls. We say grace at the table. They are inquiring minds, so whenever they have a question about God or faith, then I have a conversation with them ... I'm a big believer in a faith that is not imposed but taps into what's already there, their curiosity or their spirit.

You said you didn't hear a lot of the sermons at Trinity. How often did you go?

At the beginning, we went fairly frequently. We were single, so I'd say we probably went two or three times a month. When we had Malia, our first child, we went less frequently, and that probably continued for a couple of years, just because—I don't know if you've had the experience of taking young, squirming children to church, but it's not easy ... As they got older, we would go back a little more frequently, probably twice a month. But then I started campaigning for the United States Senate, and at that point I was in church every Sunday, maybe two, three churches a Sunday, but they weren't Trinity—because that was one of the most effective ways for us to campaign and reach out to people. So, there was quite a big chunk of time, especially during the Senate race, where we might not have gone to Trinity for two, three months at a time.

You used to travel with your Bible. Do you still do that?

Sometimes, because my briefcase gets so packed, I forget to pack it, but I often have my Bible with me. It's something that I read in the evenings and it takes me out of the immediacy of my day and gives me a point of reflection.

What do you think about the Kingdom of God? Is it attainable on Earth by humans?

I am a big believer in not just words, but deeds and works. I don't believe that the Kingdom of God is achievable on Earth without God's intervention, and without God's return through Jesus Christ, but I do believe in improvement.

What is the role of doubt in faith?

I wrote about this in "Audacity of Hope," that even after I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, that doesn't mean that I don't have doubts. I had doubts when my mother died. I have doubts every time I pick up the newspaper.

Do you pray in your personal life?

Yes, I do.

Daily?

Yeah, every day.

What do you pray for?

Forgiveness for my sins and flaws, which are many, the protection of my family, and that I'm carrying out God's will, and not in a grandiose way, but simply that there is an alignment between my actions and what he would want. And then I find myself sometimes praying for people who need a lift, need a hand.

Is there a time you have had to make a decision that was important and you called on God? Can you walk us through that?

Well, that's pretty personal. I'm not sure I'd want to walk you through that. I mean, I prayed on marrying Michelle because that's a pretty big decision, getting married. So I wanted to make sure I got that right, and I did. So, prayer worked. I prayed on running for president. That's a big decision that had an immediate impact on my family—and that I knew, win or lose, would have an impact on the country. Had I run a miserable race, that would have had an impact on the country. Should I win, that carries with it enormous responsibilities. I've spent a lot of time in prayer on that.