



Chapter 5

FAITH

Erick Erickson



Erick Erickson is the editor of Redstate.com, the author of *Red State Uprising: How to Take Back America*, a radio host and a CNN contributor. He is married and is the father of two children.

Erickson had a fascinating childhood, having spent a good chunk of his formative years outside of the United States. This absence actually kindled his love of this country. Unlike the vast majority of Americans, he *has* lived in a country where he had to hide his religion and respect the local culture so vastly different than his own.

“My parents were both registered Democrats who were from conservative families. Well, my mother’s family at least. My father’s father was actually a union activist and an FDR guy. He had come to

the country right at the turn of the century. He blamed Herbert Hoover for all of our ills, but hated the United Nations, of all things.

“I’m somewhat unique in that I grew up in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. My dad worked for Conoco Oil. When I was 5 years old, we moved there in 1980 and returned to the US in 1990 when I was 15. We were there during the Iran/Iraq war. At the time, everyone just knew that there was some guy named Ronald Reagan who was keeping us safe.

“When you shipped things overseas, you shipped items you would need by air cargo, which got there quickly. The rest went by ship, which got there six months later. All of my books were accidentally put on the ship. So, my bedtime stories at night were from the only available reading material in the house -- William F. Buckley from *National Review*. I was indoctrinated at an early age.

“The central component of our lives was that, even though we were in an Islamic country, my parents insisted we go to church. We would have to sneak off in the middle of Sunday night—Sunday was a work day, not a weekend, to a local school and meet with other Christians, discreetly carrying our Bibles as we went.

“We would come home to the states for a couple of months in the summer, generally for the Fourth of July. But overseas, it was a very different thing. There were no Memorial Day celebrations, no Veteran’s Day celebrations, nothing like that.

“My dad worked offshore for seven days, and then was home for seven days. We lived in a typical subdivision, no walls around it, right out in the middle of the city. We went to an American school just down the street with other Americans and many other people from around the world.”

While they had to be discreet with their Bibles and the practice of their religion, faith remained an important part of Erickson's life. Here he talks about the parallels between faith and the founding of our country.

"To be a patriot, you have to have some component of faith. The quintessential core belief of American patriotism, the cornerstone, is the belief that we were destined to be the 'shining city on the hill.' You've got to have a faith component to really believe that.

"I had lunch with Dick Cheney right before he left the vice president's house. He, at the time, was reading *1864: Lincoln at the Gates of History* by Charles Bracelen Flood. It's a fascinating biography, I have since read, that really goes from January 1, 1864 to December 31, 1864. I've never read a biography that covers only one year.

"*The Weekly Standard's* Executive Editor Fred Barnes was also at that lunch, and he asked Vice President Cheney if he believed that there was some divine hand in American destiny. The Vice President didn't really answer the question directly, but said, 'You can't read that book and think that everything that happened in that year was coincidence.'

"People forget that four weeks before the election in 1864, the Union was in disarray, devastated. People were rioting in the streets. Then all of a sudden, Sherman took Atlanta. Grant had wiped out Lee's army. And then there was the election."

For Erick, American history in middle school in Dubai was a very different experience than it was once he got back to the states, where he took an additional American history class in high school. He talks about the difference between American history taught in an American school abroad and what he learned here in the United States. The differences are striking and helped formed his opinions early on.

Erickson points to the fact that teaching about the founding of our country is largely missing in many schools today. The focus is on the special groups within our country, as opposed to the foundation upon which everything else lies.

“In Dubai, we studied American History in 8th grade. We were required to read the Constitution line by line in order to understand what a profound document it was. We had to read the Declaration of Independence too. We learned about the struggles of the American Founders, like Sam Adams and his family, and the struggles and the destitute situations of the men who pledged their lives, fortune and sacred honor to the Declaration of Independence. We learned about the struggles of the generals in the Civil War, such as General Lee’s torn allegiance to Virginia versus the United States, and General Grant who had to fight against people with whom he went to West Point.

“The struggles we learned about were different struggles. They were the struggles of the people who were leading the country versus the people who were being led.

“In contrast, 11th Grade American History focused on the struggles of the American Indians, the struggles of the slaves, and the struggles of the Civil Rights movement.

“It makes a profound difference when you see what the people who were leading the country were going through. They were losing their children. They were losing their homes. Yet, they continued the struggle for a cause they believed in, a cause greater than themselves.

