



"We need God's help to guide our nation through stormy seas. But we can't expect Him to protect America in a crisis if we just leave Him over on the shelf in our day-to-day living."
—Ronald Reagan

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The Reagan Legacy

There are many who say, 'Who will show us any good?' LORD, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us. You have put gladness in my heart. . . . I will both lie down in [peace](#), and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety. ([Psalm 4:6-8](#))

The memorial service for America's fortieth President, Ronald Reagan, has just ended, and his casket is on its way to interment at his presidential library in Simi Valley, California, this evening. The eulogies and the homily given during the service all sounded a single theme—a mark of the man Ronald Reagan was and impressed on everyone who knew him: He was a man of optimistic strength of conviction. This may be his lasting legacy to his country.

In their own minds, people tend to forget or misplace a historic person's place in the events of his day, seeing just the person and his accomplishments out of context. Good biographers recreate not only the events in their subjects' lives, but also the moods, the ideas, and the spirit of the times. To take a person out of his historical context mars and distorts the

picture. If we do this, we may come to know the *whens*, the *whos*, and the *whats* of his life, but we will probably misunderstand the *whys* and the *hows*.

To get a true appreciation of Ronald Reagan, we have to realize a few salient facts about his times. He was a Mid-Westerner, born and raised in the small town of Dixon, Illinois. His upbringing was not one of refinement and wealth. His father was unreliable, an alcoholic, so his raising was left to his mother, and it was primarily her values and strengths that formed him. By the time of the Depression, he was in his late teens and twenties, and he saw Americans struggle. Yet, he also saw those same people persevere and eventually rebound from those hard times.

During the Second World War, he was in his early thirties, already a leading man in Hollywood, but his roots and his beliefs kept him anchored. He was developing the self-deprecating humor that stood him so well in later years. For a second time, he saw Americans involved in life-and-death struggle, this time against foreign enemies, and again, he witnessed Americans rising to the challenge and claiming victory. Not all was triumph and happy days, but right and justice, as he saw it, had prevailed at last.

Not long thereafter, the Iron Curtain clanged down across the face of Europe, sundering East from West. Communism began its march around [the world](#), and the Communist scare hit America. Reagan, a staunch anti-Communist, bucked leftist Hollywood, speaking publicly against the scourge of a system that he considered thoroughly evil. The defeat of Communism became his mantra, along with a return to a more Constitutional government, as his predecessor, Abraham Lincoln, put it, "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

His confident presence and his first-rate abilities as a public speaker thrust him into the political limelight, carrying him first to the California State House and then, in January 1981, to the White House. Friends and enemies alike genuinely liked him as a person because he was always genial, gracious, quick to smile, and ready with a witty response or funny story. But under the affable exterior was a steel core of values he had long held dear and would not relinquish, not even for political gain. Many of his political foes never understood him for this very trait, because as "normal" politicians, they themselves were prepared to sell their souls to claim political victories.

His presidency was not a shining, complete success; it had its share of both highs and lows. The one constant in it was the smiling, confident Ronald Reagan himself. Publicly, at least, he never showed any doubts that the course he had set for the nation was the right one and that it would bring the nation to happier, better times. He told the nation many times, "Stay the course," because he believed that persevering effort in doing the right things for America and the world would result in the blessings of peace and prosperity. He never wavered from this goal.

Many have said Ronald Reagan made Americans feel good about themselves and good about America. His confidence was infectious, and it inspired a nation to achieve and grow after years of nearly across-the-board stagnation. To a great extent, he was instrumental in changing the spirit of the times from gloomy and pessimistic to bright and optimistic. He inspired ordinary people to harness their potential, which re-energized the nation and eventually changed the world by winning the Cold War. Once again, he witnessed Americans victorious after long struggle, just as he knew they could.

This may be what he is remembered most for: his smiling confidence that good will defeat evil in the end. Sure, he observed this throughout his lifetime in the events of the twentieth century, but because he was unapologetically religious, his belief was certainly grounded in the Bible. This is a constant theme of God's Word, and the events of his life bore it out as truth. As [Christians](#), we can emulate his confidence in ultimate victory and his cheerful, hopeful outlook even in the midst of uncertain times.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Conviction and Moses](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Conversion is a growing relationship with God, and thus it is a process that,

if not worked on, will deteriorate. Like a dating couple, if the partners in this relationship do not spend time with each other and become closer, they will drift apart. Conviction is paramount to this process: We must be absolutely loyal and faithful to God. Our conviction reveals itself in living by faith. The life of Moses is a stunning example of how a "convicted" Christian should live.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Are Your Beliefs Preferences or Convictions?](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh discusses the depth of our beliefs, showing the difference between our preferences and our convictions. He looks at both legal and spiritual ramifications of this subject.

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