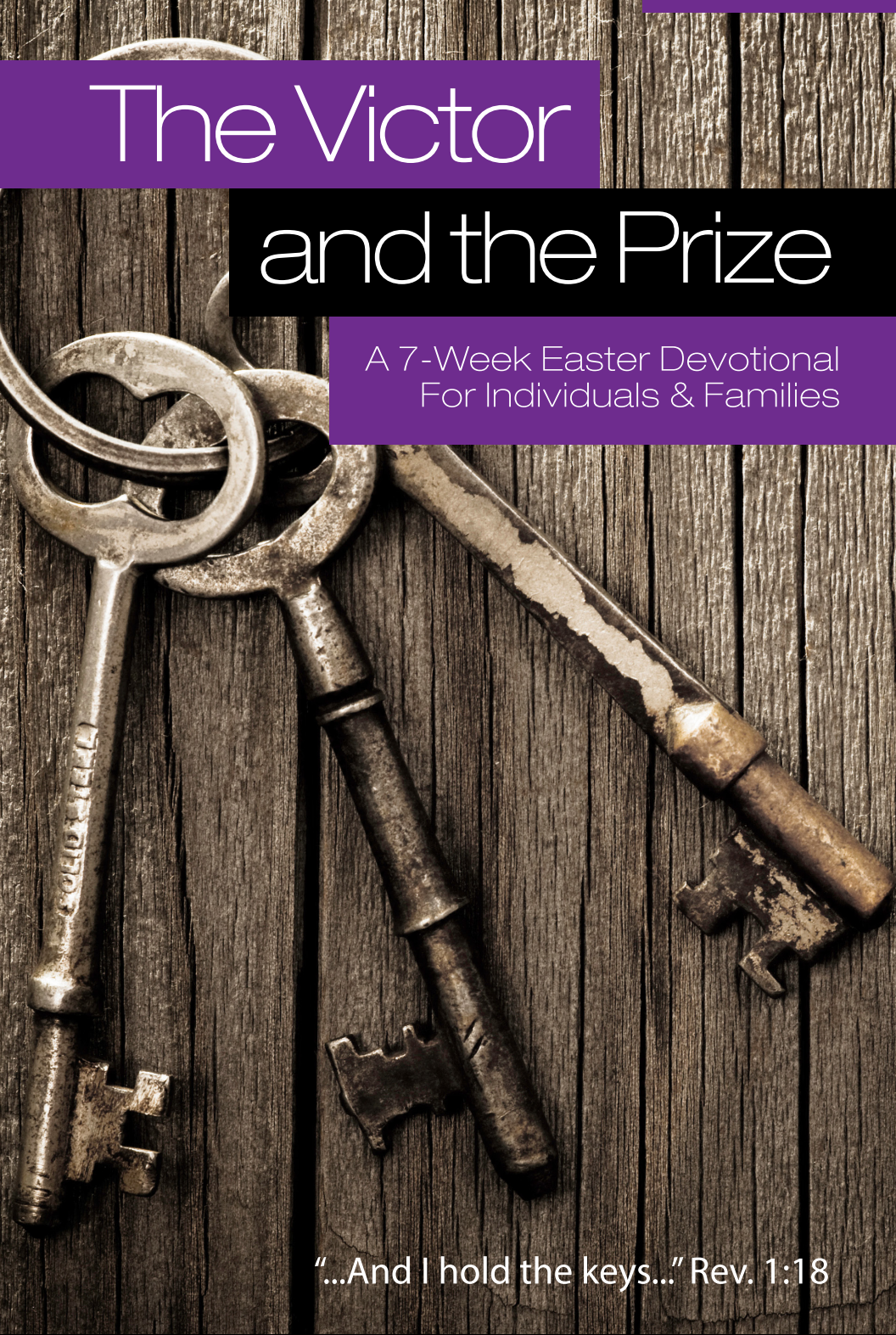
The Victor and the Prize

A 7-Week Easter Devotional
For Individuals & Families



"...And I hold the keys..." Rev. 1:18

vineyard usa



Easter marks the handing over of the keys of death to Jesus – the risen Lord of Life.



