

Ukraine Is a Reminder That Freedom Isn't Free

I arrived in Ukraine for the first time in July 2014, three years ago this month.

I originally planned to stay for three weeks. I never would have thought then, that by Independence Day 2017, three years later, I'd still be here, still reporting on the war.

On that warm summer day of my arrival in Kyiv three years ago, the taxi from the airport dropped me off at the top of Institutskaya Street, as it was still called at the time. Today, it is Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred Street, in honor of the 100 protesters who died in the February 2014 revolution. Trees green with summertime leaves lined the cobblestone street as it steeply ascended from the Maidan, Kyiv's central square and epicenter of the revolution.

Young couples in shorts and flip-flops walked past, holding hands. Police officers on their beats acted relaxed, smiling and joking.

On that day, there was little evidence of the barbaric scenes that played out on this street in February 2014, five months prior to my arrival. Yet, beneath the veneer of what could have been a normal summer day in any European capital, there were reminders of what happened there half a year earlier.

At that time, long sections of the brick sidewalk lining then-named Institutskaya Street were stripped bare, revealing earth beneath. Five months earlier, protesters had peeled away the bricks to build a defensive wall against gunfire from a special police force called the Berkut, which deposed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich had unleashed on the crowds calling for his ouster.

On that day, workers pounded new bricks into the naked soil. Others sprayed water on the black stains that dotted the stone floor of the Maidan's open expanse, erasing the traces of Molotov cocktails and the mounds of tires protesters had burned to provide a smokescreen from the snipers.

Of all the sights and sounds I encountered along Institutskaya Street on that day in July 2014, one stood out. I heard English spoken in an American accent. So my ears naturally homed in on the only understandable voice.

"Freedom isn't free," the man said.

Hallowed Ground

Just past the Hotel Ukraine, where Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred Street rounds the top of the hill overlooking the Maidan, there is a patch of open ground and a low wall off to one side.

This is a place of mourning. In July 2014, the ground here was covered in framed photos, candles and flower garlands. Bullet holes scarred the surrounding street signs and trees. The bullet holes are still there today.

On that day in July 2014, my first in Ukraine, a crowd lingered around this otherwise ordinary patch of earth. The mood was quiet and somber. Most people walked around with their arms folded across their chests. Some held a hand over their mouths. It was an unusual break from typical Slavic stoicism.

Two groups of framed photos nestled within beds of flowers and candles were arranged on the ground like a church congregation, with a cross made out of red glass candle holders in the center. The faces on the photos were of the fallen: old and young, men and women, students and professors. Hardly the neo-Nazi fascists carrying out a CIA-sponsored *putsch* as Russian media had depicted.

Families paused before the photos. Parents pointed to the memorials, trying to explain to their children what went on here, and, I imagined, what it all meant for their future.

Three years later at this spot, there is now a metal memorial with engraved faces of the dead. A flower garden grows on that patch of earth where so many died three years ago.

Prior to my arrival in 2014, I had watched a YouTube video of what had happened at this place during the revolution. The sky was gray in the video, and the trees were bare.

Snipers hidden in the surrounding rooftops gunned down the protesters one by one as they ascended the street. Some dropped dead in a flash. Others folded to the ground like in slow motion. Eventually, the dead clustered where they had collectively sought shelter in their final moments.

The protesters were unarmed. They wore motorcycle helmets and wielded shields fashioned out of the top of garbage bins and road signs for protection. As sniper fire cut down one wave of protesters at the top of the hill, their comrades would rush up to drag the dead and wounded away.

After depositing the casualties in the nearby Hotel Ukraine lobby, the survivors did something amazing. They turned around and went back.

It's hard to know, of course, the inner motivations of those protesters who walked head-on into sniper fire. Clearly, something powerful was motivating them. It had to be, because moving toward the sound of gunfire is terrifying, and one has to be motivated by something more powerful than the fear of dying to do it.

Not for Nothing

At lunch in Kyiv a few weeks after my arrival in 2014, a Ukrainian friend explained to me the mood in Ukraine. Elena

Milovidova, then a 29-year-old journalist, said there was a wave of patriotism throughout the country she had never seen before. She said there was a sense of shared responsibility among Ukrainians to live up to the sacrifices of the protesters.

“We don’t want it to be for nothing,” Milovidova told me about the revolution. “Ukrainians are very patriotic now. And if things go back to the way they were before, there will be another Maidan.”

Milovidova explained how her family was torn, like many families in Ukraine, due to her mixed Russian-Ukrainian heritage. She was proud to be Ukrainian, though, and she was proud of what the protesters did for her country. Most Russian-speaking Ukrainians felt the same way, Milovidova told me, and the idea that Ukraine was somehow split along ethnic or cultural lines was a fiction created by Moscow.

