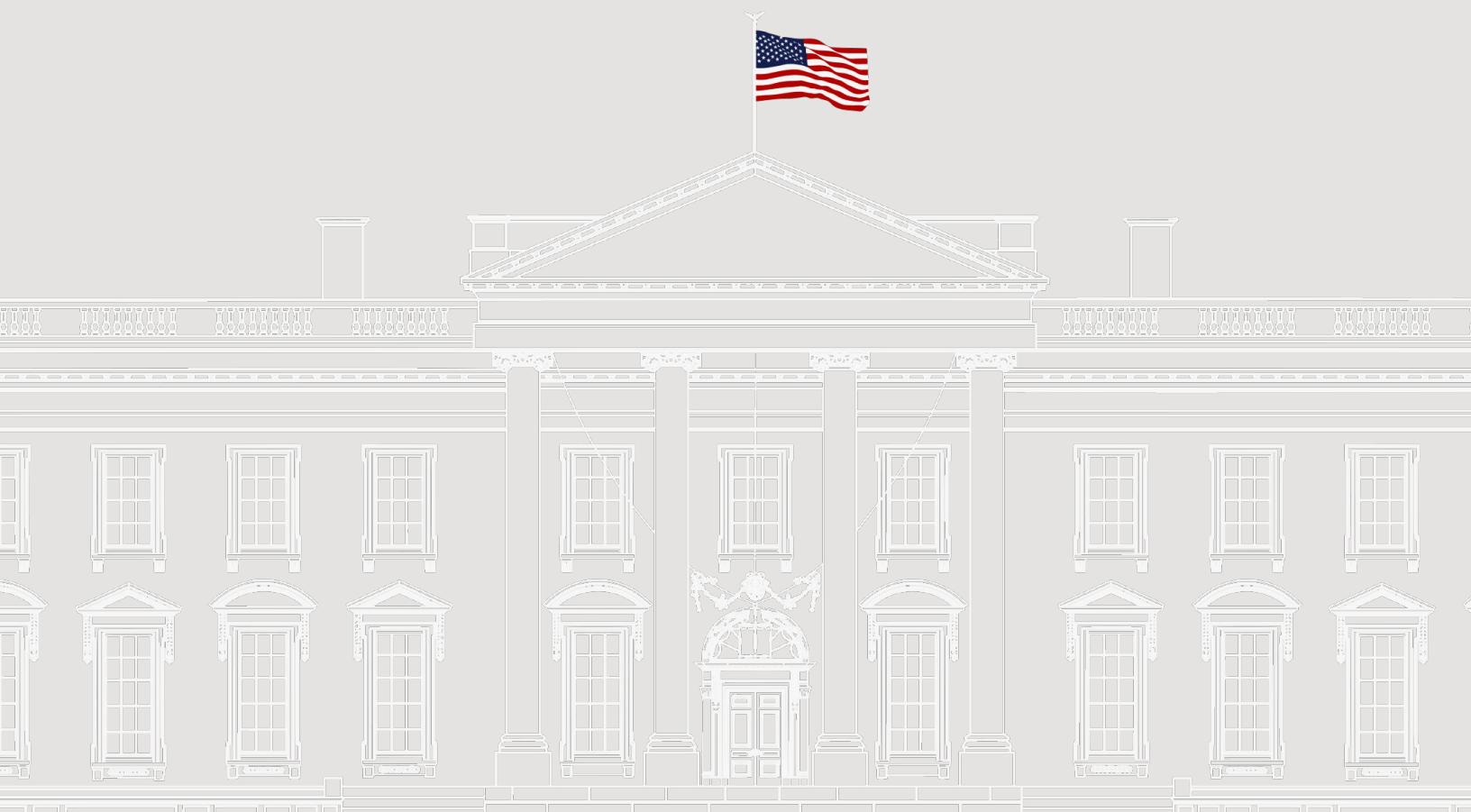


PRAYERS
and
PROCLAMATIONS
Throughout American History



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Introduction

From the birth of our nation, America has been strengthened and sustained by people of prayer. From battlefield chaplains at Valley Forge to hymns sung in slave cabins and prayers in pioneer homes, Americans have turned time and again to the “moral Ruler of the universe” in times of triumph and travail. This document gathers such moments, and in doing so, it affirms that the strength of the American spirit lays not exclusively in her ideas, but in the faith that undergirds them.

These 17 moments of prayer and faith offer compelling evidence of the enduring presence and formative role of faith within the fabric of American public life. Far from being peripheral or incidental, these events underscore how belief in divine providence, the words of Scripture, and the practice of public prayer have shaped the character of American institutions, guided moments of national crisis, and informed the moral imagination of the American people.

