

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

When Thomas Jefferson sat down to write the Declaration of Independence, he and the Declaration's editors Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, John Adams, and Robert Livingston knew the risk they were taking. And from its text, it is obvious that they were aware that they needed God's help to be successful. They knew that God was and is the one true Leader upon which they could count. God is mentioned four times in the Declaration, not by the name we know Him by, but He is mentioned nonetheless.

They appeal to *"the Supreme Judge of the World"* for His determination that what they were doing was the right thing. They placed their "firm reliance on the protection of *"Divine Providence,"* leaning on God for the strength to carry out their plan to separate. They believed that *"Nature's God"* entitled them to become an independent nation, free from England's tyrannical rule.

Probably the best known reference to God in the Declaration of Independence is this:

"...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."

All we have, all we are, all we will be is because God has endowed us with these gifts. From Scripture:

1. Life – Jesus said He came to give us life. And not just a regular life filled with self indulgence, but a life we could live to its fullest by realizing the satisfaction of serving others. Jesus said in **John 10:10**:

"I have come that they may have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

This life God gave us will not be an easy one, but it will culminate in eternal life in Heaven with God. We are to do good works and store up treasures in Heaven and, as Paul tells Timothy in **1 Timothy 6:19**: ***"take hold of the life that is truly life."***

2. Liberty – Freedom from sin and death. Freedom to become God's slaves. Paul told the Galatians (and us) in **Galatians 5:1**:

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Continue living your life in service to God, having been emancipated from the dominance of sin. James said in **James 1:25**:

"...whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do."

Blessed with eternal life, a gift only God can give.

3. Pursuit of Happiness – The word "blessed" is often translated "happy" in the more modern translations of the Bible, and many of the things that we are to pursue in our pursuit of happiness will bring us difficulty. But, in true Christian fashion, we are to look upon trials, temptation, and difficulty as means to an end. All of these things will cause us to develop patience—the patience we need to persevere. James said it best in **James 1:2-4**:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

We will have all we need for our sojourn here on this earth and will persevere to the end. Eternal life is the reward, and that truly is the happiness we all should pursue. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—three things our founders said God had endowed us with. It was our desire to be an independent nation, and that goal was achieved. And with God's help, we will achieve them as His children as well. -

-Johnny Stephens