

A CALL TO PRAYER



PRAYER WALK GUIDE AND DEVOTIONAL



Preparing and Positioning the Nation For A
50th Anniversary National Action to
Realize the Dream

***In Commemoration of the Historic August 28, 1963
March on Washington***

On behalf of the National African American Clergy Network



FORWORD

Five years ago, as clergy from across the nation pondered our role in helping then Senator Barack Obama to get elected and then to be effective in the Office of President, national clergy leaders formed and convened a committed cohort of prayer warriors. These Christian leaders from across denomination lines came together at 7 am (EST) each Tuesday for one hour of passionate prayer for the President, his family, and his staff; the United States Congress and their staffs; the pressing concerns and celebrations of our nation; our clergy and community leaders; and the people in our nation, especially the disenfranchised and marginalized. These consecrated prayer teleconferences included the careful reading of relevant scriptures, the silent listening for the heart of God in those readings, and the Spirited and transformative prayers from clergy-leaders as the Holy Spirit gave utterance. Operating totally independent of the White House, we operate under the banner of the **National African American Clergy Network**.

These weekly "centering moments" have had and continue to have profound and far-reaching impact. With the faith that such prayer will "heal our land," those who pray with us have witnessed the movement of God in our nation. We have seen minds and hearts of the nation's leaders change. We have noticed national challenges and injustices move toward resolution. We have observed deepened relationships with clergy from different denominations via our humbling habits of disciplined prayer. We have witnessed how "centering moments" of prayer can change our nation, its people and its governance structures.

As we prepare for this 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington, prayer must precede all actions up through the March and those taken after the March. Let all connect with the "God of our weary years and silent tears who brought us thus far along the way." Then we shall realize "the Dream" and see all begin to thrive in the land of liberty and justice for all.

CONTRIBUTORS

The Reverend Dr. Kendrick E. Curry, MDiv, PhD
Senior Pastor
The Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church
Washington, DC

Pastor Gloria G. Hilliard
Pastor of Intercessory Prayer
New Samaritan Baptist Church
Washington, DC

Bishop Michael V. Kelsey
Senior Pastor
New Samaritan Baptist Church
Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship, Int.
Washington, DC

The Reverend Robert H. Thompson
Phelps Minister for Phillips Church
Phillips Exeter Academy
Itinerant Elder
African Methodist Episcopal Church
Exeter, New Hampshire

The Reverend Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner
President
Skinner Leadership Institute
Co-Chair, National African American Clergy Network
Tracy's Landing, MD



INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago on August 28, 1963, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial and delivered his historic “I Have a Dream” speech, proclaiming and calling for Jobs, Justice and Freedom, and advocating racial harmony. It was one of the largest political rallies for human rights in the United State calling for civil and economic rights for African Americans.

Now fifty years later (half a century), we fight for the same “Dream.” Fifty years later, we still fight for Jobs, Justice and Freedom while seeking racial harmony. Blow the Trumpet in Zion Proclaim the Day of the Lord on August 17, 2013 will be “A CALL TO PRAYER: Preparing and Positioning the Nation’s Capital for National Action to Realize the Dream.” “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1) So now is the time for a clarion call to prayer so that our nation will collectively realize the “Dream.” It is TIME to PRAY to seek the face of the Lord Our God for: Clear Vision, Godly Wisdom, Kingdom Knowledge, Divine Direction, Bold Faith, Uncommon Favor, Relevance, Government Officials, and the Glory of God in the midst of all the planning to achieve the Dream for Jobs, Justice and Freedom as we prepare to embrace the 50th Anniversary March on Washington. God knows the plans for us and works all things in accordance with His purpose and time.

The Lord has declared, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.” (2 Chronicles 7:14–15)

The following versions of the Bible are used in the scriptures noted: New American Standard Bible, New International Version, New King James Version, and New Revised Standard Version.