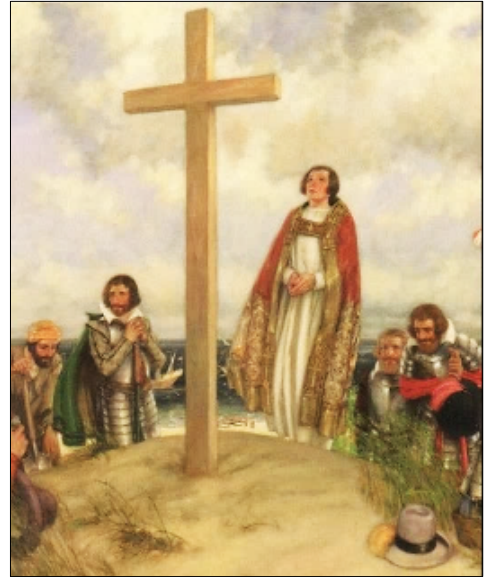
As we celebrate 250 years of freedom, citizens of all backgrounds and beliefs have an opportunity to rededicate themselves to the principles that gave birth to this land of liberty. As George Washington famously said in his Farewell Address, “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political 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, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens.”

These public prayers and proclamations not only encourage reflection on the past, but invite the current generation to consider the indispensable role of faith in sustaining civic life, moral order, and national purpose as we prepare to usher in the next 250 years of American greatness.

Today, countless faith communities continue the tradition of coming together to pray for our nation. This compilation of prayers throughout America’s history is intended to serve as a resource for encouragement, unity, and prayer to Americans of faith.

Cape Henry Landing, Jamestown, Virginia, 1607

On April 29, 1607, a group of English settlers under the charter of the Virginia Company of London landed at Cape Henry, near present-day Virginia Beach, before proceeding inland to establish what would become Jamestown colony—the first permanent English settlement in North America. Upon arrival, the colonists held the first official Anglican act of worship on American soil. The symbolic act of raising the cross and dedicating the land through prayer, led by Reverend Robert Hunt, made clear that Jamestown was not merely a political and economic endeavor. The Cape Henry landing reveals the extent to which Christianity—particularly Protestantism—accompanied the English colonial enterprise from its inception.



While the prayer commonly cited as Reverend Hunt's *Declaration at Cape Henry*, is often invoked in commemorative ceremonies and reflections on the discovery of the New World, no contemporaneous documentation exists to verify its authenticity. The prayer is a powerful symbol of the faith of the early settlers, whose original charter did, in fact, charge them with the dual purpose of settling the land and “propagating of Christian religion to such people, as yet live in darkness.”

“We do hereby dedicate this Land, and ourselves, to reach the People within these shores with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to raise up Godly generations after us, and with these generations take the Kingdom of God to all the earth. May this Covenant of Dedication remain to all generations, as long as this earth remains and may this land, along with England, be evangelists to the world. May all who see this cross remember what we have done here, and may those who come here to inhabit join us in this Covenant and this most noble work, that the Holy Scriptures may be fulfilled. From these very shores the gospel shall go forth, not only to this new world, but the entire world.”

– Attributed to Rev. Robert Hunt

Two

Embarkation Of The Pilgrims, 1620

The painting from the United States Capitol Rotunda depicts the Pilgrims gathered around an open *Geneva Bible*. Above them, the inscription “God With Us” captures the certainty that underpinned their journey. The Geneva Bible, widely used among English dissenters, included extensive marginal notes that connected Scripture to the moral and political questions of the day, reinforcing the Pilgrims’ belief in the practical application of biblical principles to all areas of life. The Separatist Pilgrim seeking religious self-determination outside the Church of England, and their Puritan contemporaries, laid early foundations for a distinctly American civic culture. Their emphasis on individual conscience, self-governance, and scripturally-informed community life contributed to enduring principles of republicanism, universal education, and economic self-sufficiency. Though small in number, their legacy shaped the ideological development of the American colonies and the institutions that would follow.



The following text is John Robinson’s pastoral prayer for the pilgrims upon their journey to the New World:

“He who hath made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all rivers of water, and whose providence is over all His works, especially over all His dear children for good, would so guide and guard you in your ways, as inwardly by His Spirit, so outwardly by the hand of His power, as that both you and we also, for and with you, may have after matter of praising His name all the days of your and our lives. Fare you well in Him in whom you trust, and in whom I rest. An unfeigned wellwiller of your happy success in this hopeful voyage.

– John Robinson

Three

Pilgrims' First Thanksgiving, 1621

The 1621 harvest feast at Plymouth marked a moment of provisional peace and mutual aid between the English settlers and the Wampanoag people. Following a devastating winter that claimed nearly half of the Pilgrims' lives, the remaining colonists gathered with members of the local Wampanoag tribe—including Chief Massasoit, Squanto, and Samoset—for a three-day observance of communal thanksgiving. While the precise prayers offered at the time are unknown, the Pilgrims' practice of giving thanks to God for provision was central to the occasion. Though not yet a formal holiday, this early observance would later be commemorated as the symbolic origin of the American Thanksgiving tradition.



