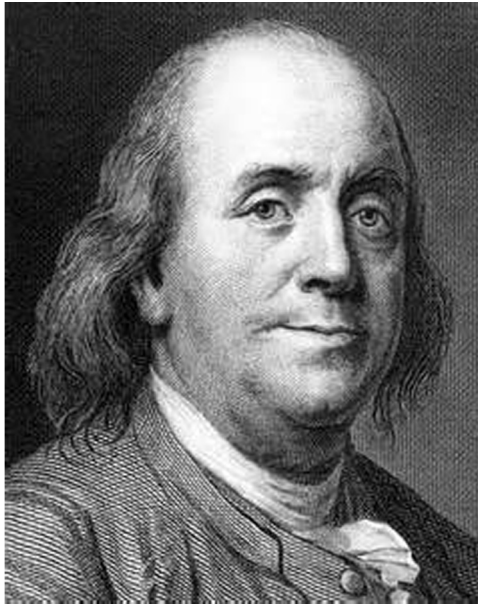


225 QUOTATIONS



Benjamin Franklin

(1706-1790)

Benjamin Franklin is a revered Founding Father who embodies the American Dream and the myth of the self-made man getting ahead in the City. He inherited the values of his Puritan ancestors while replacing their theology with reason. He collected and reprinted quotations—"the gleanings I had made of the sense of all ages and nations"—and did not originate many of those now attributed to him. Trying above all to be useful to others, Franklin championed practicality, hard work, frugality, discipline, and lifelong education and self-improvement. He has the most impressive resume in American history and is such an icon he has appeared frequently in popular culture for centuries. His Puritanism is expressed in most of his maxims and his Neoclassical aesthetics are evident in his economy, antitheses and wit.

ORDER OF TOPICS: family, youth, reading, education, liberty, government, national bird, national security, war, Indians, laws and lawyers, Socialism, Political Correctness, fools, honesty, industry, persistence, opportunity, time, money, frugality, debt, poverty, wealth, true riches, self-knowledge, wisdom, writing, skepticism, Deism, God, character, friends, anger, patience, present yourself, reticence, human nature, vanity, happiness, reason, argument, woman, flirtation, love, marriage, large family, health, sobriety, eating, old age, death, epitaph for himself:

FAMILY

Josiah, my father, married young and carried his wife with three children to New England about 1682.... By the same wife, my father had four children more born there, and by a second wife ten others—in all seventeen, of which I remember often to have seen thirteen sitting together at his table, who all grew up to years of maturity and married. I was the youngest son....

My mother, the second wife, was Abiah Folger, daughter of Peter Folger, one of the first settlers of New England, of whom honorable mention is made by Cotton Mather.

YOUTH

My elder brothers were all put apprentices to different trades. I was put to grammar school at eight years of age, my father intending to devote me as the tithe of his sons to the service of the church.

I was generally the leader among the boys and sometimes led them into scrapes.

I was employed to carry the papers [*The New England Courant*] to the customers [1771].

My brother was passionate and had often beaten me, which I took extremely amiss. I fancy his harsh and tyrannical treatment of me might be a means of impressing me with that aversion to arbitrary power that has stuck to me through my whole life.

At length a fresh difference arising between my brother and me, I took upon me to assert my freedom, presuming that he would not venture to produce the new indentures. It was not fair in me to take this advantage, and this I therefore reckon one of the first errata of my life.

I was suspected to be some runaway servant... I have been the more particular in this description of my journey, and shall be so of my first entry into that city [Philadelphia], that you may in your mind compare such unlikely beginnings with the figure I have since made there.

I was dirty from my journey; my pockets were stuffed out with shirts and stockings; I knew no soul, nor where to look for lodging. Fatigued with walking, rowing, and want of sleep, I was very hungry.... I went immediately to the baker's... He gave me accordingly three great puffy rolls. I...walked off with a roll under each arm and eating the other. Thus I went up Market Street as far as Fourth Street, passing by the door of Mr. Read, my future wife's father, when she, standing at the door, saw me, and thought I made—as I certainly did—a most awkward, ridiculous appearance.

READING

From my infancy I was passionately fond of reading, and all the little money that came into my hands was laid out in the purchasing of books. I was very fond of voyages. My first acquisition was Bunyan's works in separate little volumes.

There was also a book of Defoe's called an *Essay on Projects* and another of Dr. Mather's called *Essays to Do Good*, which perhaps gave me a turn of thinking that had an influence on some of the principal future events of my life.

Often I sat up in my room reading the greater part of the night.

I escaped being a poet, and probably a very bad one.

EDUCATION

A learned blockhead is a greater blockhead than an ignorant one.

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.

If a man empties his purse into his head, no one can take it from him.

