

Saturday: Beloved

*How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.*

(Psalm 36)

Love. Refuge. Abundance. Delights. Life. Light. These are the gifts of God for *all* people. These are the blessings that God would have *every* child experience. During this devotional time, prepare to sit comfortably, breathe deeply, and, when you are ready, meditate on one word at a time, envisioning what it would mean for every child to know that blessing. Take your time, and really do it, right now:

Love.

Refuge.

Abundance.

Delights.

Life.

Light.

What can you do to help make it so?

Prayer: O God, in you I find love, refuge, abundance, delights, life, and light. Strengthen me to bring an experience of each of those blessings to children. Amen.

Children's Defense Fund

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2014 NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF CHILDREN'S SABBATHS

Seven-Day Guide for Prayer and Reflection

Precious In God's Sight: Answering the Call to Cherish and Protect *Every* Child

By Shannon Daley-Harris



Children's Defense Fund

Sunday: Wonderfully Made

*For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your
works; that I know very well...
How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!*

(Psalm 139)

Do you remember the first glimpse of a child you love and the overwhelming sense of wonder and thanksgiving? Perhaps it was the grainy black and white image on a sonogram, or a blanket-swaddled newborn in your arms, or a grandchild, niece or nephew emerging from the car seat on a first visit. Do you have a baby pictures of yourself taken long ago when others beheld you and marveled? As God's wonderful creation, *every* child deserves to be cherished and protected. This week as we prepare our hearts and minds for the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, we celebrate the wonderfulness of *every* child. We will learn more about millions of wonderful children who *don't* have all they need to survive and thrive—such as positive early childhood development, sufficient family income, and safe communities. Together, places of worship all across the nation will be answering the call so that every wonderful child has a strong start and is cherished and protected now and in the years to come.

Prayer: Loving Creator, I praise you for my life — for hands to serve, a heart to love, a mind to learn, a voice to speak out. Help me to use my life to cherish and protect the children you have so wonderfully made. Amen.

Friday: Precious Unity

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head...

(Psalm 133: 1-2a)

Today, places of worship all across our nation will begin celebrating the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths — in mosques' noon *jummas* (gathering for prayers) and this evening in synagogues for their *Shabbat* evening services. On Saturday and Sunday, additional places of worship will join in: Baha'i communities, Catholic parishes, Protestant churches, and others. In some cities, there will be multi-faith gatherings as people of different religious traditions come together. Throughout, people of faith will be lifting a common voice of concern for the children in our nation who face problems no child should face: poverty, hunger, lack of early childhood development, gun violence. Across the nation and across traditions, we will be affirming what our traditions share: the blessing of children, the values of justice and compassion, the moral responsibility to love and protect the young and vulnerable. How good it is when we live and serve and call for justice in unity!

Prayer: Holy One, you made the earth and all of its peoples, binding us together in one human family. Help us to recognize each person as our kindred. Use us to overcome division and prejudice and any attempt to separate into "us" and "them." Help us live together in unity, cherishing and protecting every child as we would our own, as you intend. Amen.

Thursday: Precious

*For God delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.
God has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.
From oppression and violence God redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in God's sight.*

(Psalm 72:21-14)

Timothy Dawkins was well respected in Washington, D.C. as a youth organizer wise beyond his 24 years of age. Recalls a D.C. Board of Education member, “Tim was just very different. You’re talking about a young man who went to seminary ...[and] got married when he was 21 . . . He was an old soul; a soldier.” Tim attended CDF’s 2013 Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry which focused on ending gun violence and child poverty, finding new skills and kindred spirits for his work as a devoted community activist seeking to serve God by addressing the oppression of poverty and the violence that takes the lives of countless precious children, teens, and adults. Terribly, mere weeks after attending CDF’s Proctor Institute, Tim was shot and killed one evening as he walked in his neighborhood. He was a precious child of God. Psalm 72 is a prayer for God to give God’s judgments to the nation’s ruler, so that the earthly political leader would act as God intends to protect and cherish those who live in poverty, experience violence or oppression, and are most vulnerable. Do we and our political leaders work as God would have us to end oppression and violence? Do we see the life of every person, especially those most in need, as precious? If we don’t act for change, every day seven precious children and teens will lose their lives to gun accidents, suicides, and homicides. We as citizens and leaders are called to work like Tim for an end to oppression and violence, so that we don’t lose another child of God.

