

# Faith of America's Founders

Today people talk about the separation of church and state and keeping Christianity and prayer out of schools, but few people realize that many of America's founders were devoutly Christian. People such as George Washington, Abigail and John Adams, and Patrick Henry knew that God was important to the founding of the country and to its future. Not only did they base their decisions on biblical principles, but they staked the future of the United States of America on its citizens' ability to govern themselves under the kingship of Jesus Christ.

Here are best-loved quotes from some of the brave and noble people who gave their lives to building a great country.

## BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

(Statesman, author, scientist, and printer)

*When the Constitutional Convention was deadlocked and it looked like it might be dissolved by disagreements, Franklin called the delegates to prayer with these words:*

"I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?"

(Constitutional Convention, June 28, 1787)

America's founders recognized God's guidance throughout every aspect of the nation's formation.



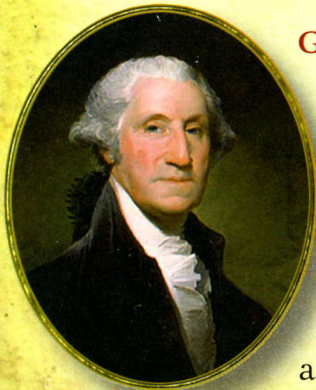
## GEORGE WASHINGTON

(First president)

*Washington commented on the course of the Revolutionary War. The instances of divine intervention were seen and noted on in the American press as well as the British papers.*

"The hand of Providence has been so conspicuous in all this that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith, and more wicked that has not gratitude to acknowledge his obligations...."

(Letter to Brigadier General Thomas Nelson, Aug. 20, 1778)



## BENJAMIN RUSH

(Signer of the Declaration of Independence, founder of first anti-slavery society in America)

*Benjamin Rush*

"I have alternately been called an Aristocrat and a Democrat. I am neither. I am a Christocrat."

(Quoted in Rush's eulogy, 1813)

Rather than rule by the elite (aristocracy) or rule by the many (democracy), many of the first Americans preferred rule by Christ.

## WILLIAM BRADFORD

(Governor of the Plymouth Colony)

"Last and not least they cherished a great hope and inward zeal of laying good foundations, or at least making some ways toward it, for the propagation and advance of the gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in the remote parts of the world, even though they should be but stepping stones to others in the performance of so great a work."

(Plymouth Plantation, 1647)



America was colonized by Christians whose aims included the spread of the Gospel.

## JOHN ADAMS

(Second president)

*Long before the Revolutionary War made America an independent nation, John Adams wondered what kind of land might be built if the Bible were taken seriously and its principles honestly practiced.*

"Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited! Every member would be obliged in conscience, to temperance, frugality, and industry; to justice, kindness, and charity towards his fellow men; and to piety, love, and reverence toward Almighty God.... What a Eutopia, what a Paradise would this region be."

(Diary, Feb. 22, 1756)

Many leaders at the time of the American Revolution saw America as an opportunity to set up a better country—one based on biblical values.







### PATRICK HENRY

(Member of the Continental Congress)

*Speaking of America's independence,  
Patrick Henry wrote,*

"Whether this will prove a blessing or a curse, will depend upon the use our people make of the blessings, which a gracious God hath bestowed on us. If they are wise, they will be great and happy.

If they are of a contrary character, they will be miserable.

**Righteousness alone can exalt them as a nation.** Reader! Whoever thou art, remember this, and in thy sphere practice virtue thyself, and encourage it in others." (Back of Stamp Act Resolves, May, 1765)

The founders knew that a great country depended on each person making right choices and encouraging others to do the same.



### SAMUEL ADAMS

(Cousin to John Adams; he was called the "Father of the American Revolution")

"The rights of the colonists as Christians...may be best understood by reading and carefully studying the institution of The Great Law Giver and Head of the Christian Church, which are to be found clearly written and promulgated in the New Testament." (From *The Rights of Colonists*, 1772)

### WILLIAM PRESCOTT

(Commander of the colonial militia at Bunker Hill)

"We consider that we are all embarked in (the same boat) and must sink or swim together.... Let us all be of one heart, and stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. And may He, of His infinite mercy, grant us deliverance of all our troubles." (Letter to citizens of Boston under British blockade, 1774)

America's desire for freedom was based on the freedom given by Jesus Christ.



