



THE *Easter* CHALLENGE

A 30-DAY JOURNEY
TO DEEPER FAITH



The Easter Challenge: A 30-Day Journey to Deeper Faith

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity rises and falls on the Resurrection. Paul told us in 1 Corinthians 15:17, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” The Resurrection was the evidence that what Jesus said was true. His claim “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6), as well as every other claim He made, was proven true. The Resurrection was the evidence that Jesus really does have the power to forgive your sins through His death on the cross. It is the evidence that those of us who put our faith in Him will also be raised from the dead.

When we put our faith in Jesus’s Resurrection, we become children of God with a new identity, new purpose, new hope, new life, and new power. To come into belief in Jesus’s Resurrection is not just to change our minds; it’s to be transformed in who we are and how we live. It’s to move from eternal death into eternal life. We step into a growing and developing relationship with our Creator that will deepen in intimacy and meaning for all of eternity.

While the benefits and grace of Jesus’s Resurrection are freely given to us by God, this thirty-day devotional will challenge you to step deeper into that amazing life through the practices and helps Jesus established and provided for us to grow deeper in Him. Begin by taking

full of advantage of the connection, help, and support we all find in the gathering of His children in the church. Jesus knew we would need each other to keep moving forward in Him, so He established His Church for our health and benefit.

From there, go deeper into the truth of His Word so that you can learn to stand on His promises, renew your thinking, and find the nourishment your soul needs. As you grow, start to engage in the mission God has called each of us to: to serve and reach beyond ourselves. It is an amazing privilege to partake in the work of God by sharing our faith with others. While we engage that mission, our own faith and walk are strengthened.

Jesus has invited us into an amazing journey. Learn how to make the very most of that journey by walking in obedience and love. Find out how prayer and gratitude make all the difference every day. We pray the next thirty days through this devotional will take you deeper into the next stage of your journey, bringing you closer and closer to Him until you meet Jesus face-to-face in your own resurrection that is sure and soon to come.

The Evidence OF THE RESURRECTION IN OUR LIVES

One of the greatest evidences of the Resurrection is what takes place in our lives when we come to Jesus. “He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’” (Revelation 21:5). What a marvelous work the Resurrection has accomplished! The shame and guilt of our past sins have been washed away. Our failures have been redeemed. Our future is full of hope, power, and the guarantee of eternal life. Our standing before God has been permanently changed. In the Resurrection we are victorious today and will be victorious in Jesus forevermore.

These first six devotions will help you dive into just a few of the transformational things that come with believing in Jesus and joining in on His Resurrection. Paul encouraged us in Romans 6:5, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.” When we put our faith in Him, Jesus brings us into His Crucifixion and Resurrection. He has made us new and is, indeed, making all things new!



INDIVIDUAL CHALLENGE

Since you’ve been made new in Jesus through His Resurrection, celebrate what He’s done by letting go of an old habit that doesn’t bring life or joy to you or others. For example, maybe you plop down on the couch and turn on the TV immediately after getting home from work. This week, go for a walk, read a book, play a game, or do something life-giving first.



FAMILY CHALLENGE

You are victorious because of Jesus’s Resurrection. Have each person in your family memorize one new promise in the Bible this week. When you face circumstances that contradict that promise, stand on that proven truth. Here are a few passages you can start with: Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 8:37–39; 1 John 3:1; Romans 8:31; Psalm 93:5.



COMMUNITY CHALLENGE

Because we have such a great hope in Christ, find a way to bring hope to someone else this week. For example, share a Scripture with a friend. Write a “way to go” note to a coworker or family member. Call a family member and tell them how they’ve made a tremendous difference in your life.



The Evidence OF A NEW IDENTITY

**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation
has come: The old has gone, the new is here!**

—2 Corinthians 5:17

On January 9, 2007, Steve Jobs announced the release of the very first iPhone. Since that time, Apple has released more than twenty different versions of the now ubiquitous product. The very first iPhone was loaded with 128 megs of RAM. The most current version carries 4 gigs—which makes the new version about thirty-one times more powerful than the first!¹ But most of us didn't really notice. Of course, we've all learned to expect nothing less, but the incremental changes that came through more than twenty iterations make that amazing transformation nearly imperceptible.

