

THREE KEYS TO THANKSGIVING

LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

By Pastor Bien Llobrera

LESSON 1:

THANKSGIVING – THE CENTER OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

1. Thanksgiving Day is always a welcome annual celebration every last Thursday of November. The holiday gives us a reason to gather to share and enjoy family love and fellowship. More important, we get to hold special thanksgiving services in our churches. Of course, we know from the Bible that thanksgiving should be offered not only once a year and not only during special occasions. The Bible commands us to be thankful always and for all things.
2. Some super-spiritual Christians are very quick to say: “When bad things happen, just say, ‘Thank you, Lord!’”
3. Is it really that easy to say “Thank you, Lord”? For example ...
 - When I cut my finger?
 - When I lose my job?
 - When I get hospitalized?
 - When I lose a loved one?
4. Let’s be honest, when bad things happen, it is NEVER easy to say “Thank you, Lord.”

THANKSGIVING: CENTRAL TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

5. And yet, when we look into God’s Word, we find this amazing truth: The essence of the Christian life is thanksgiving. Let’s use an illustration. Think of the Christian life as a gift; this gift is inside a box with a beautiful wrapping tied up with ribbons. When we untie the ribbons and remove the wrapping, and we open the box, what do we find inside the box? Inside is a precious treasure -- the essence of the Christian life. And what is the essence of the Christian life? The essence is a life of constant and consistent thanksgiving. Look at two key verses:

(a) 1 Thessalonians 5:18 – *In everything give thanks* for this is the will of God concerning you.

(b) Ephesians 5:20 - *Always giving thanks for all things* in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.

WHAT THANKSGIVING DOES NOT MEAN

6. It does not mean thoughtless, habitual, loud shouting of "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord".

7. Such thoughtless praising can boomerang – can have the opposite effect on the hearers. They may think we are glib, flippant, maybe unfeeling, or that we do not take life's hurts seriously, or worse, they may think we're just crazy.

WHAT THANKSGIVING DOES MEAN

8. It means...

(a) It means exactly what 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says: "In everything give thanks." IN EVERYTHING -- in the middle of your circumstances, whatever they may be, our instinctive and first reaction should be to look up to God in our hearts and say, "Thank you, Lord."

(b) It means exactly what Ephesians 5:20 says: "Always giving thanks for all things." FOR ALL THINGS -- not just good things, even the bad things, even the hard to understand and the hard to accept things.

9. We repeat: Thanksgiving does not mean merely saying or repeating the words "Thank you, Lord."

10. So, what does thanksgiving really mean? It means literally what the word means.

(a) According to scholars, the word to BLESS means primarily to give a gift. Hence, the word is usually translated "to bless." As in "God blessed His people."

(b) Secondarily, the same word means to give thanks for a gift. As in "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name." Isn't this interesting. When God gives me a gift, He blesses me. When I give thanks to God, I bless or thank Him. The same word, but two meanings, which are closely related to each other.

LESSON 2:

THANKSGIVING MEANS ACCEPTING GOD'S GIFT

11. A life of thanksgiving means a constant and consistent attitude that accepts everything in life as a gift from God, coupled with the recognition that God gives His gifts always with a good purpose.

12. We are talking of a LIFESTYLE of thanksgiving... in which you look at everything in life as God's gift, given by Him for a good, acceptable, and perfect purpose.

BUT HOW?

13. How can you and I live a life of thanksgiving – a life in which we accept with joy and gratitude every day and every thing that come as God's special gift to us? How? Here's how: HAVE A COKE!

14. Yes! Let's all HAVE A COKE! Let's imagine you have a bottle of Coke in your hand. Everybody, raise your bottle as in a toast, and in a voice loud and clear and with full conviction, everybody, give a toast to your neighbor and say: HAVE A COKE!

15. Now, everybody raise your Bible. Ready? Let's open our Bible to the BOOK OF HABAKKUK!

16. I invite you now to join with me in discovering from the Book of Habakkuk THREE KEYS OF THANKSGIVING, three keys that will open a new world of peace and joy and blessing for you, so that you need not experience fear or worry or sleepless nights again – if you learn to use the THREE KEYS TO THANKSGIVING.

