

AWAKEN

A 21-DAY EASTER DEVOTIONAL

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Awake, my soul, and with the sun thy daily stage of duty run; shake off dull sloth, and early rise to pay thy morning sacrifice.

Lord, I my vows to Thee renew. Disperse my sins as morning dew; guard my first springs of thought and will; and with Thyself my spirit fill.

Direct, control, suggest, this day, all I design or do or say, that all my pow'rs, with all their might, in Thy sole glory may unite.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise Him all creatures here below; praise Him above, ye heav'ny host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

INTRODUCTION

When you think of Easter, what comes to mind? For most people, it's pastel-colored eggs, bright flowers, colorful shirts and dresses, and chocolate candy. Winter is finally exiting the building, and there's a collective sense of shaking off the cold and welcoming the warmth. In today's world, Easter is pretty, sweet, clean, and nice.

But is that what Easter is really about?

Honestly, this is a far cry from the *actual* reason we celebrate the holiday. Even that word "celebrate" can seem strange. Of course, Easter Sunday should be one of the most joyous celebrations humanity has ever known, but our celebration can sometimes feel disconnected from reality. As believers, we do a great job of rejoicing in the resurrection, but sometimes, we leave off the part where we find out what Jesus was resurrected *from*. It's easy to never talk about the pain, the suffering, the horror, or the deep truth of HOW we get to Easter Sunday.

We just go through the motions. We put on some nice clothes, show up to church, and then go home and have some ham. (Now, no one here is complaining about the ham.) It's almost as if we're asleep, and if we could just wake up, we could rejoice more fully in what Jesus has done for us.

BUT WHAT IF WE COULD WAKE UP?

WHAT IF WE COULD UNDERSTAND THE FULL STORY, THE HOW AND WHY, OF JESUS' JOURNEY FROM THE MANGER TO THE CROSS?

Instead of just pastel-colored eggs, we'd see the bread and wine.

Instead of just fancy hats, we'd see a crown of thorns.

Instead of Easter baskets, we'd see a heavy cross.

Instead of being asleep, our souls would be awakened to the love of God.

That's our prayer for you this Easter. That you would be awakened to the reality and truth of all that Jesus has done for you.

HOW TO USE AWAKEN

This is a 21-day devotional, and there are really two different options you can choose from when reading through it. The first option is to read a new devotional every day. If you're someone who can stick to a plan like that, then this option is perfectly fine for you. However, when designing this devotional, we actually intended for most people to go with option two. In option two, you'll begin the devotional four weeks before Easter. Each week, you'll have seven days to complete five devotionals, and Day 21 will be Easter Day.

Not only does this help you slow down and engage more fully with each of the devotions, but it also gives you some "buffer days." Maybe you wake up on a Saturday and feel like you need to roll back over and sleep for another ten hours. That's okay! Your journey with *Awaken* isn't meant to be a burden to you. It's meant to be encouraging and easy to access. If you miss a day here or there, don't worry! You can still catch up! Just keep at it.

Our prayer for you during your time with this book is that the Holy Spirit would awaken your soul to the love Christ has for you, so much so that He died for you to have a relationship with Him.

We're going to take in the entire experience and feel the weight of what Easter means. And let's be honest, sometimes, focusing on how we get to Easter Sunday can be depressing. It can be dark. It's a far cry from bunnies, flowers, and candy. But every single time, hope does not fail. Hope does not disappoint. Every time, Sunday comes.

1 DAY ONE

DAILY SCRIPTURE

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Matthew 25:31-46

Today's reading is hard to wrap our minds around. When you read this passage, it's easy to see why some people harbor anger with God. There is a real hell; it's eternal, and if you do not believe in Jesus Christ, Scripture says that hell is where you will go when you die.

It's an understatement to say that the above sentence is difficult to accept. The truths that God is good and hell is an option are hard for us to reconcile in our minds. It's a problem that has plagued humans for as long as we've existed. C.S. Lewis said in his book, *The Problem of Pain*: "There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this [hell], if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of our Lord's own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason."¹ The idea of hell is a difficult but correct one. If the sins that Jesus died for aren't serious enough to deserve hell, then the grace extended on the cross isn't good enough to deserve heaven. But there's a way we can wake up to see what's truly happening in this passage. We can see hope embedded in the doctrine of hell.