A LETTER FROM PHIL

One of the most exciting times of the year for a Christian is Easter. The Scriptures tell us that on this incredible morning, the keys that locked the gates of death moved from the hands of the enemy of our souls – into the hands of the living Jesus (Rev. 1:18).

For the Christian, there is no more important celebration than this. Our new life in Christ flows from the resurrection moment, and changes – literally – *everything*.

This Easter devotional will take you through Easter Sunday and the Sundays that follow. Over 7 devotionals, you'll have the opportunity, again and again, to enter into the victory won by Jesus.

Your new life in Christ, I pray, will take on a powerful new sense of meaning. Hope will begin to fill your heart – just like it did the earliest disciples.

As you remember the triumph of Christ over the effects of sin and death in our lives at Easter time, worship with joy – you are a new creation.

Have a wonderful Easter,

Phil Strout
Vineyard USA National Director

"Don't fear: I am First, I am Last, I'm Alive. I died, but I came to life, and my life is now forever. See these keys in my hand? They open and lock Death's doors, they open and lock Hell's gates."

Revelation 1:18 (The Message)

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Easter is the most important event of human history – Christ is the Victor over Death.

WHY IS EASTER IMPORTANT?

EASTER SUNDAY is "Resurrection Day." At Easter we celebrate, re-enact, re-tell, and reimagine the unfathomable victory won on a morning in Israel over two thousand year ago.

Jesus, a simple carpenter's son born in Bethlehem of Judea, demonstrated in signs, wonders, and proclamation that the Kingdom of God is in our midst. He framed a vision of the world as it is, the world as it will be, and what it means to be human – through his teaching and demonstrations of the Spirit's power. Facing a cruel death at the hands of religious Jews and Roman soldiers, he was, as the Apostles' Creed puts it, "crucified, dead, and buried."

The Creed, however, does not stop here – *and neither must we.*

"On the third day..." a woman visits the tomb. A stone is rolled away. The Victor over death, Jesus, is seen to be *alive*. He appears to the disciples, and to over 500 people in a short span of time. The mighty Roman Empire is not ready for what will come next. Just when they thought they killed a cult – Christianity launches forward to become the most transforming faith to ever impact planet earth.

The Body of Christ is unleashed in passion, love, and faith on an unsuspecting empire. The world will never be the same.

The prize the Victor has won he now holds in his hands – the keys of hell and death (Rev. 1:18). We were spiritually and physically chained to sin, and its inevitable result – death. Now, we are released from the chains of fear that bound us (Rom. 8:15).

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

John 11:25-26 (The Message)

Jesus' resurrection marks the beginning of God's great restoration project. Death has met its match in the Lord of Life. Faith in the King of all Kings, Jesus, fills our hearts with hope for every moment in human history to come. God is working to make all things new – in us and in the world (Rev. 21:5). *This is the message of Easter.*

Throughout this day and the Easter season, we reclaim the saving work of Christ. Death attempted to swallow into its tomb the very Giver of Life – who transformed the tomb into a womb of new creation. Sin and death have been conquered for eternity – and also in the present. As a bearer of Christ's resurrection life, a new creation ("Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" – 2 Cor. 5:17 NIV), you are now commissioned to join God's great work of righting the world, distributing Jesus' love, and confronting the powers of our age with the empowering life of Christ in you (Col. 1:27).

THE EASTER SEASON

In historic traditions, Easter Sunday begins what is called the "Eastertide festival," a resurrection party that goes on for 50 days and culminates in Pentecost – when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. For that reason, the unique devotional in your hands is designed to take you from Easter Sunday, the First Sunday of Easter, all the way through what is called "The Great Fifty Days." It is designed for you to read beginning Easter Sunday morning, and then on the following six Sundays.

USE YOUR IMAGINATION

Each devotional is written from the perspective of one person who has encountered the Victor – the resurrected Jesus. In Ignatian spirituality, prayer and reflection is encouraged by suggesting an individual use their imagination to place themselves right in the middle of a biblical story as it unfolds. In this case, each devotional chooses one character through whose eyes we meet the resurrected Jesus. Each section is written with some "educated guesses" as to how that person might have experienced their encounter with the Lord of Easter. Let each devotional be a launch point for your own imagination as you consider how these encounters with Jesus mirror your own. *Bless you this Easter.*





A Victor is someone who has overcome an adversary, won a struggle, conquered a foe.