17. God gave these keys of thanksgiving to Habakkuk in the midst of very difficult times and very trying conditions.

HABAKKUK HAD NO REASON BE THANKFUL
(Hab. 1:1-11, 13-17)

18. Habakkuk had no reason to be thankful. In fact, he had all the reasons to grumble and complain, to worry and to fear. Habakkuk was bothered by CIRCUMSTANCES.

19. INSIDE his city and country Habakkuk saw ...

(a) Iniquity and Vanity - People followed their own ways; these ways led to uselessness, meaninglessness, and vanity.

(b) Wickedness and Misery - People did evil things that resulted in misery and suffering for themselves and others.

(c) Violence and Destruction - People took advantage of others and widespread destruction followed.

(d) Broken laws and Perverted justice - People broke the laws so much that the laws were practically set aside and ignored as if they did not exist; courts operated but only to issue crooked justice in favor of those who gave bribes.

20. Do you feel like Habakkuk today? Habakkuk, along with the other righteous people, felt all alone and felt surrounded by hordes of wicked people, who were quickly and systematically enclosing them like walls that would crush them.

21. Not only inside, but also OUTSIDE his country, Habakkuk saw a big contradiction:

(a) Chaldea, a pagan nation, was prospering by using sinful and wicked means.

(b) His own nation Israel, God's chosen people, were becoming poorer and poorer; in fact, Chaldea was about to conquer Israel.

22. Like Habakkuk, do you see non-Christians prospering through corrupt means while you remain poor and get by-passed for promotion and advancement because you don't go along with the crowd? Are you wondering if it is worth it to be a Christian? Are you tempted to think whether it is better to join the non-Christian crowds?

23. And as if the trouble inside his country and the threat from outside his country were not enough, Habakkuk also experienced a tremendous spiritual conflict DEEP IN HIS SOUL:

(a) He had been praying for a long time, but God was not answering.

Do you feel like Habakkuk? Are you going through the disillusionment of UNANSWERED PRAYERS?

(b) Not only did God not seem to answer. When God finally answered, the answer was not exactly what Habakkuk expected.

Like Habakkuk, have you received an answer, but it's not what you expected or wanted?

24. Could we blame Habakkuk if he could not see any reason to thank God? Could anybody blame you if, like Habakkuk, you don't see any reason why you should thank God in everything and for everything?

25. BUT AS HABAKKUK PRAYED, GOD GAVE HIM KEYS THAT OPENED THE DOOR TO A LIFE OF THANKSGIVING.

LESSON 3:

KEY #1: STEP OUT OF TIME AND STAND IN ETERNITY

26. How did Habakkuk go from COMPLAINING HABAKKUK to THANKFUL HABAKKUK? God gave him three keys.

KEY #1

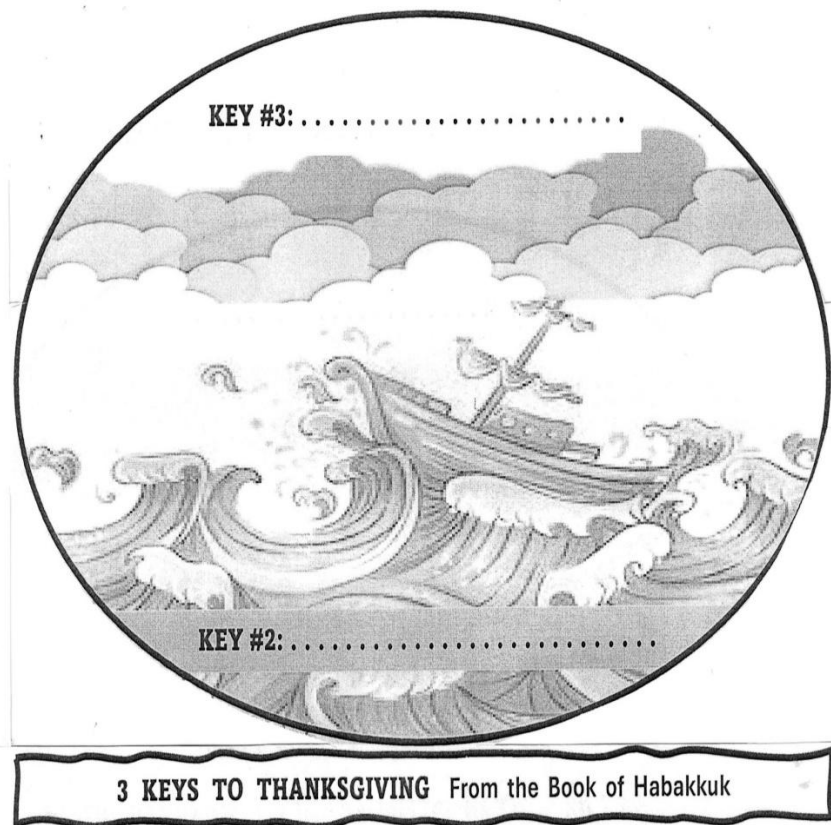
27. FIRST, let's look at KEY #1: STEP OUT OF TIME AND STAND IN ETERNITY.

