

Sunday: Living by Faith

Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith. (Habakkuk 2:4)

“How long? Not long, because mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord...Oh, be swift my soul, to answer [God]. Be jubilant, my feet. Our God is marching on.”
(Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

On this weekend celebrated as the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths by places of worship of many faiths all across our country, we give thanks for the faithful who answer God's call to march and speak out and serve and sing and pray and work for justice.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel famously said of marching with Dr. King in Selma, “It felt like my legs were praying.” Let our legs and our hands and our hearts be jubilant as we answer God's call to seek justice for children. Let us be jubilant on this Children's Sabbath as we serve with love. Let us be jubilant as we call for an end to poverty, an end to immigrant family separations, and an end gun violence. Let us be jubilant as we listen to the voices of children and youths. Let us be jubilant as we commit anew to action throughout the year to faithfully answer God's call to love and justice.

This is a joyful day, not because all is well with children, not because justice is known throughout America; this is a joyful day because we are on the move with people of faith across the land end child poverty and sources of despair to ensure that every child may live a life of hope and justice. Be jubilant!

Prayer: God of justice and joy, fill me with a sense of power and possibility, hope and determination, passion for justice, and experience of joy as I answer your call. Bless me, I pray, and this Children's Sabbath day in faithful service to your vision. Amen.

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Realizing Dr. King's Vision for *Every* Child: Lives of Hope, Not Despair

SEVEN-DAY GUIDE FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER

for the 2018 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths

By Shannon Daley-Harris

As you prepare to use this week-long guide for reflection and prayer, you are encouraged to watch or read Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s March 25, 1965 speech in Montgomery, Alabama. You may also wish to read the full biblical text Habakkuk 1:1-2:5. Excerpts of that speech accompany verses from the biblical text throughout this guide for prayer.

DEAR LORD
BE GOOD TO ME
THE SEA IS SO
WIDE AND
MY BOAT IS
SO SMALL



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Monday: How Long?

O Lord, how long must I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you “Violence,” and you will not save? (Habakkuk 1:2)

“I know you are asking today, ‘How long will it take?’ Somebody’s asking, ‘how long will prejudice blind the vision of men?’”
(Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

The anguished cry “How long?” in the midst of injustice has been on the lips of the faithful from the time of the Hebrew prophet Habakkuk to the movement led by the prophetic Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. That same cry is in on our lips today in the face of suffering and injustice:

How long will our nation let nearly 1 in 5 children live in poverty?

How long will we let 8 children or teens be killed by guns each day?

How long will we let countless immigrant children be separated from their families?

How long will we be blinded by hopelessness, selfishness, or prejudice and believe that we can’t do better?

As we prepare our hearts and minds for the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths, may we be attentive to the anguish of children in poverty, the terror of children separated from families, the fear of children worried about gun violence. May we be impatient with our own sluggish response and determined to bring justice so every child lives a life of hope, not despair.

Prayer: Eternal God, I trust that you hear my prayers even as you hear the cries of children and families in poverty and in pain. Keep me unsettled and impatient with the way things are and help me work to make them the way you would have them be—a reflection of your love and justice. Amen.

Saturday: Wait for It

For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. (Habakkuk 2:3)

“How long? Not long, because the arc of the universe is long but it bends toward justice.” (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

As I shared the “first day of school” photos of my two children, one beginning his senior year of high school and the other her freshman year, I wrote friends: “It reminds me of the James Taylor lyric, ‘The secret of life is enjoying the passage of time.’ I just didn’t think it would go so fast.” During those earliest days of motherhood, as I happily cradled baby Micah in my arms or during less happy long nights with little sleep and a crying newborn, the day that he would be driving off to high school, a younger sister in the seat beside him, seemed impossibly distant. I could imagine it, barely, but it seemed an eternity before the day would arrive. And yet there it was, that September. In those intervening 17 years, there was much that I could do to help him reach this day—nurture, protect, love, feed, teach—and much that was out of my control and would only come with the passage of time.

Both Habakkuk and Dr. King speak to a complex sense of urgency and patience. The justice that each longs for, like our own profound desire for an end to child poverty, will not come instantly, but it will come. It will not come automatically but as a result of our faithful partnership; both in Habakkuk and in the life of Dr. King, we see the role we have to play in spreading the vision and putting our faith into courageous action to help bend the arc and bring justice to fruition.

Prayer: Eternal God, help me never to confuse patience with passivity. Keep my sights focused on the future of love and justice you have promised while I seek to do all that I can in the present moment to work for its realization. Amen.

Friday: Write the Vision

“Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets so that a runner may read it.” (Habakkuk 2:2)

“How long? Not long, because you reap what you sow.”

(Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Frederick Douglass wrote, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

If we invest in health care for children, if we invest in early childhood education, if we invest in safety nets that protect children from the worst effects of poverty while also investing in what parents need to achieve lasting economic security, we will produce stronger children.

