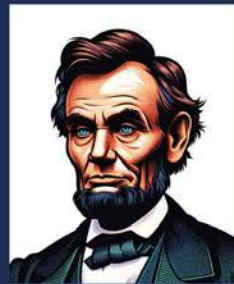
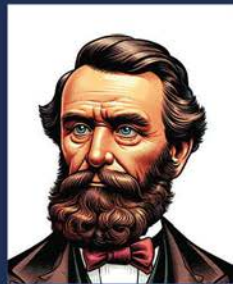


What a Character!

AMAZING AMERICAN  
PRESIDENTS

Notable Lives from History



Marilyn Boyer

First printing: August 2024

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## **Introduction**

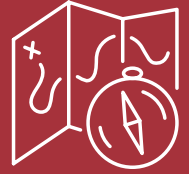
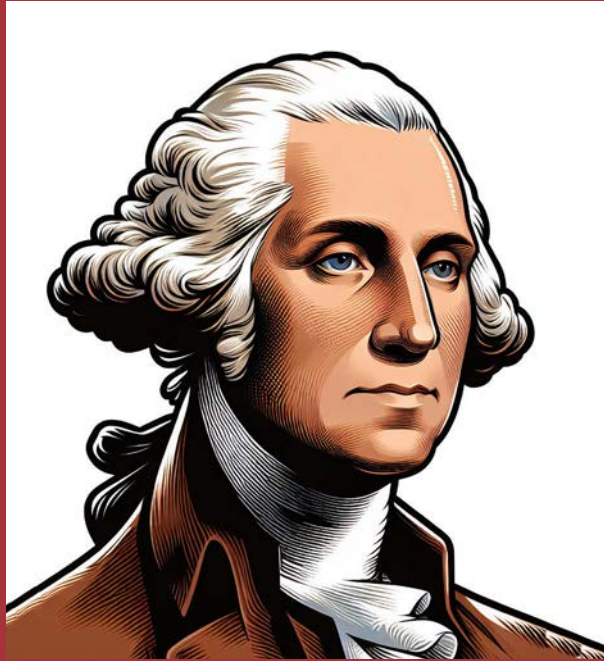
It is fascinating to explore the lives of those who grew up to become presidents of the United States. Each person's upbringing, character, and life decisions played a crucial role in shaping who they became by the time they assumed the presidency. In the stories that follow, you will learn about

specific moments when God preserved the lives of individuals who would later become presidents. No one makes the right decisions all the time, but God looks at the heart. God honors those who choose to follow the principles in His Word. Here are some individuals who sought to follow the Lord in their everyday lives and fulfilled their duties to their country at the same time.



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# George Washington – The Man Bullets Could Not Kill

February 22, 1732–  
December 14, 1799

1st President:  
1789–1797

## Who Was George Washington?

Most may already know that George Washington was the first President of the United States. However, you may not know of the various ways God miraculously preserved his life as he grew older. George Washington was born on a large farm in Virginia on February 22, 1732. His father was very wealthy and owned several big farms. He also had a business that made and sold iron. George's father died, however, when he was only 11, so George was raised by his mother and older brother, Lawrence. George loved and admired his mother very much. She trained him to be responsible, hardworking, and honest. Throughout his life, he was very close to her. He once said, "All that I am I owe to my mother. I attribute all my success in life to the moral, intellectual, and physical education I received from her."<sup>1</sup>

### Early Years

George only went to school for a few years, but he received an excellent education. His mother also taught him well. He helped her run the farms. He loved riding horses and chasing foxes through the woods with his dogs. At school, George



**distinguished** himself as a leader. He seemed to be better at running and wrestling than other boys his age. The story is told that once he threw a rock from the ground to the top of Natural Bridge, a distance of 200 feet, and he was throwing straight up in the air!



### **The Young Surveyor**

North America at this time was being explored, and new lands were being assessed and calculated for size. This was done by men called surveyors. These men would mark off boundaries and lay out roads. George learned more about this from private tutors and a local school. When George was 16 years old, Lord Fairfax, an old family friend, asked him to go with a team of surveyors to measure land he owned in Virginia.