While it is true that the Pilgrims certainly prayed at the 1621 harvest feast, their exact words remain unknown. A typical prayer might be:

“O Lord our God and heavenly Father, which of Thy unspeakable mercy towards us, hast provided meat and drink for the nourishment of our weak bodies. Grant us peace to use them reverently, as from Thy hands, with thankful hearts: let Thy blessing rest upon these Thy good creatures, to our comfort and sustentation: and grant we humbly beseech Thee, good Lord, that as we do hunger and thirst for this food of our bodies, so our souls may earnestly long after the food of eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, Amen.”

George Webb, "Short direction for the daily exercise of the Christian," London 1625 (slight modifications made to update the spelling in modern American vernacular)

Four

The First Prayer In Congress, 1774

When the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia in September 1774 to coordinate a colonial response to British encroachments, the delegates faced not only political uncertainty but profound ideological and regional diversity. Despite their differing denominational backgrounds, one of the first motions proposed—offered by John Adams and supported by Samuel Adams—was that the Congress begin its proceedings with prayer.



Rev. Jacob Duché, an Anglican clergyman from Christ Church in Philadelphia, was invited to lead the opening devotion on September 7. Despite initial concerns over denominational divisions, the prayer service proved unexpectedly unifying. Rev. Duché opened with an extended prayer and then read aloud from several chapters of Scripture, including Psalm 35—a reading that John Adams would later describe in a letter as profoundly stirring. The gathering turned into a lengthy and solemn devotional session, reportedly attended with deep emotion by the delegates, including George Washington.

The positive reception of this inaugural prayer led the Congress to institutionalize the practice. A chaplain was appointed, and each subsequent session of Congress was thereafter opened with prayer—establishing a precedent that continues in both the House and Senate to this day. Far from being a ceremonial formality, the prayer was regarded by many delegates as a source of moral clarity and national purpose during a time of political crisis and impending conflict.

“O Lord our Heavenly Father, high and mighty King of kings, and Lord of lords, who dost from thy throne behold all the dwellers on earth and reignest with power supreme and uncontrolled over all the Kingdoms, Empires and Governments; look down in mercy, we beseech Thee, on these our American States, who have fled to Thee from the rod of the oppressor and thrown themselves on Thy gracious protection, desiring to be henceforth dependent only on Thee. To Thee have they appealed for the righteousness of their cause; to Thee do they now look up for that countenance and support, which Thou alone canst give. Take them, therefore, Heavenly Father, under Thy nurturing care; give them wisdom in Council and valor in the field; defeat the malicious designs of our cruel adversaries; convince them of the unrighteousness of their Cause and if they persist in their sanguinary purposes, of own unerring justice, sounding in their hearts, constrain them to drop the weapons of war from their unnerved hands in the day of battle!

Be Thou present, O God of wisdom, and direct the councils of this honorable assembly; enable them to settle things on the best and surest foundation. That the scene of blood may be speedily closed; that order, harmony and peace may be effectually restored, and truth and justice, religion and piety, prevail and flourish amongst the people. Preserve the health of their bodies and vigor of their minds; shower down on them and the millions they here represent, such temporal blessings as Thou seest expedient for them in this world and crown them with everlasting glory in the world to come. All this we ask in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ, Thy Son and our Savior.”

Five

Government-Issued Calls To Prayer From Founding Fathers And Public Leaders

From the earliest days of American independence, beginning in 1775, the Continental Congress issued a series of official proclamations calling for national days of fasting, humiliation, and prayer. Between 1775 and 1784, at least fifteen such proclamations were formally adopted, often in response to military, political, or diplomatic developments. Beyond the actions of Congress, individual Founding Fathers incorporated prayer into public governance. John Hancock, as governor of Massachusetts, issued at least twenty-two formal prayer proclamations. Samuel Adams issued seven. These proclamations commonly called upon citizens to seek forgiveness, partake in fasting, express gratitude, and cultivate virtue in public and private life.



The practice of government-issued calls to public prayer has been continued by presidents, governors, legislatures, and local officials across generations, reaffirming a tradition in which religious observance and civic life are mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive.

Below is a prayer adapted from Washington's *Circular Letter to the States*, which he wrote on June 8, 1783 as the Commander in Chief, at his headquarters in Newburgh, New York.

"I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have the United States in his holy protection, that he would incline the hearts of the Citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to Government, to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another, for their fellow citizens of the United States at large, and particularly for their brethren who have served in the Field, and finally, that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all, to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristicks of the Devine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation. Amen".