Jesus's Resurrection doesn't make just a little better version of us. It is a complete transformation of our standing before God and our identity. Before we came into the Resurrection through faith in Jesus, we were opposed to

God (Romans 5:10); in Jesus, we are God's friends (John 15:15). Before Jesus, we were dead in our sin; in Jesus, we are alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5). Before Jesus, we were apart from God (2 John 9); in Jesus, we are children of God (John 1:12). Before Jesus, we were headed for eternal separation from God; in Jesus, we have the guarantee of eternal salvation (John 3:16).

The only "upgrades" needed are the ones that help our minds, hearts, and actions align with the truth of who we are and what God has done. There is nothing you can do to make yourself more loved, more accepted, more forgiven, or to be more of a child of God. In Jesus, the old is gone and the new is here!

Look up and read a couple of the following passages: John 15:15; Ephesians 2:5; John 1:12; John 3:16. Knowing that these passages are the current reality for a follower of Jesus, how should it affect your everyday life?

In what ways do you *feel* you have been transformed by Jesus? In what ways do you *know* you've been transformed whether or not it feels like it?

The Evidence OF GRACE

**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith
—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift
of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.**

—Ephesians 2:8–9

One of the most powerful moments in cinematic history comes near the end of *Saving Private Ryan* after Captain Miller (played by Tom Hanks) has been mortally wounded in his mission to extract Private Ryan (played by Matt Damon) from World War II. With his last breath Miller tells Ryan, “Earn this.” It’s truly a moving moment. However, if you think about it, it’s kind of a cruel thing to say. How on earth could a person earn the sacrifice of not just one man but a whole squad? Such a charge would doom poor Private Ryan to a life of immeasurable guilt.

Our rescue from sin and death came through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and His Resurrection from the grave. Fortunately, Jesus didn’t look down on John and Mary from the cross and whisper, “Earn this,” as He took His dying breath. How wonderful that instead

Jesus’s message to us is “Receive this!” There is no way we can earn our salvation or pay it back. Trying to earn salvation or pay God back for it through good works would be like trying to pay off your mortgage with Monopoly money. It’s the ridiculously wrong currency!

Fortunately, God doesn’t want you to pay it back anyway. He wants you to receive the gift of His grace. Part of receiving it is to walk in the assurance that His grace is enough to cover your past sins, your present failures, and even your future mistakes. One of the most God-honoring ways to respond to the gift of God’s grace is to receive it and refuse to walk in guilt, shame, or the false burden of trying to earn what God has freely given to you.

Do you ever find yourself trying to earn God’s love, salvation, or approval? Why do you think this is such a common mistake we make?

What is the most gracious thing a person has ever done for you? What is the most gracious thing you’ve ever done? What did you learn or observe in each situation?

The Evidence OF THE SPIRIT

When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

—Ephesians 1:13-14

According to the *Los Angeles Almanac*, more than four million people commute by car, truck, or van in Los Angeles County!² No wonder those highways are so crowded. Whether you take the highway to work, wait in the drop-off line to take your kids to school, or drive into town to get groceries, it's not too difficult to find yourself in a crowd. Despite all the people around us, it's also not too difficult to find yourself feeling alone.

The good news is that in Jesus you are never alone. Jesus promised His disciples that after His victory over the grave, He would send His Holy Spirit to help us. When you put your faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit of God takes up residence in your heart. The Bible says He is a seal on your heart that shows you belong to God. He is

also our Comforter and Counselor. The Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible. He shows us our sin and guides us in the right path. The Holy Spirit gives us power to serve Jesus and to minister to others.

Unlike the others around us, the Holy Spirit doesn't get road rage. In fact, He intercedes for us and works for our freedom and on our behalf. His guidance, His insight, and His love are as close as a quiet prayer. If you need God's direction, if you need His help, if you want Him to show you what needs to change, just ask. His Holy Spirit is always with you!