### JOHN HANCOCK

(First to sign the Declaration of Independence)

*In the days leading up to the Revolutionary War, circumstances looked grim. Many leaders called on the citizenry to fast and pray for America, as did John Hancock with these opening remarks:*

"In circumstances dark as these, it becomes us, as men and Christians, to reflect that, whilst every prudent measure should be taken to ward off the impending judgments... all confidence must be withheld from the means we use; and reposed only on that God who

rules in the Armies of Heaven, and without whose blessing the best human counsels are but foolishness—and all created power vanity,"

(April 15, 1775 Provincial Congress of Massachusetts – Day of Public Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer signed by its president John Hancock)

It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.  
—Psalm 118: 8, 9

## John Witherspoon

### JOHN WITHERSPOON

(President of the College of New Jersey [Princeton])

*Just prior to the Declaration of Independence and the ensuing war, the Continental Congress called for a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer.*

*John Witherspoon followed up with a speech at the College of New Jersey (later called Princeton):*

"While we give praise to God, the supreme disposer of all events, for His interposition on our behalf, let us guard against the dangerous error of trusting in, or boasting of, an arm of flesh..." (May 17, 1776)





**JOHN ADAMS**  
(Second president)

*In correspondence to his grandson Charles Francis Adams, John Adams wrote,*

"Statesmen, my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is **Religion and Morality** alone, which can establish the **principles** upon which **freedom** can securely stand. The only foundation of a free Constitution is **pure virtue**, and if this cannot be inspired into our people in a greater measure, than they have it now, they may change their rules and the form of government, but they will not obtain a lasting liberty." (June 21, 1776).



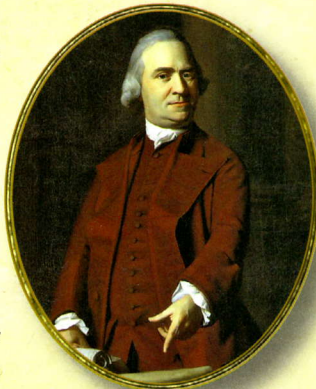
**SAMUEL ADAMS**

(Cousin to John Adams; he was called the "Father of the American Revolution")

"We have this day restored the **Sovereign** to Whom all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in **heaven** and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let his kingdom come." (Signing of the Declaration of Independence, August, 1776)

*Samuel Adams saw God as the only true King of nations. The Declaration of Independence was seen as a way of restoring God to His rightful place in the hearts of Americans. Its signing was the reverse of what the early Hebrew republic had done in calling for a king and rejecting God in 1 Samuel 8:4-7.*

America's foundations were laid on the belief that God is the true King.



**JOHN QUINCY ADAMS**  
(Sixth president)

"The **highest glory** of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the **principles of civil government** and **principles of Christianity**."

(Attributed to Adams; cited from *Pamphlet on American Revolution*, 1860, John Wingate Thornton)

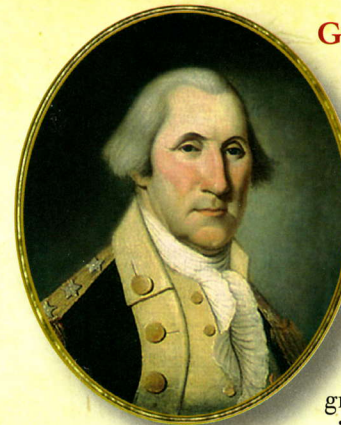
The connections between Christianity and good government were recognized in early America.