**distinguished:**  
Became known for

Surveying was a hard job. Men had to sleep outside in tents. There were deep rivers to cross, wild animals roaming around, and sometimes enemies to avoid. George and the men completed the job and returned about a month later. Lord Fairfax was pleased. He gave George the job of head surveyor of Culpepper County, Virginia.

George was 17 years old at the time. He spent the next three years in the wilderness, marking territories and boundaries. He also spent much time at the Fairfax farm, talking with Lord Fairfax and reading books from his vast library. When George was 20, his brother Lawrence developed **tuberculosis** and died. George was heartbroken as he journeyed home. He inherited Mount Vernon, his father's

**tuberculosis:** A fatal lung disease

beautiful plantation on the Potomac River. War broke out between England and France about two years after Lawrence died.

## French and Indian War

At that time, Virginia was one of 13 English colonies. There was no United States yet. France owned some colonies in America, too. Most of the French colonies were in what is now Canada; some were further south. Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia sent George Washington and some men to request the French army to leave, but they refused. It appeared that war would come. The governor told Washington to take 150 men to cut a road out to Fort Duquesne, which was a fort



established by the French close to the Monongahela River near the present site of Pittsburgh. The governor said an army had to go there to defeat the French.

The English king sent General Braddock to America to lead the fight against the French. He was a brave soldier but had no idea how to fight in forests. In Europe,



British armies in bright red uniforms would line up facing each other and then fire. Washington tried to explain to him that the Native Americans fought by hiding behind trees and rocks, and that it would be unwise to line up to fight. Both the British and the French had sought alliances with the Native People. During the **ensuing** battle, rifles boomed from the bushes but the British soldiers could not see who was firing at them. British officers were killed or wounded. Soon Braddock and Washington were the only officers left. More than half of the British soldiers were killed or badly wounded; eventually, General Braddock himself was killed.

With General Braddock gone, George Washington **rallied** the troops and organized a retreat. With his 100 militiamen, he managed to hold the French and Native American

**ensuing:** Resulting

**rallied:** Mobilized

warriors back so the rest of the British army could escape. The army had to leave supplies and wagons behind. Because of that, the Native Americans let them get away while they **confiscated** the supplies left behind.

After the battle, Washington discovered that he had been shot at. There were four bullet holes in his coat and bullet fragments in his hair. He was the only **mounted** officer alive. He wrote to his family, “By the all-powerful **dispensations** of **Providence**, I have been protected beyond all human probability or expectation; for I had four bullets through my coat, and two horses shot under me yet escaped unhurt, although death was **leveling** my companions on every side of me.”<sup>2</sup>

## The Old Native American Chief

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>confiscated:</b> Seized                              | Years later, in 1770, George Washington and his friend Dr. James Craik visited the battle site. There, an old Native American chief asked to see him. They sat down together by a fire. The chief told Washington that he had been one of the warriors that day, 15 years ago, who was helping the French. He had instructed his warriors to single out all the men on horseback, knowing they were the officers. As man after man fell, he turned all his efforts on Washington. He told Washington that he had personally fired his rifle at him 17 times but could not hit him. As an <b>expert marksman</b> , he concluded that Washington |
| <b>mounted:</b> Riding on a horse                       |  |
| <b>dispensations:</b><br>Divine periods of God’s timing |  |
| <b>Providence:</b><br>Protection of God                 |  |
| <b>leveling:</b> Destroying                             |  |
| <b>expert marksman:</b><br>A good shot                  |  |

must be under the special care of God. He stopped shooting at him and gave the order for his braves to stop as well. Then he said, “I have traveled a long and weary path that I might see the young warrior of the great battle. . . . I am come to pay **homage** to the man who is the particular favorite of Heaven, and who can never die in battle.”<sup>3</sup> This is just one instance in which God preserved George Washington’s life. We might not be a country today if he had not been protected by God. God had special plans for him.

**homage:** Honor

### George Marries

One day George was delivering some war letters to the governor at Williamsburg. On the way, he stopped at a friend’s house for dinner. Here he met a young widow, Martha Custis. They enjoyed each other’s company and stayed up late talking. On his return trip from Williamsburg, he stopped to see Martha. When he left, he had her promise to marry him. The couple lived at Mount Vernon after the war ended and were very happy.

