



A YOUVERSION BIBLE APP DEVOTIONAL SERIES

Easter Makes Everything New

AN EIGHT-DAY DEVOTIONAL BY PASTOR JIM CYMBALA

DAY 1

What Is Easter Really About?

Come to me.

MATTHEW 11:28

Most of us, if we are Christians, go to church during Easter week. We take communion on Good Friday. We dress up on Sunday. We enjoy the music and the messages. But at the end of the day on Easter, many of us go home the same way we came in.

And that's strange, after we've just been reminded of all that God has done for us: He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on a cross, even though we didn't want Him. We were cursing Him, living our own way, but Jesus said, "I'll take the guilt; you receive the pardon." That's how much He loves us.

But there's more.

On top of dying so that we could be forgiven, Jesus was raised from the dead. God raised His Son to life again to show us that, not only did He forgive us through the blood that Jesus shed on the cross, but He also offers us resurrection power so that we can live new lives.

Listen, when we believe in Jesus, the same power that raised Christ from the dead—the Holy Spirit—comes to live inside us. Now we can finally be the people God wants us to be. The Holy Spirit gives us victory over sin, ugly habits, compulsive disorders. We can't change on our own, but God loves us so much that He operates in grace and does for us what we can't do for ourselves.

If all that's true—and it is—then why are so many believers in Jesus not living in the fullness of this new life? They battle loneliness or fear. They struggle with besetting sins. They know that they are forgiven, but they think that maybe this is as good as it gets. Why is that?

We find the reason in a beautiful promise that Jesus made in Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Notice what Jesus said: "Come to me." The Old Testament religion was "Obey the commands." But Christianity goes deeper than "Obey the law." Why? Because none of us can do it! We've all broken the law, violated our consciences, hurt ourselves and others. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But the New Testament, the message of God's grace, is not "Try to obey." It's "Come to Jesus!" He'll change us!

But we don't come to Jesus. Instead, we try to keep the law. We vow, "I'm going to read the Bible. I'm going to love that person. I'm determined to get victory over that sin."

But we mess up: We look at things we shouldn't. We lie. We lose our tempers.

Yet we still say, "I'm going to change."

We're not going to change! Only Jesus can change us. That's the message of Christianity: come to a Person. Jesus didn't say "Come to church" or even "Come to the Bible." Jesus says to all of us who are trying to be good enough to please God, "Look, come to Me. Stop trying to fix yourself. I'll do the changing. In Me, you are a new creation."

That's what Easter is really all about. This week don't stay in the same-old, same-old. Come to Jesus. Let Him make everything new.

DAY 2

A New Creation

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

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

You've come to Jesus. You have new life in Him. But how new, really, is your new?

The most meaningful verse in the Bible about being new is 2 Corinthians 5:17. It tells us what Christianity is supposed to be about. But maybe 95 percent or more of all Christians—people who are truly born again, not just churchgoers—are not living anywhere near what God intended when He gave us this verse through the apostle Paul: “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

For anyone who is in Christ, God's intention is a new creation. He's not interested in fixing up the old. The old is gone! The new is here.

A lot of us, though, are oxymorons in the sense that we're Old Testament Christians. The Old Testament covenant from God was “Here are My laws. Now obey them.” But nobody did obey them, because the law only brought a knowledge of sin. It couldn't change anyone. The law, written on stone, had no life in it. The commands were right—“Don't kill; don't commit adultery; don't lie.” The problem was with us, with our carnal nature. Who we are will never change; we were messed up from the jump. So God said, “I won't work with that. Instead, trust in My Son, and I'll make you a new creation.” A new species, almost, of life.

We have grass and trees. That's life. Above that are animals, from insects to the most developed animal life. That's life. Above that is humanity; we can think, write symphonies, develop computers, go to the moon, do all kinds of amazing things. That's life too. But God says, “Now I'm going to make a new creation, above all the others. People who are in Christ won't be regular men and women anymore. They will be new creations. The old is gone.”

The old what? The old person. In Christ we have a new kind of life. The Holy Spirit now lives inside us, joined with our spirits, and when we yield to the Spirit, we have a new way of living. We can be like Christ! We don't live with our old failures, our old ways. That's living in the flesh. That's living under the law.