On the streets of Kyiv, signs of the country’s reborn patriotism were subtle but prolific. Women tied small blue and yellow ribbons, Ukraine’s national colors, on their purses. The same ribbons were tied to the radio antennas on cars and to tree branches. On St. Andrew’s Descent, a culturally eclectic hillside enclave in Kyiv not unlike Montmartre in Paris, artists sold paintings of scenes from the revolution. On Khreshchatyk, Kyiv’s main boulevard, sidewalk vendors sold rolls of toilet paper and doormats adorned with the faces of Yanukovich and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

It’s still like that, by the way, three years later.

Ukraine’s newfound patriotism was fueled by pride in the courage of its young people. Like Valentyn Onyshchenko, who was 21 years old when he took part in the revolution. He was shot by a 9-mm bullet from a pistol. Luckily, the round hit his metal belt buckle, he said, and aside from a nasty bruise, he was left unharmed.

“When I fell off the barricade, they were yelling, ‘Another man down,’” he told me. “And then they grabbed my arms and started to pull me away, but I just popped up and told them I was OK. They couldn’t believe it.”

Onyshchenko had a recurring dream of a man he saw cut down by a sniper during the revolution. In the dream, the man rose up and spoke to Onyshchenko from the grave, his face death gray with a bullet hole in his head.

“I was running and this guy was shot in the head by a sniper right in front of me,” Onyshchenko said. “His brains flew into my face and broke my glasses. But it was crazy, you know, my first thought was, ‘OK, there’s a McDonald’s right over there; I can go there to wash off my face.’”

After the revolution, Onyshchenko’s friends convinced him to see a psychiatrist. He was resistant to the idea at first, he said. Like most young men who have experienced combat, he was more worried about appearing weak than any physical danger.

The dreams of the dead man have gone away now, Onyshchenko said. “I think the psychiatrist really helped me,” he confessed.

Over dinner in 2014, Natalia Portier, another Ukrainian friend, told me she was more patriotic than she had ever been. Her job in Kyiv was sending her to the U.S., and she had to apply for a visa. I assumed with my reflexive American pride that she would be excited about this.

The truth was, Portier, then 30 years old, felt guilty about leaving her homeland in time of war. She had a brother, she explained, and she was afraid he would be mobilized to fight in the east along with the 60,000 Ukrainian troops currently deployed there at that time. There are, incidentally, still about 60,000 troops serving in the eastern war zone as of July 2017.

“The world is so cruel,” Portier said to me three years ago. She shook her head, looking past me. But then she beamed when a man walked into the pub wearing a T-shirt with a trident on it, Ukraine’s national symbol.

“It’s not so unusual to see that now,” she said, smiling. “I’m so proud of my country and to be Ukrainian. I hope this stupid war ends soon.”

Independence Day

As a veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, I know what it’s like to serve in a war zone. And as someone who was a 19-year-old cadet at the Air Force Academy on Sept. 11, 2001, I also know what inspires young men and women to go to war. I’ve been there. I get it.

The young soldiers I’ve encountered in Ukraine, destined for the front lines in the east, wear a combined look of fear and youthful exuberance that I remember seeing on young U.S. soldiers in other war zones. And the combination of pride and worry felt by the families those Ukrainian soldiers have left behind is no different than what my own family endured when my brother and I deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq.

After three years of war, most Ukrainians still believe freedom is worth fighting for. Ukrainians know why they have to win the war; they just don’t know why they had to fight it.

“The revolution was never about Russia,” Milovidova explained to me in 2014. “It was about making Ukraine better. No one thought this war would happen.”

Three years later, the words of that lone voice from my first day in Kyiv are still fresh in my mind. Especially on a day like Independence Day, when I reflect on my own country’s virtues, on why my generation spent our youths in war and on what our sacrifices ultimately accomplished.

As I see a young Ukrainian woman blowing a kiss to a passing convoy of troops or as I see an old woman kiss her fingers and then reach to touch the face of a young boy in one of the photos at the top of Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred Street, I hear those words again: “Freedom isn’t free.”

I’ve always known that, and I’ve heard the expression countless times. I even fought for it. But until I arrived in Ukraine, I never really understood what it meant. {eoa}

This article was originally published at [DailySignal.com](https://www.dailysignal.com). Used with permission.

When Will I Be an Elder of the Church?

The essence of servant leadership is the absence of selfishness.

I heard a young man in church one day ask his pastor about becoming an elder of the church. The pastor’s comment was probably fairly common among church leaders: “When you are truly an elder, you won’t need a title. You will already be known as an elder by the church.”