In Genesis, Adam and Eve sinned. God specifically told them not to eat from the tree, and they did it anyway. This sin caused a break in their relationship with God. For the rest of the Old Testament, we have God doing everything imaginable to bring the descendants of Adam and Eve back to him. The Ten Commandments, captivity, defeat, the prophets...everything that happens to the Israelites is God shouting for them to turn back to Him.

And He doesn't stop. And He isn't stopping. Hell is the consequence of a just and holy God in a broken universe. But He's not content to let us go. He's offered a way in Jesus Christ. We get the choice to take Him up on that offer. Lewis concludes: "All that are in hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened."²

WAKE UP

- Spend some time today asking the Lord to help you understand the doctrine of hell and why it is important. Talk to an adult about it if you need to.

2 DAY TWO

DAILY SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 55:6-11; Matthew 6:7-15, 26:36-46

Prayer can be frustrating. It's easy to think, "What's the point anyway? God knows everything about me. Will prayer change His mind?" When you think about it this way, prayer can seem silly and, frankly, boring.

As with most things, our best bet to figure out the truth about prayer is to look at Christ. Scripture gives us many examples of Jesus praying (we get all the blueprint we need in Matthew 6), but we're going to focus on Jesus' last prayer. This intimate passage of Scripture is heartbreaking and a striking display of Jesus' humanity. These few verses show Jesus struggling with what was about to happen and disappointed that His friends couldn't even stay awake for a little bit to pray with Him.

I think it's very gracious that we're given this picture of Jesus. Because we've all been there (or you most certainly will at some point in your life), so far beyond flowery words and neatly made lists of prayer requests. The place where you are longing for God to act and praying that if whatever is ahead of you is to be, you'll have the courage to face it by giving Him glory in the midst of it.

Looking at Jesus' prayer before His crucifixion, we see this model. Yes, Jesus is asking for God to "let this cup pass" from Him. But the prayer also gives Him strength to face what must be done. We have to confront the fact that Jesus' death was a part of God's plan. When Jesus asked God to take the cup from Him, He could have done it. It's one of the most difficult parts of the story to swallow. But, if you notice in verse 46, Jesus is ready. God was not willing to take the cup from Him, but Jesus' prayer and His communion with God gave Him the strength to rise and remain in the Father's will.

The Japanese word for "thanks" means "to express feelings." But there's also a sense of humility and sorrow behind it. This is a great description of prayer: we give thanks, we express ourselves, and we ask for forgiveness in humility for our sins. There are examples in Scripture of people praying for God to act. And there are examples of people being changed by their own prayers. But prayer is, ultimately, a conversation between you and God.

WAKE UP

- There are lots of ways to pray, and the only thing that matters is that you do it. If you are a writer, try journaling your prayers. Shut off the radio during your drive to school, and just talk to God. Ask a mentor how they pray. Pray through the Psalms. Experiment and find a process that works for you – the best way for you and God to communicate with each other.
- What obstacle keeps you from communicating with God? What can you do to overcome it?

3 DAY THREE

DAILY SCRIPTURE
Psalm 51

Every Wednesday, we're going to jump into a different psalm, praying through it and letting it sink into our hearts and minds. You'll need some paper and a pen for these Wednesday exercises, so make sure you've got one before you get started.

- Open your Bible or Bible app to Psalm 51. Read the psalm silently to yourself.
- Now, read it out loud.
- Write the psalm on your paper or in your journal. If it takes you a while, that's okay.
- Go through the psalm and circle or highlight words that stick out to you.
- Why are these words important to you?
- If there are any words you don't understand, look them up in the dictionary. Find a similar word or write the definition down on your paper or in your journal.
- Are there names of people or places you aren't familiar with? Look them up!
- Try to imagine what the author was feeling when he wrote this psalm. What were his emotions? Struggles? Frustrations? Joys? Triumphs?
- Have you ever felt the way the author felt? When? Why?
- Write your own psalm about a time when you experienced what the author might have experienced.
- Find a verse from Psalm 51 that sticks with you. Write it on a piece of paper and keep it where you can see it this week.
- Pray through the psalm, asking God to reveal Himself to you through His Word.
- Get creative: find one word or phrase within this psalm that speaks to you. Meditate on it, and write down your thoughts and reflections in your journal.