The new life is much more than going to church, having a Bible, trying to do right. That has nothing to do with Christianity. Zero. Christianity is a new creation. It's Jesus dying for our sins and washing them away—but it doesn't stop there. It's being born again, as Jesus comes to live inside us by His Spirit, into a new kind of living. It's a joy and a peace that you and I scarcely think about once in a year—what we could be, what we should be, what God purposed us to be.

Draw near to Jesus today. Let Him renew your life.

DAY 3

You Must Be Born Again

No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.

JOHN 3:3

Too many of us settle for a cultural concept of Christianity: Go to church on Sunday. Stay home the rest of the week. Hardly read the Word. Even if we do have some kind of devotional life, we just battle through the same-old, same-old. Yes, we're slightly improved, but we're nowhere near what the Bible holds up as what our life should be: new creations.

This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God"—no one can enter into and understand the things of God—"unless they are born again" (John 3:3). Most of us know Nicodemus' famous answer: "How can I go back into my mother's womb?" All he could think about was natural birth. But Jesus went on to say, "No, that which is born naturally is natural. You have to be born from above, spiritually—born again to a new whole way of living."

What Jesus was pointing out to Nicodemus we scarcely have digested ourselves. What did He mean? Born again into what? Into the kind of life that we read about in 2 Corinthians 5:17: the old is gone; the new has come. We still have our bodies and our personalities, but that's it. Our lives are supposed to be Christ now, through the Holy Spirit. That's what Paul meant when he said, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Paul was gone. He was messed up. "The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20).

When we put our faith in Jesus, not only does the blood that He shed provide forgiveness for our sins, but God says, "I'm going to give you a new inner person when you're born again. My Spirit will dwell inside you and give you new motivations, new desires."

So the secret of the Christian life is to let the Holy Spirit—Christ living inside us—come out in every area of our lives.

When we open up to the Holy Spirit within us, we will be true new creations. We will be nothing like the people in the world. We won't share their values, the way they reason, their mindsets, their morality. No, we will live supernaturally—on a higher level. Remember, this is the Spirit who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. If that same Spirit lives in us, and He does, then He will also give life to our mortal bodies, as Romans 8:11 says. Everything will be new.

Praise God for the new covenant. Praise God for Jesus! Let's serve Him today, not in the oldness of the letter, but in the newness of our spirits that have been born again through Jesus Christ.

DAY 4

Out with the Old, in with the New

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.

EZEKIEL 36:26

The new covenant, the new way of life that Jesus secured for us through His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, was promised by God in the Old Testament: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you,” God said. He was saying, “I’m not working with your old heart, your old will. I’m going to put a new heart and a new spirit in you, because what you have now is messed up, and it can’t be changed. I’m not fixing it, not putting a Band-Aid on it. I’m giving you a new heart, a new spirit.”

He went on, “I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” In other words, “You won’t be hard and calloused anymore. You’ll be tender now and see things the way I do, not because you study and practice but because I’m giving you a new heart, a new spirit. Live out of it!”

He continued, “And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezek. 36:26–27). This was hundreds of years before Christ came to earth. How are we going to obey God and be overcoming? His Spirit, in our new spirits, will move us from the inside out. It’s not by turning over a new leaf or promising to change. That’s wasted. “I’m going to put My powerful Spirit in you,” God says, “the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, and I will move you however I want to move you. You’ll want to obey Me; you’ll want to read My Word; you’ll want to show compassion, not because someone taught you to do these things but because My heart is in you.”

Teaching has its place, but Christianity is not a teaching religion. That’s for Mormons and Buddhists and Jehovah’s Witnesses—all they can do is teach. Christianity is supernatural! It’s a new life. The old has gone, the new has come.

Many of us, like I did, grew up in church trying to patch up the old. But that’s hopeless. Christianity is not about, “Come on, do better. Jesus died on the cross, after all.” No, the whole thing is of the Lord—the pardon, the forgiveness, the cross, the blood, and the Spirit working in us giving us new hearts, new centers that we’re supposed to live out of. That’s why the Bible says, “Walk by the Spirit, by that new Holy Spirit living in you. Let Him shape your thoughts and your desires.” Praise God. Isn’t that good?

Let’s rejoice in the promise of the new covenant.

DAY 5

The World's Ways Won't Do

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:12

If the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is living inside us, giving us His life, why do so few truly born-again believers realize what He can do through them?

