

# National Day of Prayer 2023: How the National Day of Prayer Can Unite the Church

Our world is marked by division and polarization. It's easy for us to talk about "those people" on the other side of our cultural, political or denominational fence. Using social media, we make judgments about people we've never met based on a few sentences.

But when we come together around Jesus in prayer, something happens. We begin to see one another as God sees us—image-bearers, worthy of dignity and respect, in all circumstances.

Today marks the National Day of Prayer, an annual observance first established in 1952 on the first Thursday in May. I believe the National Day of Prayer can unite the church by reminding us there's more that unites us than divides us.

## **Called to Unity**

In an age of "Us vs. Them," the church is called to stand as a stark contrast with the world.

The modern church isn't too different from the church in Corinth in Paul's day. During that time, Christians drew lines based on different teachers with different positions, similar to the many denominational divides of today.

Yet what does Paul say?

"Now I ask you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak in agreement and that there be no divisions among you. But be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10).

I'm not saying disagreement is wrong. Each of us should hold

fast to what we believe is most faithful to God and his Word. But unity isn't the same thing as uniformity. We have far more common ground than we tend to admit.

Jesus prayed for us, "that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You. May they also be one in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me" (John 17:21).

What does it say about our faith if the church is as divided (if not more divided) than the world? More than that, what does it say about Jesus?

## **Two Choices**

When I read Scripture, I see a clear contrast: We're either prayerful or we're prideful.

God honors his people when they humble themselves and pray (2 Chron. 7:14). Today, the same choice is before us. We can either trust ourselves—our opinions, our politicians or our positions—or we can trust in God. As Psalm 20:7 says, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God."

The world will only see unity in the church when we intentionally set aside our differences and come together. Maybe that's why Paul tells us to "*Make every effort* to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3, NIV, emphasis added).

## **Time for Us to Pray-Together**

I heard a story about two pastors who came to an annual event in my hometown on the National Day of Prayer. These pastors had regarded one another with disdain from a distance. But when they came together and prayed, they sought forgiveness and made peace.

Once a year, we have a day set aside by our government to

remind us: "There is one body and one Spirit, even as you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4-6)..

Now, more than ever, we need the National Day of Prayer. We all need to recognize the solution to our problem isn't in ourselves or our positions. The solution to our problem is Jesus. Let's pray to Him, together. {eoa}

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