EASTER SUNDAY

DEATH – there is no family in your world or mine that has not tasted its bitter bite and hollowing sting. Whether Death quickly claims its victory in a hospital bed, or kills as a slow, haunting specter, gradually eroding joy in a living soul, Death in all its forms is truly one of the great enemies of humanity.

Without faith, one might say that Death's unrelenting will has mastered us, its mystery intimidated us, its power confounded us, and its grip claimed us. Death drains hope from our hearts time and time again, leaving homes in bereft mourning, whole societies in inconsolable grief, and even creation in chaotic disarray.

Imagine for a moment, that you are one of the frightened women who has just silently walked a solemn journey to the tomb of your Lord and Master. It is Sunday morning, and you've been up for agitated hours. Your soul has been carved out; it echoes as voices of grief and despair taunt you – fueled by recent days of horror.

Jesus, your Lord and Master, secured your allegiance with every act of love, word of hope, and life-altering miracle. He offered you a vision of the world that made your life, your faith, finally make sense. On Friday you helplessly watched him bleed out and cry out to his Father. Hanging on a rough, hewn cross at the hands of hate-mongering soldiers, your greatest Hope gasped for air and died – without a shred of dignity.

While the other disciples hide from the authorities, you have a task of honor you simply must fulfill. You wake early, gathering and mixing spices, all to keep the stench

"On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb...."

Luke 24:1-6 (The Message)

of Jesus' death-reeking tomb at bay. Your hands retain the fragrance of the burial herbs you've mixed. You are aware that the lifeless body of Jesus, which only days ago was yanked unceremoniously from the spikes driven through him, had been washed, embalmed, wrapped in linen, and laid on a cold slab in a rock-cave tomb.

As you walk, Death's hungry ambassadors are now clawing at you again – fear, self-hatred, emotional slavery, and spiritual disorientation. You remember how each emissary of Death, in its turn, was overcome with a word, a touch of love, a miracle, or a simple command to trust – from Jesus. But now, he is dead.

Then, you are shaken from your thoughts as you arrive at the tomb. You gasp – your next great fear is upon you; Jesus' body has been *stolen*. Beyond grief, you taste your stinging tears as you run wildly to the grave.

What do you find? An open tomb. A folded linen. A question: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Then, a familiar voice speaks behind you. You turn. Breathless, you *see*. And you believe. You believe.

Jesus Christ, the Victor, is alive. In his hands – the keys of Death. *The tide has turned.*

APPLY THIS IN YOUR LIFE

On this Easter Sunday, we celebrate Death's greatest mistake – inviting the Lord of Life into its halls. The tomb of Death became a womb of Life, and because of Easter, you and I are truly *free*. As you celebrate Christ's victory over Death today, prepare your heart to discover the Prize for which he died and rose again. Ask God to reveal himself to you over this time of reflection, and prepare to enter into the new life that is the promised "reward of his suffering" (Is. 53:10-12) – new creation life in you and in the world.

A CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, my resurrected King, there is no grip of Death that is stronger than your hold of Life. I gladly welcome you to root out Death's sting in my life, in every area, and to heal me with new creation hope this season. In Jesus' name I come, amen.

SUGGESTED SONG

Christ Is Risen *(Riddle)*





HOPE for humanity's future rests on God's actions and promises – not man's.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

WAITING is, perhaps, the hardest part of faith. We daily wait in hope that something good will happen, or in fear that something bad will happen. Waiting, almost always, unnerves us.

Jesus has now been raised from the dead, and the women at the tomb have actually seen him in the flesh. With reckless joy they run to the place where the disciples are hiding, waiting – and stutter their unbelievable story. Grabbing at the arms of the disciples to persuade them to come, the women proclaim that their hope has been realized – Jesus is truly *alive*. Peter and John run to the gravesite, returning when they find nothing but an empty tomb.

