

# Brunson's Release Confirms Trump's Commitment to Protect Your Religious Freedom

Just a few days ago, Pastor Andrew Brunson was released from house arrest in Turkey, where he was wrongfully imprisoned for two years. The courts declared the American pastor as guilty of spying—which he has consistently denied—but sentenced him to time served.

Brunson flew home to the United States over the weekend, where President Donald Trump met with him in the Oval Office. One of the first things Brunson did was drop to his knees and pray for Trump.

A video of the event shows Brunson laying his hand on Trump's shoulder and praying: "Lord God, I ask that You pour out Your Holy Spirit on President Trump. Give him supernatural wisdom to accomplish all the plans You have for this country." (Watch the full video of Brunson's prayer [here](#).)

Trump worked diligently to free the persecuted pastor—even to the point of imposing sanctions on Turkey. But no one should be shocked about this. Trump promised during his presidential campaign that he would pursue religious freedom for America's citizens—from the Christian baker who feels convicted about baking a cake for a gay wedding to the falsely accused minister whose only crime is sharing the gospel.

As I wrote in my new book, *Trump Aftershock*, the president made it clear even before he entered the presidential sweepstakes that he would use the power and influence of the United States to defend the interests of men and women in the faith community. Since that time he has taken an interest in the plight of Christians suffering from persecution around the world. According to David Curry, the president and CEO of Open

Doors USA, which works on behalf of persecuted Christians, religious liberty will be one of the most critical issues facing the Trump administration over the next several years. It is, he said, “the central issue that they’re going to have to deal with, whether you’re looking at it through the lens of immigration, whether you’re looking at it through the lens of terrorism.”

As Open Doors and like-minded relief agencies have pointed out, Islamic extremism is now the greatest threat to Christians in other nations. Curry said that “2016 was the worst year of persecution of Christians on record, with a shocking 215 million Christians experiencing high levels of persecution for their faith.” Governments such as North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sudan are actively engaged in the repression and persecution of believers. He added that “nearly one in every 12 Christians in the world today lives in an area or in a culture in which Christianity is illegal, forbidden or punished. And yet today the world is largely silent on the shocking wave of religious intolerance.”

Evidence that the president has taken the challenge seriously was the appointment of former U.S. Senator and former Kansas Governor Sam Brownback on July 26, 2017, as ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom. While Democrats criticized Brownback’s traditional Christian values, especially as they relate to the LGBT community, evangelicals cheered his record on religious freedom. It would take a tie-breaking vote from Vice President Pence, who serves as president of the Senate, to secure the confirmation, but the appointment received high praise in the faith community.

“Confirmation of Sam Brownback as the ambassador-at-large sends a message to the world,” said Oklahoma Senator James Lankford, “that religious freedom is a priority of the United States government.” And it signaled that the president would be an advocate for religious freedom around the world. Many in the faith community had been hoping to see more evidence of

support for religious freedom from the State Department. A few days before Brownback was confirmed, the White House issued a statement from the president saying, "Faith breathes life and hope into our world. We must diligently guard, preserve and cherish this unalienable right."

In January 2018, the Trump administration placed Pakistan on its Special Watch List because of its severe violations of religious freedom. In doing so, the administration took a stand for religious freedom around the world. It also designated 10 more "countries of particular concern." Then, in May 2018, the State Department Office of International Religious Freedom released the annual report for 2017. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who had been confirmed to his post just a month earlier, called a press conference to announce release of the new report. Subsequently Ambassador Brownback provided a special briefing on the report, which covered two hundred countries and territories.

President Trump and Vice President Pence have made a priority of maintaining an open dialogue with America's churches and church leaders, and the vice president reaffirmed that commitment in his remarks to the more than 11,000 members of the Southern Baptist Convention who attended the annual meeting in Dallas on June 13, 2018. He spoke first about the progress the administration has made, protecting life, preserving religious liberty, helping the persecuted church and standing with Israel. But those gains, he said, cannot be sustained without engaged churchgoing Americans.

During his remarks, he said, "I believe that your voice, your compassion, your values and your ministries are more needed than ever before. ... But you should also know that we recognize that the most important work in America doesn't happen in the White House or anywhere in Washington, D.C., for that matter." Then he said:

*For a president whose administration began with a monumental*

*shock wave and whose words and deeds continue to set off aftershocks around the globe, it may come as a shock of even greater magnitude that his administration has become such a strong defender of religious liberty. But for people of faith, it's really no surprise. One of the most famous events in Bible history is a story about the risks and rewards of standing for religious freedom—it's the story of Queen Esther, who risked her life to approach the throne of King Ahasuerus to explain that General Haman was lying to the king in order to destroy the Hebrew slaves living in Persia.*

*“For if you remain silent at this time, protection and deliverance for the Jews will be ordained from some other place, but you and your father's house shall be destroyed” (And who knows if you may have attained royal position for such a time as this?”After hearing the challenge, Esther said, “I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:14–16, NASB). Providentially the king listened to Esther, her people were spared, and Haman became the victim of his own conspiracy.*

The story of Queen Esther is a moving tribute to the power of loyalty and selfless courage that has been celebrated by Jewish families for countless generations. But as Gen. Jerry Boykin told me in a previous chapter, “I am absolutely convinced that he was raised up for such a time as this.” The analogy is a good one because the consequences of failure in both cases are so great.

I can offer no better statement of what I believe the Trump aftershock is really all about. Who knows whether Donald Trump has been lifted up to help this nation avert or at least delay impending disaster. He is not a perfect man, and we are not perfect people, but for many in the household of faith, President Trump has been chosen for such a time as this. The only question now is, How will America respond?

My prayer is that we respond in faith. In fact, that's the reason I wrote *God and Donald Trump* and its sequel, *Trump Aftershock*. My goal was to highlight the way God has chosen and used Trump for His purposes in the U.S. The premise of *Trump Aftershock* is that if God's used Trump's election as a metaphorical earthquake, then everything we've seen Trump do since then are the aftershocks.

I encourage you to pre-order the book now on Amazon or at [www.charisma.com](#), where you can download a free chapter. If you buy the book at that website, you'll receive a bundle of free content, including a subscription to *Charisma's* print magazine.

Listen to my podcast below to hear more about how God is using Trump's administration to further the cause of religious liberty.