28. Please look at our figure (below). We see a ship battling to stay afloat in the stormy ocean; Habakkuk is like a person inside this ship being threatened by the storms of life. In the figure, we see three levels: LEVEL 1 represents God's dwelling place in heaven, outside of time (above, outside the circle of time and space). Inside the circle of time and space: LEVEL 2 is the bottom of the ocean. LEVEL 3 is the sky above the clouds.

29. As Habakkuk prayed desperately in the middle of that life-threatening stormy ocean (1:12-13), God gave him KEY #1: He enabled Habakkuk to STEP OUT OF TIME AND STAND IN ETERNITY (LEVEL 1). It is as if God snatched him from the turbulent ocean of the world and transported him to stand ABOVE AND BEYOND storms of the present life and made him to stand in ETERNITY, before the throne of God.

FIG. 1: KEY #1

KEY #1: STEP OUT OF TIME AND STAND IN ETERNITY



3 KEYS TO THANKSGIVING From the Book of Habakkuk

30. From the vintage point of eternity, what did Habakkuk see?

(a) First, from the perspective of eternity, Habakkuk saw that **THE ETERNAL GOD IS ALWAYS IN CONTROL**. The problems of Habakkuk are symbolized by the **CRUEL CHALDEANS**. Hab. 1:5-6 shows who was behind the Chaldeans. God says "I am doing this"; "I am raising up the Chaldeans". That's right! God Himself raised the Chaldeans.

- Do you have a "Chaldean" in your life? A Chaldean is any person or thing that makes your life hard, and who makes it very hard for you to thank God.

- God wants you to know that He is in control of that Chaldean. Your Chaldean may be as hard as a sledge-hammer or as sharp as a barber's razor. Don't look at the sledge-hammer or the razor; look at the Hand that holds the sledge-hammer or the razor -- God is holding that Chaldean in His hands.

(b) Second, from the perspective of eternity, Habakkuk saw that the holy God always controlled everything for His purpose.

- Habakkuk 1:13 tells us that God's eyes are too pure to look on evil – specially in the life of His people.
- God's purpose is to purify and perfect His people (1:12). God cannot stand sin and impurity in His people. This world is His refining furnace; He is outside of the furnace, handling the controls.
- God's purpose determines His priorities:
 - * Character before comfort.
 - * Holiness before happiness.
 - * People are working very hard preparing to retire and then to die. God is preparing people to live with Him for eternity; He will make sure you are of eternal quality.

CHALLENGE

31. Are you ready to receive KEY #1 today? Will you take God's hand and will you allow Him to enable you to STEP OUT OF TIME AND STAND IN ETERNITY? Will you pray this three-part prayer?

- Father God, I believe you are in control.
- Father God, I believe you have a great purpose behind this difficult and painful situation.
- Father God, I thank you now for the result.

LESSON 4:

KEY #2: REST IN FAITH DEEP IN THE HEART OF GOD

32. What is KEY #2? What does this key help us to be thankful for?

33. In Habakkuk chapter 2, we find that the prophet was being prevented from being thankful because he was troubled by certain PEOPLE (whose descendants continue to be with us today)...