**GEORGE WASHINGTON**  
(First president)

*Washington's private prayer was recorded near his headquarters on the Hudson River. Washington also wrote down many of his own prayers in his field notebook.*

"And now, **Almighty Father**, if it is **Thy holy will** that we shall obtain a place and name among the nations of the Earth, grant that we may be enabled to **show our gratitude for Thy goodness** by our endeavors to fear and obey Thee." (Private prayer, 1779)



**ROGER SHERMAN**

(Signer of all four of the major founding documents)

*Roger Sherman*

*In a speech to Congress, Roger Sherman said:*

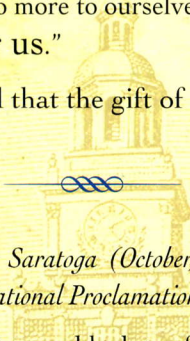
"Admiring and thankfully acknowledging the riches of **redeeming love**, and earnestly imploring that **divine assistance** which may enable us to live no more to ourselves, but to him who loves us and gave himself to die for us."

Many founders understood that the gift of salvation requires people to respond in selfless ways.

**CONTINENTAL CONGRESS**

*Victory over British forces at Saratoga (October, 1777) led to this order by George Washington, declaring the first National Proclamation of Thanksgiving.*

"Forasmuch as it is the indispensable duty of all men to adore the superintending **Providence of Almighty God**; to acknowledge with **gratitude** their obligation to Him for benefits received and to implore such further blessing as they stand in need of; and it having pleased Him in **His abundant mercy** not only to continue to us the innumerable bounties of His common Providence...to smile upon us as in the prosecution of a just and necessary war for the defense and establishment of our unalienable rights and liberties.... It is therefore recommended...to set apart Thursday, the 18th day of December next, for the solemn **thanksgiving and praise**." (November, 1777)





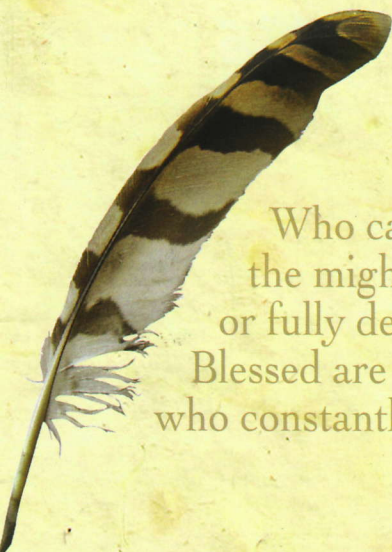
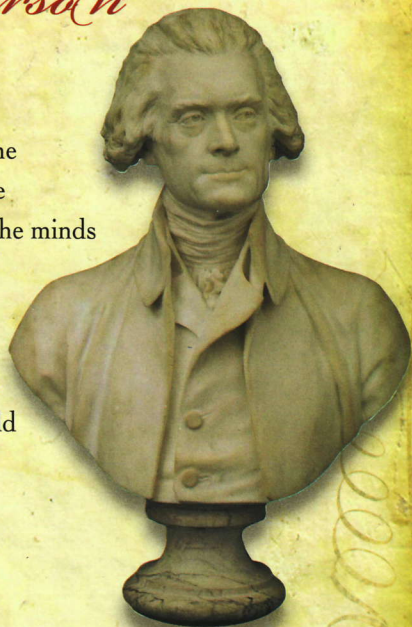
# Thomas Jefferson

**THOMAS JEFFERSON**

(Third president)

"God who gave us life, gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their **only firm basis**, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the **Gift of God?**" – Notes on the State of Virginia, 1781

Men and nations tend to forget the goodness of God. The founders warned that America would lose its liberty if it did not honor God.



Who can proclaim  
the mighty acts of the LORD  
or fully declare his praise?  
Blessed are they who maintain justice  
who constantly do what is right.

— Psalm 106:2, 3

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## GEORGE WASHINGTON

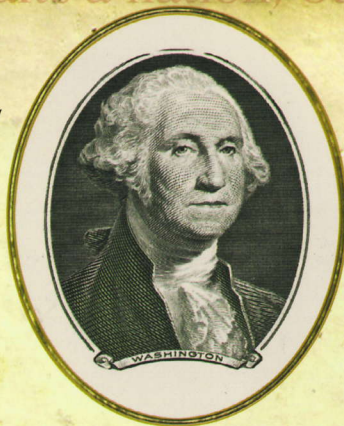
(First president)

*Washington's retirement into private life was preceded by this farewell address:*

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, **religion and morality** are indispensable supports.

