

Discussion Guide on Christian Faith in Politics



This Discussion Guide is best used for small groups. It is supported by the more detailed Discussion Notes.

How George Washington's Faith Inspires Us

Average Americans would be hard-pressed to speak with much depth about President George Washington, much less his faith in Jesus Christ. Most familiar with his likeness on the dollar bill, we see our first president as a two-dimensional character.

But there's no better description of faith Hebrews 11:1-2, 6: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. *This* is what the ancients were commended for . . . And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."

Biblical faith begins with the certainty that God exists. This is non-negotiable. Once you settle that issue, there is the "full assurance of faith" that God can accomplish anything we request, as long as it fits within the revealed truth of His Holy Word (Hebrews 10:22). Hence, we have "confidence."

Washington's Devotional Life

D. James Kennedy, documented George Washington's devotional life in his book, *What They Believed: The Faith of Washington, Jefferson & Lincoln*. Whether as a young man, an officer in the army, a general, or the President of the United States, unless there was an absolute emergency, Washington would leave the living room at nine o'clock in the evening, take his candle, and retire to his library. At ten o'clock he would emerge and go to his bedroom. On several occasions, people who happened to be in the home because of certain emergencies that arose, had to go to the library in that nine o'clock hour to talk with Washington. Invariably, they found him on his knees in front of a chair, a candle on the stand nearby, praying aloud before an open Bible. Similarly, he would devote the four o'clock hour, early in the morning, to personal prayer in the same manner. ¹

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In William Johnson's book, *George Washington, the Christian*, he documented 80 different titles Washington used for the Almighty in his various writings. The list includes such names as: Almighty Being, Almighty God, All-Powerful Guide, All-Wise Dispenser of Events, Author of All Good, Beloved Son, Beneficent Author of All Good, Creator, Benign Parent of the Human Race, Divine Author of the Universe, and Gracious God.

Washington's Heart-felt Prayers

Without a doubt, Washington's unwavering faith in God and devotion to prayer were formative to his leadership. Indeed, Washington had an *incredibly* tender heart toward God. He chronicled many of his prayers in writing, such as:

"O most Glorious God, in Jesus Christ my merciful and loving Father, I acknowledge and confess my guilt, in the weak and imperfect performance of the duties of this day I have called on Thee for pardon and forgiveness of sins, but so coldly and carelessly, that my prayers are become my sin and stand in need of pardon." ²

Washington's perceived even his prayers as sinful. On another occasion, he prayed:

"I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, in thought, word and deed. I have likewise sinned by omitting what I ought to have done and committing what I ought not. I have neglected the means of Grace, and opportunities of becoming better; my iniquities are multiplied, and my sins are very great. I confess them, O Lord, with shame and sorrow, detestation and loathing. I humbly beseech Thee to be merciful to me in the free pardon of my sins, for the sake of Thy dear Son, my only savior, J.C. [Jesus Christ], who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." ³

Clearly, President Washington wasn't just playing lip service to Christianity. In fact, his poignant prayer reminds us of King David's prayer after his sin of adultery (Psalm 51:1-3,10-12). David prayed:

"God, be merciful to me because you are loving. Because You are always ready to be merciful, wipe out all my wrongs. Wash away all my guilt and

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make me clean again. I know about my wrongs, and I can't forget my sin. Create in me a pure heart, God, and make my spirit right again. Do not send me away from You or take Your Holy Spirit away from me. Give me back the joy of Your salvation. Keep me strong by giving me a willing spirit.”

How Washington's Christianity Influenced His Public Life

In light of his personal devotional life, it should be no surprise that Washington, after appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the American forces in the Revolution, issued this order:

“The General most earnestly requires and expects a due observance of those articles of war established for the government of the army, which forbid profane cursing, swearing, and drunkenness.”

He believed and said that we cannot expect the blessings of Heaven upon our army if we offend the God of Heaven by our conduct. Therefore, he felt any man who was using profane language and swearing was actually a *traitor* to the American cause, cutting off the aid of Heaven to the cause of freedom. ⁴

When Washington was sworn in as President, he bent down and reverently kissed the Bible. That was the first act of the first President of our country.

In his first inaugural address, Washington said, “It would be peculiarly improper to omit, in this first official act, my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being, who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect” (p. 25). He then led the Senate and the House of Representatives on foot to St. Paul's Chapel for a two-hour service of worship. ⁵

And, after serving two terms, Washington made these remarks in his Farewell Address. “Of all the dispositions and habits which led 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 finest props of the duties of men and citizens.” ⁶

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From the earliest days of our history, George Washington and other leaders, professed faith and reliance on the God of Heaven in their personal and political endeavors. Each election is an opportunity to reflect our personal faith through our political choices.

Discussion Questions:

1. How was President Washington's devotional life demonstrated?
2. When you read Washington's prayers from his diary, what did you think?
3. Looking back on your education, were you ever taught about Washington's very personal faith in Jesus Christ?
4. Cite one example of how Washington's faith in Christ influenced his public decisions.

Endnotes

¹ D. James Kennedy, *What They Believed: The Faith of Washington, Jefferson & Lincoln*, Coral Ridge Ministries, Fort Lauderdale, Florida: 2003, p. 18.

² *Ibid*, p. 17.

³ *Ibid*, p. 17.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 23.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 24.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 26