Titles don’t mean much in the kingdom of God. A title invites the opportunity for us to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Titles puffeth upeth.

A servant leader embraces accountability. There is no need to be right, only to be heard. The servant leader speaks life into hearers and doesn’t seek credit or validation.

Conflict enters a relationship when a leader demands to be

served. Power is dangerous when the wrong hand holds the scepter. A true servant leader doesn't read his own press clippings. The leader's sense of self-worth comes from his nearness to the cross.

Servant leaders show more than they tell.

The two most powerful markers of a servant are humility and gratitude. Both markers show up—every day in every way.

A leader demonstrates humility and gratitude without even trying. It comes from within.

The language of a selfish leader reveals the heart. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

I can't serve myself if I have died to self.

Kingdom leaders are servant leaders.

How to Control Your Tongue in the Trump Era

Last week, President Trump issued a tweet from the White House, mocking MSNBC host Mika Brzezinski's appearance and questioning her sanity. And after both Republicans and Democrats in Washington begged Trump to use a more civil tone in his communication, he took to Twitter again, calling Brzezinski "dumb as a rock" and her on-air partner, Joe Scarborough, "crazy."

What is going on here? Trump's defenders say liberal journalists deserve harsh treatment because they relentlessly insult the president. Trump's deputy press secretary, Sarah

Huckabee Sanders, said her boss “fights fire with fire.” She added: “The American people elected a fighter.”

Liberal politicians and journalists questioned whether Trump is mentally stable. Meanwhile Republicans begged their leader to calm down. Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said Trump’s tweetstorm was “beneath the office and represents what is wrong with American politics.”

This is all new territory for us as Americans. Social media now allows our president, along with his political enemies, to toss verbal grenades while the audience listens to the explosions in real time. I’m sure politicians said awful things about each other before the digital age. But with Twitter, the ugliness is out there for us all to read and respond to with our own angry retorts.

Trump was certainly not elected because of his politeness. He is gruff and feisty, and his remarks often sound like those of a playground bully. His in-your-face attitude is what endeared him to many voters who are sick of conventional politics. They want a president who acts like a professional wrestler, breathing threats and flexing his muscles.

It remains to be seen whether this combative tone will work for President Trump or whether it will backfire. But this is certainly not the tone we need in the church today. Politicians may argue, and comedians may pull ugly stunts. But as a Christian, I can’t lower myself to this level.

I am called to reflect the love of Jesus. So are you.

The spirit of the world wants us to take sides in this nasty battle. The devil wants us to hate each other, bicker and throw mud. But the kingdom of Jesus transcends this divisive world. We are called to love people and share Christ with them. If politics prevents you from fulfilling the Great Commission, then you have traded your faith for an idol.

I know some conservative Christians who have become much angrier since the 2016 election. They can chop liberal politicians and journalists into pieces with their words. I also know some left-leaning Christians who have changed into monsters because they are so angry. They seethe with so much animosity toward Donald Trump that they are becoming the bully they say he is.

In this age of outrage, we have lost our first love. How can we rise above this ugly conflict and speak as prophets to our culture? The best way to maintain a prophetic voice is to control your words. Let's remember these simple rules:

1. **Think before you speak.** James 1:19-20 says: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God." The definition of discretion is "the quality of behaving or speaking in such a way as to avoid causing offense." If someone says something to you that makes you angry, bite your lip and wait before you lash out.

You do not have to have the last word. Don't ruin your testimony by being impetuous. Proverbs 29:20 says it bluntly: "Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him." Sometimes the best thing to do in an argument is to shut up. Proverbs 17:28 says: "Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise; and he who shuts his lips is esteemed a man of understanding."

2. **Learn to respond in the opposite spirit.** Anger breeds anger. Mudslinging provokes more mudslinging. But when we have the Holy Spirit inside of us, we have the power to overcome the flesh and manifest the attitude of Jesus. When someone begins arguing, you can turn the conversation by showing compassion or mercy. Proverbs 15:1 says: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger." You can set the tone.

3. **Let love be your guide.** I Corinthians 16:14 says: “Let all that you do be done in love.” That’s a simple but powerful command. If what you are about to write on Facebook isn’t loving, don’t post it. Let love temper your words and your social media communication. Love builds a platform for you to share Christ, but angry, bitter or demeaning words remove all hope of you communicating the gospel with others.

