

Clara Barton and the American Red Cross¹

American history is rife with stories of God's providence. We can recount George Washington's brushes with death and realize the hand of the Almighty was on him. Washington was not alone in this special divine care, nor was it reserved for men on the battlefield. God also worked in and through the lives of numerous women in our history. The black author, **Phillis Wheatley**, changed **George Washington's** mind about allowing slaves and former slaves to fight alongside white soldiers. Teenager **Sybil Ludington** made a ride similar to and every bit as hard as **Paul Revere** to warn American patriots of approaching British troops. **Abigail Adams** influenced future presidents during the War. She encouraged her husband, **John**, our second president, and trained their son, **John Quincy Adams**, our sixth. George Washington's mother had supported her son throughout his life, and he attributed his success to her.

Clara Barton was a schoolteacher who moved to Washington, DC, at the beginning of the Civil War. She, too, experienced the providence of God in saving her life and arranging events that nurtured the charitable spirit of Americans. Miss Barton established the American Red Cross Society on May 21, 1881, and served as its director until 1904. She expressed her attitude of selfless service, which compelled her to start the Red Cross organization.

An institution or reform movement that is not selfish must originate in the recognition of some evil that is adding to the sum of human suffering or diminishing the sum of happiness. I may be compelled to face danger but never fear it, and while our soldiers can stand and fight, I can stand and feed and nurse them.

I am well and strong and young – young enough to go to the front. If I cannot be a soldier, I'll help soldiers.

In her initial service, Clara brought much-needed supplies to wounded soldiers and aided in searching for missing combatants at **Abraham Lincoln's** request. On September 17, 1862, Clara encountered a providential event when she attempted to carry a wounded soldier off the Antietam battlefield. She wrote:

A ball had passed between my body and the right arm, which supported him, cutting through the sleeve and passing through his chest from shoulder to shoulder. There was no more to be done for him, and I left him to his rest. I have never mended that hole in my sleeve. I wonder if a soldier ever does mend a bullet hole in his coat.

Clara experienced some of the Civil War's bloodiest battles, including Antietam and Fredericksburg. She first visited the "*Lacy House*" in August 1862, bringing food and hospital supplies to the wounded. She returned in December 1862, caring for the wounded from both sides during the Battle of Fredericksburg. On December 13, 1862, when the fighting was heaviest, Clara stood in the doorway of the *Lacy House*. An artillery shell hit, and the fragments severed the artery of a young soldier. She immediately applied a tourniquet and saved his life.

During the following two weeks, Clara saw a massive number of wounded Union and Confederate soldiers. Doctors stuffed the suffering into every available space in the house while others waited outside in the cold. Barton set up a soup kitchen in the yard to care for them.

During the Franco-German War, Clara Barton went to Europe and worked with Henri Dunant. Dunant founded the International Red Cross and was the first recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. He inspired Clara to establish the American Red Cross Society.

¹ This lesson draws heavily from: Federer, Susie. *Miracles in American History: 32 Amazing Stories of Answered Prayer*. Virginia Beach, VA, Amerisearch, Inc, 2016, pp. 131-142.

Clara served in hospitals in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. **President William McKinley** spoke of her in his message on December 5, 1898.

It is a pleasure for me to mention in terms of cordial appreciation the timely and useful work of the **American National Red Cross**, both in relief measures preparatory to the campaigns, in sanitary assistance at several of the camps of assemblage, and later, under the able and experienced leadership of the president of the society, Miss Clara Barton, on the fields of battle and in the hospitals at the front in Cuba. Working in conjunction with the governmental authorities ... and with the enthusiastic cooperation of many patriotic women and societies in the various states, the Red Cross has fully maintained its already high reputation for intense earnestness and ability to exercise the noble purposes of its international organization, thus justifying the confidence and support which it has received at the hands of the American people. We are constantly reminded of our obligation to the Divine Master for His watchful care over us and His safe guidance, for which the nation . . . offers humble prayer for the continuance of His favor.

Opening a Red Cross Drive in New York City, **President Woodrow Wilson** stated on May 18, 1918:

"Being members of the American Red Cross ... a great fraternity and fellowship which extends all over the world ... this cross which these ladies bore here today is an emblem of Christianity itself. ... When you think of this, you realize how the people of the United States are being drawn together into a great intimate family whose heart is being used for the service of the soldiers not only, but for the long night of suffering and terror, in order that they and men everywhere may see the dawn of a day of righteousness and justice and peace."

