

Fifth Week of Lent

Spiritual Practice: Gratitude

Gratitude is our thankful response to God for His presence, His provisions, and His faithfulness in our lives. Gratitude includes counting our blessings and growing in awareness of God at work in and around us. Gratitude overflows into generosity.

Consider these practices:

- Sing songs and hymns that focus on God's goodness.
- Make daily or weekly entries in a gratitude journal.
- Express gratitude to others; say thank you and affirm their kindness.
- Share your resources with others out of a sense of grateful abundance.

Monday, March 23

"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!"

Habakkuk 3:18 (NLT)

Rejoice in the Lord

We're starting at the end of the story. Today's Scripture verse is from the conclusion to the book of Habakkuk. It is the prophet's declaration that, in the midst of an approaching dark time, God is in control.

You see, Habakkuk prophesied right before Babylon swept over Judah and took God's people into captivity. Habakkuk had been wrestling with God, because although he acknowledged Israel's rebellion against the Lord, he questioned how a pure and just God could allow an evil nation to conquer His people.

Habakkuk voiced his complaints to God about that seeming lack of justice. God replied that Babylon was His instrument to punish the wayward Israelites, but He also foretold that Babylon itself would fall one day, reaping the consequences of the evil it had sown. Habakkuk could rejoice in the Lord because he realized that God's will was being accomplished, that God's people would experience restoration after captivity, and that God remains faithful through it all.

Lent reminds us that God's will is sometimes accomplished in unexpected ways: the sinless One becomes sin for us; the innocent One is punished; the crucified One rises again. Your Savior—who did all this out of love for you—will surely carry you through whatever dark times you may face.

I rejoice in You, my Savior. Thank You for Your death and resurrection. Help me trust You to accomplish Your will in my life day by day. Amen.

Tuesday, March 24

“How long, O Lord, must I call for help? But you do not listen! ‘Violence is everywhere!’ I cry, but you do not come to save. Must I forever see these evil deeds? Why must I watch all this misery? Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence. I am surrounded by people who love to argue and fight. The law has become paralyzed, and there is no justice in the courts. The wicked far outnumber the righteous, so that justice has become perverted.”
Habakkuk 1:2-4 (NLT)

How Long, O Lord?

This wrenching cry for justice is Habakkuk’s opening complaint. It could have been written today, couldn’t it? In fact, it has been the cry of believers down through the ages. Job lamented: *“Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?”* (Job 21:7). Jeremiah echoed the cry, *“Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?”* (Jeremiah 12:1b).

The Psalms, too, repeat the theme: *“I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked”* (Psalm 73:3). But the Psalms also offer an antidote: *“Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb”* (Psalm 37:1-2). If we are not to fret, what are we to do? Psalm 37 tells us:

*“Trust in the Lord, and do good. Delight yourself in the Lord.
Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him.
Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.”*

This reminds me of our Lord’s earthly life. He trusted His Father always; He did good by preaching Good News, by healing bodies and souls. And when Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all, He committed His way to God and patiently awaited Easter morn.

Many Christians consider Lent not just a time to abstain from certain things but a time to be intentional about doing good, about showing kindness and practical help to others. Doing so follows the example of Jesus and reflects His love. Who can you bless with kindness and care today?

Dear Jesus, Help me not to fret the state of this sinful world, but to trust You and do good. Amen.

Wednesday, March 25

“Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked; but the righteous will live by their faith.” Habakkuk 2:4 (NLT)

By Faith

My confirmation verse is Romans 1:16: *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile”* (NIV). Verse 17 of Romans 1 continues by explaining: *“For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.”*

That final phrase quotes Habakkuk 2:4, our Scripture for today. It contrasts the proud, who trust only in themselves, with the humble, who put their trust in God to save them. Paul, the author of Romans, expands on this theme in his letter to the Galatians: *“No one who relies on the law is justified before God, because the righteous will live by faith. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit”* (Galatians 3:11, 13-14 NIV).