(a) Superstar Sisters -- The more they boast, the more they seem to succeed. (2:4-5)

(b) Mrs. Loanshark -- The more interest they charge, the more bank branches they put up. (2:6-8)

(c) Mr. Legal-Land-grabber -- They know the law and use it to take what belongs to others. (2:9-11)

(d) Mob Brothers -- They don't care about the law; they use brute force and violence to get what they want. (2:12)

(e) Mr. and Miss Drugdealer -- They enslave others with addictions in order to take advantage of them. (2:15-17)

(f) Rev. Monsignor Misleader -- Leads people into a religion of idolatry, by which someone and something is worshipped other than God.

34. Like Habakkuk, when faced with people such as these, we pray -- but how do we pray? Actually, we don't really pray; instead...

(a) We tell God what to do.

(b) We tell God when to do it (now, immediately)

(c) We tell God how to do it (in such a way that the whole world will know that God is on our side, and we are in the right)

35. It was in this situation, that God gave Habakkuk the second key to a life of continual and consistent thanksgiving.

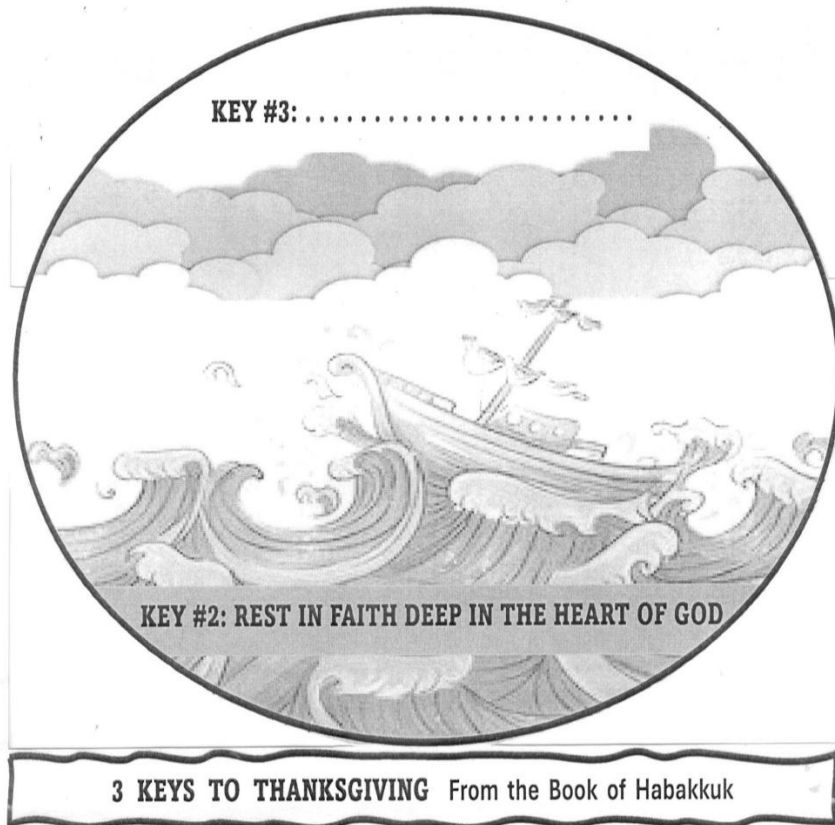
- KEY #2: REST IN FAITH DEEP IN THE HEART OF GOD

36. Let's look at our figure again. A ship is battling to stay afloat in the midst of a super-typhoon; Habakkuk is inside that ship, and the super-typhoon represents all trials and troubles that threaten to drown him. Remember the three levels? LEVEL 1 represents eternity in heaven where God dwells (outside of time and space). Inside the circle: LEVEL 2 represents the bottom of the ocean. LEVEL 3 represents the sky above the stormy clouds.

37. Now, let's look at that turbulent ocean. Did you know that no matter how violent and turbulent the storm may be on the surface of ocean, did you know that down in the heart of the ocean, the waves and winds do not disturb the calm of the deep?

FIG. 2

KEY #1: STEP OUT OF TIME AND STAND IN ETERNITY



38. So it is in the Christian life. This is the second key to a life of thanksgiving: We must learn to dive deep into the heart of God and rest there in faith. **KEY #2: REST IN FAITH DEEP IN THE HEART OF GOD.** And when we rest in God's heart, what do we discover?