In vain would that man claim the **tribute of patriotism**, who should labor to subvert these great **pillars of human happiness....**"

(Farewell Address, Sept. 19, 1796)



## JOHN JAY

(First Chief Justice of Supreme Court, coauthor of the *Federalist Papers*)

"Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the **duty**, as well as the **privilege and interest** of our Christian nation to select and prefer **Christians** for their rulers."

(Private letter to Jedediah Morse, 1797)

"Unto Him who is the author and giver of all good, I render **sincere and humble thanks** for His merciful and unmerited blessings, and especially for our **redemption and salvation** by his **beloved son.**" (John Jay's will)

Many founders fervently believed that God was the final source of both mercy and judgment.



## CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

"Day of Thanksgiving. Resolved. That a joint committee of both houses be directed to wait upon the President of the United States to request that he recommend to the people of the United States a day of public **Thanksgiving and prayer**, to be observed by acknowledging, with **grateful heart**, the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a constitution of government for their **safety and happiness.**" (Sept. 25, 1789)

America's founders recognized the importance of thanking God for blessings and safety.

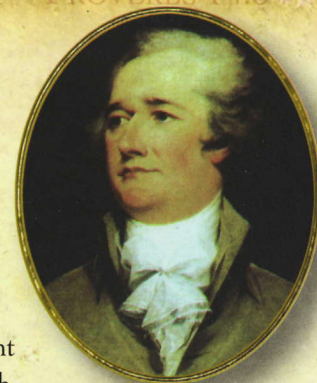
## ALEXANDER HAMILTON

(Signer of the Constitution)

*Referring to the Constitution created:*

"For my own part, I sincerely esteem it a system which without the **finger of God**, never could have been suggested and agreed upon by such a diversity of interests." (Shortly after the Constitutional Convention)

Without God's guidance, many people with such different interests could not have agreed upon the principles by which America was to be governed.



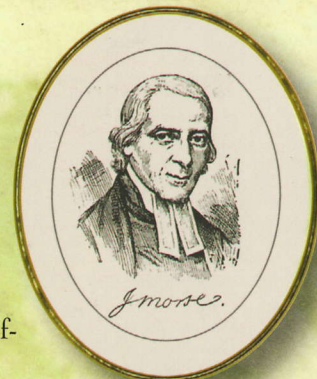
Blessed are the people  
whose God is the LORD. —PSALM 144:15

## JEDEDIAH MORSE

(Educator and geographer)

"Whenever the **pillars of Christianity** should be overthrown, our present republican forms of **government**, and **all the blessings** which flow from them, **must fall** with them." (1799, Election Sermon)

Early Americans believed that the blessings of self-government were tied to obeying the Gospel.



We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy  
deeds of the LORD, his power, and the  
wonders he has done. —PSALM 78:4

## JAMES MONROE

(Fifth president)

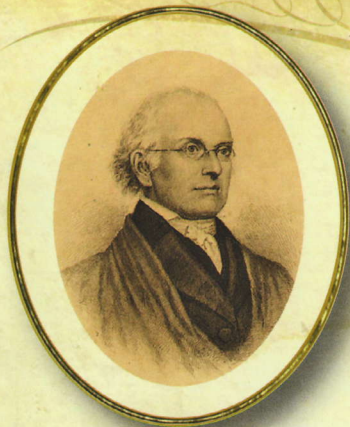
"The liberty, prosperity and happiness of our country will always be the object of my most fervent prayer to the **Supreme Author of All Good.**"

(Second Inaugural Address, Mar. 5, 1821)

Public prayers in Congress existed from the beginning. Prayers for the nation were never viewed as purely private, but were often made publicly for public servants and the nation as a whole.







