

Fourth Week of Lent

Spiritual Practice: Prayer Walk

A prayer walk is time spent in physical and spiritual motion—walking and talking with God. There are endless variations you can try:

- Walk in a park or forest preserve, slowing down to observe the wonders of creation. View even familiar sites with fresh eyes and praise the Creator as you walk.
- Walk through your neighborhood and pray for your neighbors as you pass their homes. Even if you don't know all of them, you can ask God to bless their lives, to keep them safe, and to bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ.
- Walk on an indoor track or a treadmill with your prayer list handy or with Scripture verses to meditate on as you walk.

If physical limitations make it hard to walk, try sitting near a window to look outdoors as you pray.

Monday, March 16

“Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. The Lord lifts up the humble ... the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.” Psalm 147:5-6a, 11

Hope in His Love

Great, abundant in power, with understanding beyond measure. Those are some of the ways today's Scripture verses describe our Lord. If you read through Psalm 147, you will find many other descriptions: He is beautiful and worthy of praise. He builds up, gathers, and blesses His children. He heals and binds their wounds.

This was true for God's people long ago, and it is true for us today. What is a fitting response? Psalm 147 tells us that, too—humility, fear of the Lord, and hope in His steadfast love.

That is the response Jesus was looking for from His followers. He minced no words with the proud religious leaders who feared only the loss of their own fine reputation and put their hope in outward observance of the law. Matthew's gospel records “seven woes” to the scribes and Pharisees as Jesus took them to task for their hypocrisy and self-righteousness.

Jesus wanted something else, something better. *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,”* He said, *“How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”* (Matthew 23:37).

Hear the heart of your Savior, who longs to draw you close to Himself. Come to Him today with a humble heart, with fear and reverence, and with hope—for His steadfast love for you never ends.

Jesus, You are great in power, great in understanding, great in love. Thank You for being my Savior and my Friend. Amen.

Tuesday, March 17

“Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!” Psalm 148:1-3

All Creation Praises

Have you ever stood beneath the night sky, mesmerized by shining stars too numerous to count? Or have you gazed at a sunrise or sunset from a height that afforded a completely unobstructed view of the grandeur? If so, Psalm 19:1 might have come to mind: *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”* Or perhaps you thought of Psalm 8:1: *“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”*

It is fitting that God’s beautiful creation moves us to praise the Creator. In Psalm 148, creation itself is called to praise the Lord. Sun and moon, hail and fire, snow and mist, mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars—all are to praise God. Though their voices may not be heard by human ears, their very existence testifies to the awesome and powerful One who created them.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday amidst shouts of praise, the Pharisees tried to get the crowd to shut up. But Jesus told them, *“If these were silent, the very stones would cry out”* (Luke 19:40).

Let us not be outdone by a bunch of stones. Let us raise our voices to praise our Savior and Redeemer!

**All praise and honor and glory to You, our Lord and our God, this day and always.
Amen.**

Wednesday, March 18

“Let them praise the name of the Lord! For he commanded and they were created.”
Psalm 148:5

Re-creation

Yesterday, we heard the psalmist’s cry for everything to praise the Lord. Creation—and all God’s creatures—are to praise their Creator. Today’s verse spells it out plainly, *“Let them praise the name of the Lord! For he commanded and they were created.”*

God is the Creator. It seems such a simple statement, yet it reveals so much about our God. He is the source of everything. He thought it all up! He imagined and ordered the intricacy and complexity of the natural world. He spoke it into being out of nothing in a sequence that builds one creative act upon another. He designed an environment that could sustain life and then added plants, birds, animals, and, finally, humankind. And it was all good, a reflection of the goodness of God.

We don’t know how long the perfection of Eden lasted, but we do know that all creation praised God perfectly and fully. Now we live in a different world. Fallen into sin, we are bruised and broken, so far from God’s original intent.

But God has not forgotten us, and He is still in the creating business—re-creating us. In fact, He is making us new in Christ. He covers our sin with the blood of His Son, our guilt and shame with His robe of righteousness. He shines His light to break through the darkness in our hearts. He mends the broken pieces of our lives.