Imagine for a moment that you are one of the hiding disciples. The twin soul sicknesses of sadness and fear have you by the gut. Women with crazed looks in their eyes, possibly driven to mental illness by their grief, will not convince you that your Lord is, in any way, *alive*.

In fact, everyone in this room with you, Peter, and James, and John, and the others – their eyes are red and dark from the confusion and the mixed messages of the last weeks. And now, an empty tomb?

You recall how Jesus spoke of a future hope, God's promised righting of the world and the Kingdom of God established on the earth. He had you convinced that he, the Messiah, was ready to bring about Israel's long-awaited deliverance. In the city, he flipped tables, stood for the poor, made crippled men walk, gave sight to the blind, delivered the demonized, even raised up dead children! His actions spoke of the age

"...Jesus appeared to them and said, 'Peace be with you.' They ...were scared half to death. '...Look at my hands; look at my feet – it's really me.' ...They still couldn't believe what they were seeing."

Luke 24:36-41 (The Message)

to come; the "presence of the future" broke in every time he healed, taught, or acted. How did the Jewish council get past God himself to get to their all-powerful Jesus?

Baffled, you all sit and wait for the next Roman move. You wait, thinking about your own crucifixion, your own family, your own facing of Jesus' fate. Nausea fills the pit of your stomach. You wait, expecting evil to come. Evil to strike. Evil to win.

Then, inexplicably, something in the room changes. The atmosphere becomes electric. Your senses tingle. The hair on your neck stands on end. The room seems to become physically brighter. Fear begins to drain from your heavy heart. What you see next you would never have allowed yourself to believe could happen.

Jesus appears in the room. *"Peace be with you,"* he says.

Silent, trembling stares fix on him. "It is I," Jesus says, "touch me." Silence. Then, all at once, the room bursts with exclamations of joy! Your mind spins as you consider what is happening before your very eyes. If Jesus is alive, *everything* changes. The implications are mind-numbing. The future has completely changed – for you, your people Israel, and the world. Who rises from the dead? Hope rises from the dead! God rises from the dead! Jesus, the Christ, your Lord, rises from the dead!

APPLY THIS IN YOUR LIFE

Waiting in fear, like the disciples, may be a more common part of our lives than we'd care to admit. Every day, you and I have a choice. We can choose faith over fear, believing in God's promises, as we wait. Or, we can succumb to fear and live our life hiding from Death's reach. Today, choose to trust in God, to have faith in his purposes – as you wait for his next move.

A CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I have waited in fear, disbelieving the future hope that you have laid out for those who love you. I choose to believe you are making all things new, and I am a part of that redemptive project. In Jesus' name I come, amen.

SUGGESTED SONG

Sure *(Morgan, Corum, Hines)*





The Resurrection is God's demonstration that a new life can emerge from the old.

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

TRANSFORMATION begins the moment we believe that Jesus is risen from the dead, and is with us, in us, and ready to change our lives. At that watershed moment of raw belief, we partner with the God of creation in allowing his new creation work to begin within. The Scriptures, recounting salvation history and teaching us the way of Jesus, feed this transformation.

At the moment we accept the resurrection of Jesus, the sinister siblings of Skepticism, Cynicism, and Unbelief are dislodged from their thrones within. They lose their powers of persuasion as we, with practice, begin to learn to counter our fear with a faith that moves mountains.

Imagine for a moment that you are one of the two disciples walking along the road to Emmaus after Jesus' resurrection. You are walking a 7-mile journey from Jerusalem to this small village. You followed Jesus.

You've heard the news about your Lord's body. Some women told you and your companions that Jesus had risen, but leaders you trust ran to the tomb and saw nothing. Baffled, you and your friend are speaking to one another in questions.

A man walks up beside you, clearly hoping to enter the conversation. "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" he asks. You and your companion stop. Your hearts sink, and yet you have enough words left to question this man as to why his head has been in the sand while the cataclysmic news of the day passes him by.

Graciously, and as a sort of catharsis, you explain. You speak of Jesus, his prophet's

"That same day two of them were walking to the village Emmaus, about seven miles out of Jerusalem. ...In the middle of their talk and questions, Jesus came up and walked along with them."