### JOSEPH STORY

(Justice to the Supreme Court)

"There is not a truth to be gathered from history more certain, more momentous than this: that **civil liberty** cannot long be separated from **religious liberty** without danger, and ultimately without destruction to both. **Wherever religious liberty exists, it will, first or last, bring in and establish political liberty.**"

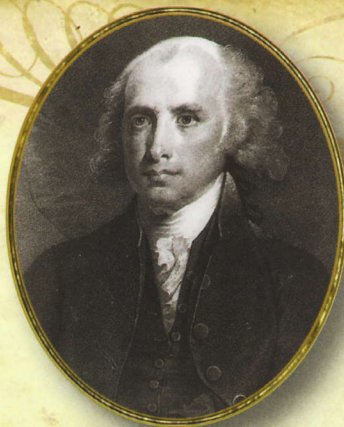
(Commentary on the First Amendment)

Freedom of every kind comes from God.

### DANIEL WEBSTER

(Politician, diplomat, and educator)

"Finally, let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the **Christian** religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society, and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary. Let us cherish these sentiments, and extend this influence still more widely; in **full conviction** that that is the happiest society which partakes in the highest degree of the mild and peaceful spirit of Christianity." (Speech at the bicentennial of the Pilgrims' landing at Plymouth Rock, Dec. 22, 1820)

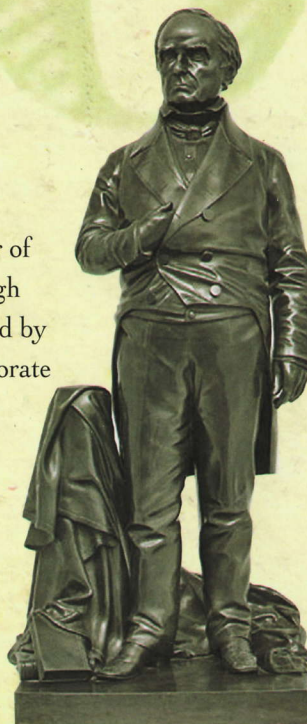


### JAMES MADISON

(Fourth president)

"We have all been encouraged to feel in the **guardianship and guidance** of that **Almighty Being**, whose power regulates the **destiny of nations.**"

(Inaugural Address, Mar. 4, 1809)



### ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

(French statesman and historian)

*De Tocqueville observed and wrote about America beginning in 1831. As a Frenchman he may be regarded as an outside, objective witness to the Christian nature of early America.*

"In the United States the **sovereign authority is religious...** there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater **influence over the souls of men** than in America, and there can be no greater proof of its utility and of its conformity to human nature than that its influence is powerfully felt over the most **enlightened and free nation of the earth.**"

(*Democracy in America*,  
2 Vols. 1835 & 1840)

"America is great because it is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

(Attributed to De Tocqueville)

### GOVERNEUR MORRIS

(Delegate to the Constitutional Convention; writer of the final draft of the Constitution)

"Religion is the only solid basis of good morals; therefore **education should teach the precepts of religion**, and the duties of man toward God."

(Cited in *The Life of Gouverneur Morris*, J. Sparks, 1832)

Public education and Christianity were seen as working together, not conflicting.

*Gouverneur Morris*



### ANDREW JACKSON

(Seventh president)

"That book [the Bible], Sir, is the **Rock** upon which our **Republic rests.**"

(Re: Bible, June 8, 1845)

The Bible was seen as vital to the foundation of the nation.



The fear of the LORD  
is the beginning of  
wisdom, and knowledge  
of the Holy One is  
understanding.