Six

Building The Military: General Orders, George Washington, 1776-1783

The establishment of America's military forces date to the Revolutionary War for Independence. At that time, Commander-in-Chief George Washington instituted the military's policies and standards, many of which continue today. One of his earliest orders was for Divine Service to be a standard part of the activities of every military unit. Congress undertook the same practice for the Navy, stipulating, *"The commanders of the ships of the Thirteen United Colonies are to take care that Divine Service be performed twice a day on board, and a sermon preached on Sundays."*



Washington included in his General Orders that all soldiers avoid *"profane cursing, swearing, and drunkenness,"* the *"use of an oath or execration,"* *"games of chance,"* *"vice and immorality,"* and other such behaviors. He continued, *"As a mean to abolish this, and every other species of immorality, Brigadiers are enjoined to take effectual care to have Divine Service duly performed in their respective brigades,"* for *"We can have little hopes of the blessing of Heaven on our Arms if we insult it by our impiety and folly."*

Abiel Leonard, a Connecticut chaplain, was one of General Washington's closest military friends. Leonard composed a prayer for Washington's Army published in Cambridge in 1775, an excerpt from which is shown below:

"O my God, in obedience to the call of thy providence, I have engaged myself, and plighted my faith, to jeopardy my life in the high places of the field in the defense of my dear country and the liberties of it acknowledging thy people to be my people, their interest my interest, and their God to be my God. ... And I desire now to make solemn dedication of myself to thee in it through Jesus Christ presenting myself to thy Divine Majesty to be disposed of by thee to thy glory and the good of America.

...Teach, I pray thee, my hands to war, and my fingers to fight in the defense of America, and the rights and liberties of it! Impress upon my mind a true sense of my duty, and the obligation I am under to my country! ...

...Hear me, O my God, and accept of those my petitions through Jesus Christ, to whom with thee, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, one God, be glory, honor and praise, forever and ever. AMEN."

Seven

Prayer At The Constitutional Convention, September 1787

The Constitutional Convention convened in Philadelphia in May 1787 to address the structural weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. Chaired by George Washington, the delegates set out to establish a more effective national framework. However, after several weeks of debate, severe divisions emerged over matters of representation, executive power, and the structure of federal authority. The convention reached a critical impasse; tempers flared, and some delegates left the proceedings in frustration.



On June 28, 81-year-old Benjamin Franklin—the eldest delegate present—rose before the assembly. Though not known for his religiosity, Franklin proposed that “prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven” be offered daily before business commenced. Edmund Randolph of Virginia proposed that a public sermon be preached to the delegates in conjunction with the approaching Fourth of July celebrations. The Convention adjourned for a short recess, during which many delegates attended religious services. During this recess, Rev. William Rogers delivered a prayer for the Convention, asking for wisdom and unity among the delegates. When the Convention resumed, there was a noticeable shift in tone. Debate gave way to compromise, resulting in the final drafting of the United States Constitution. The Constitution that emerged from this Convention has since endured for nearly two-and-a-half centuries, the longest continuously operating written constitution in the world.

“As this is a period, O Lord! big, with events, impenetrable by any human scrutiny, we fervently recommend to thy fatherly notice, that august Body assembled in this city, who compose our Federal Convention; will it please Thee, O Eternal I Am! to favor them from day to day with thy immediate presence; be thou their wisdom and their strength! Enable them to devise such measures as may prove happily instrumental for healing all divisions, and promoting the good of the great whole; incline the hearts of all the people to receive with pleasure, combined with a determination to carry into execution, whatever these thy servants may wisely recommend; that the United States of America may furnish the world with one example of a free and permanent government, which shall be the result of human and mutual deliberation, and which shall not, like all other governments, whether ancient or modern, spring out of mere chance, or be established by force. May we triumph in the cheering prospect of being completely delivered from anarchy; and continue, under the influence of republican virtue, to partake of all the blessings of cultivated and civilized society!”

— from the Fourth of July, 1787 prayer for the Constitutional Convention of Reverend William Rogers

Eight

Jewish Blessing For The Government, In Honor Of President Washington, 1789

George Washington's inauguration was the first peaceful transfer of executive power under a written constitution in the history of modern republican governance. Held at Federal Hall in New York City, then the seat of the federal government, the proceedings were organized with the involvement of fourteen clergy members, including Christian ministers and at least one Jewish rabbi. The ceremony incorporated seven distinct religious elements: (1) the use of a Bible in administering the oath of office, (2) the president's verbal affirmation "So help me God" and the subsequent act of kissing the Bible, (3) a private prayer by Washington immediately following the oath, (4) explicitly religious language in the inaugural address, (5) Washington's formal call for public prayer and national acknowledgment of divine providence, (6) an inaugural worship service at St. Paul's Chapel, and (7) prayers led by clergy in both private and public settings.



In his address to the assembled members of Congress, Washington referenced divine providence extensively, with roughly one-third of the speech devoted to reflections on the role of a higher power in the nation's founding. He emphasized the moral obligations of free government and the necessity of virtue among both leaders and citizens. Written by the Congregation *Beth Shalome* in Richmond, Virginia, this prayer for the nascent government of the United States is possibly the first of its kind.