12 DAY PRAYER WALK GUIDE

DAY 1

PRAYER FOCUS: PRAYER OF REPENTANCE, RECONCILIATION AND RESTORATION

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." I John 1:9

"...and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish." Jonah 3:8-9

"...For he is our peace, in the flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us...that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace." Ephesians 2:14-15

PRAYER

O God, we repent from our sins against You and the human family. Reconcile us to You and each other, and restore every broken relationship until we are one in You.

DAY 2

PRAYER FOCUS: RESCUE FROM SIN'S PENALTY AND POWER

"If You, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness...My soul waits for the LORD more than watchmen wait for the morning...put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption. He Himself will redeem...all from their sins." Psalm 130:3-8

"For he who has died is freed from sin." Romans 6:7

"...seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." Jeremiah 29:7

PRAYER

Visit our City, O God, and forgive us and heal our Nation's Capital.

DAY 3

PRAYER FOCUS: BREAK THROUGH COMPLACENCY AND PRIDE

"If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail." Isaiah 58:10-11

"These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men. Therefore

once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder, the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish." Isaiah 29:13-14

"Whoever says, 'I am in the light', while hating his brother or sister, is still in the darkness." 1 John 2:9

PRAYER

O Lord God, liberate us from the bondage of pride and complacency.

DAY 4

PRAYER FOCUS: CLEAR VISION

"The lamp of your body is the eye, when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Then watch out that the light in you may not be darkness. If therefore our whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it shall be wholly illumined as when the lamp illumines you with its rays." Luke 11:34-36

"Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come. It will not tarry." Habakkuk 2:2-3

PRAYER

Grant us clear vision, O Lord, which vividly expresses the "Heart of God" for this 50th Anniversary March on Washington.

DAY 5

PRAYER FOCUS: GODLY WISDOM, KINGDOM KNOWLEDGE AND DIVINE DIRECTION

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction." Proverbs 1:7

"For the LORD gives wisdom; From His Mouth come knowledge and understanding." Proverbs 2:6

"Trust in the LORD with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your path." Proverbs 3:5

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

PRAYER

O God, grant us Your wisdom which strategically explores the particularities of the Your plan for a successful March.

DAY 6

PRAYER FOCUS: BOLD OBEDIENCE

“And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” 1 Samuel 15:22

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” James 2:26

“The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are BOLD as a lion.” Proverbs 28:1

“LORD...grant to your servants that with all BOLDNESS they may speak Your Word, by stretching out Your hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your Holy Servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken: and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with BOLDNESS.” Acts 4:29-31

PRAYER

Lord God, grant us bold obedience to break the bonds of injustice.

DAY 7

PRAYER FOCUS: RESTORATION FOR DEVASTATED CITIES

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on Me...the LORD has anointed ME to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners...They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.” Isaiah 61:1, 4

“Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” Jeremiah 29:7

“...If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail...” Isaiah 58:10, 11

PRAYER

O Lord God, restore hope to the hopeless and grant us the ingenuity and heart to resolve joblessness, homelessness and poverty in our Nation.

DAY 8

PRAYER FOCUS: GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS – PRESIDENT OBAMA, STAFF,
CONGRESS, SENATE, SUPREME COURT, CITY AND LOCAL OFFICIALS

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” Romans 13:1

“I urge, then first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority.” 1 Timothy 2:1-2

“The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.” Psalm 33:5

"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.'" Zechariah 7:9

PRAYER

O Lord God, make our officials examples of righteousness; grant them Godly wisdom in all their deliberations so they will speak and legislate truth; flee from all corruptions, and advance God's Justice and serve in love and harmony.

DAY 9

PRAYER FOCUS: RELEVANT RESULTS, ROOTED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” John 15:4-5

“Go out into the streets and alleys...and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in...” Luke 14:21-23

PRAYER

O Lord God, anoint our efforts with godly results. May our investment of time, energy and resources be met with Your Divine approval to the extent that Your people may experience the life and liberty that honors Christ.