We are all born ignorant, but one must work hard to remain stupid.

Being ignorant is not so much a shame, as being unwilling to learn.

An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.

Genius without education is like silver in the mine.

By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.

LIBERTY

Where liberty is, there is my country.

Rebellion against tyrants is obedience to God.

Even peace may be purchased at too high a price.

We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.

Any society that would give up a little liberty to gain a little security will deserve neither and lose both.
To George Washington, General of the armies of the United States, who, like Joshua of old, commanded both the sun and the moon to stand still, and both obeyed. [toast given just after the Revolution, topping those by the English and French ambassadors]

GOVERNMENT

The first mistake in public business is the going into it.

I shall never ask, never refuse, nor ever resign an office.

All who think cannot but see there is a sanction like that of religion which binds us in partnership in the serious work of the world.

The Constitution only gives people the right to pursue happiness. You have to catch it yourself.

In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes.

No nation was ever ruined by trade.

A Republic, sir. If you can keep it.

NATIONAL BIRD

I wish the bald eagle had not been chosen as the representative of our country; he is a bird of bad moral character; like those among men who live by sharpening and robbing, he is generally poor, and often very lousy. The turkey is a much more respectable bird, and withal a true original native of America.

NATIONAL SECURITY

He that is not secure is not safe.

A small leak can sink a great ship.

Distrust and caution are the parents of security.

A great empire, like a great cake, is most easily diminished at the edges.

WAR

Necessity never made a good bargain.

There never was a good war or a bad peace.

Wars are not paid for in wartime, the bill comes later.

INDIANS

Savages we call them because their manners differ from ours.

LAWS AND LAWYERS

The strictest law sometimes becomes the severest injustice.

Laws too gentle are seldom obeyed, too severe, seldom executed.

A countryman between two lawyers is like a fish between two cats.

God works wonders now and then. Behold a lawyer, an honest man.

Whether you're an honest man or a thief depends on whose solicitor has given me my brief.

SOCIALISM

Mine is better than ours.

Our necessities never equal our wants.

The worst wheel of the cart makes the most noise.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

If all printers were determined not to print anything till they were sure it would offend nobody, there would be very little printed.

The cat in gloves catches no mice.

FOOLS

He that won't be counseled can't be helped.

Where sense is wanting, everything is wanting.

Wise men don't need advice. Fools never take it.

He who falls in love with himself will have no rivals.

A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle.

I didn't fail the test, I just found 100 ways to do it wrong.

Experience is a dear teacher, but fools will learn in no other.

Wise men learn by other's harms, fools scarcely by their own.

Any fool can criticize, condemn and complain and most fools do.

Don't throw stones at your neighbors', if your own windows are glass.

Tricks and treachery are the practice of fools, that don't have brains enough to be honest.

HONESTY

Honesty is the best policy.

Half a truth is often a great lie.

A good conscience is a continual Christmas.

That which is not honest cannot be truly useful.

There is no kind of dishonesty into which otherwise good people more easily and frequently fall than that of defrauding the government.

INDUSTRY

Industry need not wish.

Fatigue is the best pillow.

Never confuse motion with action.

He that lives upon hope will die fasting.

It is hard for an empty bag to stand upright.

Sloth, like rust, consumes faster than labor wears.

He that waits upon fortune is never sure of a dinner.

Sloth makes all things difficult, industry all things easy.

Laziness travels so slowly that poverty soon overtakes him.

Trouble springs from idleness, and grievous toil from needless ease.

It is the working man who is the happy man. It is the idle man who is the miserable man.

I took care not only to be in *reality* industrious and frugal, but to avoid all *appearances* of the contrary.

Leisure is the time for doing something useful. This leisure the diligent person will obtain, the lazy one never.

When men are employed, they are best contented; for on the days they worked they were good-natured and cheerful, and, with the consciousness of having done a good day's work, they spent the evening jollily; but on our idle days they were mutinous and quarrelsome.

PERSISTENCE

Little strokes fell great oaks.

Constant dropping wears away stones.

Diligence is the mother of good luck.

Energy and persistence conquer all things.

The used key is always bright.

Applause waits on success.

OPPORTUNITY

Opportunity is the great bawd.

To succeed, jump as quickly at opportunities as you do at conclusions.

TIME

Time is money.

Lost time is never found again.

You may delay, but time will not.

He that rises late must trot all day.

One today is worth two tomorrows.

There will be enough sleeping in the grave.

Employ time well, if thou meanest to gain leisure.

Never leave that till tomorrow which you can do today.

Do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of.

Since thou art not sure of a minute, throw not away an hour.

If time be of all things the most precious, wasting time must be the greatest prodigality.

