

July: Walk in Love for Your Country
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Verse:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. II Chronicles 7:14

Upward Gaze:

Dear Heavenly Father, allow me to open up my heart to the people of my country. Let me see their beauty as a reflection of the love I have for this nation and as I have for you. Amen

Development of theme:

It's no surprise that our country is divided - politically, morally, and ethically. We have rallying on all sides of multiple spectrums that both challenge and support our approach to life as a Christian. At best, it's trying - and it's worst, it's heartbreaking and exhausting. However, July is the month to celebrate the establishment of this great nation. Each year I am reminded of that fateful day, July 4, 1776, where a unanimous decision was reached - *The Declaration of Independence*. It is the statement adopted by the Second Continental Congress meeting at the Pennsylvania State House in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

I'm sure you studied this document in school - I know this, because I teach this document every year. Do you remember it's last line? A good bulk of the document is dedicated to the grievances against Great Britain, but in the end, in order to establish the nation in which we are free to worship the one true God, these men took a solemn oath: **"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."**

WOW! These men, under the protection of God (divine providence - under God's sovereign guidance and control) pledged everything for this nation. This was not a lightly chosen pledge - these men were committing treason against the crown and this was punishable by death; but it did not stop them from seeking out what was right. In doing so, they were relying on the protection of the Almighty in order to accomplish this goal.

What does this have to do with God's word from the days of Israel? "There was a time when the Israelites also desperately needed a new look at the past. Their ancestors had also been torn from home, beaten and dragged off in chains to serve as slaves in a foreign country. Chronicles sheds new light on that history by highlighting rare moments of peace and prosperity. Worship of the true God had made Israel strong."**. This idea parallels our Declaration in that it outlines the oppression of our ancestors and gives us hope in the future of our nation.

In both Israel and now, we seek God's sovereignty to guide our journey. While the promise in our study text was originally given to Solomon, it is applicable to all who call on the Lord in good faith - all who repent and seek his ways as loving people of God.

As you enjoy fireworks and fun, hamburgers and hotdogs, friends and fellowship on green lawns while the cannons boom - remember that this month's celebration is attributed to men who risked it all under God's protection to establish a nation we love. Honor them in your celebration, and honor God whose sovereignty reigns.

God Bless America!

** "A Time for Hope." *Bible Gateway*, NIV Student Bible Notes/Zondervan, 2002.

Inward Glimpse (Reflection):

Read James 4: 8-10 and consider it along with I Chronicles 7:14

- How can I draw nearer to God and rely on him?
- How can I humble myself before the Lord and rely solely on his divine providence?

Outward Glance (Discussion):

In your prayers groups, consider ways to support those that are still pledging their lives to support our great nation - military, police officers, firefighters, and EMTs. How have they placed their lives in God's hands and how can we walk with them in their support of our country?

1 Timothy 2:2 urges us to pray for those in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Make a list of the government officials representing you on the national, state and local levels. Pray for them.

One more peek:

...and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captivity and say, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly'; and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their captivity where they were taken, and pray toward the land you gave their ancestors, toward the city you have chosen and toward the temple I have built for your Name; then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you.

2 Chronicles 6:37-39 New International Version (NIV)