DAY 10

PRAYER FOCUS: UNCOMMON FAVOR

“May the FAVOR of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us – yes, establish the work of our hands.” Psalm 90:17

PRAYER

Grant us extreme favor, O God, and give us the wisdom to correctly and appropriately apply

that favor to complete all assignments given to us with excellence.

DAY 11

PRAYER FOCUS: RENEWED PASSION FOR PRAYER

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." 2 Chronicles 7:14

"Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near." Isaiah 55:6

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God..." Psalm 42-1-2a

PRAYER

O Lord God, stir up in us the passion for communing with You. Create in us a hunger and thirst for Your presence, that no substitute will satisfy our innermost need for time with You

DAY 12

PRAYER FOCUS: GLORY OF GOD REVEALED

"Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth springs from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. Indeed, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its produce. Righteousness will go before Him, and I will make His footsteps into a way." Psalm 85:10-13

"O You who hear PRAYER, to You all men will come...You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas..." Psalm 65:2, 5

PRAYER

O Lord God, we expect Your Glory to be revealed in and thru this March. May the very fruit of righteousness shine through on this 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington.



12 DAY DEVOTIONAL

DAY ONE

"...Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." Jeremiah 29:7

This prophetic word from the book of Jeremiah was written to a group of leaders who were convinced that their presence in the unfamiliar, enemy territory of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was to be short-lived. According to the understanding of those leaders, their exile was but a temporary interruption of God's plan for victory for the people of Israel, and that victory, with the resulting return to Jerusalem, was imminent. Jeremiah heard another word. Their presence in the strange land was not contrary to the will of God, but in fact was the result of divine action. It was the land to which God had sent them into exile. They must carry themselves accordingly. They must invest themselves in the land where God sent them, in fact they must actively seek its welfare, understanding that the blessings they expected for themselves would be entwined with the blessings, the welfare, of this new and unfamiliar land.

For many Americans of African descent, living in America has been like living in exile. And, as if we read the original words of Jeremiah's letter, we have come to understand that our welfare is inextricably bound up with the welfare of our country, this exiled land, this America. So, we have given our best, planting gardens both metaphoric and actual, raising children, taking wives and sons for our children that they and we might increase. We have sought the welfare of this land with all that God has given us. For we understand that all of the blessings of our lives and the lives of our children will come from the work we do today.

DAY TWO

"...For he is our peace; in the flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us...that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace." Ephesians 2: 14, 15

Those first who marched, fifty years ago, were united on at least one thing: They were doing the work of God. The process as we have learned from many, who are still here to tell the tale, was messy, with the typical wrangling and in-fighting common to great change movements. They were clamoring for position and influence and they were sexist. In fact, all of the normal human foibles and faults were in full array, including deep fear and skepticism. Still, they were prepared spiritually. They dressed seriously. They were about their (and our) Father's business. They were convinced that the promised new humanity was within their reach. They came together with a clear vision, black and white, male and female, rich and poor, from the north and from the south, across many faiths, across both parties, with a political purpose they believed to be God's purpose: to secure economic and social justice and voting rights and to

continue to do all they could to remove every remaining vestige of racial discrimination from our society. Their conviction that their work was God's work was central to all of the successes and changes that brought them, individually and collectively to that march on Washington.

As we commemorate their work fifty years later, let us also recommit ourselves to the spiritual heart of their work. Still it is true that God has removed the dividing wall of hostility. Let's not rebuild another. In spite of the rhetoric of our day, we still know that God, alone, is our peace. Let us seek that sure and lasting peace. The work seems more complex in many ways, and those human foibles and faults are exhaustingly too well known to us. Nevertheless, our God is still a God of justice. Our God is still creating a new humanity through us.

DAY THREE

"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28

Perhaps the boldest claim of America is that we could create one nation from many parts. Usually, as any student of history will attest, people who are different from each other, fight. Our nation claims something bold, something still new. America claims that out of many voices, many places of origin, many points of view, many ways of doing things, many ways of seeing God, we can create one nation that would be indivisible and durable. With our history, we have claimed that we could show the world a new way to be and to live. This was our prophetic gift to the world. This is our challenge to ourselves in these most fractious times. Are we one? Can we become one? Is that portion of the American dream still a possibility? Can we find within our hearts some foundation for truly being one with our brothers and sisters across America? Is this still the work to which Christ is calling us?