Don’t allow today’s toxic public conversation to infect you with hate. Let’s model civility, reconciliation and kindness to a nation that needs the love of Jesus. And let’s pray that our president, who is surrounded by Christians, will learn to restrain his anger before he tweets. {eoa}

7 Meaningful Ways God Speaks That Can Help Your Marriage

When we asked couples what they struggle with, communication was No. 1. It can feel as though you and your spouse are speaking different languages, and attempts to talk seem to only make things worse. Since we are made in God’s image, looking at God’s communication with us should teach us a lot about healthy communication in marriage.

God is always communicating. The Bible is basically a record of and means of God’s communication with us. “God, who at various times and in diverse ways spoke long ago to the fathers through the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the world” (Heb. 1:1-2).

Imagine God trying to communicate with us. He knows

everything, has all the answers, and loves us with a heart that is infinite, passionate, strong, and wise. But we struggle to hear and understand Him. Jesus described it like this: "In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says: 'By hearing, you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing, you will see and shall not perceive; for this people's heart has grown dull. Their ears have become hard of hearing, and they have closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts, and turn, and I should heal them'" (Matt. 13:14-15).

Talk about a closed heart! Does that sound like your spouse when you try to communicate?

And perhaps it describes you sometimes as well.

But God doesn't give up, and neither should you.

Here are some aspects of God's communication with us that can help you in communicating with your spouse.

1. **He goes first.**

God doesn't wait for us to be good enough or willing to listen before communicating. He makes the first move. We are decidedly unworthy, but He speaks anyway. Everything in the Bible, including Jesus coming in person, were at God's initiative. And He continues to take the initiative in communicating with us now.

So don't wait for your spouse to do it; you step up and work on communication first. You invest the time to learn the necessary skills, to discover how your spouse hears best, to broach the difficult subjects, to communicate when your spouse doesn't seem interested. You make the first move.

2. **He seeks our understanding instead of forcing our obedience.**

God could have forced us to obey Him, but He values our freely-given love and worship too much. Because He's God, He doesn't have to work hard to understand us, but He does work hard at helping us understand Him in any way we as humans can.

Trying to get your way in your marriage will be a very short-lived victory. If you want a real relationship you will have to work toward understanding, not compliance. It's understanding that fosters connection and intimacy. Seek understanding first.

3. He lets us talk, and He listens.

God encourages us to communicate with Him. "Come now, let us reason together" (Is. 1:18a). "Let us then come with confidence to the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16). And He assures us that He hears us (see 1 John 5:14). It's not one-sided. He invites us to pour out everything in our hearts to Him.

Be an eager, attentive listener to your spouse. Concentrate on listening not only with your ears, but with your eyes and heart. Listen to their words and also to what's underneath the words such as their wounds, dreams, emotions, needs and more.

4. He is always after strengthening the relationship.

God's communication with us is always about encouraging relationship. When He corrects us, it's with the message "I don't want you to be hurt! Come back to Me!" He promises good things to make us desire relationship with Him. He is the ultimate example of communicating from an open heart.

In communicating with your spouse, always make your goal strengthening the relationship between you. If you have something negative to say, attack the problem, not the person. Demonstrate by your words and actions that you desire the relationship to be not only preserved but deepened.

5. He speaks in a language we can understand.

The few times God used His own voice to speak to humans, they cowered in fear. (see Ex. 20:18-19). So God uses our language. He has inspired human beings to speak His message to us. His letter to us—the Bible—is a collection of stories, poems and letters. He became one with us in the person of Jesus, showing us what He is like in a demonstration we'd have to be blind to miss. Still we often don't "get it," but He keeps speaking our language.

Make an effort to listen to yourself with your spouse's ears. Pay attention to what they are hearing, not just what you are saying. Invest in framing and delivering your words in the way your spouse can best hear and understand.

6. He risks Himself in communicating with us.

How many times have human beings misunderstood what God is saying? God risks His reputation by communicating with us. And His biggest communication of all—coming Himself in the person of Jesus—was riskiest of all when we as humans rejected Him and crucified Him.

Communicating with your spouse makes you vulnerable. You might be—probably will be—misunderstood, rejected or hurt either occasionally or frequently. But the consequences of not communicating are too great, and the potential benefits of understanding and intimacy too valuable. So just do it, even if it's hard, frustrating, scary and risky.

7. He never gives up.

God doesn't close His heart to us when we misunderstand Him, get angry or walk away. He respects our choices and communicates again and again. He keeps on seeking to find ways to help us respond to Him. He never gives up.

Don't close your heart to your spouse. Even if you must protect it at times, keep it open. Keep communicating, seeking to understand. Keep seeking to win your spouse's heart. Keep

searching for how your spouse can best hear you.