(a) We discover that God is the Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25), and He pronounces woe upon all sinners and evildoers. As Judge God has set a time in which He will bring the full force of these woes upon all who deserve them (Romans 12:19).

(b) We also discover that judgment has already been pronounced: 2:13 -- "Is it not indeed from the Lord of hosts that peoples toil for fire, and nations grow weary for nothing?"

(c) Furthermore, we discover that victory is already assured: 2:14 -- "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

39. In the meantime, like Habakkuk, we must ... wait in faith, Hab. 2:3, 4c: "For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal, and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come; it will not delay.... But the righteous shall live by faith." When you do not understand, to live by faith means, you must hold on to these unshakable truths about God:

- (a) God is good, He will never do you harm.
- (b) God is wise, He never makes a mistake.
- (c) God is faithful, He is always on time.
- (d) God is love, He never lets an extra teardrop fall (Psalm 56:8; 2 Kings 20:5; Rev. 21:4)

CHALLENGE

40. Are you ready to receive KEY #2?

- **KEY #2: REST IN FAITH DEEP IN THE HEART OF GOD**

41. Here's another ILLUSTRATION: What is released when you crush a rose under your heel? The fragrance of the rose is released.

42. We have seen that CIRCUMSTANCES and PEOPLE often serve as hindrances to a life of thanksgiving. As you use this second key, resting in faith deep in the heart of God, let God assure you that He has a great plan for that "heel", that Chaldean, that person or persons who are crushing you; God is using that Chaldean to accomplish His plan to transform you into the kind of person that will continually bring forth the fragrance of Christ.

43. Are you going through the experience of being crushed under the heel of certain circumstances or certain persons? Be assured that God knows and feels what you are going through. As you are going through the crushing, REST IN FAITH DEEP IN THE HEART OF GOD and say again and again (please say these words with me):

- God is good, He will not do me harm.
- God is wise, He will not commit a mistake.
- God is faithful, He is always on time.
- God is loving, He will not let an extra teardrop fall.

LESSON 5:

KEY #3: LOVE THE GIVER MORE THAN ALL HIS GIFTS

44. This brings us to the third place where God wants us to stand, ABOVE THE STORMS OF LIFE; in that place we see one thing -- and one thing only -- that's necessary to life.

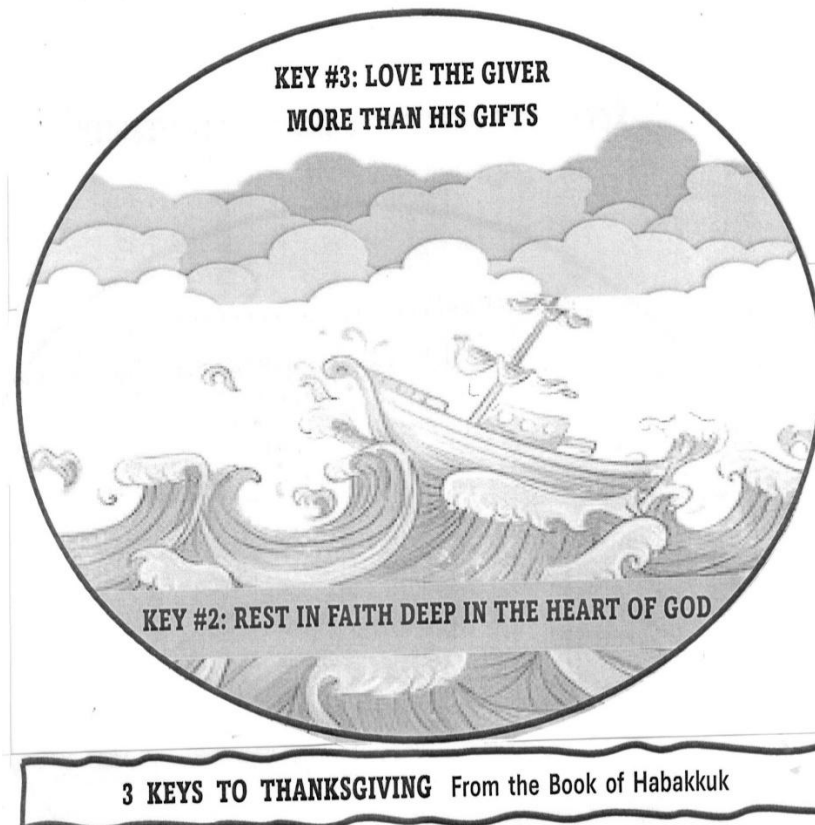
45. Let's review FIGURES. FIG. 1: Key #1 helps us to STEP OUT OF TIME AND STAND IN ETERNITY. FIG. 3: Key #2 helps us to REST IN FAITH DEEP IN THE HEART OF GOD.