Luke 23:13-16 (The Message)

bearing, and his miraculous words and works. You recount how the chief priests trapped him, and handed him over to the Romans for a cruel, humiliating, and excruciating death. Then, you explain your deferred hope, that he would be the Messiah, the redeemer of Israel. Three days after his crucifixion, strange news came this morning. His body is gone from the tomb, women have seen angels, and you are bewildered. Your new travel companion is silent, as are you.

Then the man looks you both deep in the eyes, and pierces your heart with the sheer authority in his voice. "How foolish you are," he chides, "and how slow to believe all the prophets have spoken!" Speaking of suffering (Is. 53) and the Messiah's path to glory, he schools you from Moses on, and lays out God's plan for salvation history. Riveted by his words, and arriving at your destination, you invite him to stay.

The moment your compelling guest breaks the bread, a wonderful revelation washes over you like a wave. It's Jesus! He is in front of you! He is with you! *He is alive!*

He disappears, but your heart will never be the same. It's been burning since you met him on the road – and it will burn forever.

APPLY THIS IN YOUR LIFE

The transformation of our heart occurs in the presence of the risen Jesus. Without a risen Christ changing us, from the inside out, your efforts and mine are short-lived and as effective as our own wayward will.

Jesus' resurrection means that your heart can change. You can change. If his body can come back to life, your heart can be set free from every fear, every vice, every addiction that binds you. The keys of hell and death are in the hands of the risen Jesus – you can be set free. Are you ready?

A CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, your resurrection proves that you can make all things new – including my heart. Reveal yourself to me, as you did the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and set my heart burning in your presence. I want to know you as you are.

SUGGESTED SONG

Fiery Love (Lane, Wheeldon)





Believing is seeing in the Kingdom of God – eyes of faith must lead the eyes of sight.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

FREEDOM – freedom of the heart, the mind, and the body – is a well-worn idea in our day. We long to see those caught in the sex trade set free. We want to see our children free to be themselves in the face of a media onslaught bent on shaping them into a "beautiful" image. Everyone wants to see all who are in chains be released.

But is everyone who is physically bound *not* free? Conversely, is everyone who is not in chains actually *free* on the inside? No. Inner freedom starts with allegiance to the risen Christ, and this remains *the most powerful source of freedom*. As the Scripture says, "...If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn. 8:36).

Imagine for a moment that you are Thomas in the story of Christ's resurrection. The other disciples have seen Jesus – over a week ago now. In fact, it seems that everyone has "seen" him but you.

Try as you might, you can't figure out how, if Jesus really is alive, you would be left out. When we are left out, and don't know the reason, we assume the worst. For you, the worst thought you could imagine is that Jesus would rise from the dead, and show himself to everyone but you because you lack significance or he doesn't love you. Knowing your Lord, the better assumption is that all these people you know and love have *lost their minds*. That's a better explanation given the Jesus you knew.

Here you are. Eight days after the tomb is found empty, you are sitting in a room with your crazy friends. At least they're pleasant, and given your rejection by everyone else because you followed Jesus,

"But he said, "Unless I see the nail holes in his hands, put my finger in the nail holes, and stick my hand in his side, I won't believe it." ...Jesus came through the locked doors ...and said, "Peace to you."

John 20:25-28 (The Message)

they may still be your only friends. The Romans haven't acted yet to arrest you, which is inevitable, so you take solace in their company. But your faith? It is lying with Jesus in some grave robber's hastily dug hole in the ground.

You see, you are the poster child for a generation to come. Your critical, enlightened mind needs to touch, feel, and experience truth for yourself. If the science doesn't add up, if reason doesn't cut a way for it, no truth can or should stand. The farther in time you are away from Jesus' miracles, the more you settle in your stance. When the others press you, you state your case – you will have to *see* to *believe*.

As you stare at the floor in frustration, you glance up to see smiles around the room – and all eyes aimed in one direction. You turn your head, and there is *Jesus*. He is looking right at you – even *through* you.

