

Day 1 - Our Living Hope

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in Heaven for you.— I Peter 1:3-4

Our Living Hope - our theme for Christmas Gift Shop this year. Biblical hope is defined as being confidently expectant of God's promises knowing that He is faithful. As a follower of Christ, hope is not a mere "wish" but full confidence that our God has already done the very thing for which we hope. He gives us His abiding presence in this life and the joy of living eternally in His presence. What blessed assurance! The song *Living Hope* by Phil Wickham inspired this year's theme. Begin this Week of Prayer in praise, worship, and thankfulness to Jesus, our Savior whose birth we celebrate, as you meditate on the words of the song.

1. How great the chasm that lay between us
How high the mountain I could not climb
In desperation, I turned to heaven
And spoke your name into the night

2. Then through the darkness
Your loving kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul
The work is finished, the end is written
Jesus Christ, my living hope

3. Who could imagine so great a mercy?
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?
The God of ages stepped down from glory
To wear my sin and bear my shame

4. The cross has spoken, I am forgiven
The king of kings calls me His own
Beautiful savior, I'm yours forever
Jesus Christ, my living hope

Chorus: Hallelujah, praise the one who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope
Oh God, you are my living hope

5. Then came the morning that sealed the promise
Your buried body began to breathe
Out of the silence, the roaring lion
Declared the grave has no claim on me
Jesus, yours is the victory

Praise God...He is already victorious, and we can share the victory with Him!

Prayer: Father, thank You for the full confidence we can have in You and in the Living Hope you offer through Jesus Christ, your Son! Help us to share Your Living Hope with those who do not have You as their Lord and Savior.

Day 2 - The Privilege of Prayer

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.— Romans 8:26

How privileged we are to be in the presence of our Father through prayer. Yesterday, we began by praising, worshipping, and thanking Him for the Living Hope we know is his Son, Jesus Christ. Our hope and confidence, of course, is in spending eternity with Him, but for now, we are in the reality of life on earth. We know all too well that we live in a broken world full of hurt, heartbreak, anger, ugliness, injustice, and just so many things we don't understand and for which we don't have answers.

Jesus instructs us to ask, seek, knock, and we will find. Our Living Hope is not just for eternal things but full confidence that He hears our prayers, understands the situations for which we pray, and longs to guide us to the answers. This week, as you pray for the Christmas Gift Shop (CGS), the volunteers, and the guests, please pray in full confidence that He hears your prayers and wants you fully engaged in your time with Him. Our Living Hope is not only for the future but is alive now, and we have full confidence that He hears our prayers! Pray also that God will open your heart and lead you to sense the needs of those who arrive at our doors in need, not only of material things, but also in need of receiving Living Hope.

Prayer: Father, thank you that You allow us to commune with You, the Holy God and Creator of the Universe. We thank you that you already know our needs and the needs of all those who serve you or enter as guests through the doors of the CGS. Thank you for Your Holy Spirit who intercedes for us and presents our praises and petitions to You when our words are not sufficient.



Day 3 - Thanks be to God!

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you...because of the Hope laid up for you in Heaven.— Colossians 1:3-5

Christmas Gift Shop (CGS) is one of my favorite times of the year! The excitement and enthusiasm among the volunteers begins months earlier in August at the annual kickoff banquet. We are encouraged by a biblical message, hear about ways churches can support the ministry, and we actually sing Christmas carols together! Then, for the staff of the Shelby Baptist Association and many volunteers the new season begins with guest interviews and working with churches to coordinate the gifts, clothes, popcorn and cookies, and monetary donations. The Christmas Spirit really sets in at our Open House on the second Sunday in November. Christmas music plays throughout the building and the scent of Christmas punch and cookies is heavy in the air. This is the opportunity for visitors and church members across the Association to come and see what the CGS is all about. I have noticed over the years that so many first-time visitors are in awe of the beauty of the old building, the creative efforts of the volunteers who have decorated the rooms, and the extremely well-developed organization of the overall shop.

The CGS is a truly unique ministry and I've often thought it ought to be duplicated by other non-profit organizations. Praise God for those who began this ministry more than 27 years ago and for staff members throughout the years. Praise Him for the hundreds of volunteers who serve our community through this effort!

Sometimes, before entering into deep and intense prayers and petitions, it's nice just to think about the history of the success God has given to this ministry!

Prayer: Praise God from Whom all blessings flow! Thank you, Father, for the very idea of the CGS, the strength of this ministry in our community over the years, and, most especially, all those who have come to faith in You through it over the years.

Day 4 - He Knows My Name

I say unto you that likewise more joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.— Luke 15:7

This week, we have praised and thanked God for His blessings on Christmas Gift Shop. Now, let's enter into a time of petition. My favorite part of CGS is the Prayer Room. This small room reminds me of the movie *The War Room*, in which a woman created a closet in her house as her private prayer space. She wrote Scripture, prayers, and answered prayers on the walls of the closet. There was power in that room! So, it is with the CGS Prayer Room. Volunteers receive a list of guests for their shift with first names, gender, and ages - no other identifying information. After the parents complete their shopping, they go into a private room with a couple of volunteers (called Buddies) for a time of sharing and prayer. While this happens, the Prayer Room volunteer prays for the family. During my time there, I thank God that He knows each one of our guests by name and pray that He will help them through whatever situations in their life have led them to our gift shop. God cares and wants them to know He loves them just as they are.

