

Lessons from Presidents

The Thinking President

David McCullough's biography of John Adams, one of America's founding fathers and early presidents, describes him as "both a devout 'Christian' and an independent thinker, and he saw no conflict in that." I am struck by that statement, for it carries a note of surprise, suggesting that Christians are somehow naïve or unenlightened, and that the idea of a "thinking Christian" is a contradiction.

Nothing could be further from the truth. One of the great benefits of salvation is that it causes the believer's mind to be guarded by the peace of God (Phil. 4:7), which can foster clear thinking, discernment, and wisdom. Paul described this in his second letter to Corinth when he wrote that in Christ we are equipped for "casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2Cor. 10:5).

To sift through an argument wisely, to embrace the clarity of the knowledge of God, and to align our thinking with the mind of Christ are valuable skills when living in a world lacking in discernment. These skills enable us to use our minds to represent Christ. Every Christian should be a thinking Christian. Are you? Faith was never intended as a substitute for intelligence. (B. Crowder)

The Challenging President

On September 12, 1962, President John F. Kennedy delivered a speech at Rice University in Houston, Texas, about the difficult challenges facing the nation. He also shared his passion for the United States to place a man on the moon. In balancing the needs of his people with the desire to conquer space, Kennedy said, "We choose to go to the moon in this decade. We choose to go to the moon and do the other things, not because they are easy but because they are hard." The nation responded. Seven years later, Neil Armstrong took a "giant leap for mankind" in July of 1969, by walking on the moon.

Today's world is filled with energy-saving devices that make life easier, but there is something to be said for embracing life's challenges. The apostle Paul found serving Christ hard, but he didn't see it as a cause for discouragement. He continued to focus on Christ, and wrote, "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair" (2Cor. 4:8). Paul knew that "He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you" (v.14). The goal was worth the pain. By the grace of God, may we commit to serving Jesus, not just when it's easy, but especially when it's hard. Jesus gave His all to save us; are we giving our all to serve Him? (B. Crowder)

The Depression President

During the Great Depression, many people in the US lived in shantytowns made up of plywood, tarps, and blankets. These decrepit dwellings, known as "Hoovervilles," housed those who had been evicted from their homes. Many blamed President Herbert Hoover for the economic woes. Ironically, Hoover's apparent ineffectiveness as a leader was in sharp contrast to his previous record. Earlier, Hoover's expertise in geological engineering led to successful mining projects in Australia and China. He also effectively spearheaded humanitarian efforts. But when the stock market crashed in October 1929, President Hoover was in circumstances beyond his control. He would be forever tied with the economic depression of the 1930s.

One major fiasco, however, does not mean one's whole life is a failure. What if we remembered Abraham only as a deceiver (Gen. 12:10-20), Moses as disobedient to God (Num. 20:1-13), or David as a murderer? (2Sam. 11). Despite their sins, these men are remembered for their persevering faith: "who through faith . . . out of weakness were made strong" (Heb. 11:33-34). Our life is not a failure if we've repented of our sins. God can still use us to serve Him. Success often rises out of the ashes of failure. (D. Fisher)

The Morally Bankrupt Presidents

We will never forget the American journalists who defended former President Clinton whose immorality should have shocked the nation into demanding that he resign. Instead, we were assured that his immorality does not affect his ability to lead the nation. Honest, honorable folk know better. Now we are once again being assured by the same journalists that the instant gratification-style economic policy and socialist tendencies of the current administration are not affecting the President's ability to lead the nation. Christians know better.

On a poster advertising a business management seminar: "The Value of a Leader Is Directly Proportional to That Leader's Values." The accuracy of that statement is beyond dispute. What we value shapes our character and will ultimately define who we are and how we lead, or whether we can lead at all. This does not apply only to Presidents, however.

For the follower of Christ, values are even more significant. When Paul wrote to the believers at Colosse, he said, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). His point is that only as we allow our values to be motivated and shaped by the eternal (not the temporal) will we be effective ambassadors of Christ in the world. It is in the understanding that we are pilgrims in this world, not tourists, that we can keep a clear perspective and an undistracted heart and can more effectively serve the Savior.

It has been said that we live in a world that knows the cost of everything but the value of nothing. In this world of the "here and now," however, followers of Christ are called to build our values around what lasts forever. To say it another way: The Effectiveness of a Believer Is Directly Proportional to That Believer's Values.

A Moments Wisdom

- May the mother-in-law remember that she was once a daughter-in-law.
- A narrow mind and a wide mouth usually go together.
- Don't expect your neighbor to be better than your neighbor's neighbor.
- When you obey your supervisor, it instructs your subordinates.
- Obstacles always show up when you remove your focus from the goal.
- The greater the obstacle, the more glory in overcoming it.
- Many people use their youth to make their old age miserable.
- The fools and the dead never change their opinions.
- Opportunities are often lost when we are broadcasting instead of tuning in.
- Even when opportunity knocks, a man must rise up out of his seat and open the door.
- It takes a strong man to swim against the current; any dead fish can float along with it.
- A cloud cannot cast a shadow on you unless the sun is shining behind it.
- Trying to resolve a problem with blame is like trying to unsnarl a traffic jam by blowing your horn.