

How to Shift America's Spiritual Atmosphere

Ronnie Floyd, the pastor of Cross Church in Arkansas, is president-elect of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee. Floyd is also the president of the National Day of Prayer, which occurs on Thursday. In a special chat with Charisma, Floyd addresses some of the key questions about standing together in the power of prayer.

Why have a National Day of Prayer?

If you look at American history, you quickly realize prayer was essential to our Founding Fathers and instrumental for our history as a nation. In fact, you could probably trace every significant moment in American history, from the first Continental Congress when the state delegates debated whether to declare independence from Great Britain and to the Civil War and beyond, by the prayer gatherings and declarations our leaders issued. Prayer is part of our DNA as a nation. So, we don't have a National Day of Prayer because a few people wanted to impose a religious observance on America. We are following a long, long tradition in our history that has seen us through the thick and thin and that we must preserve for ourselves and future generations.

How can prayer unite us?

I've always believed prayer creates the space where Americans can come together and recover their sense of unity. This is because prayer puts things into perspective. When we bow our heads in prayer, we recognize there is something or someone greater than us, greater than our differences and our petty arguments we busy ourselves with every day. Prayer reminds us of our shared need for God's grace and mercy on our lives. It humbles us and makes us realize that at the end of the day, we

are all in this together. And it's in that state of humility that we can find unity.

How does prayer affect our country's spiritual atmosphere?

If every person in America—especially our leaders—prayed before they started their days and interacted with one another, our country would look very different than what it looks like today. So much of the hatred and hostility we see and read about daily comes from selfishness and pride. Prayer is the ultimate test of humility because it requires us to bow down spiritually—and at times literally—before God and recognize that we need help. And if He can show grace to us and love us as broken as we are, we should be able to show grace to and love one another.

What are the specific prayers we can pray on May 2 and beyond?

The theme for this year's National Day of Prayer is "Love One Another." It comes from Jesus' words in John 13:34, "Love one another. Just as I have loved you." Our biggest prayer is for a love one another movement to grow in America—from our homes and our churches to the Capitol, the White House and our nation as a whole. We are praying for love to reign supreme across all ethnicities, denominations, communities and political persuasions.

Our team has also prepared a prayer guide that people can use in their gatherings on the National Day, and I have written a prayer I will pray over America during our national observance.

How was the theme determined?

When determining the theme for the National Day of Prayer, we always start with this question: What is the heart of God for the National Day of Prayer?

I asked myself this question the day after the 2018 National

Day of Prayer and—out of personal conviction—I fasted and prayed for 21 days. As God moved in our hearts, the theme of love started to emerge, and we were reminded of how important it was for Jesus for his disciples to love one another. He said love is the one quality that we would be known for. Not our creeds or our denominations or songs or anything else. Love is what sets followers of Jesus apart. But love is painfully absent in America today, and if we want a transformational change in our society, we must return to Jesus' words.

We've had many attacks on houses of worship around the world recently, and Christians are criticized for offering prayer. How can prayer actually make a difference?

I've said it before, and I will repeat it a thousand times: prayer is not inaction—it is our greatest action. Prayer is not a passive affair. Yes, when you pray, you are asking God to do the miraculous, to do what only he can do. But at the same time, prayer changes our hearts, reminds us of who God is and the mission that he has given us to be his people on earth—and that should always move us to action.

I have also said for years and years: God can do more in a moment than we can do in a lifetime. As I wrote in the new revised and expanded 20th anniversary edition of my book *How to Pray: Developing an Intimate Relationship with God*, when we pray, we depend on God. When we do not pray, we depend on ourselves. Prayer is surrendering to God and trusting that he will care for us and our needs.

Anything else you'd like to add?

You can still get involved in the National Day of Prayer. We have free tools available at so you or your church can host a prayer gathering or find one nearby. You also can watch the livestream of the National Observance on our website and our Facebook page, which will be held Thursday at 7:30 p.m. ET.

Pastor Andrew Brunson and his wife Norine, Rev. Anthony B. Thompson, Rev. Samuel Rodriguez and others will join us at the U.S. Capitol in Washington for a powerful evening of prayer for America. You don't want to miss it.

No matter where you are, you can be a part of the National Day of Prayer and join millions of Christians in prayer for America.

Listen to the podcast for an interview with Ronnie Floyd.