

Third Place
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**Rediscovering the Quiet Virtues:
The Secret to Washington's Unfailing Joy and Self-Restraint**

It was through reading *The Life of Washington* that I was introduced to the importance of the immortal virtues. Weems holds up the multifaceted diamond of Washington's life and pinpoints the source of each side's sparkle. Myriads of values are described, each of which could inspire volumes. Among the list of impressive values, two quieter virtues make the boldest statement: self-mastery and joyful toil. Sadly, these values are substantially disregarded in the present American culture. In our time, we are encouraged to let our passions lead us, and rebellion characterizes many of our actions. What a tragedy that values so essential in forming our founding father have become so decidedly obsolete! Only by rediscovering these unassuming virtues can we truly see beyond the temporal and fix our eyes on the everlasting.

Washington's delight in godly truth stems from love of his Creator. This adoration of truth builds a sturdy moral foundation that allows him to execute self-mastery. Washington uses his self-control to continually refine his character. Patience, observation, and humility spring from his incredible self-restraint. Washington reins in his pride, always being the first to self-assess and apologize for his wrongs. His self-mastery eventually leads to his greatest feat: giving up his power willingly by stepping down from the Presidency. The Bible defines great spiritual battle as combat between our soul, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Self-restraint rejects the selfish ideology of this world, denies the unregulated passions of the flesh, and defies the devil. Self-control is truly a beautiful virtue to behold. Being a fruit of the Spirit, this virtue is strong evidence of spiritual health. Oh, that the Lord would strengthen my soul to sprout a seed of similar self-control!

Washington also mastered the ability to delight in his duty. His authentic joy in even the

most mundane and monotonous points of life stemmed from his strong grasp of eternal realities. Washington's loyalty lay with the country of heaven¹, over even that for his precious America. This clarity of vision and higher allegiance made him unmovable by earthly bribes and empowered an unbending adherence to his conscience. He stood nearly incorruptible through the most tempting and trying occupations. Throughout his time as a surveyor, war general, dedicated farmer, and President, Washington performed his duties joyfully. Unlike so many men, Washington did not toil in order to gain rewards or fame. During physical labor and mental strain, he kept sight of his toil's purpose: to glorify and enjoy God. Washington's unusual stamina and incomparable work ethic were merely an overflow of his desire to please God with every action.

All earthly prizes are nothing in comparison to the delight found in drawing near to the Lord. How different life could be if I set my sight above earthly achievements and toward heavenly realities! Through this renewed perspective, joy would come with the knowledge that "earth has no sorrow that heav'n cannot heal."²

¹ Hebrews 11: 16

² Thomas Moore, *Spiritual Songs for Social Worship*, 1831.