

THE ONE YEAR®

WONDER *of the* CROSS DEVOTIONAL

365 DAILY BIBLE READINGS
TO RENEW YOUR FAITH

CHRIS
TIEGREEN



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The One Year Wonder of the Cross Devotional: 365 Daily Bible Readings to Renew Your Faith

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Introduction

When God's Spirit burst on the scene at Pentecost, Spirit-inhabited believers were in awe and onlookers were amazed. The power of the Cross had been unleashed, and lives were being changed. The Kingdom of God was breaking into the empires of the world.

The early church was an enigma to virtually everyone, even its own members. The new movement continued to make waves across the empire throughout the first century, and no one, not even its own proponents, could figure it out. How did God's new work fulfill old Scriptures? Where did it fit within Judaism? What was this new creation supposed to look like? What, ultimately, was God doing with His people?

Much of the New Testament was written to answer these kinds of questions. But Acts, the apostolic letters, and Revelation were more than a record of theological struggles; they were a testimony to the inexplicable work of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The devotional readings in this book are based on the experiences and testimonies of the early church. You'll find some readings based on Old Testament passages that figured heavily in the church's understanding of God's purposes, but the majority of devotionals are taken from Acts, the letters of the apostles, and Revelation. These are the writings that have shaped church history for the last two millennia and continue to inspire us today. They build up our faith by testifying to the still-surprising power of God. And, by encouraging us to keep our focus on the Kingdom that is and is to come, they show us how we may experience the wonder of the Cross ourselves.



An Earth-Shattering Event

*What I received I passed on to you as of first importance:
that Christ died for our sins . . . that he was raised
on the third day . . . and that he appeared.*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-5

In Word

The Jews were split on the issue. Some believed that God would one day resurrect human beings, others did not. The Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, but certainly not in a physical resurrection. For everyone, however, the issue was a mysterious, one-day-we'll-understand issue. No one—absolutely no one—expected to see a resurrected human in his or her lifetime.

Not until Jesus came, anyway. He raised a few people from the dead Himself—Jairus's daughter and Lazarus, to name two—but those were temporary resurrections. Everyone knew Jairus's daughter and Lazarus would die again one day. Still, the fact that they could be raised for a time gave hope to eyewitnesses that permanent resurrection was at least theoretically possible. And then when Jesus appeared after being in a tomb for three days . . .

This was the earth-shattering foundation of the church. Jesus' teachings were profound, His miracles spectacular; but they didn't define the church. The new movement that began in a small Roman outpost was based on a revolutionary, shocking truth: The specter of death had lost its power. A man, certifiably dead, was now alive. And He promised life to everyone who believed in Him.

In Deed

It's impossible for us to understand, two millennia later, how utterly radical the idea of resurrection was. It was not an illusion of prescientific people; Jesus appeared to a lot of people, for many days, and displayed His eternal body. Many who saw Him were later martyred for admitting it. That doesn't happen en masse with illusions. It only happens with historical fact.

If you think about it, this fact changes everything. It changes how we live, how we think, how we plan, how we work—everything! Let it change you; no, let it define you. Resolve this year to live a resurrected life.

Jesus has forced open a door that had been locked
since the death of the first man. . . . Everything
is different because He has done so.

—C. S. LEWIS

An Essential Sign

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:17

In Word

The Resurrection validates everything we believe in. Without it, the Bible is bold enough to say, our faith is worthless. Those who think Christianity is worthwhile for life in this world alone are disagreeing with Paul; he thought we were pitiful creatures indeed if our faith is only a this-world faith (v. 19).

No, God gave us the Resurrection—Jesus’ and ours—for a reason. It’s a promise, a pledge, a validation that our life on this fallen planet is but a tiny fraction of the life we were meant to live. While the rest of the world goes about living for the here and now, we live for eternity. While they make investments hoping for good returns in a matter of years or decades, we make investments hoping for good returns in a matter of timeless “ages.” While they interpret their trials as things that will make or break the quality of their lives, we interpret our trials as events that are shaping us to understand God and inherit His riches. The Resurrection makes all the difference in the world. And beyond.

This, in fact, was the point of creation from day one. Genesis is the account of God’s creation, but the cross of Christ and the empty tomb are the account of the re-creation. The early church was suddenly aware that they were living in the re-creation, the fulfillment of all God had promised, the Kingdom that does not pass away. And that knowledge guided everything they did.

In Deed

We often think of the Resurrection as an Eastertime phenomenon—a past miracle that gives us faint hope for the future. It is so much more.

