

Day 1 - Rise and Shine

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Isaiah 60:1

Attune your mind's ear to the children singing.

Rise and shine and give God the glory, glory!

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Children of the Lord.

The song originated from Is. 60:1, the theme for Christmas Gift Shop (CGS) 2023. Isaiah instructed Jerusalem's inhabitants to awaken from the doldrums and see what God's up to. They experienced tough times after their return from exile. Temple and walls destroyed, skirmishes with neighboring nations, economy in shambles. What a mess!

A bright future of spiritual renewal awaited the faithful. God gives believers a reason to get up in the morning. The light of His presence illumines your way. Arise to bask today in the hope, peace, and meaningful life that descends when God works in, around, and through you.

God rescues Christ followers from sin's gloom. His salvation is an alarm clock that rouses you to a fresh outlook for a new day.

Do you find yourself out of sorts spiritually? It happens to the best Christians. When your spirit falls into sluggish mode, open your spiritual eyes to a new, brighter day with Jesus. He'll use your prayer time, a sermon, a Bible study, or the encouragement of a fellow believer.

Hear the alarm? Time to rise and shine for the Lord.

Prayer Points:

- Thank the Lord for the assurance of salvation.
- Whatever your involvement in CGS, ask God for the energy to dive in with your best effort.
- Offer yourself to God as an instrument to introduce other people to the Christ light?

God of light, shine on me the fire of spiritual renewal I need to be useful to You.

Day 2 - Reflection

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. Isaiah 60:2

A college course entitled "A History of Greece" introduced me to photos of iconic Athens sites like the Parthenon, the Acropolis, and Mars Hill. The snapshots didn't compare with the sight of those locales when I viewed them in person.

Isaiah assured the Jews of an "in person" experience with God's glory. What happens when you encounter the glory of God? His power and holiness invade your life. His glory lights the way for believers during challenging times, like stress fatigue, family discord, or depression.

The Jews received the promise of a personal relationship with the living God. His glory descended on them. The brilliance of God's glory bounced off the people to reflect Him to the world.

God revealed Himself to Jerusalem's residents after the exile. You, too, can access God's glory. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, . . ." (Jn. 1:14). When you trust Jesus as Savior, His glory radiates from your life to attract other people toward Christ.

How are you doing at reflecting Jesus to people overshadowed by sin? That's a believer's calling.

Do others see Jesus in you?

Prayer Points:

- Ask the Lord to reveal His purpose for you this day.
- Support in prayer the "buddies" charged with offering a personal relationship with Christ to CGS shoppers.
- Pray for the courage to mirror Christ to people you encounter today.

Glorious Father, use me to reflect the light of Christ to a sin-darkened world.

Day 3 - Welcome Mat

And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Isaiah 60:3

"WELCOME" was stamped on the mat outside the front door. When the doorbell rang, the shirtless man of the house flung open the door and proved the mat to be a lie. He held a pistol at his side and barked, "Who are you? And what do you want?" I squeaked, "I'm with Publisher's Clearing House, and I'm here to give you a million dollars." Not funny to him.

Isaiah described the happy result of God's saving light cast on Jerusalem. It attracted nations and kings. Perhaps they brought Jewish exiles back to their homeland. The city was to put out the welcome mat for those travelers.

Jerusalem's inhabitants also anticipated the arrival of a Messiah to deliver them from troublesome times. We know that Messiah to be Jesus, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

Jesus charged the church to dust off the welcome mat. We should receive gladly any person coming to Him. Regardless of their race, primary language, spiritual status, social standing. People crave the glow of a Christlike smile and kind words. Welcome all in your orbit to come to Jesus.

CGS presents a unique opportunity. People will flock to us. Whatever your role, welcome all-comers. Remind your co-workers to throw out the welcome mat. And mean it.

How truthful is your welcome mat?

Prayer Points:

- Support in prayer the CGS wrapping paper brigade, toy room stockers, and stocking stuffers.
- Ask the Lord to put someone in your way today with a desire to know Christ's love.
- Pray for openness to all people because Jesus loves them every one.

Hospitable Christ, stamp Your welcome on my heart in bright colors that can be seen from afar.

Day 4 - The Best Cheerleader

Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic forever, a joy from age to age. Isaiah 60:15

The team traveled a long distance for a football game versus a heavily favored opponent. A few faithful fans accompanied the team. The cheerleaders made up for the small fan base. They jumped, chanted, yelled, and waved pom-poms. Surprisingly the visitors upset the home team. The coach credited the cheerleaders with being difference makers. "We owe the victory to them."

One Cheerleader stood with Israel. He was enough. Jerusalem had endured a time when they were "forsaken and hated." Maps no longer plotted their existence. But God, their Cheerleader, promised to make them "majestic forever." He planned to put them back on the map.

The Lord committed to make the Jews "a joy from age to age." As a nation out of touch with God, Israel knew loneliness, sadness, and hopelessness. God promised to revitalize their spirits. A renewed right relationship with Him became their source of joy.