I think, Father, if you were to say grace over the whole cask once for all, it would be a vast saving of time.

[Ben at age 10, impatient with his father saying grace before and after every meal]

MONEY

Beware the hobby that eats.

Remember that credit is money.

A penny saved is a penny earned.

The use of money is all the advantage there is in having it.

If you would know the value of money, go and try to borrow some.

He that is of the opinion money will do everything may well be suspected of doing everything for money.

Money has never made man happy, nor will it; there is nothing in its nature to produce happiness. The more of it one has, the more one wants.

FRUGALITY

Buy what thou hast no need of and ere long thou shalt sell thy necessities.

DEBT

Creditors have better memories than debtors.

Rather go to bed without dinner than to rise in debt.

POVERTY

Having been poor is no shame, but being ashamed of it is.

WEALTH

He does not possess wealth; it possesses him.

Wealth is not his that has it, but his that enjoys it.

If you desire many things, many things will seem few.

If a man could have half of his wishes, he would double his troubles.

It is only when the rich are sick that they fully feel the impotence of wealth.

It is the eye of other people that ruins us. If I were blind I would want neither fine clothes, fine houses, nor fine furniture.

TRUE RICHES

Who is rich? He that is content.

Content makes poor men rich; discontent makes rich men poor.

I conceive that the great part of the miseries of mankind are brought upon them by false estimates they have of the value of things.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Observe all men, thyself most.

Who has deceived thee so often as thyself?

The doorstep to the temple of wisdom is a knowledge of our own ignorance.

WISDOM

A word to the wise is enough.

Who is wise? He that learns from everyone.

The doors of wisdom are never shut.

WRITING

[Writing] should proceed regularly from things known to things unknown, distinctly and clearly without confusion. The words used should be the most expressive that the language affords, provided they are the most generally understood. Nothing should be expressed in two words that can as well be expressed in one; that is, no synonyms should be used, or very rarely, but the whole should be so placed as to be agreeable to the ear in reading; summarily it should be smooth, clear, and short, for the contrary qualities are displeasing... In this sense, that is best wrote which is best adapted for obtaining the end of the writer.

SKEPTICISM

When in doubt, don't.

To follow by faith alone is to follow blindly.

The way to see by Faith is to shut the Eye of Reason.

In the affairs of this world, men are not saved by faith, but by want of it.

The discontented man finds no easy chair.

DEISM

This doctrine, tho' it might be true, was not very useful.

GOD

I believe there is one supreme, most perfect Being, Author and Father of the Gods themselves. For I believe that Man is not the most perfect Being but one, rather that as there are many Degrees of Beings his inferiors, so there are many Degrees of Beings superior to him.

The worship of God is a duty; the hearing and reading of sermons may be useful; but, if men rest in hearing and praying, as many do, it is as if a tree should value itself on being watered and putting forth leaves, tho' it never produced any fruit.

Gentlemen, I would not hesitate to put my lightning rod atop your church. Being a religious man, I cannot believe that God is biased when distributing his lightening.

I owe the mentioned happiness of my past life to his divine providence, which led me to the means I used and gave them success.

God helps those who help themselves.

CHARACTER

Write injuries in dust, benefits in marble.

It is easier to prevent bad habits than to break them.

Speak ill of no man, but speak all the good you know of everybody.

He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else.

Tomorrow, every fault is to be amended; but that tomorrow never comes.

It is much easier to suppress a first desire than to satisfy those that follow.

Each year one vicious habit discarded, in time might make the worst of us good.

At twenty years of age the will reigns, at thirty the wit, and at forty the judgment.

It takes many good deeds to build a good reputation, and only one bad one to lose it.

How few there are who have courage enough to own their faults, or resolution enough to mend them.

Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every new year find you a better man.

Your net worth to the world is usually determined by what remains after your bad habits are subtracted from your good ones.

It is a grand mistake to think of being great without goodness and I pronounce it as certain that there was never a truly great man that was not at the same time truly virtuous.

FRIENDS

Be slow in choosing a friend, slower in changing.

When befriended, remember it; when you befriend, forget it.

Do good to your friends to keep them, to your enemies to win them.

Guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days.

ANGER

Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame.

If passion drives you, let reason hold the reins.

Who is powerful? He that governs his passions.

Anger is never without a reason, but seldom with a good one.

He that composes himself is wiser than he that composes a book.

PATIENCE

Haste makes waste.

He that can have patience can have what he will.

PRESENT YOURSELF

Hide not your talents. They for use were made. What's a sundial in the shade?

If you would not be forgotten, as soon as you are dead and rotten, either write something worth reading or do something worth the writing.

RETICENCE

Well done is better than well said.

He that speaks much, is much mistaken.

Words may show a man's wit but actions his meaning.