Communicating with your spouse like God communicates with us does not happen naturally. It takes intentional effort and God's work in your heart and in your relationship. This would be one of the most important things to pray about—that God open your heart and your spouse's heart, and that He fill you with the grace to communicate with your spouse in the same ways He communicates with us.

Reprinted with permission from [Dr. Carol Ministries](#). Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is an author, speaker, minister and OB-GYN.

5 Telltale Traits of an Immature Christian

The first epistle of Peter (written somewhere around the year A.D. 63-64) is addressed to those who have been scattered throughout the greater Asia area. The letter is addressed to the aliens scattered, but the theme of this amazing book is the true grace of God. For the next few moments, let's consider some of the implications of grace in our lives. That grace, or unmerited favor of God, has been deposited into us because of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Grace means that we are secure because of who Jesus is and, since we've entered that relationship with Him, the text tells us that we have "an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance that does not fade away (1 Pet. 1:4a). We are secure in Christ and as a result of that security, we are called into holiness and challenged to live a holy life that reflects the character of Jesus because "you shall be holy for I am holy (Lev. 11:45c). Holiness leads us into fear of a holy God. This fear

is not the same as that which goes bump in the night; rather, this fear is a wholesome dread of displeasing Him. The continuing result of this grace is that we are to grow. That's where we pick up the text in 1 Peter 2:1-10. I encourage you to grab your copy of the Scriptures and read those verses.

First, we see a prerequisite to growth. The apostle Peter tells us to "put aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and slander of every kind" (1 Pet. 2:1, NIV). We are to put away malice, that is a vicious disposition, that spirit of doing harm, always thinking the worst of other people. Even as a child of God, malice, or distrust of people, so easily creeps back into our lives and we can come to that place where we are the ones who truly have a vicious disposition.

Peter not only says "malice" but he talks about "deceit," which means to mislead. It really comes from a fishing term, to bait the hook. If you're an avid fisherman, you know that baiting the hook is a way to try to deceive the fish into believing it's going to get something good to eat, but when it bites into that food and grabs hold of that hook, it is now caught. Deceit is intentionally misleading. As a child of God, it should not be part of our lives. And yet, church leaders sometimes find themselves misleading their people, not telling them all of the truth. Or sometimes, as a child of God, we mislead the church leadership into thinking that we are far more holy or spiritual than we really are. Sometimes it's in our work environment where we shade the truth just a little bit so that we look better than we actually are. Sometimes we try to make someone look worse than they really are! So, Peter says you need to put away malice, that vicious disposition, deceit, to intentionally mislead. Then he goes on to talk about hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy is an outward show, masquerading as something you are not. Now, let's be completely honest with one another! There have been times when we all have been the hypocrite, saying one thing and doing another; condemning an action and

then finding ourselves doing the exact same thing. Peter tells us to stop doing this.

The next prerequisite for growth on the list is envy. Envy is coveting, or wanting what others have, resenting their prosperity. Instead, we are to rejoice with them that they have been blessed with such great possessions, wealth, or position! It can be a challenge for us to learn to be grateful to the Lord for what others have, and to be incredibly grateful to the Lord for what we have.

The next part of the list is slander, which means to defame or give an evil report. These are negative things that Peter speaks about that need to be removed from our lives if, as the children of God, we are going to grow in this amazing grace.

In verse 2, Peter gives us a positive point when he says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2, MEV). Just as a newborn infant longs for his mother's pure milk, so we, as newborn children of Jesus, need to long for God's Word, because that is how we grow. Acts 6:4 tells us that "we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Coupled with the ministry of prayer is the ministry of the word, feeding on the Scriptures. If we only do this on Sundays at church and then not again until the next Sunday, it's like eating at a buffet for Sunday lunch and then not eating again until the following Sunday. As children of God, we need to be in His Word to learn from Him, seek His face and rejoice in who He is. So Peter tells us to grow! Grow up, putting aside these evil things and longing for the pure milk of the word.

As a result of this, as we see in verse 5, we are living stones, and we who believe in Jesus will never be disappointed. In verse 6, we see Jesus as the cornerstone who was rejected, the stumbling stone. But, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own

possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. You see, we must grow so that we can fulfill the mission that Christ has given to us as a chosen people, God's own possession, a group who have the privilege of proclaiming the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness.

