

# A CALL TO PRAYER

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## Psalms 11:4–5

The cold-blooded massacre of nine Christians attending the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the oldest black congregation south of Baltimore, has shocked all of us. I am, as you are, deeply saddened and troubled by this senseless savagery. In trying moments like this, it is natural for us to experience a whole gamut of emotions—anger, despair, rejection, sorrow, sadness, hatred, hopelessness, revenge—to name a few.

While we mourn the death of these precious souls, it helps us to keep in mind that what has happened in South Carolina is a symptom of the human heart that is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). Unless we are given a new heart, the pathology of the old unregenerate heart inevitably finds its vicious expression in every aspect of our lives, both personal and national.

As people of faith, how should we respond in times like this, especially as the condition of America is becoming dangerously perilous and our nation is slouching toward Gomorrah? If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? During the American Civil War, when Confederate commander General Robert E. Lee led his army of 76,000 men into Pennsylvania, President Abraham Lincoln remained firm in his faith in God. He said to a wounded general at Gettysburg: “When everyone seemed panic-stricken...I went to my room...and got down on my knees before Almighty God and prayed...Soon a sweet comfort crept into my soul that God Almighty had taken the whole business into His own hands...”

There you have it. The answer is to turn to God in prayer, believing that “God Almighty had taken the whole business into His own hands.” This is not the time to point fingers at each other or score political points. This is the time to pray. Let us pray for the families of the martyred souls that God will comfort them and give them peace that surpasses all human understanding. Let us pray for the people of Charleston, South Carolina, that God will give them strength to cope with this unfathomable tragedy. Let us pray with the realization that the Lord is in His holy temple and is watching and examining all that is going on in our midst, while at the same time He is testing the faith of the righteous (Ps. 11:4–5). He is not impervious to our pain. This is the time to acknowledge our impotence to solve the problems of the human heart, which God in Christ alone can do. It is time not to panic, but rather to do what President Lincoln did in a time of crisis—get down on our knees before Almighty God and pray.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), the Great French thinker, historian, and author of *Democracy in America*, wrote: “I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her fertile fields and boundless forests, and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her public school system and her institutions of learning, and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her democratic congress and her matchless constitution, and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of

her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great”

America’s greatness and goodness will be restored if we turn to God in contrition and repentance and when our pulpits begin to roar with the thunderous and imperious “Thus Sayeth the Lord.”