*... "El Tseva'ot, You have provided peace and quiet for the heart of our government;
You have placed the President of the United States to act as our leader;
Through prayer we humble ourselves before You,
To our supplications lend an ear and rescue us.
Common sense, knowledge and insight, bestow upon the head of our state,
May he act justly towards us, gladden and bring joy to our hearts,
May he lead us along an honorable path,
Until his old age may he continue to act as leader and judge among us.
May those who govern over us do so with purity of heart and with honor...
...Protect and shield the Vice President, Senators and Representatives of the United States.
Provide wisdom and sense to all who lead our court system,
May the hearts of our leaders be just and trustworthy,
Provide success and bless all of our nation,
And from the hands of foreigners, protect us.....And let us say: Amen."*

Nine

John Quincy Adams Independence Day Address, 1837

On the Fourth of July in 1837, President John Quincy Adams, former president, then sitting US representative, and son of John Adams, rose before the citizens of Newburyport Massachusetts to deliver a commemorative oration. His words, soaring and unflinching, posed a question whose answer resounds across centuries.

“Why is it, Friends and Fellow Citizens, that you are here assembled? Why is it, that, entering upon the sixty-second year of our national existence, you have honored with an invitation to address you from this place, a fellow citizen of a former age, bearing in the records of his memory, the warm and vivid affections which attached him, at the distance of a full half century, to your town, and to your forefathers, then the cherished associates of his youthful days? Why is it that, next to the birth day of the Savior of the World, your most joyous and most venerated festival returns on this day?—And why is it that, among the swarming myriads of our population, thousands and tens of thousands among us, abstaining, under the dictate of religious principle, from the commemoration of that birth-day of Him, who brought life and immortality to light, yet unite with all their brethren of this community, year after year, in celebrating this the birthday of the nation?”

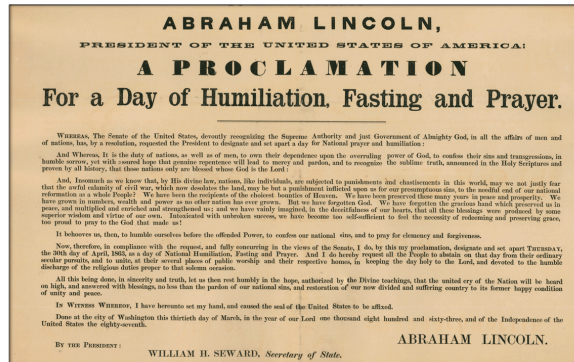
Is it not that, in the chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Savior? That it forms a leading event in the progress of the gospel dispensation? Is it not that the Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on the foundation of the Redeemer’s mission upon the earth? That it laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity...

...the Declaration of Independence announced the One People, assuming their station among the powers of the earth, as a civilized, religious, and Christian people,—acknowledging themselves bound by the obligations, and claiming the rights to which they were entitled by the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.

... A moral Ruler of the universe, the Governor and Controller of all human power is the only unlimited sovereign acknowledged by the Declaration of Independence; and it claims for the United States of America, when assuming their equal station among the nations of the earth, only the power to do all that may be done of right.”

— John Quincy Adams, Independence Day Address, 1837

President Abraham Lincoln's Call For A Day Of Humiliation, Fasting, And Prayer, March 30, 1863



As the nation tore itself apart in Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln urged the American people to examine their relationship with God and Scriptures, and to conform their lives to that standard.

"Whereas, it is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon 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...

"...We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious Hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

"...It behooves us then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness...

"I do not doubt that our country will finally come through safe and undivided. But do not misunderstand me...I do not rely on the patriotism of our people...the bravery and devotion of the boys in blue...(or) the loyalty and skill of our generals...

"But the God of our fathers, who raised up this country to be the refuge and asylum of the oppressed and downtrodden of all nations, will not let it perish now. I may not live to see it...I do not expect to see it, but God will bring us through safe."

Eleven

President Franklin Roosevelt, D-Day, June 6, 1944

On June 6, 1944, as Allied troops stormed the beaches of Normandy, President Franklin D. Roosevelt led the nation in an extraordinary act of faith. That evening, FDR delivered a radio broadcast in the form of a solemn prayer, asking Americans to join him in seeking God's aid. This D-Day prayer was heard by millions and remains one of the most iconic instances of a President publicly beseeching God at a critical moment in history. Below is the text of FDR's prayer:

"Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our Nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity. Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith. They will need Thy blessings. Their road will be long and hard. For the enemy is strong. He may hurl back our forces. Success may not come with rushing speed, but we shall return again and again; and we know that by Thy grace, and by the righteousness of our cause, our sons will triumph. They will be sore tried, by night and by day, without rest-until the victory is won. The darkness will be rent by noise and flame. Men's souls will be shaken with the violences of war. For these men are lately drawn from the ways of peace. They fight not for the lust of conquest. They fight to end conquest. They fight to liberate. They fight to let justice arise, and tolerance and good will among all Thy people. They yearn but for the end of battle, for their return to the haven of home. Some will never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom.

And for us at home - fathers, mothers, children, wives, sisters, and brothers of brave men overseas - whose thoughts and prayers are ever with them - help us, Almighty God, to rededicate ourselves in renewed faith in Thee in this hour of great sacrifice. Many people have urged that I call the Nation into a single day of special prayer. But because the road is long and the desire is great, I ask that our people devote themselves in a continuance of prayer. As we rise to each new day, and again when each day is spent, let words of prayer be on our lips, invoking Thy help to our efforts. Give us strength, too - strength in our daily tasks, to redouble the contributions we make in the physical and the material support of our armed forces. And let our hearts be stout, to wait out the long travail, to bear sorrows that may come, to impart our courage unto our sons wheresoever they may be.

