

April 7/8, 2023
"Easter 2023"
Pastor Jeff Manion



SPEND DAILY TIME WITH GOD AS YOU READ, THINK, PRAY + ACT.

2023 SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Intentional activities to deepen our relationship with God and mold us to be more like Jesus.

APRIL PRACTICE Confession

Day 1 John 20:1-31 | The Resurrection

Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus's head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. John 20:6-8

Everyone assumes it's the end of Jesus. He's dead. Crucified. It's a public and humiliating death for the upstart rabbi out of Galilee. Since being arrested and executed, many people have lost respect for him and his followers. Jesus is simply a criminal not to be followed or trusted. Yet, on that first Easter morning, something completely unexpected happens. Jesus is not in the tomb. He's risen from the dead. In doing so, Jesus shows he's not a criminal but the Son of God.

Varied opinions exist today about who Jesus was and what he came to do. Some believe he was just a good moral teacher with helpful insights. Others don't know what to think. Yet, the resurrection proves Jesus was who he said—the Son of God sent to save the world.

We still grapple with who we believe Jesus to be and the implications on our lives. This week we look at the resurrection from the perspective of his followers. Along the way, we will learn from how they respond to the resurrection. Whether we are already believers of Jesus, yet to believe or have some doubts—the most important question is, "Who is Jesus?"

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Think about the question, "Who do I say Jesus is?" Then consider, "In light of who Jesus is, how should I respond?" This answer will vary for us all. Maybe we are led to say a prayer of gratitude or worship, (re)commit to giving over control of our lives in an area we have withheld, or something entirely different.

Day 2 John 20:1-10 | Crisis and Confusion

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalen went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one who Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" John 20:1-2

Jesus's followers wake up to crisis and confusion on a day we now celebrate as Easter. Their leader, Jesus, has been betrayed, arrested and murdered. The shock and pain are significant a few days later. Jesus-followers are terrified wondering if they might be next, grief-stricken and mourning the seeming failure of this Messiah they had put their trust in. It's a full-on faithquake for them.

As we look back on that fateful morning, we see what they could not. We see that God is at work even in the midst of their crisis and confusion. They didn't understand why Jesus had to die, where he had gone or anything that happened, but God did.

We all face different challenges—many of us are in the midst of crises or confusion. Whether our belief is strong, wavering or new—we can take great hope that the God we serve is the same God that raised Jesus from the dead. God is often at work in ways we cannot see and has a way of bringing beauty out of pain and difficulty. This doesn't mean our circumstances will change or we won't experience pain. But it means God wants us to trust and cling to him, especially in crisis or confusion.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Journal, "What crisis or confusion do I need to take to God today?" Then pray in a way that acknowledges the challenge and expresses trust in God. May we have peace knowing our gracious God meets us in our crisis and confusion and helps us see where he is at work, even in the difficult spaces of our lives.

Day 3 John 20:11-18 | Mary

Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”). John 20:16

Confused and full of grief, Mary stands outside the empty tomb where Jesus’s body had been laid. It’s in this broken place where Jesus meets her and calls her name, “Mary.” Immediately, she knows his voice and turns toward him. The story calls back (see John 10:27), where Jesus says, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” There’s something tender in these words and the scene with Mary. Not only is Jesus the Son of God, but he is a shepherd who knows his sheep. And what’s interesting is that Mary turns from grief to mission with that one word. She immediately went to the disciples to share what she saw.

What if Jesus knows our name too? What if he calls our name and invites us to follow him too? What if he knows us, knows what we have been through, knows what we struggle with, loves us, and invites us to follow him?

The truth is that he does know and invites us to follow him. Realizing this is true—this truth is too good not to share. May we, like Mary, be moved in gratitude to share what God has done in our life. We don’t have to know or understand everything about the Bible, but we can share what we’ve experienced God doing in our lives.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Pray a prayer of gratitude for what God has done. Thank him for caring about you, and said in John 10:27, knowing his sheep. Then ask God for an opportunity and the words to share what God has done in your life with somebody.

Day 4 John 20:19-29 | Thomas

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” John 20:26-28

One of the disciples, Thomas, isn’t with the rest when Jesus first appears to them and doubts their story. While all together a week later, Jesus appears to them again and singles out Thomas. Instead of scolding him for his doubt, Jesus invites Thomas to see and believe. Jesus tells Thomas to look at and touch the wounds of the execution. Jesus wants Thomas on his team and to stop doubting. Thomas immediately believes, crying out, “My Lord and my God!”

Thomas isn’t the only person in the Bible with doubts. It’s ok to doubt at times. Many of us find ourselves with questions today. Whether we are Jesus-believers with doubts, skeptical or seeking—we can learn from Jesus and Thomas. Jesus doesn’t appear angry but instead invites Thomas to see and then believe. Thomas, once he sees Jesus, moves from doubt to belief.

Maybe we’re struggling with doubt and need to hear God’s tender voice inviting us to see. Perhaps we’re a believer who can learn from Jesus to grow in graciousness toward those who have doubts. Or we might have some questions and are holding back until all the answers are clear. Sometimes, we might need to move from doubt to belief before having all the answers. Watch this video as Pastor Jeff Manion talks about the God who knows our name and is inviting us to come and see.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Consider whether you are struggling with doubt and how you can move to belief in Jesus. We would love to start a conversation with you. Email us at btw@adabible.org. If you are seeking, join us these next three weeks to hear from guest pastor John Dickson. John is a scholar, speaker, and author who may help address some of your questions.

Day 5 John 20:20-31 | Life

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31-32

All of us want a life that is something real and meaningful. In today’s verse, we read that by believing in Jesus, people can have life in his name. John wants to highlight the deep truths about who Jesus is and that there’s life through believing in him. In John 10:10, Jesus says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full.” Jesus repeats this theme in teachings—that following Jesus gives people the life God created them for. Something real and meaningful.

Our culture does not usually point toward honoring God. It’s easy to believe following Jesus diminishes our freedom and actions or that Christianity is just a list of rules robbing us of the real fun in life. If we’re not careful, we can act as if following Jesus and living in a way that honors him means a life of less joy and life. However, the truth is following Jesus and becoming more like him lets us experience life like nothing else—real, abundant life. Life as it is meant to be in harmony with God and the world. A peaceful life knowing we can trust God when things are tough. A thankful life knowing God forgives our past. A hopeful life where God will fix what is broken. And a balanced life when we put God first above everything else. This is the life promised in a relationship with God—the real abundant life.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Listen to the Ada Bible Worship Team sing, “Living Hope.” As you listen, consider these words: that Jesus truly is your living hope today, he has broken every chain and set you free, AND that in his name there is salvation and living hope.