

Day 1 - His Presence is Present Enough

"Yet I will triumph in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like deer's feet, and has me walk on my high places." Habakkuk 3:18-19 NASB

Habakkuk's name means "embracer" due to his intense love for God. We do not know much more about him, but we do have an idea surrounding the environment and times in which he prophesied. He starts his book by asking a question: Lord, how long are you going to let this evil continue? We've all asked this question when it seems that evil is winning instead of righteousness prevailing. When God tells him He is sending the Babylonians to punish Judah, Habakkuk was perplexed because they were more evil than the people of Judah. When told of all the difficult things that would befall Judah, he replied, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord!" We have a choice as to how we will respond to the trials in our lives. Habakkuk is teaching us to rejoice.

God's plan was not clear to Habakkuk, but he chose to trust in the One constant in his life who had loved him completely and never failed him. He trusted the power, purposes, and person of God. This kind of faith brings rejoicing. Psalm 16:11 says, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Habakkuk knew the secret as did King David when he said, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me" in Psalm 51:11. David felt the worst possible thing that could happen to him was God removing His presence from him; Habakkuk knew no matter how bad things seemed, the presence of God trumped it all. 1 John 3:19 tells us we find rest in His presence. This is the only way to describe how Habakkuk could rejoice while Judah faced turmoil - how his feet were like the feet of a deer, signifying his great confidence in his God.

As we enter this year's Christmas Gift Shop, let us bind ourselves closer to the Christ Child, Immanuel ("God with us"), the Savior of our souls and the eternal King of all Kings. Pray against distractions from the mission before us this season. Let's focus on Him as we communicate His love to others and bask in the intimacy our Father offers, realizing that His presence is present enough.

Day 2 - Prepare Him Room

"While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn Son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2:6-7 NASB

The humble circumstances of the birth of Jesus are beautifully depicted in the book of Luke. The parents of Jesus had to seek lodging in a stable, and the first cradle to receive the eternal King of Kings was an animal feeding trough. We cannot miss that Jesus lived in complete extravagance before He was sent to the very earth He spoke into existence. He was not mired down by the disappointments of this world or a failing body, yet His Majesty subjected Himself to begin His life in a stable. Later, He was let down by His government, townspeople, and even His closest confidants in a body that would be broken beyond recognition for us. Some see the stable as an appropriate beginning, as there are no racial or cultural divides, political preferences, or favorite sports teams. It's not pretentious. There is dirt on the floor, smells in the air, and no expectations. One writer said, "all the poor, insignificant, forgotten people of the world can gather around the manger and dare to believe that the Babe who lies there really belongs to them".

James Dobson says belongingness and feeling valued are crucial to a healthy self-concept. Jesus cared for us so much that He willingly left Heaven in all its splendor so we could know our value in Him. The apostle Paul said, "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). This is a powerful declaration of the love of God and the lengths He was willing to go to reconcile humanity to Himself. He had no room at His birth, but made room at the cross for all.

Throughout the Christmas Gift Shop, many may come who have never felt a sense of belonging or value. They could have seen "no vacancy" signs all their lives. It is the job of every volunteer to show them the joy that awaits in belonging to the One who made room at the cross for them. Let us prepare room for Him in our hearts, for He desires an intimate, eternal relationship with all of us. Pray God will begin to open hearts to hear about the greatest love story of all time, in which they, along with Jesus, are the main characters.



Day 3 - Joy from the Desert

"Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." James 1:2-4 NASB

Have you ever heard the expression or song, "Mama said there'd be days like this?" We all can relate. It's a time when everything seems to go wrong. Imagine the washing machine dies with a huge wet load inside. Finances are already tight. Then you realize the refrigerator is not cool, but you are now late to work and need to leave these problems until later. On the way, you get a ticket for speeding because you are running late! Or maybe something much bigger is going on: depression, a rebellious child, abuse, loss of a job, friend, or family member. You fill in the blanks! It may feel as if you are in a desert alone, wounded, and desperately searching for water.