The task of reaching a lost generation, a lost world, is at stake. If we are going to see our nations reached for Jesus, then we, the church, must be renewed by seeking His face; by longing for the pure milk of the Word; and by growing into a deep, mature faith which will not tolerate things like malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. Let's grow together for the sake of the gospel. {eoa}

Dr. S. Lindsay Taylor is president of Strategic Renewal Canada. This sister ministry launched just a year ago and is seeking to be used of the Lord to ignite the heart of the local church to seek the face of God in Canada, a nation in great need of spiritual renewal. If you are reading this article and you are in a Canadian church, we want to encourage you to contact Strategic Renewal Canada. You can do that through their website, which is simply www.strategicrenewal.ca, or you can call Lindsay directly at 519-993-1597. He will be glad to assist you and your ministry.

©2017 S. Lindsay Taylor. All rights reserved.

**The Declaration of
Independence Is the American**

Creed

The Declaration of Independence contains the clearest, most concise and most eloquent articulation of the American creed, [says David Azerrad](#), “a political definition of man in two axioms, and three corollary propositions on government”:

In the course of making this argument and building their case, the founders also laid down the timeless and universal principles that were to define the new country. In that second paragraph, we find the clearest, most concise and most eloquent articulation of the American creed. The truths proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence define us as a nation and bind us together as Americans. They unite the diverse pluribus into an American unum.

Natural human equality is the first axiom of the American creed. The founders, of course, recognized that human beings are different and unequal in more ways than anybody could count. But for political purposes, all men and women—regardless of race, religion, sex or whatever the oppressed category—are born equally free and independent and therefore may not be ruled without their consent. In America, we recognize neither natural slavery nor divine-right monarchy. The differences that separate us are never so great as to create a chasm between human beings. As Thomas Jefferson [explained](#): ‘Because Sir Isaac Newton was superior to others in understanding he was not therefore lord of the person or property of others.’

[Click here](#) to read the rest of Azerrad’s assessment. {eoa}

Take a Moment to Read the Declaration of Independence Today

Outside of the Bible, the Declaration of Independence is, quite arguably, the document that most changed the world—and is easily among the most important pieces of literature ever written.

But have you ever taken the time to read it?

Read the full text of our nation's birth certificate below. Then, be sure to share it with friends, family and neighbors on this, the 241st anniversary of our nation's declaration that "all men are created equal" and "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights:"

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in

such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government and to provide new guards for their future security.—

Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the state remaining in the meantime exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without and convulsions within.

He has endeavored to prevent the population of these states; for that purpose obstructing the laws for naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies without the consent of our legislature.

He has affected to render the military independent of and superior to civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states:

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing taxes on us without our consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury:

For transporting us beyond seas to be tried for pretended offenses:

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighboring province, establishing therein an arbitrary government and enlarging its boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule in these colonies:

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments:

For suspending our own legislatures and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages and

totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow citizens taken captive on the high seas to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms: our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have we been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.

We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies are, and of right ought

to be free and independent states; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor. {eoa}

The Beautiful Reason God Is Letting You Endure This Trial

It's the journey of most believers: you give your life to Jesus, get saved and enter a time of grace: Life is sweet, old sins fade away, all things are becoming new.

But then it happens. You hit a wall. It could be from something you did or through no fault of your own, but the crisis comes either way.

Things are no longer sweet. Life is hard, and all you want to do is go back to when it was easy.

Here's the temptation: the flesh wants to go back, but God wants to take us forward, through the wilderness and into Christian maturity.

Pruning doesn't happen because we've done something wrong, but because we're doing something right—seeking Jesus ([John 15:2](#)). God's plan for the testing is to use it to draw us closer to

Him, to increase our dependence on Christ.

Without the wilderness and trials, it can be tempting to think we can do it all in our own strength. Many believers, during their initial season of grace, think this is how their Christian walk will be forever—easy, fruitful and blessed.

But God works in seasons, and He allows the pruning to bring maturity so that we can bear even more fruit.

It's so important to realize this, so that we respond rightly when the trials come. Instead of getting mad at God or thinking we've done something wrong, we can set our sights on His redeeming love—which is stronger than death ([Song 8:6](#)).

The same love that saved us will also carry us through this difficulty. What we don't see yet is how much growth and maturity we'll have after we go through the testing.

God's ways are not our ways, but higher ([Is. 55:9](#)). We think we'd grow the most when ministry is easy and life is good, but this is not God's pattern. Every leader in the Bible experienced times of trial, and most were persecuted or mocked for their faith.

The road to Christian maturity isn't easy, but it's worth it. Learning to love God in our weakness—and to accept His love even when we feel undeserving—will unlock things in our hearts that few things can.

Mike Bickle, director of the International House of Prayer, talks about the journey of Christian maturity in his 12-part series, [Studies in the Song of Solomon](#).

This powerful teaching has helped set many people free from striving, condemnation and shame and into receiving the all-powerful love of God. A key part of this journey, however, is going through seasons of adversity and growth in our Christian walk.