“You ask someone today what they know about the Connecticut Compromise of 1787 also known as the Great Compromise of 1787 and their eyes glaze over.² But how very necessary that was as were the

² The Connecticut Compromise or Great Compromise came during the Constitutional Convention and became the basis for the way the legislative branch of our government was originally structured. It gave the states proportional representation in the House of Representatives based on population and structured the Senate so all states are equally represented. Senators were originally elected from within each state’s House of Representatives by the members of the House, not the general population. The American public did not elect

Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, written by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.³ These struggles were essential in the founding struggles of the founders of our country. But people don't pay attention to these struggles anymore. They are much more interested in the Civil Rights Era, which *is* important but you can't understand the Civil Rights Era unless you understand the struggles of the founders of our country.

"The interesting thing was that my 8th Grade American History teacher in Dubai was a profound liberal. I was in 8th Grade in 1988 during the Dukakis/Bush election. We did mock debates, studied that presidential election, and questioned why the election was structured the way it was. The Constitution has the answers. It tied everything back to the original documents. *The Federalist Papers* were mandatory reading in 8th Grade.

"This is an educational component that is often missed. People just aren't interested in teaching the history of this country. They are more interested in teaching the history of certain groups within the country."

Although Erickson's children are still young, he has already started talking to them about our country, and why things are the way they are.

"I'm the political one in the family, and I try not to talk politics with my children. My wife, on the other hand, has been explaining to my daughter why she goes to private school and not public school, or the 'government school' as they refer to it together.

"My daughter has started asking questions already, like 'Why are there 50 stars on the flag?' and 'Who is the president?' and things like

United States senators until 1913, when the 17th Amendment was passed, allowing for this to happen. (source: pg. 113 *A Patriot's History of the United States* by Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen and *The Constitution* from The Cato Institute)

³ Written by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson in 1798 and 1799, respectively, the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions attempted to revive the Anti-Federalist sentiment calling for state sovereignty and trying to draw a distinction between the citizens of the states and the states themselves. The resolutions attempted to determine the power the states have as they relate to the federal government. No other states supported these resolutions for fear that, if they were upheld, many states would succeed from the Union if they disagreed with federal laws. The counties would succeed from the states, and then towns would succeed from counties. (source: pg. 152 *A Patriot's History of the United States* by Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen)

that. She asks these questions and we try to answer. For example, the Fourth of July this year, we talked about why people explode fireworks and what the celebration is really about.

“She has memorized the Pledge of Allegiance and the first few lines of *The Star-Spangled Banner* in school and what they were talking about in order to understand the struggle those people went through in order to build our country. There are some parts she doesn’t understand, but she understands there was a great fight. And there was a king, and we didn’t want a king anymore. We wanted to govern ourselves but to do that, we had to be responsible.”

Asked about what else beyond faith really helps form patriots, Erickson points out that understanding history is vital for our children to understand and appreciate being a patriot.

“I do think there is a huge faith component, but there’s more than that. You’ve got to understand and appreciate the actual history of the country, what a Puritan work ethic is and where that term comes from. Faith is the starting point, but you’ve got to understand the fight. You’ve got to understand what The Revolution was all about. You’ve got to know your honest history.

“Our five year old had been getting picked on at school. My wife told her, ‘You’re only a victim if you choose to be.’ Think about the Founders—they chose not to be victims. It seems like most people today would rather be victims and get sympathy. It’s disturbing how many people are willing to go that route. People have no appreciation of what the founders went through.

“One of my 5-year-olds first questions was asking me to explain who the people are on the money, to explain who that guy is on the penny and why he was worth being there and the guy on the quarter and the dime and the nickel. It was a great jumping off point to

introduce Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.”⁴

★ ★ ★ *Key Points* ★ ★ ★

- Teach children to appreciate the freedoms they have in this country as compared to other countries.
- Understand that faith was an underlying component of our country’s founding.
- Focus on the Founding Fathers and our early history, not the history of the special groups.
- It is never too early to start talking about our country and its history. Talk about the flag, our presidents, and our freedoms. Talk about why certain people are on the money as an introduction to your children about the presidents.



⁴ According to page 32 in *The American Patriot’s Almanac* by William J. Bennett and John T. E. Cribb, Franklin Roosevelt is on the dime because of his advocacy for the establishment of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, which is now known as The March of Dimes. The organization was founded in order to help wipe out polio, a disease from which President Roosevelt himself suffered. His image began appearing on the dime in January 1946 following his death. Before that, females representing Liberty appeared on the dime.