The Israelites were tested in the desert and failed miserably on more than one occasion. They rebelled against leadership, worshipped idols, and wanted to go back to slavery. Meanwhile, God gave them freedom, nourished them every day with miraculous manna, and provided water from a rock. He guided them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire to give them light by night. He shut out their enemies, equipped leaders, and met their desperate cries by delivering them from their distress. He did it because of His unconditional, unwavering covenant of love for His people (Psalms 136:16).

God has major purposes and blessings for us in the desert. He wants us to know Him more deeply. We tend to tune our ears to His voice and wisdom alone. Christian author, Sylvia Gunther, says, "He wants to show us that there are only two places to go: down and out, or right up into His lap...In the heat of the desert, He burns up or blows away all the wood, hay, and stubble of our pride, confidence, and striving." When James says to consider your trials as joyful, he is not disconnected from our pain. He understands God will produce endurance in us and use our desert experiences to make us "complete, lacking in nothing." Joy comes from the love, provision, and intimate relationship with our Deliverer while we are there.

During the Christmas Gift Shop, we will encounter those in the desert right now, whether they be a guest, volunteer, or leader. You may be the one drink of water someone receives for the very dry road they are presently on. Pray for opportunities for the compassion of Christ to flow through you with eternal results.

Day 4 - Going Against the Flow

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-24 NASB

As we look at the climate of society today, there seems to be consistent bad activity on the news. People get angry when things do not go their way. Instead of looking for adult solutions, many kick, scream, hurl insults, and damage property. Instead of looking to the truth of God's Word, they listen to the lies of the world and react poorly. Scripture, however, tells us we are to be the opposite of these things. Paul tells us that these nine attributes come from the Holy Spirit, and we cannot produce them on our own. So, how do we exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in today's climate? Our fruit grows when we attach ourselves to the vine, as Jesus says in John 15. He tells us that if we abide in Him, we will bear much fruit, but apart from Him, we can do nothing. We must pursue God's way of life over our own. God blesses our obedience as we follow His instructions in the Bible. We become stronger in our relationship to the Father and produce fruit that brings healing and wholeness to the world around us.

We must remember all that our Father has done for us and thank Him. Joy springs forth out of a grateful heart. We must also remember that "God made Him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus bore our sin and took our punishment because of His profound love for us. He stood toe to toe against our accuser, the devil, and fought for us. After all of that, he offers comfort in our times of sadness, wise counsel for our tough decisions, strength when we are at our weakest, and He allows us to be co-heirs with Him in eternity. He is the sole reason we can have joy, not based on circumstances, but because of the love God has lavished on us when He knew us before the creation of the world.

Make no mistake! Every soul that comes through the Christmas Gift Shop is a divine appointment. When they arrive, we are on the mission field. Pray that all involved will prepare their hearts by abiding in Christ. Pray that each guest is attracted to Him because of you. Pray that souls are saved, and lives are changed.



Day 5 - Broken Cisterns

"Be appalled, O heavens, at this, and shudder, be very desolate," declares the Lord. "For My people have committed two evils: They have abandoned Me, the fountain of living waters, to carve out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that do not hold water." Jeremiah 2:12-13 NASB

At the beginning of Jeremiah 2, God recalls the devotion of the Israelites to Him in their youth and how they followed Him while He protected them in the wilderness. However, in verse 4, He begins to ask what fault they found in Him that made them stray from Him, chasing empty things that only brought emptiness. He asks why they had not asked where He was after He brought them into a fruitful land and met all their needs. Instead, they worshipped created things instead of the Creator. Let these words sink in and break your heart! After all He had done for them, they rejected Him.

A cistern was an underground receptacle for collecting and storing rainwater. They were vital for drinking, washing, and irrigation, especially during the long, dry summers in Israel. Water provision was also necessary if you went to battle with an enemy. God said the people were exchanging the fountain of living water He provides for broken cisterns that can hold no water. How many times do we chase after things, hoping they will bring the satisfaction or security that we crave, only to find ourselves disappointed when they fail to do so? We drink from the broken cisterns of wealth, popularity, position, power, relationships, and even purpose in life, and become imprisoned by them. The problem is we were created to pursue God and be satisfied in Him alone. We must turn away from the broken cisterns in our lives and place our trust in Him. "Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.'" (John 7:37-38).