“We must not settle only for the early stages of experiencing God’s love where Jesus reveals Himself to us as Savior (who freely forgives us), as Provider (who blesses our circumstances), and the Lord of Hosts or captain of the armies of heaven (who uses us in ministry in His war against darkness),” Mike says in session 12. “He also wants us to know Him as the Bridegroom King who loves us with all His heart and mind.”

Leaning into God’s love is the only way to make it through the testings and challenges of life. Our strength will fail at times, but His love is constant and unchanging.

You can watch Mike’s teaching [here](#) to gain greater insight into how God matures His saints.

We leave you with some Scriptures for encouragement, and a question for reflection:

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not give up” (Gal. 6:9).

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now, if for a little while, you have had to suffer various trials, in order that the genuineness of your faith, which is more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tried by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom, having not seen, you love; and in whom, though you do not see Him now, you believe and you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving as the result of your faith the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:6-9).

“The Lord, He goes before you. He will be with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you. Do not fear, nor be dismayed” (Deut. 31:8).

“Praying earnestly that ... [God will release His Spirit and

grace to] perfect what is lacking in your faith . . . And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all men ... To this end may He establish your hearts to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thess. 3:10-13; bracketed words added).

Question: What's something you've learned from a time of testing or trial? {eoa}

*A Detroit native who was raised in Vermont and Connecticut, **Adam Wittenberg** worked as a newspaper journalist until 2012, when he moved to Kansas City to complete the Intro to IHOPKC internship. Afterwards, he earned a four-year certificate in House of Prayer Leadership from IHOPU and is now on full-time staff in the Marketing department at [IHOPKC](#). Adam is also active in evangelism and has a vision to reach people everywhere with the good news of Jesus Christ.*

America Owes Everything to Its Forefathers

It's time to watch fireworks displays, sing patriotic songs and ruminate about our country's rich heritage and history. It's time to celebrate America's national birthday. As we do so, we should recognize that millions of our ancestors, by their creative thinking, hard work, devotion to the common good and personal sacrifices, have helped make our nation a beacon of democracy and opportunity in a world that has faced a sea of challenges since 1776.

We obviously owe a huge debt of gratitude to America's

founders, who risked their property, reputations and lives to express their opposition to Britain's policies, to call for independence, to fight a war to achieve this objective and to craft a new nation that has defended and disseminated the principles of freedom around the globe.

Not surprisingly, four of the principal founders were the first four presidents of the United States: George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison all served effectively as the nation's chief executive, setting precedents and establishing policies that placed the fledging country on a solid foundation and helped ensure its stability and success.

Also, not surprisingly, their successors in the office have often praised the founders for their wisdom in devising such a venerable Constitution and workable government and appealed to them to bolster their own reputations and policies. Twentieth and 21st-century presidents have especially lauded the religious convictions of the founders.

Both Republican and Democratic chief executives have argued that the founders' religious convictions helped shape the government they crafted. "Nothing is more true," Herbert Hoover proclaimed, "than George Washington's statement: 'National morality cannot exist in the absence of religious principle.'" The Scriptures, insisted Franklin Roosevelt, shaped the philosophy of the founding fathers and guided their actions.

"Our Founding Fathers," Harry Truman announced, "believed that God created this Nation." They correctly acknowledged "that God was our strength in time of peril and the source of all our blessings." That the United States endured the "agonies of the American Revolution and emerge[d] triumphant," Truman argued, was miraculous. Its independence was "the working of God's hand."

Dwight Eisenhower insisted that the Founding Fathers "wrote their religious faith into our founding documents, stamped their trust in God upon our coins and currency, put it squarely at the base of our institutions." They strove to obey God's commandments, live in freedom and create a prosperous country. "The knowledge that God is the source of all power," Eisenhower maintained, gave birth to and sustained America. Human dignity depended on the God-given rights that were "eloquently stated" in the Declaration of Independence.

Faith in Almighty God, John F. Kennedy contended, "was a dominant power in the lives of our Founding Fathers." He urged Americans to "dwell upon the deep religious convictions of those who formed our nation."

Ronald Reagan repeatedly stressed the religious commitments of the Founding Fathers, especially their contention that the United States would flourish only if its people acted morally. The founders, he declared, "believed faith in God was the key to our being a good people and America's becoming a great nation." Reagan regularly recounted how the founders, especially Washington, had relied on God in leading the nation. The Declaration of Independence, Reagan claimed, expressed America's recognition of God's power and authority. He noted that Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison all accentuated God's providential guidance and the importance of prayer. The Founding Fathers ensured that Congress began each day with prayer, Reagan proclaimed, because they valued prayer so highly.