If you could ask God for advice on any one thing, what would you ask? Take a minute right now to ask for the Holy Spirit's advice and leading in that area. He may give you the answer right away through a thought or an idea, or it may come later. But God promises to give us wisdom if we ask for it.

Can you think of an insight, a truth, a conviction, or an understanding that almost certainly came to you from God? What does the Holy Spirit's leading sound, feel, or look like?

The Evidence OF PURPOSE

**Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed
in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.**

—John 1:12

“Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” Many people attribute this bit of advice to Confucius even though there’s little evidence he actually said it. But it reflects an idea that permeates American culture: your career is your purpose. While finding a meaningful career that fits well is an amazing blessing, it’s not the highest calling.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks: “What is the chief end of man?” It gives the following insightful answer: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”³ Micah 6:8 teaches us, “And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Jesus’s death and Resurrection opened the door for you to have a connection and relationship with your Creator.

Our work and ministry can be meaningful and fulfilling. But ultimately your purpose isn’t found in what you do. It’s found in knowing God and drawing near to Him. While it’s wonderful to prepare for, achieve, and advance in a career, there is no real meaning and purpose outside of the Resurrection of Jesus. You were created to have a relationship with God, to know Him, to love Him, to be changed by Him, and to bring glory and praise to His name. How wonderful that you can live out that purpose no matter where you are and no matter what you do!

How can your relationship with God bring greater meaning and purpose to the time you spend at work, at school, or with your family this week?

How would you describe your current relationship with God? What things are getting in the way of you going deeper with Him?

The Evidence

OF HOPE FOR ETERNITY

**But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,
where moths and vermin do not destroy,
and where thieves do not break in and steal.**

—Matthew 6:20

Ten minutes is a really short time to wait for a ride at Disneyland, an acceptable amount of time to wait in line to order fast food, and an eternity to wait for the bathroom. You may be at a stage in your life where you feel you have all the time in the world. Or perhaps you feel that your time is short, and you can't believe how fast it's going by.

No matter how much time you have left on this earth, it can't compare with the time you will spend in heaven. Paul told us in Romans 6:5, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his." While eternity is hard for us to grasp, Jesus challenged us to spend all of our time with eternity in mind. There are three things you can invest in now that will carry

on forever: your own heart and character, other people, and the glory of God. While it's not exactly clear what our reward will look like, Jesus assured us that investing in eternal things will pay in a greater way than we can hope or imagine.

To live in light of the Resurrection changes how we spend our time. Knowing that our achievements, positions, and possessions will fade away, let's not waste our time living for the things of this earth. How amazing to think that making a wise investment of just ten minutes in something such as prayer, a song of praise, or an act of compassion will pay eternal dividends! Spend the time you have storing up treasure in heaven. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).

In light of eternity, what are some of the biggest ways you are wasting time? What adjustments do you want to make to that investment?

Considering that your character, other people, and God's glory will last forever, what eternal investments can you make today?

The Evidence OF POWER FOR LIVING

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

—Ephesians 1:18-20

According to the website Earth&World, the strongest animal on the planet is the dung beetle. It's only one-half inch long, but it can carry more than one thousand times its own weight—usually in the form of a big ball of dung.⁴ If a dung beetle weighed the same as an average man, it would be able to lift a small automobile over its head and carry it around.

When we become followers of Jesus, not only does the Resurrection bring us eternal salvation in heaven, it brings us strength and power on earth beyond anything we could find on our own. We must remember that we

serve a risen Savior and a victorious King. Because we are in Jesus, that same victory belongs to us, and we have Resurrection power for everyday living.

In that power and strength, the issues and sins that once held us in bondage are defeated. The lies we once believed have lost their potency. The Enemy who accuses and harasses us has lost his footing. Jesus's victory is our victory. His Word is proven true. By His name and through His Resurrection, every weapon that is formed against us will not prosper (Isaiah 54:17). Engage the spiritual battles you face with the name of Jesus on your lips and the Word of God in your heart. Take hold of the victory that has already been won. The same power that raised Jesus from the grave is now active and working in your life!

What current spiritual battle are you facing? What is your strategy to win it?

In what past struggles have you found strength and victory in Jesus? How does that affect the way you'll face future struggles or battles?