All things are relative in these days of post-Christian America. The temptation is to hunker down in the face of the confusion of unfamiliar voices and points of view, and to define and defend our particular point of view with swords drawn and in full battle array. Because we lay claim to the One God who has created all that we can ever know or desire, however, a more embracing approach is appropriate. We are all children of God, created by God, given life by that same God, benefitting from the same blessings and suffering from the same injustices. All of this was true, before any of us endorsed any creed. "...before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58) Let us therefore reach out to our brothers and sisters with humility and clear commitment.

DAY FOUR

"The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love." Psalm 33:5
"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to

one another..." Zechariah 7:9

Our eyes are so focused on the here and now that we lose sight of this notion: Justice is found with God. Human systems do a lot, and our courts may be the best hope we have for justice here on earth. Again and again, however, we are disappointed by the decisions and actions of our system of justice because we know they fall from what we know in our hearts to be true justice. African American males, in particular, have developed sophisticated ways of functioning in our society, minimizing encounters with those who uphold the law in order to avoid the negative repercussions that so often result from those encounters. It is miraculous that this cleverness does not make it impossible for us to love our country. Perhaps we err when we trust our human systems to supply our justice. In a sense, those sophisticated adjustments are capitulations to the notion that there is no justice in America, an admission that justice is not to be known by us in this world.

God seems to expect something different from us. In the scriptures, as shown in these passages from Psalms and Zechariah, we are reminded that God expects just behavior from His people. God is a God of justice, and those who know God must likewise seek justice. Pragmatism encourages sophisticated means of avoiding negative encounters. History cautions us to have low expectations when we enter the justice system. But God is calling us to be vigilant and tireless is working to manifest true justice in all aspects of our corporate life.

May Almighty God empower our efforts to manifest justice in our world.

DAY FIVE

"...if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail..." Isaiah 58: 10, 11

Everywhere in our land, we see the needy. We know of families who have been devastated because of bankruptcies as a result of medical costs and we know people who are suffering for want of health care. We know people who have needed to depend upon the generosity of care agencies for clothing or housing. We know people who would be hungry except for the supplemental meal programs that our government administers in schools or departments of social service. We know many, many people who must work multiple jobs because of low wages. We also know that the gap between the richest and the most in our land continues to widen. We know that our government places much hope and emphasis on those who have much, believing them to be the source of hope for the many who have little. The poor and the middle class in our nation are embattled. More and more, the policies of our government seem

hostile to the needs of the poor and needy in our midst, or, they are made less important on the scale of national priorities.

We need to always remember the needs of the poor. Let us not be shy to name policies that are hostile to the poor, sinful and shameful. They are contrary to the desires of God as recorded again and again in scriptures. One preacher reminds us, "Attention to the small benefits all." This is the assurance God gives us when He speaks through the prophet Isaiah. When we care for the neediest, God will supply the needs of all.

DAY SIX

"Whoever says, 'I am in the light,' while hating his brother or sister, is still in the darkness." 1 John 2:9

It is very easy to demonize those who disagree with us. How easily do we wrap ourselves in righteous indignation, as if we served a God who served only us, one whose concerns did not extend to the needs of all of His creation we are among those who have been demonized. Easily within our collective memory is the time when we were the cast off ones, those deemed to be "less than" by those in power and who guided the policies of our nation. Still living are some whose very bodies bear the brunt of this demonization: tattoos on the arms of holocaust survivors, scars on the bodies of those who were beaten or who suffered the savagery of dogs set upon them. Fifty years ago, in spite of, or perhaps, because of the immensity of the task before them, those who marched showed each other and the world that we could love each as brothers and sisters, in spite of history, creed and political party. Love triumphed over all.