We read about the apostle Paul or about all the people getting saved in the early church, and we think, “Look at the way they lived for God!” Or we read church history, like Hudson Taylor’s *Spiritual Secret*. “Oh, Hudson Taylor, he went to China, and God used him in amazing ways!” But this kind of power and faith isn’t just for a special few or for great heroes of the faith. Jesus rose from the dead so that all of us could live on another level. So why don’t we?

The world has invaded the church.

We look at people’s credentials, but God doesn’t. What was so special about the people God has used greatly? It wasn’t their training or intellect. Jesus picked twelve common people—fishermen, tax collectors, political zealots—and put them in charge of the entire movement of Christianity throughout the world. Why? He was never looking at their talent or ability! He was thinking, “I’m going to put My Spirit in them, and whatever they do will bring glory to God, because everyone will know that no great thing could come from these people.” It’s like Zechariah 4:6 says: “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

More degrees do not mean more fruit. In fact, many theological seminaries today have become spiritual cemeteries. People earn degrees, but they don’t live in the power of the Holy Spirit. They write that off as emotional fanaticism. But look at the shape that Christianity is in now. In one country where I’ve been, they say, “No, you can’t have just one PhD to be a pastor. You’ve got to have two.” Where would anyone get that from the Word of God? No, God chose the foolish things and the weak things to shame the strong (see 1 Cor. 1:27).

The world has so affected our way of thinking. When Christians come to church and want to grow, we don’t press them to pray and open to the Holy Spirit so that Jesus’ new resurrection life can come out of them. No, we try to fix the old: “So what happened to you when you were eleven? When you were eighteen?”

But that old life is gone! Isn’t that what the Bible says? “The old is gone; the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). God doesn’t want to work with Jim Cymbala’s old life—with my alcoholic father and all the bad stuff that happened when I was growing up. He says, “I’m going to lift you way above all that. I’m going to give you a new heart and a new spirit.”

We mean well, but we’re trying to use natural weapons to do spiritual warfare.

We can’t. It’s God or bust.

Boldness to Serve Christ

The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid.

2 TIMOTHY 1:7

When we are victorious, new-life, new-covenant, Spirit-filled believers, the Holy Spirit living within us will give us boldness to serve Him. “The righteous shall be as bold as a lion” (Prov. 28:1), and we are righteous in Jesus Christ by His shed blood on the cross!

Too many of us, though, when God calls us to do something for Him, say, “But I’m afraid.” We worry, “I’m afraid I could fail. I’m afraid of tomorrow. I’m afraid of the new virus that’s supposed to be twenty times more deadly than HIV. I’m afraid of global warming. I’m afraid of my family turning on me. I’m afraid people will laugh at me. I’m afraid, I’m afraid, I’m afraid.”

Paul wrote to Timothy, a young minister, “The Spirit God gave us does not make us timid [fearful], but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7). Whenever we are walking in any kind of fear, it has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. That doesn’t mean that we should act like bulls in a china shop trying to do things God never asked us to do, but as we walk in the Spirit, we will have a boldness and confidence that come from God. We will walk in faith, because the Spirit produces that in us, and faith is the opposite of fear.

A Christian living in the fullness of the Spirit can never say, “I see the door open, but I’m afraid.” Jesus didn’t hang back from the cross because He was afraid. We won’t find the apostle Paul pulling back in fear either. He never said, “A door for ministry is open, but I’m afraid I could end up in prison again.” When the early Christians were martyred after the close of Scripture, what stood out to the Romans who were killing them was that as they went to the flame or to get their heads cut off, they were praising God right to the final moment.

What are we worried about again? Run that by me, all the pressure you’re under.

A Christian living the old life says, “I know, but North Korea, and China, and Ukraine, and now Hezbollah and Hamas . . .” Listen, pray about it, but get up in the morning and do God’s will! God is with us!

When we live in fear, we’re not living the new life; we’re living the old life. We think, “God’s going to fix me up, and I’ll be more courageous than I used to be.” There’s nothing in the Bible that says God’s going to work with us and fix us up. We’re too hopelessly ruined. God says, “I’ll give you a new heart. I’ll put a new spirit in you. You’ll be filled with my power, love, and self-discipline.”

If you are overflowing with the Spirit, you will never say “But I’m afraid,” not to yourself or to anyone else. Like David wrote in Psalm 118:6, you will say, “The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid.”