The prophet Isaiah foretold that this would happen, that when the Messiah came He would bring good news to the poor; bind up the brokenhearted; proclaim liberty to the captives; comfort all who mourn, giving them the oil of gladness instead of mourning ... that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified (see Isaiah 61:1-3).

Are there parts of your life that need mending? Need liberty? Need wholeness? Need peace? Take them to the One who alone can make all things new.

Dear Savior, Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. Amen.

Thursday, March 19

“Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly! Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King! For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation.” Psalm 149:1-2, 4

The Lord Takes Pleasure

“Do you still love me?” the toddler asked her dad. She had just been scolded for doing something wrong, and dad was explaining what the consequence was going to be. But his little girl’s question stopped him in his tracks. “Of course, I love you,” he assured her. “I will always love you. Nothing can change that.” Relief flooded his daughter’s face as she blinked back her tears and ran to his arms.

Can we picture God like that loving father? Or do we sometimes wonder if His love will dry up since we keep falling for the same temptations and repenting of the same sins over and over again? If that describes you, let Psalm 149:4 comfort your heart: *“The Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation.”*

This theme of God’s delight in His people runs throughout Scripture, beginning when He created humankind in His image. The Old Testament prophets tell us that the Lord rejoices over us with singing (Zephaniah 3:17) and that when the Messiah sees all that His suffering and death has accomplished, He is satisfied (Isaiah 53:11). In the New Testament, we learn that Jesus was content to be called the Friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19) and that He went to the cross for you and me for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

Why does He love us so? The reason is beyond our ability to grasp. He loves because He is love. We cannot comprehend it, but we can receive it humbly and rejoice with all our hearts.

God, my Savior, Thank You for taking pleasure in me because of Your unfailing, eternal love. Amen.

Friday, March 20

“Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!

Let the godly exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds.”

Psalm 149:3, 5

No Matter Where

How many ways can we praise the Lord? Psalm 149 gives us some examples: singing, dancing, playing instruments, even while lying in bed!

I have visited different churches with different worship styles. Some were quiet and reflective. Others were loud and expressive. Some were structured; others seemed like a free-for-all. I've heard many different instruments in church and even seen dancing, but I never visited a church where people were lying in bed!

Wait ... maybe I have. I have knelt at the bedside of my young sons, asking angels to keep them safe while they slept. I have sat on the edge of the bed of an elderly saint singing hymns together. I have stood beside a hospital bed with prayers rising as a dear soul slipped from this life to the next.

I have also offered prayers and praises from my own bed, whether wakeful or worried or ill. I bet you have had these bedtime prayers, too. No wonder the psalmist mentioned lying in bed! What a wonderful God we have who welcomes our praises and listens to the cries of our hearts—no matter where we offer them.

Lord Jesus, May my thoughts turn to You all day—as I sit, when I rise, and even when I lie down. Amen.

Lessons on The Path of Prayer from Kerby Kerber

“Can you make our waitress feel better?” Mom asked my sisters and me as part of our “ladyship” training. We would “see the person” and smile, sing, or joke to lighten the load. *They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love.*

Cancer came into my life when I had landed a new position after being fired from a 20-year job that stimulated and taxed me to the point that I was ready for a break. But God...

Cancer forced me to face my mortality, which focused me on God’s plan to use my remaining days as He directed. Words from Brahms Requiem reverberated in my soul: *Lord, make me to know the measure of my days on earth, to consider my frailties, that I must perish.*

I had been feeling unworthy of love, having worked in too many directions but not accomplishing the quality I wanted. But God brought cancer, forcing me to let go of the “too many” things. *Open my eyes, Lord.* My renewed vision revealed the beauty around me (the smiles, calls, hugs, cards, songs, card games, lunches, and visits of my friends and family) and kept me from malaise.

Slowly, the light and life that follow intense challenges came. I examined work, church, and family commitments to listen for God’s direction. This required that I intentionally connect with God through prayer as He continued to challenge and grow me. God pruned and focused me, giving me renewed courage, perseverance, and grace—for others and for myself. Scripture, expressed in these song lyrics, supported me:

- *The Lord is my light and my salvation. The Lord is the strength of my life. So, I will not be afraid.*
- *Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your path straight. Don’t worry about tomorrow, cause He’s got it under control.*

How is God focusing you to use your gifts in His plan? Pray about that, and He will guide you.