But if we leave children to struggle in the depleted, hardscrabble soil of poverty, if we refuse to pull the strangling weeds of racism, if we withhold the essential water of education...we will reap what we sow.

Let’s write the vision and make it plain: every child, every child deserves a healthy start, a head start, a fair start, a safe start and a moral start in life with the help of strong families and caring communities. Let’s write the vision with our speaking and our preaching, let’s make it plain through our actions and our service, let’s proclaim it at worship and at work, at school and on the sidelines of our children’s games. What can we do to realize Dr. King’s vision for every child so all children have lives of hope, not despair? How will you share God’s vision of justice for children?

Prayer: O God of boundless compassion and everlasting justice, open my eyes to see your vision for our world, open my heart to long for its realization, open my mouth to proclaim it. Amen.

Tuesday: See

Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. (Habakkuk 1:3)

“How long? Not long, because truth pressed to earth will rise again.” (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Have you noticed our human tendency to “rubberneck” or gawk at disasters we didn’t cause or can’t do anything about, such as a car accident on the highway or even reality TV?

Then, have you experienced our human desire to look away from terrible problems we might have contributed to, or feel hopeless about solving, or those we fear will require our effort and sacrifice to make a difference? When there is pain of guilt or hopelessness or potential sacrifice, we start desperately looking for distraction.

Did the prophet, like us, feel hopeless? Worry about what would be required of him to stop the injustice? When nearly 13 million children live in poverty in our rich nation, we might feel guilty, or hopeless, or worried about what it will cost us—in time, money, or other sacrifice—to resolve the injustice. But ignoring child poverty doesn’t make it go away. Covering up the truth of the problems doesn’t solve them. We need to face this head on—to see in the face of every child in poverty God’s own reflection, and summon the honesty, hope, and willingness to commit to do what needs to be done to bring economic justice and an end to child poverty. We can do it. We just need to face up to the task.

Prayer: Dear God, I know there is no place I can hide from you. You see my fear, my despair, the things from which I would run away. Remind me that you are with me and fill me with the courage, hope, and commitment to face the problems in your world and do all I can to solve them. Amen.

Wednesday: Surrounded

So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous—therefore judgment comes forth perverted. (Habakkuk 1:4)

“How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.”

(Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

“The battle at Krueger Park” is a YouTube video taken by a tourist shocked to see a baby water buffalo being stalked and then attacked by a pride of lions. The rest of the water buffalo herd runs off during the chaos of the assault. The baby water buffalo is surrounded by biting, clawing lions, twisting in anguish and falling into a watering hole. Just when it seems the situation could not be any worse, a crocodile surfaces from the water and grabs the leg of the struggling baby water buffalo, who is now beset on every side. It appears that the baby’s death is imminent, surrounded by these terrorizing forces.

Yet, with the camera focused on the struggle of the baby surrounded by predators, into view comes the returning herd of water buffalos; the predators are themselves now surrounded by a large herd of adult water buffalo who drive off the attacking lions. The baby water buffalo is able to struggle out of the water and is once again surrounded by the protective herd.

It often feels that our children are surrounded by forces that will do them in—violence, racism, and other injustice. But we can surround them with a greater strength and put to flight the forces that would harm them.

Prayer: Holy One, remind me that you are ever present, surrounding me with your love. Help me to enfold children, reflecting and embodying your love, protection, and desire for justice. Amen.

Thursday: Standing Watch

I will stand at my watchpost and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what [God] will say to me, and what [God] will answer concerning my complaint. (Habakkuk 2:1)

“How long? Not long, because ‘Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne, Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown, Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.’” (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

A cartoon depicts one person saying to another, “Sometimes I want to ask God why God lets there be so much pain and suffering in the world.” The other responds, “Why don’t you ask God?” The first replies, “Because I’m afraid God would ask me the same thing.”

It’s not sufficient for us to watch and wait for God to answer our complaints about injustice in the world. Even as we are attentive for God’s word to us, we must take action to end the injustice that children have suffered on our watch. The hymn to which Dr. King referred in the quote above begins: *“Once to every [one] and nation, comes the moment to decide, In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side; Some great cause, some great decision, offering each the bloom or blight, And the choice goes by forever, ’twixt that darkness and that light.”*

It is our moment to decide whether we will join our hearts, hands, breath, and being to end the sources of despair that we have the capacity to end: immigrant family separations, unchecked gun violence, child poverty in our rich nation. We have the resources, technology, and opportunity to do so...or not. The choice is ours. What will we decide?

Prayer: Ever present Holy One, it is easier to wait for you to act than to take action myself. Help me to hear your call to action and instill in me the courage to respond, to choose the good and just cause of ending child poverty and suffering. Amen.