The American republic, declared George H. W. Bush, was built on the founders' "faith in Almighty God" and "spiritual principles." Convinced that all people "are equal in the sight of their Creator," the founders devised a system of government that protected "the God-given rights of every individual." The founders cared deeply about religion, Bill Clinton maintained, because they thought it promoted the character and conduct essential to the republic's success. The framers of the

Constitution, Clinton argued, “recognized the awesome power” religious liberty possessed to unite citizens to promote the common good.

“The faith of our Founding Fathers.” George W. Bush proclaimed, established the precedent that prayers and national days of prayer are an honored part of our American way of life.” “Our Founding Fathers,” he added, “knew the importance of freedom of religion to a stable and lasting Union.” They “relied on their faith to guide them as they built our democracy.” Barack Obama praised the founders for giving Americans the ability “to worship and practice religion as they choose.”

Presidents have also frequently cited the founders to reinforce policies they advocated. Consider three examples:

In urging Congress to pass the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, Clinton claimed that it better protected “Americans of all faiths in the exercise of their religion” and was “far more consistent” with the founders’ intention than the Supreme Court’s decision in *Employment Division v. Smith* (1990). This act, Clinton maintained, honored “the principle that our laws and institutions should not impede or hinder but rather should protect and preserve fundamental religious liberties.”

In promoting faith-based initiatives, George W. Bush argued in 2001 that the nation’s founders had approved using federal money to fund the activities of religious groups that promoted morality and improved social conditions but not those endeavors that spread their specific beliefs.

In calling on the Senate to approve the Law of the Sea Convention in 2016, Obama reminded them that “the power to make treaties is written into our Constitution. Our Founding Fathers ratified lots of treaties.”

As we celebrate our nation’s 241st birthday, let’s thank God

for giving us this incredible collection of founders who labored so courageously, tirelessly and effectively to establish the world's largest to-that-date republic and ensure its success. {eoa}

Dr. Gary Scott Smith is the retired chair of the history department at Grove City College and is a fellow for faith and politics with The Center for Vision & Values.

This article was originally published at VisionAndValues.org. Used with permission.

John Adams Played an Indispensable Role in Propelling the American Revolution

That the brilliant wordsmith Thomas Jefferson was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence is indisputable, but a lesser-known fact is that the man who played the indispensable role in its adoption by the Continental Congress in July 1776 was John Adams of Massachusetts, our second president.

Jefferson later confirmed Adams' role as the tireless "floor manager" of the declaration:

No man better merited than Mr. John Adams to hold a most conspicuous place in the design. He was the pillar of its support on the floor of Congress, its ablest advocate and defender against the multifarious assaults encountered.

As historian David McCullough has written, tension in the congressional debate was heightened by the sighting of a hundred British ships off New York, the first arrivals of a fleet that would number over 400. So serious a step as independence warranted unanimity among the colonies, but Delaware and Pennsylvania remained question marks.

Just as the doors of Congress were about to be closed, Caesar Rodney of Delaware arrived, "booted and spurred." Although suffering from skin cancer, Rodney had ridden 80 miles through the night, changing horses several times, to cast his "aye" vote for independence.

More important to the cause, McCullough writes, were two empty chairs in the Pennsylvania delegation. Unwilling to vote for independence, but acknowledging the need for Congress to be unanimous, John Dickinson and Robert Morris "had voluntarily absented themselves from the proceedings," placing Pennsylvania behind independence by the narrow margin of 3-2.

On the final day of debate, when adoption of the Declaration by all 13 colonies was still in doubt, Adams rose to speak "with a power of thought and expression," Jefferson wrote, "that moved us from our seats."

To Richard Stockton, a new delegate from New Jersey, Adams was "the atlas" of the hour, "the man to whom the country is most indebted for the great measure of independency."

Today, some 241 years later, we remain awed by the courage of the delegates assembled in Philadelphia who declared their independence from England, then the most powerful nation in the world, and pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to a new nation—the United States of America.

While Jefferson himself penned the declaration of Independence, it was Adams more than anyone else who was responsible for its adoption. He, more than any other delegate, understood how consequential the Declaration would

be, writing to his beloved wife Abigail:

The second day of July 1776 will be the most memorable epocha in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival.

It ought to be commemorated as the Day of Deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other from this time forward forever more.

So, let the illuminations begin! {eoa}

Lee Edwards *is the distinguished fellow in conservative thought at The Heritage Foundation's B. Kenneth Simon Center for Principles and Politics.*

This article was originally published at DailySignal.com. Used with permission.