You stumble to your feet in awe as the other disciples provide a soundtrack of laughter to your shock. Jesus invites you to do the math, to enlist the science – to touch his wounds. Like many other critical minds will discover after you, knowing Christ as Lord and present King is a knowing that transcends facts or data. You fall to your knees and begin to weep. You don't need to touch him. "My Lord and my God..." is all you can say.

APPLY THIS IN YOUR LIFE

Our greatest enemies are sin, death, and the devil. Each of these foes seeks to propel us into a swirl of ongoing doubt that ultimately ends up in faithlessness. As it was for Thomas, it is a living encounter with the presence of God, embraced and nurtured, that will keep us from the chains of doubt – and reveling in inner freedom.

A CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I am convinced that you rose from the dead, and continue to be active and present in our current lives. I will work with you to cultivate my growth by embracing the truth of your resurrection, applying your word to my life, and gathering with others to worship. My faith will rise as I give of myself in my community.

SUGGESTED SONG

Peace (Corum)





Love naturally flows from an encounter with the God who accepts you as you are.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LOVE exists when someone values you, and expresses in both affection and action that you are the target of their deepest honor. The greatest of loves, according to the Scriptures, consummates in the giving of one's life to rescue that of another. This kind of love is unconditional, and incomparably *healing*. Could it also be *eternal?*

Jesus understood the healing nature of resurrection love – it would last forever, and heal people through *all time to come*. While the cup of suffering in Gethsemane remained a terrible vessel from which to drink, Jesus knew that the grave was just one stopping point in Love's ultimate mission.

Imagine for a moment that you are Peter, out on your boat, fishing. It is the place you love to be most in the world; it has been a sanctuary for you, since you were young, where you could be alone with your thoughts as you simply did the hard work of casting your nets.

Jesus knew your love for fishing, and often communicated with you through its metaphor. You would be a "fisher of men," he said. He also taught you to not be so cocky about your fishing skills the day he suggested you fish on the other side of the boat (even though you'd already tried that), just as an act of obedience (Luke 5:1-11). Your haul almost burst your nets. You laugh out loud, just thinking about it.

These are even more incredible days. Jesus has appeared to you, and to many others, and you have no idea when he will show up again. All you know is that when he shows up, your love for him grows deeper

"After breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' 'Yes, Master, you know I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.'"

John 21:13-15 (The Message)

and more powerful. Impulsivity has given way to wisdom; your career as a fisherman seems like it must pass away to do the greater work of extending the Kingdom of God. You are ready. Jesus' resurrection makes you believe anything is possible – and you don't care if you live or die doing what he asks. You've never felt more alive than you do now.

Your thoughts are interrupted as a man calls from the shore. The face and voice are indistinct, but he suggests you try fishing on the other side of the boat. The reference is lost on you; you simply throw the net over the other side. As the fish begin to pack into the net, it hits you.

You turn and scream, "Jesus!" Into the water you go, swimming hard to your Lord.

A few minutes later, you are sitting on the shore with the living Jesus. He asks you if you love him more than all the others. "Yes, Lord," you respond, "You know I love you." He asks you two more times, and you answer the same. After each time you answer he asks you to feed his lambs, take care of his sheep, and feed his sheep.

You are being ordained for ministry by the risen Christ. You, and the others, will carry this eternal, healing love, to the world.

APPLY THIS IN YOUR LIFE

Peter was a man who knew the joy of being accepted, and deeply treasured, by God. Jesus' love, in his life, healed him from so many diseases of the heart that he could only respond by being a part of taking that restoring love to the world. God is in the business of taking broken, dead things – and restoring them with resurrection life. He invites you to join him in that plan to heal the world. Will you say "Yes" again this Easter?

A CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I don't know where I would go for a greater love than you have shown me along my life's journey. I am thankful that, through all the struggles, you have been there – loving me all the way. Like Peter, I'm ready to be used by you in any way you please. You commission me to extend your Kingdom in the world; I say, "Yes."

SUGGESTED SONG

All Is Well (Barnett/Delmore/Corum)





Resurrection Living is Open-Tomb living, a new normal for those who follow Christ.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

VOCATION is a word that means "calling," and is a way of understanding who we are, and what we are invited by God to do with him in the world. For the early Christians, the resurrection of Jesus marked the moment their life vocation radically changed.