46. Now, let's notice the clouds in our figure. Many of us have traveled in a jet plane. Remember, the jet plane flies above the clouds; when you look out of the plane, you can see clouds under you. Did you know that no matter how stormy it might be on the earth, if you fly high enough above the clouds, you will not be affected by the storms on the earth?

47. That is the third place where God brought Habakkuk – at LEVEL 3, above the clouds and above the storms of life -- and the third key opens to us that place. And what is our third key?

FIG. 3

KEY #1: STEP OUT OF TIME AND STAND IN ETERNITY



- KEY #3: LOVE THE GIVER MORE THAN ALL HIS GIFTS.

48. When you use this key, your life will truly become a continual and consistent feast of thanksgiving -- everyday, not only once a year, but every day will be thanksgiving day in your life.

49. Listen to Habakkuk's soaring song of triumph – the ultimate expression of a life of thanksgiving (3:19): ***"The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hind's feet, and makes me walk on my high places."*** Do you see Habakkuk now?

- (a) High on the mountain top, like a strong, fleet-footed deer, outrunning all his pursuers.
- (b) High beyond the clouds, like an eagle gliding restfully above the contrary winds.

50. Here's the secret: The stronger the wind, the higher the eagle soars...

(a) The eagle doesn't even need to flap its wings. It simply faces the wind, and adjusts its wings, and then the wind does the work of lifting him into the sky.

(b) The most violent wind of adversity is a friend to the eagle; but it is a deadly enemy to an earthbound chicken.

HOW HABAKKUK FOUND THE THIRD AND FINAL KEY

51. How did Habakkuk find the third key? He found the key to the place of continual thanksgiving when he faced very hard and difficult circumstances in his life.

52. He had to face the most cruel and terrifying enemy.

(a) Habakkuk 3:16: "I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us."

(b) Habakkuk could hear the tramping boots of the approaching army.

(c) He had to face total calamity and absolute loss of everything. Listen to his testimony:

- Habakkuk 3:17: "Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, and there be no cattle in the stalls."

(d) The land of Israel and the people of God were stripped of everything -- food, clothing, shelter, material possessions; they escape – by the skin of their teeth -- with only the torn clothes on their bleeding backs.

BUT WHAT DID HABAKKUK DISCOVER IN THE HIGH PLACE?

53. He discovered that when everything is gone and even life itself is about to be lost, Habakkuk discovered in the high place that:

- GOD IS ENOUGH!
- GOD IS SUFFICIENT!
- IN GOD I HAVE EVERYTHING!
- THEREFORE, I CAN REJOICE, I CAN SHOUT WITH GENUINE AND UNRESERVED THANKSGIVING!

54. Listen to HABAKKUK 3:17, 18: "Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, and there be no cattle in the stalls. ***Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.***"

(a) Habakkuk discovered that the worst hurricane -- the worst earthquake -- the worst tsunami -- in his life succeeded only in stripping from him things that he did not really need.

(b) When everything unnecessary was stripped off, he discovered he could soar to the heights, away and beyond the reach of the storms.

(c) And when he reached the heights, who did he find there? God – the only real and necessary treasure of life!

55. Do you remember the gospel song which says this:

"When you come to the place where God is all you got
You'll find He's all you need!"

That's what Habakkuk discovered when he used the third key.

56. Are you ready to receive KEY #3?

- KEY #3: LOVE THE GIVER MORE THAN ALL HIS GIFTS.

57. Do you feel like God has allowed the storms of life to beat upon you and to strip you of everything? Do you feel as if all you have left is God. You are blessed, because you are in the position to make the greatest, sweetest, and most wonderful discovery of all: WHEN YOU HAVE GOD... you will discover that:

- God is enough!
- God is sufficient!
- When you have God, you have everything!