Keep on Being Filled

Be filled with the Spirit.

EPHESIANS 5:18

The devil doesn't like believers who are full of the Holy Spirit, yielded to God, and overflowing with Christ's new-creation life. He does everything he can to get us to fall right back into cultural Christianity.

When the disciples were first persecuted, the same religious leaders who had killed Jesus brought Peter and John in and said, "We know you prayed for a guy and he got healed and everyone's buzzing about it. But did we not tell you, no more talking in Jesus' name? Didn't you get that? We don't want that name mentioned in Jerusalem!" (see Acts 3). The implication was, "You know what happened to Him. It can happen to you."

Then Peter told them, "Well, you guys judge whether we should obey you or God, but we can't stop talking about everything we've seen and heard."

So after threatening the disciples, the religious leaders let them go. That's when a lot of us would have turned tail and run.

But what did Peter and John do after the leaders threatened them? They went to where the believers were having a prayer meeting, and "they raised their voices together in prayer to God" (Acts 4:24). Look how they prayed: "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness" (Acts 4:29). In other words, "Lord, they don't want Your word, and they want us to be afraid, but grant us boldness so that we won't stop doing what You want us to do!" This was a battle.

We're all tested in the new life. We battle fearful attacks, like the disciples did. What should we do when Satan is pressing us hard and trying to get us to quit? Call on the Lord. Look what happened next: "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:31).

Wait a minute. If they were Christians, then they were already filled with the Spirit, because Romans 8:9 says that "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ." But Ephesians 5:18 tells us, "Be filled with the Spirit." That word "filled" is in the continuous present tense, so it's saying, "Keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit." Yes, we have the Spirit living in us, but we need to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit.

When the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they "spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31).

Are you living out of your new life in Christ, strengthened in Him day after day? Or do you need to get alone with God and draw near to Him again? If you constantly turn to Jesus when you are tested and attacked, you won't give way when Satan comes after you. The Holy Spirit will fill you every day, every moment, and strengthen you with His power.

Jesus Every Day

Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

ROMANS 6:4

How real is Jesus to you?

When we live the old life, we say that Jesus is with us, but the presence of Jesus is really just a concept to us—a verse in the Bible. We talk with other people as if the Lord is nowhere near. We get nervous and afraid. We feel lonely. We are defeated by besetting sins.

But when the Holy Spirit is working in us, He makes Jesus so real to us that it changes every day of our lives. We don't say things that we would ordinarily say, because we don't want to say those things in front of Jesus. We stop feeling alone, because we know that Jesus is with us—we can talk to Him, and He talks back to us. We make good decisions, because we ask the Lord what He wants, and He shows us. We gain victory over sins that we could never overcome on our own.

Do you only know Jesus as the One who died on a cross for you two thousand years ago? Or does He share every day with you? Are you living the old life or the new?

If there's an absence in our lives of the Holy Spirit making Jesus real to us, we can get into some very barren, shallow living. Oh, yes, we are Christians. We're born again. Christ lives in us. But without the fullness of the Spirit of Jesus, we can really go to seed. But when we are continually being filled with the Spirit, the reality of Jesus goes to a whole new level.

Jesus curbs our tongues and keeps us from saying things that will hurt us or others because we're conscious of His presence. Jesus cures our loneliness, because He is our best friend. Jesus is present with us every day—talking to us, helping us make decisions, tempering our lives.

One of the great cures for a besetting sin is to let the Holy Spirit make Jesus real to you. If you're conscious that Jesus is with you, and you're talking to Him all day, do you think pornography will have a strong pull on you? Or gossiping? Or telling lies? Or using profanity? Or talking inappropriately to your wife or husband? Are you going to do those things in front of Jesus? No.

We need to keep on being filled with the Spirit—not just take a little sip but have rivers of living water coming out of us. We're meant to be overflowing.

Maybe this new-creation life is not what you learned growing up. Maybe you learned “Become a Christian, and join our church, and come on Sundays when you can.” That is not Christianity. Christianity is supernatural: the old is gone; the new has come. If anyone is in Christ Jesus, he or she is a new creation.

That's the promise of Christianity—not just that your past sins are forgiven but that you have a new potential, a new beginning. Praise God.

Don't settle for the old life. Come to Jesus. Keep on being filled with His Spirit. The Spirit of Jesus makes everything new.