And, O Lord, give us Faith. Give us Faith in Thee; Faith in our sons; Faith in each other; Faith in our united crusade. Let not the keenness of our spirit ever be dulled. Let not the impacts of temporary events, of temporal matters of but fleeting moment let not these deter us in our unconquerable purpose. With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy. Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogancies. Lead us to the saving of our country, and with our sister Nations into a world unity that will spell a sure peace a peace invulnerable to the schemings of unworthy men. And a peace that will let all of men live in freedom, reaping the just rewards of their honest toil.

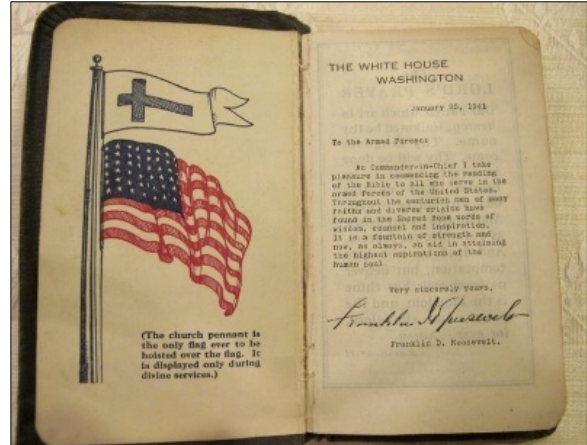
Thy will be done, Almighty God.

Amen."

Twelve

Armed Forces Prayer Book, 1951

From 1774 to the present, more than 67 versions of *Bibles and Armed Forces Prayer Books* have been officially distributed to soldiers, sailors, and airmen in every conflict from the American War for Independence to the War on Terror. During World War I, the US Government distributed pocket-sized Bibles and service books that included words of encouragement from notable leaders within its front cover. This included messages from President Woodrow Wilson, President Teddy Roosevelt, and General John J. Pershing in World War I. Featured prominently in World War II Bibles were the words of President Franklin Roosevelt, General George C. Marshall, General Omar Bradley, and General Douglas McArthur.

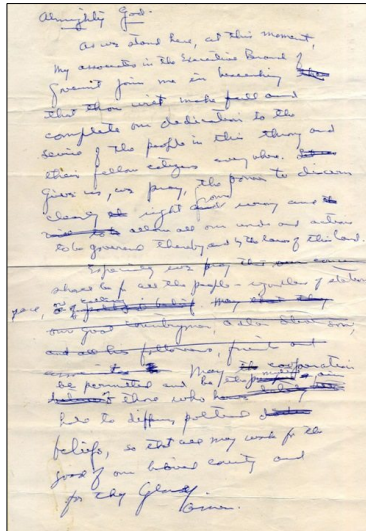


Also distributed to warriors in the Second World War were Bibles that had an outer-plate of steel on the cover. When placed in the left breast pocket over the heart, it was capable of stopping a bullet. It was thus known as a "Heart-Shield Bible." To this day, in the US Flag Code the call to serve God precedes the call to serve country. General Omar Bradley, the first chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the newly created Department of Defense, contributed the following Cadet Prayer to the *Armed Forces Prayer Book* published in 1951:

"O God, our Father, Thou Searcher of men's hearts, help us to draw near to Thee in sincerity and truth. May our religion be filled with gladness and may our worship to Thee be natural. Strengthen and increase our admiration for honest dealing and clean thinking, and suffer not our hatred of hypocrisy and pretense ever to diminish. Encourage us in our endeavor to live above the common level of life. Make us to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never to be content with a half truth when the whole can be won. Endow us with courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy, that scorns to compromise with vice and injustice and knows no fear when truth and right are in jeopardy. Guard us against flippancy and irreverence in the sacred things of life. Grant us new ties of friendship and new opportunities of service. Kindle our hearts in fellowship with those of a cheerful countenance, and soften our hearts with sympathy for those who sorrow and suffer. May we find genuine pleasure in clean and wholesome mirth and feel inherent disgust for all coarse-minded humor. Help us in our work and in our play to keep ourselves physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight that we may the better maintain the honor of the Corps untarnished and unsullied, and acquit ourselves like men in our effort to realize the ideals of West Point in doing our duty to Thee and to our Country. All of which we ask in the name of the Great Friend and Master of men. Amen."

Thirteen

Dwight Eisenhower's Inauguration And Presidency, 1953–1960



When Dwight D. Eisenhower assumed the presidency on January 20, 1953, he began his tenure with a deeply personal act: immediately following the oath of office, he offered a prayer he had composed himself. Delivered publicly from the inauguration platform, the prayer asked for divine guidance, strength, and humility in service to the nation. It marked the first time a U.S. president had included a self-written prayer as part of an inaugural address.