Some days you're on the field battling a powerful opponent. Perhaps you're playing against the same despair Israel knew. Life's a real struggle. In those days, look to the sidelines for the Holy Cheerleader. He's pulling for you. Invite Him into the game to help you. You can't lose.

Two bits, four bits, six bits, a dollar. The Lord's for you. Stand up and holler.

Prayer points:

- Take time now to give God the burdens of your day.
- Ask the Lord to cheer the CGS interviewers and SBA leadership to emanate Christ-like joy to those with whom they interact.
- Thank God for individuals, organizations, businesses, and churches that make CGS possible.

Proactive Father, thank You for supporting me. Please come through to instill in me joy that endures.

Day 5 - Gold and Good News

A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord. Isaiah 60:6

The Federal Reserve distributes currency to banks across the country. Large shipments of greenbacks and coins in the U.S. travel mostly by armored carrier. Banks receive the deliveries and store them securely.

Isaiah noted other means of transfer for valuable materials—camels and ships. Flocks and herds arrived on foot. No Brinks truck deliveries. No locked repositories awaited those provisions.

The precious cargo didn't arrive in Jerusalem for the purpose of storage. Jewish exiles returned from distant lands. They brought wealth accumulated during long years of separation from the homeland. They conveyed the goods to be used not stored.

Isaiah anticipated two worthy applications for the treasures.

- 1) To beautify the temple. Either to rebuild or upgrade the place where the people met God.
- 2) For the praise and glory of God. They gave it to Him as a praise offering.

God is not concerned with how much or little stuff you possess. He does care what you do with His provision. Unselfish, wise management of resources shows what you think of God. He's not after what's in your wallet. He wants your whole heart. And when you deliver that to Him, you'll honor Him by how you use your wallet's contents.

Don't expect any Amazon packages to arrive by camel.

Prayer Points:

- Prayerfully open your whole heart to God.
- Thank the Lord today for the resources He's entrusted to you.
- Ask God to accept the efforts of CGS volunteers as a praise offering.

Generous Father, reveal how You desire me to use the resources You've bestowed to advance Your purpose and glorify You.

Day 6 - Open the Gates

Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut, that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession. Isaiah 60:11

The nation of Israel today throws open the gates to all Jews. Citizenship is extended to any Jew regardless of their country of origin. The practice is called *aliyah* -- a Hebrew word meaning "ascend, go up." All Jews are invited to "go up" to their sacred land.

Isaiah recounted a "going up" to Jerusalem by an unlikely horde. Former conquerors flocked to the city. They tore down the walls on their original visits. These prior enemies arrived in peace. They brought the materials and wealth needed to rebuild the city.

In previous decades God judged Israel's sins when He sent those armies to destroy Jerusalem and displace residents. In a surprising turnaround, He converted enemies into allies. God forgave the sin of the Jewish people and aided their recovery.

You, too, deal with adversaries daily. Like health problems, unfriendly people, car trouble, schedule interruptions. As you work through these headaches, anticipate God's favor to show up. He'll bless you with a solution like a supportive friend, a meaningful Scripture, a good night's rest.

Will you clear out your heart to make room for the next good thing God wants to give you? He might surprise you as you pursue a difficult task at CGS.

Prepare to be amazed by God!

Prayer points:

- Ask God to use you today in the big and small jobs you undertake.
- Pray for those gifted with their first Bible at CGS. Ask God to convict them with His truth.
- Praise God for the gift of Christ He bestowed on you.

Unselfish Lord, forgive me when I fail to leave my heart's door open to receive the surprise of Your favor.

Day 7 - In His Time

The least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the LORD; in its time I will hasten it. Isaiah 60:22

Do you keep a handy dandy calendar? Maybe on your fridge, desk, or phone app. You note doctor appointments, birthdays, or other upcoming events. Like me, you probably prefer to manage your own calendar.

The Jews aspired to restore their nation after the exile on their schedule. God, however, kept the calendar. Nation building progressed in fits and starts for the people. Perhaps the Lord sensed their frustration.

God counseled patience. He planned to grow the people from their fledgling state to a "mighty nation." But on His timetable. The Lord keeps the calendar when it comes to His kingdom business.

Are you on mission for God? You've taken on responsibilities for the Lord in CGS, your church, or another project that honors Him. Has it become a burden? Deadlines loom. People let you down. Materials run short. Remember that you aren't called to fix every problem by yourself. No snag is outside God's power to resolve.

The Lord possesses the ability to help. He wants to be involved alongside you. Trust Him to show up in His time. Relinquish control of your kingdom work day planner to God.

Refuse to be a "no show" for what the Lord has on the calendar for you.

Prayer points:

- Ask the Lord to fill you with Christlike patience when interruptions hinder your schedule.
- Seek Godly sensitivity to the spiritual needs of people you encounter today.
- Thank the Lord for the fulfilling opportunity to serve Him through CGS.

Dependable Father, I commit to move when You command it and to wait when You're not ready. I'm prepared to accept Your timing.

Christmas Gift Shop 2023 Devotional



"Arise, Shine for Your Light has Come"

Isaiah 60:1



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