This remains the task. We must walk in the light, and we must allow the light to root out every darkness. We must allow ourselves to be open to God's prophetic presence in our lives, enabling us to expose where we hate our brother or sister. We must not be satisfied that things are as good as they might be, but instead with opened eyes and strengthened hearts, let us see and support those people who are demonized. There are still those who are despised, for no good reason. Sometimes, those who are the despisers are our selves. God, deliver us from our hatreds.

DAY SEVEN

"You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convinced by the law as transgressors." James 2: 8, 9

Of course, it is very hard to love. We throw the word around, as if it were the confection we so often use to symbolize love: chocolate, created to be savored; sweet, succulent and indulgent. No, love is hard, demanding, compelling, humbling, and relentless. Jesus died

because of love. Women give birth in love. Strong marriages survive because of love. Love is self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-giving. Love corrects us and (re)directs us. Love empowers us and supplies our hope and faith. When one has been wronged, or when one's humanity is challenged or denied in some way, there is often an appeal to the solution of hatred or violence as a means of redress. Giving in to those human emotions can satisfy, for a while. But those emotions, even when experienced as positive at the start, are in the end, negative and destructive. Love is positive and creative. Love always leaves more life in its wake. Love is what God expects of us.

As we honor those who walked fifty years ago, let us not fail to understand the strength of their love. They loved their country and the possibility of a united nation. With open eyes, and suffering all around them, they managed to love their enemies, and the people of God they and their enemies could become. They loved God and believed in God's power to change. And so, they walked. They walked in strength.

DAY EIGHT

"Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." Isaiah 1: 16-18

Always, always, God beckons us to lead better lives. Always, he encourages us. Sometimes, he threatens us with the withdrawal of His love. But, God's inability to ever forsake us reveals those "threats" to be more the words of a frustrated parent who does not know what else to do. We are God's disobedient children. He made us free, so we are free to do as we wish, but God desires more for us and from us. "Come," he says, "let us reason together."

"Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." In other words, care for those most in need. Hearing these words, how can we be idle while the hungry are denied food, those without shelter denied housing and those without health care denied insurance? Those who walked before us were tireless in their challenge to the government to serve the people. Today, we have lost sight of the basic requirement of our human existence before God that we not live as if we were on this planet alone. As Christians striving to honor God, we need to hold the systems established to provide support and nurture to the people of God accountable. We are they who must teach governments to treat the people of God with the respect God expects.

DAY NINE

"I will teach you hidden lessons from our past — stories we have heard and known, stories our ancestors handed down to us. We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the LORD, about his power and his mighty wonders." Psalm 78: 2b-4

Fifty years ago, we witnessed a small miracle. Thousands of Americans from all races and walks of life gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial to demonstrate concern and outrage over a lack of justice and basic rights for many Americans. The miracle was in the composition of the crowd - so many races, so many cities and towns represented. The miracle was in the movement that spawned the march - men and women who learned the power of non-violent resistance to evil forces; their courage and discipline in the face of cruelty inspired the nation and the world. The miracle was in the hearts and minds of those who marched; blacks in the south, in particular, had begun to truly believe that things could be different. There was a miracle of faith, too. The faith of those mothers and fathers who were ensconced in involuntary servitude, spoken through silent prayers, stirring spirituals and nurtured in their hearts for centuries was finally bearing fruit. Finally, it seemed that Americans of African descent would be free! In the end, what did we learn? What are the lessons we have to tell today's young ones? What lasting truth can we extract from that glorious, storied time?

Because of that movement and the courage of so many whose names will never be spoken, all Americans now see the basic rights the marchers walked for as being deserved by them. Women, the differently abled, those whose first language is not English, members and allies of the LGBT community, now demand and reasonably expect that basic rights will not be denied them. This is a lesson and a possibility that is also the fruit of the faith of those slave ancestors. In fact, this part of the story of African Americans was part of the proving ground for the very notion of human rights in the entire world. The true source of the miracle, however, was the spiritual strength of those southern blacks.

In the end, this is what we learned: Following the words of Jesus bears fruit. AMEN.