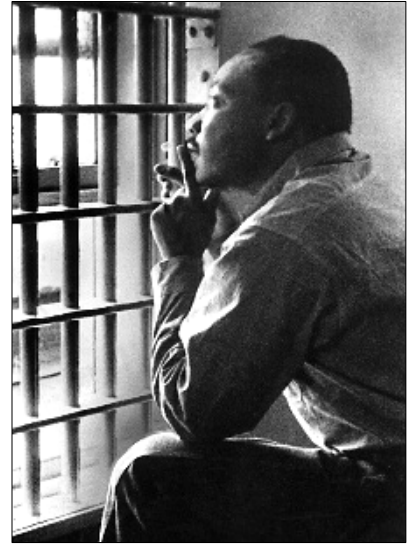
“My friends, before I begin the expression of those thoughts that I deem appropriate to this moment, would you permit me the privilege of uttering a little private prayer of my own. And I ask that you bow your heads: Almighty God, as we stand here at this moment my future associates in the executive branch of government join me in beseeching that Thou will make full and complete our dedication to the service of the people in this throng, and their fellow citizens everywhere. Give us, we pray, the power to discern clearly right from wrong, and allow all our words and actions to be governed thereby, and by the laws of this land. Especially we pray that our concern shall be for all the people regardless of station, race, or calling. May cooperation be permitted and be the mutual aim of those who, under the concepts of our Constitution, hold to differing political faiths; so that all may work for the good of our beloved country and Thy glory. Amen.”

Fourteen

Martin Luther King Jr.'S Prayers, 1963

In the summer of 1953, a young and newly-ordained Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. served as assistant pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. It was during this period that King first reached a broader public through radio ministry. His Sunday sermons were broadcast to the people of Atlanta, offering spiritual guidance across lines of race and class.

As part of these radio services, King composed and delivered a series of handwritten prayers. These prayers reveal a young preacher already well-attuned to the moral failings of society—whether pride, prejudice, or complacency—and to the redemptive power of faith, justice, and love. King called upon God not only for individual forgiveness but for courage, wisdom, and perseverance in the ongoing struggle for a more just and righteous world.



“O thou Eternal God, out of whose absolute power and infinite intelligence the whole universe has come into being. We humbly confess that we have not loved thee with our hearts, souls and minds and we have not loved our neighbors as Christ loved us. We have all too often lived by our own selfish impulses rather than by the life of sacrificial love as revealed by Christ. We often give in order to receive, we love our friends and hate our enemies, we go the first mile but dare not travel the second, we forgive but dare not forget. And so as we look within ourselves we are confronted with the appalling fact that the history of our lives is the history of an eternal revolt against thee. But thou, O God, have mercy upon us. Forgive us for what we could have been but failed to be....

...O God our eternal Father, we praise thee for gifts of mind with which thou hast endowed us. We are able to rise out of the half-realities of the sense world to a world of ideal beauty and eternal truth...

Most Gracious and all wise God; Before whose face the generations rise and fall; Thou in whom we live, and move, and have our being. We thank thee [for?] all of thy good and gracious gifts, for life and for health; for food and for raiment; for the beauties of nature and the love of human nature. We come before thee painfully aware of our inadequacies and shortcomings. We realize that we stand surrounded with the mountains of love and we deliberately dwell in the valley of hate. We stand amid the forces of truth and deliberately lie; We are forever offered the high road and yet we choose to travel the low road. For these sins O God forgive. Break the spell of that which blinds our minds. Purify our hearts that we may see thee....

O God, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind; In whom to dwell is to find peace and security; toward whom to turn is to find life and life eternal, we humbly beseech Thee for all sorts and conditions of men; that thou wouldst be pleased to make thy ways known unto them, Thy saving health unto all nations. We also pray for Thy holy Church universal; that it may be so guided and governed by thy Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the [land] of peace, and in righteousness of life. Finally we commend to thy Fatherly goodness all those who are in any way afflicted or distressed in mind or body. Give them patience under the suffering and power of endurance. This we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Fifteen

The Apollo Space Program, 1967-1972

After a cabin fire during a launch rehearsal for Apollo 1 resulted in the death of all three of its astronauts, Apollo personnel and workers launched the Apollo Prayer League for employees and fellow workers to pray diligently in advance of each “human spiritual odyssey,” and Christian symbolism began to heavily inspire subsequent missions. Astronaut Buzz Aldrin, a Presbyterian elder, took communion while on the lunar module during *Apollo 11*—the first manned lunar landing—in July 1969. Six Apollo missions carried copies of the Bible into space, many in microform.