Let us confess our broken cisterns to the Lord and ask Him to forgive us. Pray our satisfaction will be found in Him alone and that we convey that to our guests effectively as they seek the living water. To withstand a siege from the enemy, water provision is necessary. We must go to our Father-not only as we did when we were first saved, but for daily living water provision so we are no longer imprisoned by them. He is the only One who can bring lasting refreshment.

Day 6 - A Secure Relationship

"My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." John 10:27-30 NASB

Have you ever had an agreement or contract with someone that you felt was iron-clad, and the other person broke the agreement? Perhaps you were given a job that you counted on, and the other party backed out. Maybe you had a parent walk out on you at a young age, or you stood before God, family, and friends reciting wedding vows that were broken years later. I would venture to say we have all felt abandonment at some point in our lives, and it can break our hearts. The insecurity it brings can hinder relationships in the future.

John assures us there is someone who will love and keep us for all eternity. In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul says, "In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory." Peter says we are those "who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." The word "guarded" here means both "kept from escaping" and "protected from attack." Do you know what this means, beloved? It means Jesus will never abandon you. The Father will never walk out on you or leave you to fend for yourself. You will grow old with Him. He will never let anyone steal you away, and even you cannot sabotage the grip of the One who put the stars and moons in the sky, parted the Red Sea, died on a cross, and raised Himself from the dead. He is in it for the long haul, and that haul really is forever! By His power, He will keep us in His hand from the moment we believe in Him throughout all eternity.

As we focus on the mission before us, let us pray for a renewed joy in the eternal security our Savior provides, and thank Him for never letting go. Let us also pray for effective ways to communicate this to our guests, so they too can experience a love that will never abandon them.



Day 7 - Rekindling the Inner Fire

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor, not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality." Romans 12:10-13 NASB

In the mid-1700s, George Whitefield was considered the most significant preacher of the Great Awakening in America. At the time, our country had fallen away from God, so Whitefield immersed himself in prayer for revival. At age 58, he traveled from Georgia to Maine with crushing chest pain, preaching the gospel to the colonies with a grueling schedule. He would not heed everyone's advice to rest. According to the book, America's Revival Heritage, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, I am weary in Thy work but not of it. If I have not finished my course, let me go and speak for Thee once more in the fields, and seal Thy truth, and come home and die." He then stood and began to speak. His voice could barely be heard, and he was unable to focus his mind. He stopped and stood in silence for several minutes. Then he prayed for God to assist him in preaching one more time, believing He would. According to witnesses, Whitefield was rekindled by an inner fire. His voice became strong and clear, preaching for two hours. When he was done, he said, "I go! I go to rest prepared. My body fails; my spirit expands. How willingly I would ever live to preach Christ! But I die to be with Him." He died the next morning.

What fueled this unusual passion? Whitefield was so in love with Jesus for his own salvation, he could not keep from sharing Him, no matter the cost. He understood what Paul meant when he said, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Many say that without this great revival, our Declaration of Independence would not read as it does today. It was a document compiled to govern our country by Christ-centered, Holy Spirit-filled men of God.

We must treat all who come through the Christmas Gift Shop as if our lives and their eternity depend upon it. Let us stop, be silent, and let God rekindle a burning fire within us as Whitefield did. As Paul instructed in Romans 12, devote yourselves to one another in brotherly love with honor. Let us not be slothful in our mission to bring our honored neighbors to Jesus and pray that God will show us their needs so we can minister as He sees fit. Rejoice in the God we serve and trust Him for a great return on the work He enables us to do through the Christmas Gift Shop.

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Joy is here! Habakkuk 3:18

Christmas Gift Shop

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