Washington was elected to The House of Burgesses, Virginia’s colonial government. He was considered a hero of



the French and Indian War. When the assembly opened, the speaker praised Washington for his **valor** in the war. When asked to speak, Washington was so embarrassed by the praise that no words came to him. The speaker relieved his embarrassment by saying, “Sit down, Mr. Washington. Your **modesty** is equal to your valor, and that surpasses any language that I possess.”<sup>4</sup> Washington was more than happy to sit down.

Conflict between the colonies and Great Britain was brewing. King George III was taxing the colonies heavily to help pay for his war with France. The colonists were willing to pay their share but had no say in **Parliament**. This was just the start of many **usurpations** by King

George over his colonies.

**valor:** Bravery

**modesty:** Humility

**Parliament:** The ruling body in England

**usurpations:** Acts of taking power by force

**Tyranny:** Oppressive rule

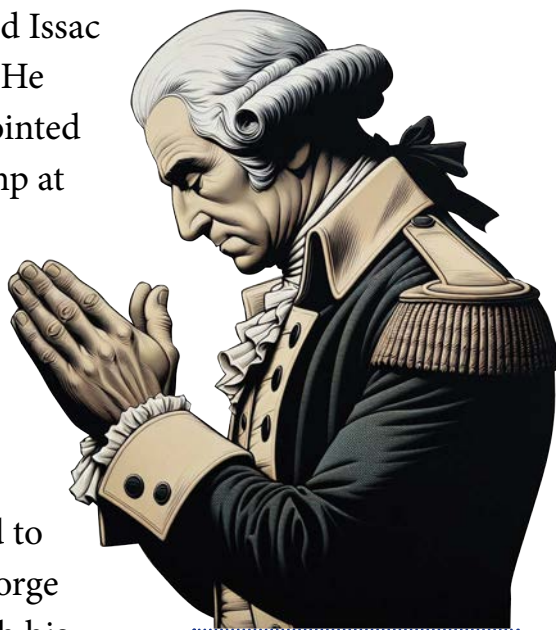
**daunting:** Overwhelming or intimidating

### Commander in Chief

In 1775, the Second Continental Congress met. The war with England over King George’s **tyranny** had begun. The Battle of Lexington and Concord had already taken place, in which the British had tried to steal the colonists’ weapons and gunpowder. The colonies needed a military leader. Washington was chosen for this job. Humbly he said, “I am not worthy of this honor.”<sup>5</sup> He won every vote, however, and was compelled to answer the call from his country. The job was **daunting**; Washington, as was his custom, turned to prayer for help.

## The Prayer at Valley Forge

There was an old Quaker man named Issac Potts, who was known to be a **Tory**. He related this story to a friend as he pointed out the location of Washington's camp at Valley Forge. The winter was harsh, and his men were freezing and hungry. Mr. Potts was passing by the woods when: "I heard a **plaintive** sound as, of a man in prayer. I tied my horse to a **sapling** and went quietly into the woods and to my astonishment I saw the great George Washington on his knees, alone, with his sword on one side and his cocked hat on the other. He was at prayer to God, **beseeching** to **interpose** with his Divine aid, as it was ye Crisis & the cause of the country, of humanity & of the world. Such a prayer I never heard from the lips of man. I left him alone praying. I went home and told my wife. I saw a sight and heard today what I never saw or heard before.... We never thought a man could be a soldier & a Christian, but if there is one in the world, it is Washington. She also was astonished. We thought it was the cause of God & that America could **prevail**." <sup>26</sup> Thus, the Tory became a Patriot.