On May 1, 1940, **President Franklin D. Roosevelt** greeted the chairman of the American National Red Cross, **Norman H. Davis**, in Washington, D.C., and said:

"The great International Red Cross organization, founded 76 years ago to bring mercy to the battlefield. ... I am confident that whatever may be the problems which intensification of warfare may bring, the American people will respond to any appeal for funds when the Red Cross deems it necessary to call upon them for additional aid. By such response, we can aid in sustaining the spirit and morale of those in distress abroad until the happy day we all pray for, when hostilities shall cease."

Clara Barton was an example of a genuine servant. She saw opportunities to help and took them. She reflected God's heart for the hurting in her role as a wartime nurse and Red Cross founder. Paul wrote of the servant spirit in **Philippians 2:5-7** (NKJV).

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

Since this is **Mother's Day**, let me mention that Americans first celebrated the Day in 1908 when Anna Jarvis held a memorial for her mother at St Andrew's Methodist Church in Grafton, West Virginia.² She had begun a campaign to establish Mother's Day in 1905, the year her mother died. She felt there should be a holiday for "the person who has done more for you than anyone in the world."³ At first, Congress rejected the idea, but by 1911, states observed the holiday locally. In 1914, **Woodrow Wilson** signed a proclamation designating Mother's Day, to be held on the second Sunday in May, as a national holiday to honor mothers.⁴

² Kaag, John; Cleary, Skye C. (10 May 2018). "[Nietzsche Wishes You an Ambivalent Mother's Day](https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/05/10/nietzsche-wishes-you-an-ambivalent-mothers-day/)" [The Paris Review](https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/05/10/nietzsche-wishes-you-an-ambivalent-mothers-day/). Retrieved 13 May 2018. Referenced in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother%27s_Day.

³ "Engaging Families – US Dept. of Education. WWW2.ed.gov. December 14, 2017. Referenced in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother%27s_Day.

⁴ Lois M. Collins (May 6, 2014). "Mother's Day 100 Year History of a Colorful Tale of Love, Anger and Civil Unrest. Desert News. Referenced in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother%27s_Day.

One comedian said, "My mom taught me so many things, like..."

***Spiritual habits** - "You'd better pray that comes out of the carpet."

***How to appreciate a job well done** - "If you and your brothers are going to kill each other, do it outside. I just finished cleaning."

***Logic** - "Because I said so, that's why!"

***More logic** - "If you fall out of that tree and break your neck, you won't go to the mall with me."

***Justice** - "One day, you'll have kids, and I hope they turn out just like you!"

Not only have women played a pivotal role in America, but they were also instrumental to the work of Jesus.

- Who prompted Jesus to perform His first miracle? A Woman!
- Who ministered to Christ during His public ministry? The women!
- Who anointed the body of Jesus? The women!
- Who stayed with Jesus throughout his trial and crucifixion? The women!
- Who were the first witnesses to the resurrected Savior? The women!
- Who makes up the majority of the population of most churches today? The women!

Clara Barton did not marry or have children. However, she left a legacy that exhibited the spirit of Moms everywhere as she cared for "her boys" during the War Between the States and in establishing the Red Cross to care for those in need. The serving spirit of mothers and nurses like Clara Barton displays God's nurturing heart. In **Isaiah 66:13** (NKJV), God describes Himself uniquely.

**As one whom his mother comforts,
So I will comfort you;
And you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.**

We thank God for our Moms and the women who have influenced our lives. We see God's involvement in the lives of specific women and the men who shaped American history. God is still working His providence in the lives of men and women today. He needs humble servants to respond.

Mordecai knew of Haman's plans to destroy the Jews and asked his niece Esther to intercede for the people. Listen to **Esther 4:14** (NKJV):

¹⁴For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Clara Barton may not have had as dramatic a call to action as Esther, but she determined to do what she could for the well-being of those young men who went into battle for the sake of their country. She served in the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and her Red Cross continued from the Great War through today.

Purportedly, when **Napoleon** planned to invade England, an American wanted to see him. "I can give him two minutes," Napoleon said. But two minutes was not long enough to understand the revolutionary idea of a ship propelled by steam. If Napoleon had listened longer to **Robert Fulton**, the history of the world might have been altered.

To whom is God telling us to listen today? He has numerous servants who care about Him and His people. Men and women have roles in fulfilling the will of God. We can contribute and humbly pay attention to what people are doing and saying.

Keep The Light of God's Providence Through Women Burning!

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