The Resurrection validates our faith in the redeeming work of our High Priest, who has taken away our sins. It allows us to live with a sense of risk and adventure, because it makes us part of a new order of creation that ultimately cannot fail—our lives are grounded in Someone who reigns in eternal victory.

No resurrection, no Christianity.

—MICHAEL RAMSEY

A Powerful Process

*Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man,
so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:49

In Word

The first-century Christian lived with an eye on the coming Kingdom. More than that, he or she lived with an eye on the new creation taking place within. It was a marvel to behold: a sinful heart taking on the likeness of Jesus.

True, Paul had to remind his readers that this was happening. Some were ignorant of the process, sometimes even of the goal. Some, like a lot of Christians today, accepted the Resurrection as a future reality but not as a present dynamic. They forgot what Paul emphasizes in Ephesians 1:19-20—that the very power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that is working in those who believe. The magnificent force that overcame death is at work in the hearts and minds of those for whom He died.

We can't take that for granted. The Jesus we read fondly of in Scripture really is alive, and He makes His home within us. We may not be aware of His presence, but that's our fault, not His. When we gather as a corporate body in our churches, He is there, bringing all parts of the whole together. When we are alone in our moments of crisis and need, He is there, reminding us, if we will let Him, that sealed tombs are no match for His creative power. Sinful hearts, too, are no match for Him. Whatever frustrates us in this world, He has overcome it. We can live with that blessing not only in the future physical resurrection but also in the present spiritual one.

In Deed

We need to live with an eye on the coming Kingdom. There are corporate elements of that; God is building His church for a glorious purpose. But there are individual elements as well. Deep within your soul, His Spirit has rebirthed you. He is growing you to maturity, and you are being shaped into His image. One day, you will look just like Him. It's inevitable.

That's going to happen whether we're aware of the process or not, but what a blessing to be aware of it! Examine what He's doing deep within you, and participate in it wholeheartedly. It's what you were made for.

The resurrection is a unique manifestation within this world of the transition God makes for us out of this way of being into another.

—AUSTIN FARRER

A Permanent Support

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

In Word

Our lives are grounded in eternity. That realization made the early church bold and adventurous. It kept them from cowering at the hands of the Romans and the roar of the lions. It kept them from running from Pharisaical zealots and savage stonings. It motivated Paul, who had been dragged out of one city and left for dead, to get back up and walk into the same city with a powerful message (Acts 14:8-20). It inspired Stephen to proclaim the risen Jesus with his dying breath (Acts 7:56). It made the church an in-your-face contradiction to the reigning culture.

Oh, for such boldness today. The power of eternity will not make us aggressively offensive, as some misguided Christians become, but it will cause us to be unmoved in the face of the world's fickle opinions. It will give us perspective.

Think about the influence of an eternal perspective. It won't let us write off relationships as insignificant; they have "forever" implications. It won't let us be indifferent to our responsibilities; we will be accountable in judgment. It won't let us interpret our trials as defeats; they never last as long as our lives do. It won't let us spend our resources of time, money, and talents frivolously; they are opportunities for everlasting investments. And, perhaps most profoundly, it won't let us live in fear of death; the wages of sin have been dealt with, and we have nothing to fear when this body wastes away. We are more secure than the mountains and the seas. Our feet are planted on imperishable ground.

In Deed

Knowing that we are grounded in eternity—really knowing it deep down inside—will transform a neurotic, fearful soul into a powerful, courageous servant of the most high King. It will drive us to live our adventures with meaning and purpose.

Learn to live with the perspective of eternity. Be faithful in this world, but crave the day this temporal dwelling is shed for heavenly glory. That craving ought to shape everything we do. The power of an eternal perspective changes lives—beginning with our own.

Christ has turned all our sunsets into dawns.

—CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

An Urgent Message

The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:26

In Word

Our world is dying. Many of its citizens know that; others live under wild illusions. The existentialists of past ages, for all their hopelessness, at least got one thing right: If God isn't real, life is pointless. You live and you die. And no one, in the long run, remembers you.

That's the hopelessness that shapes a lot of societies today. Cultures cut loose from spiritual absolutes are drifting aimlessly, pointlessly toward death and meaninglessness. The world's citizens try to make the best of it, much like the band on the Titanic that kept playing even as the ship began to sink. Those who do not know Christ invest their lives in pleasure, relationships, work, status, possessions, and a host of other things, none of which lasts. But they give the illusion of meaning, and sometimes illusions are better than nothing. At least in the minds of those who hold them.