**Tory:** An American colonist who sided with England

**plaintive:** Mournful or sad

**sapling:** Young tree

**beseeching:**  
Pleading

**interpose:** Intercede

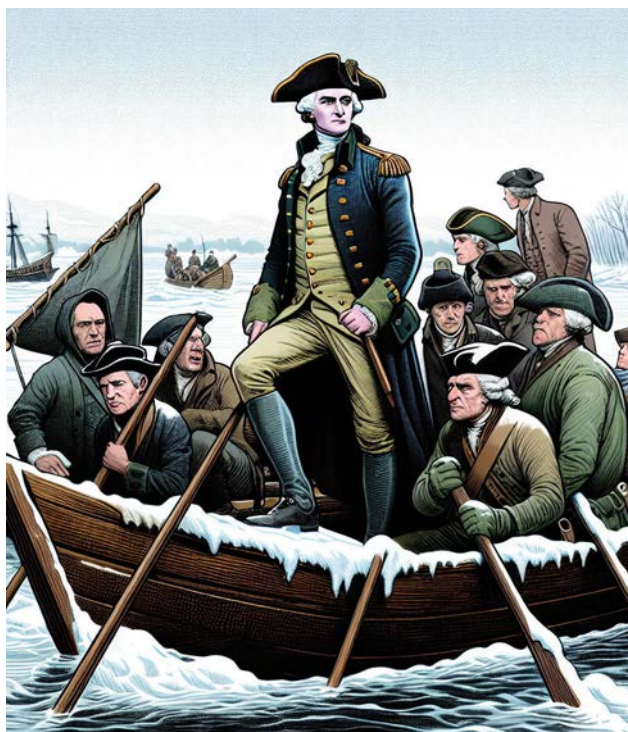
**prevail:** Win

## The Christmas Surprise

It was December 25, 1776. The British thought the war was almost over and were celebrating the Christmas holiday. Several hundred **Hessian** soldiers were camped at Trenton, New Jersey, nine miles from Washington's camp. Washington desperately needed a victory to encourage his men.

**Hessian:** German soldiers King George had hired to fight the Patriots

He came up with a daring plan: he would surprise the Hessians on Christmas night when they weren't expecting him. To do that, however, he had to transport men, cannons, and horses on large rafts across the Delaware River. The river was so cold it had chunks of ice floating on it. To make it worse, there was a winter storm. The Hessians certainly weren't expecting the Patriots. They were eating, drinking, and celebrating; some were still sleeping, when the Patriots attacked. Their leader was killed and 1000 Hessian soldiers were captured. Washington won a tremendous victory, giving much hope to his troops.



## Providentially Spared Again

British sniper Major Patrick Ferguson had invented a specialized gun known as the “Ferguson Rifle,” which could shoot six to eight times per minute and was much more accurate at long distances. At the Battle of Brandywine, he had his band of sharpshooters using this distinctive gun. They worked together in groups, targeting important American officers and soldiers. They would single out one American after another, shooting him down and moving to another location.



Ferguson singled out a tall officer mounted on a horse. “Ferguson later expressed that just before he ordered his men to fire, he experienced a surprising impulse, and the idea of shooting that particular American suddenly disgusted him.”<sup>7</sup> The American officer, who was in easy rifle range, turned and looked at him, slowly turned his horse around, and calmly trotted off. Ferguson later learned the man he had let live was George Washington. He commented that he was glad he hadn’t shot him. God had again preserved Washington’s life.

## The Last Battle

The war ended at Yorktown, Virginia, in 1781. With the help of France, who sent warships and soldiers, the British were trapped by the