58. Please say with me:

- KEY #3: LOVE THE GIVER MORE THAN ALL HIS GIFTS.

59. Two hymn writers expressed this truth powerfully:

(a) A. B. Simpson:

Once it was the blessing,
Now it is the Lord;
Once it was the feeling,
Now it is His Word;
Once His gifts I wanted,
Now the Giver own;
Once it was the healing,
Now Himself alone.

(b) Will L. Thompson:

Jesus is all the world to me,
My life, my joy, my all;
He is my strength from day to day
Without Him I would fall...

VI. CHALLENGE

A. Shall we declare with Habakkuk (3:17-19):

Though the fig tree should not blossom,
And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail,
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold,
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
Yet I will exult 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 hinds' feet,
And makes me walk on my high places.

60. Shall we again declare boldly together:

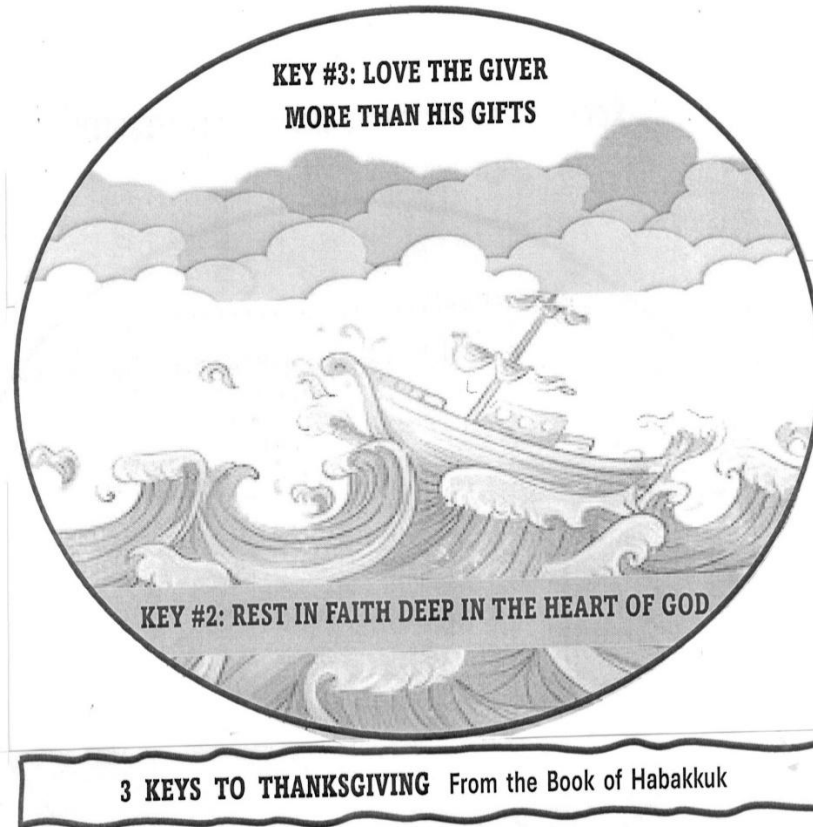
- God is enough!
- God is sufficient!
- When I have God, I have everything!

61. And because I have everything, I can continually and consistently rejoice with genuine and unreserved thanksgiving! Because I have the Giver, I will always give thanks in everything, for everything, to the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

CONCLUSION

62. One last time, let's look at FIG. 3 and read together the THREE KEYS TO THANKSGIVING:

KEY #1: STEP OUT OF TIME AND STAND IN ETERNITY



Everybody, give each other a toast: HAVE A COKE!

- KEY #1: STEP OUT OF TIME AND STAND IN ETERNITY.
- KEY #2: REST IN FAITH DEEP IN THE HEART OF GOD.
- KEY #3: LOVE THE GIVER MORE THAN ALL HIS GIFTS.

63. When we use these three keys we shall discover and prove by experience that...

A life of thanksgiving means a constant and consistent attitude that accepts everything in life as a gift from God, coupled with the recognition that God gives His gifts always with a good purpose.

BROTHERS & SISTERS IN THE LORD, LET'S HAVE HAB-A-KKUK (HAVE A COKE)!