From the covenant given to Abraham, through the long years of the prophets, for first-century believers and for us today, faith is the key—faith in Christ alone, the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. Our salvation doesn’t depend on us. It depends on Jesus, who has done it all. Open your heart to receive the free gift of God’s mercy and grace!

Jesus, I trust in You alone for forgiveness and eternal life. Thank You for this amazing gift. Amen.

Thursday, March 26

“For as the waters fill the sea, the earth will be filled with an awareness of the glory of the Lord. The Lord is in his holy Temple. Let all the earth be silent before him.”

Habakkuk 2:14, 20 (NLT)

Silent Before Him

In response to Habakkuk’s complaints, which we looked at earlier this week, God has the final word. He is using an enemy nation to punish His people so that they wake up and turn back to the Lord. But Babylon is not invincible, and her rule will not last. In fact, all of Babylon’s power and wealth will come to naught. The acclaim that once belonged to her will fade away, forgotten.

And then ... then something marvelous will happen: the glory of the Lord will fill the earth. All will see it. All will recognize that there is only one true God. Those who worshipped false gods will see their idols for what they are: empty images without breath or life, unable to see or hear or speak, useless to rescue or save. Then all will know that the Lord alone saves, the Lord alone reigns in His temple.

When will this happen? When Christ returns, when every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (see Philippians 2:10-11). But we don’t need to wait to bow the knee. We don’t need to wait to declare by faith that Jesus is our Savior and Lord.

There is a time for loud and joyful praise. There is also a time for silent awe, as Habakkuk asserts. Take a moment of silence before the Lord now. Bow your heart in worship.

Lord of All, I bow before You. Amen.

Friday, March 27

“Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights.” (Habakkuk 3:17-19 NLT)

So Many Faithful

We are back at the end of the story. Back to the place of *even though*, as today’s Scripture puts it. *Even though* God’s plans were not my plans, Habakkuk could have worded it. *Even though* God’s ways were not what I hoped for. *Even though* the enemy has done his worst. *Even though* the wine vats are empty, the crops are a bust, and the cattle are all dead. *Even though* all that is true, this is also true: God is my Savior; God is my Strength.

I wonder if Jesus had His *even though* moments, times when He might have thought: *Even though* My back is ripped open from the lashes. *Even though* thorns pierce My scalp. *Even though* I feel forsaken, I know this is true: God is My strength. God is My Father. I commit My soul to Him.

Because Jesus bore these *even though* moments, we can be sure that, even when the worst happens to us, we are never forsaken, never abandoned. For nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I bless You, dear Lord, for the security I have in You even when trouble or hardship comes my way. Thank You for always keeping me safe in Your love. Amen.

Lessons on The Path of Prayer from Has & Doris Kerper

Where does one begin in looking back through the years? We recollect childhood memories, struggles during the depression years, and experiences during World War II. We remember the joys and challenges of early married life, of raising a family, of seeing the children grow up to have families of their own.

It's quite a panorama when one looks back—broad fields of contentment and sunlit days as well as dark crevasses and snake-like passages. We hear sounds of joy and laughter, but also groaning and crying. Yet this seemingly random collection of memories has an unseen thread, a beautiful mosaic of life given meaning by God's presence and His love.

Now our thoughts turn to advancing years and old age. We don't know what the future holds. We live each day trusting God and looking for ways we can still serve others. Scripture is our foundation and gives us daily encouragement.

When we are weary or ill, His promise strengthens us: *"Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint"* (Isaiah 40:31 NIV).

When we remember past griefs, such as the early death of our third daughter, or when we face fresh losses, we don't grieve as those who have no hope, because *"we believe that Jesus died and rose again; even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep"* (1 Thessalonians 4:14 NSVA).

Whenever we need His listening ear, we remember that *"The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth"* (Psalm 145:18 ESV).

In our senior years, He is our Rock, and our times are in His hands.