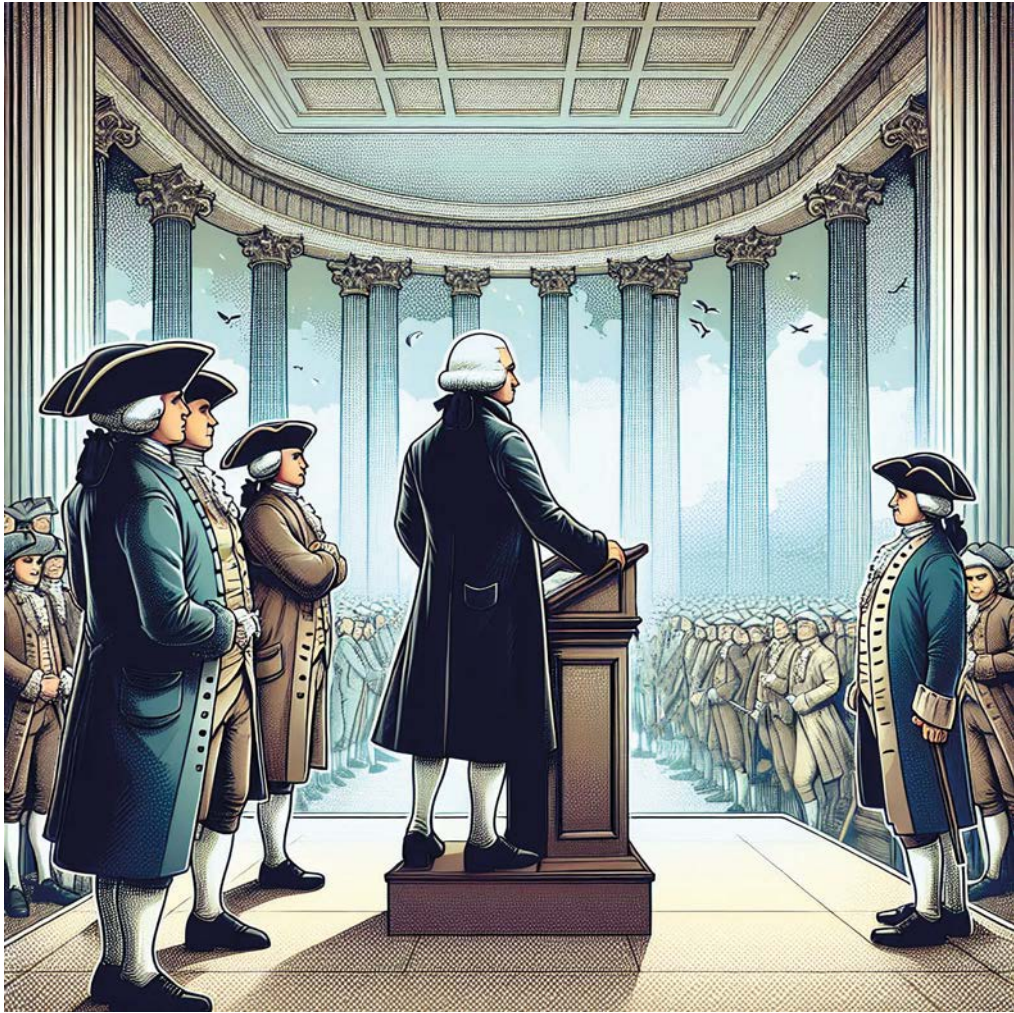
Americans and the French. Cornwallis surrendered; the war was over. There were a few more **skirmishes**, but the United States of America had been born, and Washington was a hero. He was tremendously esteemed by his countrymen.

**skirmishes:** Small battles

Washington was selected to lead the Constitutional Convention which drafted the laws governing this country. Some people wanted him to become king, but Washington declined. He said that would be a bad idea. They had fought for freedom from a **monarchy**. Even King George had expected George Washington to assume kingship of America. Benjamin West, a famous American artist, was employed by King George to paint many portraits of the king. Knowing him to be an influential American, the king inquired of him what Washington would do now that he had led the colonists to victory. West said he had heard that Washington would return to his farm. Amazed, King George replied, “If he does that he will be the greatest man in the world.”<sup>8</sup>

**monarchy:** A country governed by a king or queen





## **President of the United States**

George Washington wanted to return to his farm and a peaceful life, but America needed him again. He was elected president. When he was inaugurated, Washington actually kissed his Bible to show honor to God. He was elected for a second term but declined to run for a third. He said it was time for another man to take the job. In his farewell speech in 1796 at the close of his second term, George Washington said, “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 who should labor to **subvert** these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of

**dispositions:**  
Tendencies

**indispensable:**  
Absolutely necessary

**subvert:** Undermine

**supposition:** Belief

the duties of Men and Citizens... And let us with caution indulge the **supposition** that morality can be maintained without religion.”<sup>9</sup>

At last, Washington could go home to Mount Vernon to stay. He spent his last days enjoying his family, farming, and fox hunting. When he died in 1799, the whole country mourned his passing. He was lovingly called the “Father of His Country.”

