

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

Have We Forgotten?

Forgetfulness is a great human weakness, especially when it comes to the sacrifice and costs that have been made for privileges we presume to be “rights” today.

Ronald Reagan, our 40th president, once said, “If we ever forget that we are one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under.”

Living several millennia before President Reagan was a man named Moses. Moses authored the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—and he, too, was a great political leader.

The core teaching of Moses can be summed up in one verse: *...take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*

—Deuteronomy 6:12 ESV

This is a great warning that extends to us today: Don't forget the Lord!

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD...

—Psalm 33:12 ESV

Leaders throughout our history have challenged Americans to remember God by calling Americans to pray. Since the early 1950s, U.S. Presidents have issued annual proclamations making the first Thursday in May a national day of prayer. Today marks the 60th anniversary of this national gathering. In addition, there have been other times and moments when such proclamations have been given by Washington, Lincoln, and even as recently as 2001, when President George W. Bush proclaimed Sept. 14, 2001, as a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance following the terrorists' attacks on our nation.

Last year, a legal challenge was posed to this practice with great debate and hesitation. But on April 19, 2011, the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals issued a unanimous decision, determining that the presidential proclamation imposes no requirement on a person and therefore, no one is hurt by a request that can be declined.

Chief Justice Frank Easterbrook, a Reagan appointee, wrote in the court opinion: “Those who do not agree with a president's statement may speak in opposition to it, they are not entitled to silence the speech of which they disapprove.”

Today, we have the freedom and the obligation to gather in prayer for our nation. But for all that can be said about prayer and proclamations, the real impulse and call to this day is not from men; it is from God.

God Invites Us to Seek Him in Prayer

Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.

—Jeremiah 33:3 ESV

God invites us to call upon Him with our needs, questions, fears, dreams, etc. But this invitation also includes calling to Him corporately as a nation.

**God Instructs Us to Prayer as Citizens**

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. —1 Timothy 2:1-2 ESV

Prayer is not so much a civic responsibility as a clear, biblical instruction for us as citizens. For those of us who believe in Jesus Christ, this land is not our true “home-land,” for we have a greater and brighter hope in heaven. However, for the present, this is our place of occupation and we have a responsibility before God to live decidedly and distinctively for Christ in this land.

Prayer is more than an *accessory* to our daily lives; it is to be the *priority* in all we do.

To quote the great “theologian,” M.C. Hammer, “We got to pray just to make it today!”

You may be asking: How do I call on God? Can my prayers really make a difference? What can I do that matters today?

Let's consider God's “calling plan.” I'm not talking about AT&T, Verizon, Sprint or Vonage. Through God's “calling plan,” you can have a direct link anytime, anywhere, day or night that doesn't involve tunnels, towers, blocks, or cell phone reception.

A-C-T-S . . . Prayer involves:

Adoration. Our trust is not and must never be in our government, but in God who rules and reigns. *Adoration* acknowledges who God is and what He can do. Many times there is more emphasis on *words* and *posture* in prayer than *humility* and *dependence*.

Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

—Psalm 46:10 ESV

Prayer is a form of worship as we recognize who God is and give honor and praise to His name. We can praise God for His righteousness, His justice, His love, His forgiveness, His peace, etc.

The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. —Psalm 103:19 ESV

If we are not careful, our tendency will be to put our trust in wrong sources as we attempt to gain strength for life. We must recognize and acknowledge who God is as we approach Him through prayer.

Confession. *Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.* —Isaiah 59:1-2 ESV

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

—1 John 1:9 ESV

Confession involves agreeing with God concerning our sin and guilt, and taking responsibility for our offenses: murder, theft, racism, pornography, arrogance, greed, indulgence, immorality, abortion, divorce, adultery, abuse, homosexuality, forgetfulness, etc.

In Romans 13, we are admonished to obey laws, pay taxes, show honor, etc. As Americans, we have the opportunity to express our voice through our vote, but I fear many in America are apathetic with a “who cares” mentality. Do exercise your right to vote?

The curse of America may also be her blessings—the temptation to trade material values and personal indulgences for spiritual virtue and truth. The America of the 18th century is not the America of the 21st century. Rather than being a society shaped by a collective value system of moral absolutes, we are a people trapped in the confusion of moral relativism. America is a nation governed not by choice, but by law for which we no longer recognize its spiritual or moral base. The relativism of our day—a philosophy to where there are no absolute margins—has destroyed not so much the law, but the hearts and minds of our citizens.

“Decadence is the decay that results from the hollowing out of meanings. When decadence is in full swing, meanings are not simply hollow, but we exult in the gutting of them. This we call autonomy, liberation, freedom.”

—Richard Neuhaus

Thanksgiving. Gratitude rather than greed should direct our motivation to pray.

Let me encourage you to identify places where you can make a positive difference in our nation and community. The healthiest and best hope for our nation come from those who are eager and willing to serve and to support the needs of others without the motive of profit or gain.

“It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.”

—Bishop Sheen

Supplication. *...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

—Philippians 4:6 ESV

Don't expect a nation to be moral without the Gospel. *... and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* —John 8:32 ESV

The only hope for the future of America is the same that was her light in days gone by—the influence of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Gospel!

The Church revolutionized the hearts of the first century and ultimately witnessed the demise of the Roman Empire. Through the rise and fall of nations, the Church has survived from that time until now through days of hostility and, at times, harmony.

We cannot fully determine what will happen in America until we witness what happens in and through the church.

When you take the A-C-T-S of prayer and pray for our nation, you can stand, place your hand over your heart and say,

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

This is more than a motto; it is a life commitment of a true American patriot!

“While the storm clouds gather far across the sea,
Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free.

Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,
As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer:

**God bless America, land that I love,
Stand beside her and guide her
Through the night with a light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies,
To the oceans white with foam,
God bless America, my home sweet home.
God bless America, my home sweet home.**

—Irving Berlin