Prayer: Loving God, help me to stand alongside and serve with young leaders as your hands and feet to rescue children from oppression and violence knowing they are precious in your sight. Amen.

Monday: Treasure or trash?

*The precious children of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold —
how they are reckoned as earthen pots, the work of a potter's hands!
Even the jackals offer the breast and nurse their young,
but my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness.
The tongue of the infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst;
the children beg for food, but no one gives them anything.*

(Lamentations 4:2-4)

Monday morning, for many of us, brings an inward groan — reluctance to head back to the office or school. However, for many children living in poverty, Monday mornings find them racing to school with extra urgency and eagerness: the federally funded school breakfast that morning may be the first square meal they’ve had since the school bell rang at the end of the day on Friday. Poverty doesn’t take the weekend off; it is a 24/7 experience for more than 16 million precious children in our nation — one out of every five children. Hunger saps their bodies, dulls their minds, distracts their attention — chipping away at their growth and learning. Every one of these children is precious in God’s sight, worth their weight in gold, but we treat them as earthen pots, cheap pottery that can be discarded when it chips or breaks. We can no longer treat some children as treasures and others as trash; we must cherish *every* child.

Prayer: Loving God, help me to see every child as precious. Instill in me a determination to cherish and protect every child so that none hungers or thirsts. Amen.

Tuesday: Practicing What We Preach

And the word of the LORD came to me saying, “...There is a conspiracy of her prophets in [the land’s] midst, like a roaring lion tearing the prey. They have devoured lives; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in the midst of her.... The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice.”

(Ezekiel 22: 23-26, NAS)

The prophet Ezekiel announced God’s strong word against the failures of priests, princes, prophets, and people. Religious leaders, political leaders, social justice voices, and citizens all fell short, practicing oppression, violence, greed, dishonesty, failing to assure justice to immigrants and those in poverty. What in the world do we think God’s prophetic word to us would be today? Is there any sector that can claim to be doing all we should? Are we practicing what we preach? “The people of the land have practiced oppression...” says the prophet. By practiced he meant, of course, something they did. But it makes me think about the other meaning of practice — doing something again and again to cement it in your memory, to solidify it as a skill. Could it be that oppression is something we do so often, so regularly, that it is something we are getting “good” at? How different would it be if we practiced what we preach — if again and again until it became second nature — we spoke out for justice and stood up whenever someone wronged those living in poverty or those in our land as immigrants?

Prayer: Living God, help me to practice what is preached: to love my neighbor — especially children, those in poverty, and immigrants — as myself. Amen.

Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west

Wednesday: Created for God’s Glory

I will gather you;...bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth — everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

(Isaiah 43:4-7)

Unless we change the odds, one in every three Black boys and one in seven Latino boys born in 2001 will be incarcerated in their lifetime, pushed along the Cradle to Prison Pipeline instead of set on paths of success. Precious children are now seen as commodities to fill for-profit prison cells. Isaiah’s image of the ingathering of the dispersed, the return of the children from exile, offers us a future to hope for and work toward. What would it look like if every community embraced and welcomed every son and daughter, every child whom God formed and made and created for God’s glory?

Prayer: God, help me to live in the knowledge that I am precious in your sight, honored, and loved. Help me to move beyond fear in the sure knowledge that you are with me. So emboldened, help me to gather in your sons and daughters who have been pushed to the margins, outside our community, into incarceration. Help me to create a congregation and community that welcomes every child as you do, knowing that each has been created for your glory. Amen.