In all, 1,029 Bibles were carried aboard six Apollo missions, of which 101 were left on the surface of the Moon. For many involved, the exploration of the heavens was not only a triumph of human ingenuity but also an opportunity to reaffirm faith in the God of the universe. For example, as Apollo 8, the first manned mission to the Moon, entered lunar orbit on Christmas Eve, 1968, astronauts Frank Borman, Jim Lovell, and William Anders conducted a live television broadcast in which they showed pictures of the Earth and Moon as seen from Apollo 8. Lovell said, "The vast loneliness is awe-inspiring and it makes you realize just what you have back there on Earth." The following prayer was then broadcast to earth by astronaut Frank Borman:

Give us, O God, the vision which can see thy love in the world in spite of human failure. Give us the faith to trust thy goodness in spite of our ignorance and weakness. Give us the knowledge that we may continue to pray with understanding hearts. And show us what each one of us can do to set forward the coming of the day of universal peace. Amen.

The broadcast concluded with the crew taking turns reading the Creation Account (Genesis 1:1-10).

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."

Borman then added:

"And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas, and God bless all of you - all of you on the good Earth."

Sixteen

Billy Graham Prays At The 1969 Presidential Inauguration

When Billy Graham stepped to the podium to deliver the invocation at Richard Nixon's 1969 inauguration, he did so as a fixture of American public life, whose spiritual counsel was sought by presidents of both parties. Beginning with his attendance at President Eisenhower's inauguration in 1953, Reverend Graham's continued participation in the inauguration ceremony confirmed a tradition in which divine aid is humbly invoked on behalf of the republic and its new stewards.

This particular prayer, uttered at the height of cultural upheaval in the late 1960s, functioned as something of a petition and a prophetic warning. In a time when many Americans feared the foundation may be cracking, Graham hearkened back to the bedrock of repentance, righteousness, and redemption.

"Our Father and our God, Thou hast said, 'Blessed is that nation whose God is the Lord.' We recognize on this historic occasion that we are 'a nation under God.' We thank Thee for this torch of faith handed to us by our forefathers. May we never let it be extinguished. Thou alone hast given us our prosperity, our freedom and our power. This faith in God is our heritage and our foundation!"

...Thou hast warned us in the Scriptures, 'If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?' As George Washington reminded us in his farewell address, morality and faith are the pillars of our society.

...Too long we have neglected Thy word and ignored Thy laws. Too long we have tried to solve our problems without reference to Thee. Too long we have tried to live by bread alone.

...And now with the wages of our sins staring us in the face, we remember Thy words, 'If my people who are called by my Name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.'

Help us this day to turn from our sins and to turn by simple faith to the One who said, 'Ye must be born again.'

So we pray, O God, as we enter a new era, that we as a nation may experience a moral and spiritual restoration.

We pray this humbly in the name of the Prince of Peace, who shed his blood on the Cross that men might have eternal life. Amen."

Seventeen

President Bush Addresses The National Prayer Service After 9/11 Attacks, 2001

Three days after 9/11, on September 14, 2001, political and religious leaders gathered at the Washington National Cathedral for a nationally televised Prayer and Remembrance Service. Representatives of multiple faiths participated. The service included prayers, Scripture readings, and the singing of “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” President George W. Bush and former presidents attended in solidarity. Millions watched or listened as the nation in mourning paused to pray. President Bush spoke the following words:

“We are here in the middle hour of our grief. So many have suffered so great a loss, and today we express our nation's sorrow. We come before God to pray for the missing and the dead, and for those who love them. On Tuesday, our country was attacked with deliberate and massive cruelty. We have seen the images of fire and ashes, and bent steel.

Now come the names, the list of casualties we are only beginning to read. They are the names of men and women who began their day at a desk or in an airport, busy with life. They are the names of people who faced death, and in their last moments called home to say, be brave, and I love you.

They are the names of passengers who defied their murderers, and prevented the murder of others on the ground. They are the names of men and women who wore the uniform of the United States, and died at their posts.

They are the names of rescuers, the ones whom death found running up the stairs and into the fires to help others. We will read all these names. We will linger over them, and learn their stories, and many Americans will weep.

To the children and parents and spouses and families and friends of the lost, we offer the deepest sympathy of the nation. And I assure you, you are not alone.

Just three days removed from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history. But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil....

...God's signs are not always the ones we look for. We learn in tragedy that his purposes are not always our own. Yet the prayers of private suffering, whether in our homes or in this great cathedral, are known and heard, and understood.

There are prayers that help us last through the day, or endure the night. There are prayers of friends and strangers, that give us strength for the journey. And there are prayers that yield our will to a will greater than our own.

This world He created is of moral design. Grief and tragedy and hatred are only for a time. Goodness, remembrance, and love have no end. And the Lord of life holds all who die, and all who mourn....

...America is a nation full of good fortune, with so much to be grateful for. But we are not spared from suffering. In every generation, the world has produced enemies of human freedom. They have attacked America, because we are freedom's home and defender. And the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time.

On this national day of prayer and remembrance, we ask almighty God to watch over our nation, and grant us patience and resolve in all that is to come. We pray that He will comfort and console those who now walk in sorrow. We thank Him for each life we now must mourn, and the promise of a life to come.

As we have been assured, neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, can separate us from God's love. May He bless the souls of the departed. May He comfort our own. And may He always guide our country."

– President George W. Bush