DAY TEN

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth...Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God...I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Matthew 5: 5, 8, 9, 39, 44b

Surely these words from Jesus are not meant to be taken literally! How quickly we run from the Sermon on the Mount! How easily we jump to rationalize those words and claim them as

allegory or hyperbole. We reject some of these words out of hand: What is blessed about meekness? Why have a pure heart if that means others walk over you? Don't resist an evildoer? Surely he jests! Love your enemies? Jesus must have lived in a different neighborhood than any known today.

Any person who lived fifty years ago, or who grasps the wonder and miracle of those days cannot escape these words and their literal application. Jesus said, "Do not resist evildoers. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you." Fifty years and more ago, strong, determined, courageous black men and women meekly bore the fire hoses, dogs and beatings of the unjust law and changed the nation. They were meek, but their meekness did not equate to passivity. They did not resist evildoers and their acts. They suffered at their hands, allowing them (and their cruelty) full freedom, believing that was the only way to love them. They showed their love by not allowing their cruelty to alter their determination to love. They loved them, they were peacemakers, and they were children of God.

Because we know those things to be true, can we be so bold as to claim anything other than the full truth of that sermon?

DAY ELEVEN

"My child, never forget the things I have taught you. Store my commands in your heart. If you do this, you will live many years, and your life will be satisfying. Never let loyalty and kindness leave you! Tie them around your neck as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart. Then you will find favor with both God and people, and you will earn a good reputation. Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take." Proverbs 3: 1-6

We live in a time of great angst. When we think of young people, anxiety quickly replaces confidence. Fear overcomes wisdom. The trouble is, fear and love do not coexist. When we give in to fear, even on behalf of our children, we betray our faith in God. We are inclined to bemoan the disobedience and rebellious nature of our children, forgetting just how natural, and perhaps, how necessary that rebellion is. When we reflect, we are able to see that through our rebellion, we came to a deeper, more organic understanding of the wisdom of our elders. Rebellion may be one of the great under-appreciated gifts of God in human development. The key to productive rebellion seems to be found in the remembering. The key to remembering is being taught. Sadly, there are times when we fail to teach our children, because our fear or lack of faith or simple fatigue has gotten in the way of our responsibility to transfer wisdom.

Our acknowledgement of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the March on Washington gives us an opportunity to revisit those lessons that shaped our nation at that time. We also now have an opportunity to teach our young ones the wisdom of loyalty and kindness, and the benefits of

faithful witness, even when borne over centuries. The biggest challenge and gift, is the opportunity we now have to put to bed our doubts and fears. Let us, with courage, strip bare our bluster and see where we have lacked faith and given into fear. Let us reclaim the faith of our forbearers, continue to teach our young people and challenge them to remember.

DAY TWELVE

"Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all..." Galatians 6: 7 - 10a

The truth of this passage from Galatians is rooted deeply in the heart of African American spirituality. Even in casual spirituality, the law of reciprocity is affirmed and seems to be universally believed. We reap what we sow; what goes around comes around. In the face of this inarguable truth, our only hope is God's forgiveness. May God's mercy deliver us from reaping what we sow. In the interim, until God's judgment and that final reaping, let us do our best. Let us sow and reap to the Spirit as long as God gives us strength to do so.

In the political sphere, what this means is that we must not tire of the fight at hand. We must demand justice, economically and legally. We must protect and safeguard our basic rights, including the right to vote. We need to grow ever more aware of the needs of the neediest, and find creative ways to meet those needs. We are the heirs of a system of successful direct action that had the March on Washington as its most storied moment. We are the heirs of people who were determined to do as Galatians encourages; they did not grow weary. We should honor their commitment and recognize their wisdom. Let us not grow weary, even in this time of heightened fractiousness. Let us never grow weary in doing good for the people of God.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Visit www.skinnerleadership.org
Contact us at bws@skinnerleadership.org
[@williamsskinner](https://twitter.com/williamsskinner) (Twitter)

Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner
Dr. T. DeWitt Smith
Co-Chairs, National African American Clergy Network