One year, I felt compelled during one particular visit to put my hands against the shared wall of the Prayer Room and the Buddy Room as a way of laying hands on the guests who were in there. I could not discern the exact conversation, but I could hear enough to know there was pain and hurt being poured out to the Buddies. I think I prayed as earnestly as I've ever prayed. A few minutes later, I could hear excitement in the hall outside the room. The mother I had just prayed for had accepted Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord! I think I understood a little that day of how the angels in Heaven rejoice at the addition of another soul in the Kingdom. The joy was pure and real for all of us that day!

Prayer: Our wonderful, omniscient Father, what a joy it is to pray for people by name. Thank You that we don't have to know every detail to present a situation to You because You already know. Thank You that You leave the ninety-nine to search for the one lost sheep!



Day 5 - His Eye is on the Sparrow

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not: you are of more value than many sparrows.— Luke 12:6-7

As mentioned yesterday, it is a good thing to pray for people by name, but as you read this guide, that is not possible. Praise God that He already knows their names and everything they need! But, to help you pray today, here is a short list of suggestions that may help you pray more specifically for our Christmas Gift Shop guests.

Children

- Health and safety
- Favor in the eyes of their teachers
- Protection in their homes and neighborhoods
- That they will like the gifts and clothing items their parents select at the CGS
- That they will love learning and receive an education that prepares them for life
- Will have a warm house and warm clothes for the winter
- Good ways to spend their free time
- Influence of good friends and wisdom to stay away from people of bad influence
- Have adults who will take them to Sunday School and church
- To realize their worth as God's child and creation
- To believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior

Adults/Parents

- Wisdom to make wise financial decisions
- Money to pay bills / gainful employment (if possible)
- Adequate, affordable healthcare
- Dependable vehicle(s) / transportation
- To select gifts the children will enjoy
- To spend quality time with their children
- To have loving, respectful relationships
- Special help for grandparents who are raising grandchildren
- Model and teach the good behavior they want to see in their children
- Realize their worth if they are a child of God
- Freedom from any addictions or strongholds
- To be active member(s) in a healthy, biblical church
- To believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior

Prayer: Father, every family that enters the CGS is different and unique, but there are some things that we know we can ask because they are important in the human experience. We ask that You lead us to pray appropriately for the CGS guests. We thank you that the Holy Spirit already knows the needs and desires of the hearts of our guests and their families. Thank you that you care about every single detail of our lives. If Your eye is on the sparrow, then we know you are watching us too because our lives are of more value than many sparrows.

Day 6 - Harmony Among the Members

Our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where He wants it...This makes for harmony among the members...All of you together are Christ's body and each of you is a part of it.— 1 Corinthians 12:18, 25, 27

The army of volunteers who turn the cogs of the wheels of the Christmas Gift Shop never cease to amaze me. The love poured into this ministry by so many people is a testimony of their desire to serve God through making the CGS work effectively. Many tasks must be completed months and weeks before the Shop opens; others are done while the Shop is in operation in early December. Regardless, there is a LOT of work to be done. I have been the Task Force Coordinator for the Mantle Room for a number of years, and my "regulars" not only eagerly sign up to serve but also many offer to work more than one shift. Many "newbies" every year remind me to call them again next year so they can work again. The other Task Force Coordinators can echo this sentiment. We love our volunteers and thank God for sending them to us!

The emotions and excitement in the atmosphere of the Shop is contagious! We always gather before each shift and pray for the guests who will come through the shop that day. After this everyone scurries off to his or her assigned area where we become invisible elves for the next few hours.

You will see below the various specialized areas of the Shop. The work in some areas is done weeks and days ahead of time, and others are operational during the fourteen days the Shop is open. Please pray for each area, asking God to fill the needed items (toys, clothes, popcorn, cookies, financial resources) in every area and also to supply volunteers for every shift...that's twenty-eight shifts with multiple people needed for each shift. It's a busy time of year for everyone, but most of the CGS veterans will tell you that this part of the Christmas season is their most fun and rewarding!

Prayer Room Warriors	Gift Wrappers
Toy Stockers	Popcorn and Cookies Tins
Stocking Stuffers	Clothing Sponsors
The Mantle Room	Guest Refreshments

And...the Buddies who help the guests pick out the gifts for their children and share the Gospel with them!

Prayer: Father, just as Your church has people with many different gifts and talents, so the Christmas Gift Shop requires volunteers with a wide diversity of interests and skills. We humbly ask that You provide the financial and material resources to meet the needs of the CGS, and we also ask that Your Holy Spirit will lead the people You already have in mind to volunteer and give.



Day 7 - Merry Christmas!

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.— Luke 2:10-11

So now, it's the Christmas season and we celebrate our Living Hope that God so mysteriously, creatively, and lovingly sent us so long ago. What a joy it has been this week to offer the sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving, and prayer to our God.

Remember how we began...thanking God for Our Living Hope. Today, go back and read again the words of the song from Day 1. The connection between Christmas and Easter is so apparent in this song. One is celebrating the beginning of our Messiah's earthly life, and the other is celebrating the beginning of our eternal life because of His sacrifice and resurrection. The mystery and miracle of both are more than I can take in. But...there's that Living Hope again, and I know I don't have to understand it all but just fall into His loving arms and accept it in faith. Praise God!

Prayer: Our Loving Father, You are our only Hope and that's enough! Thank you for the gift of Your Son. Thank you that we are Your people and You are our God. Sometimes we have no words to offer, only silent thoughts of praise, joy, and awe. We love you and praise You for all eternity. Please accept our worship.



Christmas Gift Shop 2021 Devotional



“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” 1 Peter 1:3



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