But Christianity offers a Kingdom without illusions. We have meaning, purpose, truth, and an ultimately worthwhile Person to point to. Our world clutches its deceptive trinkets—false philosophies and pursuits—because it's afraid to own up to the sin that separated us from the Creator. But owning up leads to immense blessing, and we're the only ones who can point the way. The world needs the knowledge of the Resurrection more than it knows.

In Deed

That's why Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into the world and be witnesses. Witnesses of what? Of a once-dead Savior standing before them with holes in His hands and a promise in His mouth. That alone—that above every word this world has ever uttered—is the meaning to life.

You have a holy purpose. By accepting the risen Savior, you accepted the risen Savior's mission. Perhaps you did not know that at the time, but now you do. A desperate, blind world waits for truth. Be a witness of the Resurrection, which pulls us from this sinking ship into the regensis. The world needs that knowledge. It is dying without it.

Jesus' resurrection makes it impossible
for man's story to end in chaos.

—CARLO CARRETTO

Intimate Union

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

GALATIANS 5:25

In Word

For centuries, God's people watched the Spirit work. They saw the Spirit lead through the wilderness, inspire the prophets, fill the Temple, and empower the kings. Still, He was a phenomenon, not a way of life. No, the prescribed way of life was the law of Moses. And though the law was good and complete in itself, it never provided a complete relationship.

That changed after Jesus ascended. The law that was written on stone tablets became the law that was written on hearts. And the Writer was more than an abstract principle; He was God Himself, the Spirit from eternity past, the very Breath of the Almighty. Just as God exhaled into the first Adam, He breathed Himself into those who have faith in the second Adam—Jesus. Flesh once made from dust and destined to return to dust became a holy habitation; God came to live in very human, very earthen vessels. The Temple of stone became a temple of flesh—organic, dynamic flesh.

Jesus is the prototype, of course. He was the very definition of the temple of God on earth. But after His ascension, what temple was left? The one on Mount Zion, with its tattered veil and its spiritually blind guardians? No, not good enough. God had ordained a better dwelling: us.

In Deed

We had no idea that all past tabernacles and temples were pictures of Jesus and blueprints for the human heart, did we? Both nervous and infatuated, we once wondered if the God of our dreams would pay us any attention, only to find that He now approaches us in an intimate union beyond anything human flesh has ever experienced. It's the greatest romance the world has ever known.

The question for us today is whether we're even aware of the intimacy. Has the marriage grown comfortable—maybe even distant? If so, go back to the beginning. It's astounding that God dwells within. Rekindle the flame, and let Him burn.

Breathe on me, Breath of God.

—EDWIN HATCH

Destined Lovers

If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

GALATIANS 5:18

In Word

Our Bridegroom was never after a slavishly obedient bride to begin with. Sure, He loves it when His people conform to His standards, but no groom with even an ounce of passion wants a cold, calculated servant for a bride. No, God's purpose from the very beginning was a people for Himself—who lived, breathed, and loved in sync with Him. He wanted hearts that beat His rhythms, companions with whom to share His secrets and His deep longings. Rules never accomplish that; only freely given love and intimacy do.

That's why the law of Moses is not at the end of the Bible. It's a start, a lesson in the futility of human sin. It existed, according to Paul, to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). It saved no one; it only showed us our need for a Savior.

The fulfillment of the plan, the early Christians realized, was the staggering truth that God made us not to know Him through obedience, but to obey through knowing Him. The romantic embrace from our holy Suitor comes first; then our character can be transformed to look like Him. And the evidence of the romantic embrace came in Acts 2, as the wind blew and the fire fell. The Holy Spirit claimed His true love. We will never be the same.

In Deed

It's a genuine shame that many Christians have turned this holy intimacy back into religion. Perhaps it's too close, too personal. Religion is easier; it keeps God at arm's length. But if God were satisfied with arm's length, Jesus never would have died and the Holy Spirit never would have descended. He made us to crave intimate union, and then He offered Himself for the craving. Religion isn't enough. An exhilarating, thriving marriage is.

If that's not your experience with God, something needs to change. Draw close to Him in complete trust and desperate love, and He will draw close to you in holy passion. This union is your fulfillment, planned from eternity past. Embrace it by letting His Spirit embrace you.

What else are the laws of God written in our hearts
but the very presence of the Holy Ghost?

—AUGUSTINE

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