HUMAN NATURE

Nine men in ten are would-be suicides.

Some are weatherwise, some are otherwise.

Three can keep a secret, if two of them are dead.

The art of acting consists in keeping people from coughing.

The absent are never without fault, nor the present without excuse.

She laughs at everything you say. Why? Because she has fine teeth.

Admiration is the daughter of ignorance.

Most people return small favors, acknowledge medium ones and repay greater ones—with ingratitude.

He that has done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another, than he whom you yourself have obliged.

All mankind is divided into three classes: those that are immovable, those that are movable, and those that move.

VANITY

I never saw the introductory words “without vanity I may say,” etc., but some vain thing immediately followed.

HAPPINESS

There are two ways of being happy: We must either diminish our wants or augment our means—either may do—the result is the same and it is for each man to decide for himself and to do that which happens to be easier.

Human felicity is produced not as much by great pieces of good fortune that seldom happen as by little advantages that occur every day.

REASON

Hear reason, or she'll make you feel her.

So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable creature, since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do.

ARGUMENT

Those disputing, contradicting, and confuting people are generally unfortunate in their affairs. They get victory, sometimes, but they never get good will, which would be of more use to them.

WOMAN

When you have once reformed the Women, you will find it a much easier task to reform the Men.

When man and woman die, as poets sang, his heart's the last part moves, her last, the tongue.

FLIRTATION

Beauty and folly are old companions.

What a difference, my dear friend, between you and me! You find innumerable faults in me, whereas I see only one fault in you (but perhaps it is the fault of my glasses). I mean this avarice which leads you to seek a monopoly on all my affections, and not to allow me any for the agreeable ladies of your country. Do you imagine that it is impossible for my affection to be divided without being diminished? The sounds brought forth from the pianoforte by your clever hands can be enjoyed by 20 people simultaneously without diminishing at all the pleasure for me, and I could, with as little reason, demand that no other ears but mine be allowed to be charmed by those sweet sounds. [To Mme. Brillon in 1779, when she was about 30 years old and he over 70]

LOVE

If you would be loved, love, and be loveable.

Absence sharpens love, presence strengthens it.

MARRIAGE

A place for everything, everything in its place.

Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterward.

Never take a wife till thou hast a house (and a fire) to put her in.

Where there's marriage without love, there will be love without marriage.

If you would have a faithful servant, and one that you like, serve yourself.

There are three faithful friends—an old wife, an old dog, and ready money.

A house is not a home unless it contains food and fire for the mind as well as the body.

Marriage is the most natural state of man, and...the state in which you will find solid happiness.

A little house well filled, a little field well tilled, and a little wife well willed, are great riches.

He that displays too often his wife and his wallet is in danger of having both of them borrowed.

None but the well-bred man knows how to confess a fault, or acknowledge himself in an error.

Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.

He that would live in peace and at ease must not speak of all he knows or all he sees.

You can bear your own faults, and why not a fault in your wife?

LARGE FAMILY

He that raises a large family does, indeed, while he lives to observe them, stand a broader mark for sorrow, but then he stands a broader mark for pleasure too.

HEALTH

Games lubricate the body and the mind.

Wine is constant proof that God loves us and loves to see us happy.

Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

I stripped and leaped into the river and swam from near Chelsea to Blackfriar's, performing on the way many feats of activity, both upon and under water.

SOBRIETY

Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.

Many a man thinks he is buying pleasure, when he is really selling himself to it.

EATING

In general, mankind, since the improvement of cookery, eats twice as much as nature requires.

I saw few die of hunger, of eating, a hundred thousand.

To lengthen thy life, lessen thy meals.

Eat to live, and not live to eat.

OLD AGE

Many foxes grow gray but few grow good.

When you're finished changing, you're finished.

Life's tragedy is that we get old too soon and wise too late.

I guess I don't so much mind being old, as I mind being fat and old.

Many people die at twenty-five and aren't buried until they are seventy-five.

Work as if you were to live a hundred years. Pray as if you were to die tomorrow.

I wake up every morning at nine and grab for the morning paper. Then I look at the obituary page. If my name is not on it, I get up.

I should have not objection to go over the same life from its beginning to the end, requesting only the advantage authors have, of correcting in a second edition the faults of the first.

DEATH

I would rather have it said, "He lived usefully," than "He died rich."

I look upon death to be as necessary to our constitution as sleep. We shall rise refreshed in the morning.

EPITAPH

The Body of
Benjamin Franklin
(like the cover of an old book,
its contents torn out,
and stript of its lettering and gilding),
lies here food for worms,
yet the work itself shall not be lost,
for it will (as he believed) appear once more
in a new
and more beautiful edition
corrected and amended
by The Author