— PROVERBS 9:10



## ABRAHAM LINCOLN

(Sixteenth president)

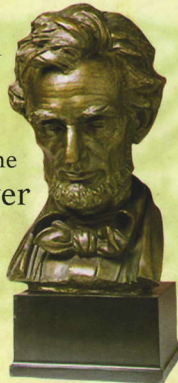
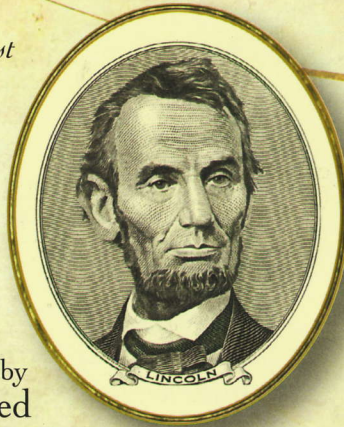
*Lincoln issued a proclamation appointing a National Fast Day. An excerpt reads:*

"It is the duty of nations as well as of men to owe their dependence on the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon, and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord." (Proclamation, Mar. 30, 1863)

National confession and repentance was recognized as a duty that the people of all nations owe to God.

"That the Almighty does make use of human agencies, and directly intervenes in human affairs, is one of the plainest statements of the Bible. I have had so many evidences of his direction—so many instances when I have been controlled by some other power than my own will—that I cannot doubt that this power comes from above." (Answer to L.E. Chittenden, 1865)

America's leaders, from presidents to soldiers, have asked for and found direction from God.

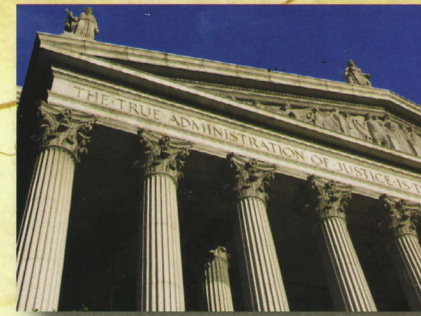
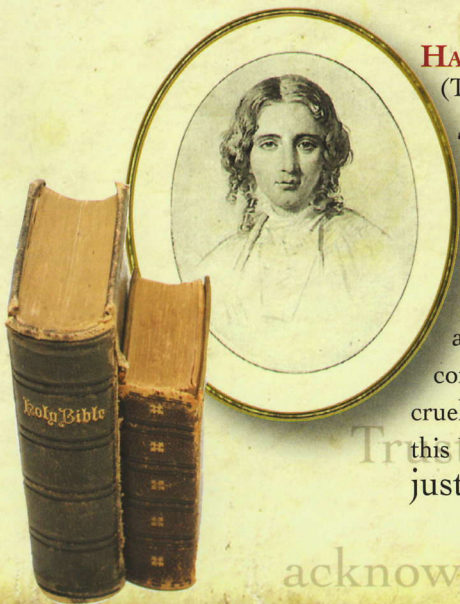


## HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

(Teacher, author, and abolitionist)

*Stowe's book did much to fuel the abolitionist movement. It ends with these words:*

"A day of grace is yet held out to us. Both North and South have been guilty before God; and the Christian church has a heavy account to answer. Not by combining together, to protect injustice and cruelty, and making a common capital of sin, is this Union to be saved, but by repentance, justice and mercy." (Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1852)



## THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*In 1892, in the case of Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States, the Supreme Court examined thousands of documents concerning the founding of the nation, including every state constitution as well as compacts leading up to the time of the American Revolution. After ten years of research, the court issued a unanimous decision that included the recognition that this nation is not only historically and culturally religious, but that the very system of government and our laws are based on a Christian worldview.*

*Regarding this documentary evidence, the Court further stated:*

"There is no dissonance in these declarations. There is a universal language pervading them all, having one meaning. They affirm and reaffirm that this is a religious nation. These are not individual sayings, declarations of private persons. They are organic utterances. They speak the voice of the entire people."

"This is a religious people...this is a Christian nation."

(Trinity Decision, 1892)

There has been debate about whether America can truly be called a Christian nation. But there is no doubt—from looking at historical records—that founders and the citizens of America were committed to Christian ideals. They were grateful to God for His guidance and set out to create a better nation, one that was built on biblical principles. At a time when other nations were rejecting Christianity (such as France during the French Revolution of 1789), America stood out as an example of faith and optimism.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways  
acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. —PROVERBS 3:5-6