The resurrection meant they were now *called* to be witnesses and heralds of the risen Lord and King of the Universe, Jesus. They were now called to be new creation agents partnering with God in his redemptive work, doing the works of Jesus in all arenas of life. They were now called to embrace their new identity as people being changed by God's new creation work, furthering that work in the world.

Imagine for a moment that you are the Apostle Paul, traveling on your horse from Jerusalem to Syrian Damascus. You are heading for your next purge of "Christians" from Jewish society. It seems that you were born for such a time as this. You were schooled to be a great scholar in the Scriptures. You learned the arts of rhetoric and persuasion, and rose above others in your public speaking abilities. You are a Pharisee, zealous for the faith of your people, and rising in the ranks of Judaism. Your mind is wandering toward your task, assigned to you, in your mind, by God himself. You will extinguish this cult's influence, and eradicate the memory of the renegade Jesus whose grave was robbed, and who mocked God with false miracles and subversive teaching. You have a mission, and a mission has you. God will back you up.

Then, a flash of light, and the hard thud from falling to the ground from atop your horse (Acts 9:1-19). You are groaning in

"Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it!"

2 Corinthians 5:17 (The Message)

pain, and darkness is all around you. But your eyes – they are open. Why is it dark? You are blind!

A voice speaks, and you don't know who is addressing you. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" you ask. "I am Jesus...." Like a thunderclap, your brain ignites into an electrical storm of paradox, fear, despair, and horror. The dead Galilean is speaking to you. Fright begins to merge with a strange peace encroaching on your mind. Your vocation, your calling, has just made a hard left turn.

You have encountered the resurrected Jesus, and nothing will ever be the same. With the Spirit's life pulsing within you, and a love for Jesus that flows from having been forgiven for so much, you will express what "life in the Spirit" is for the Christian. You will plant churches everywhere you go, and will express a new Kingdom ethic for Jews and Gentiles – calling God's people to a new way of being human empowered by the life and teaching of Jesus. You will proclaim who the church of Jesus Christ truly is – the people of God in whom the Holy Spirit moves, and through whom he acts in the world.

You are a living reminder that God can raise *any* life from the grave.

APPLY THIS IN YOUR LIFE

Paul was convinced, by a striking encounter, that Jesus was truly risen from the dead. The entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures began to fall into place for Paul from this moment onward, and he went on to call us through his writings to become a people of the Spirit.

Paul's fearlessness in the face of difficulty reminds us that our new life in Christ is a priceless treasure, and is worth giving all to both protect it and pass it on to others.

A CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Paul reminds me that with you, all things are possible, and you can take any person or situation and lead them to resurrection life. I thank you for this reality. Use me to further your Kingdom, and make my life a beacon of hope for others who see how much you have healed me.

SUGGESTED SONG

Stand In Awe (Riddle)





New Creation describes God's great restoration project – the Kingdom of God realized.

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

WHERE IS THE WORLD GOING? It's the topic of television shows, books, parties, movies, and music. It is also possibly one of the most disagreed-on ideas in all of human history.

Presidents promise that human evolution will bear the fruit of enlightened masses, advanced technology, cured disease, and a clean earth. For Christians, views differ. Some imagine an annihilated earth and a sparsely populated heaven. Still others Christianize popular views, optimistically suggesting all things will get better – eventually. For Paul, John, and the early Christians, however, the resurrection of Jesus marked a new cosmic direction – toward *New Creation.*

Imagine for a moment that you are the Apostle John, sitting in a small cell in a prison colony on the Greek island of Patmos. You were, you are, the "disciple Jesus loved" (Jn. 2:20 NIV). You wrote a Gospel than began with the pronouncement, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God." You wrote letters to churches in your care, proclaiming the love of God that compels us to love others. The truth of the prayer Jesus taught you to pray, "...Your kingdom come, your will be done, *on earth as it is in heaven*" stirs deep within you.

Suddenly, the wall of your small cave dwelling becomes like a modern movie screen, and an open vision fills your eyes! You are being given a multi-media message, for believers of all time, from "Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:1-5 NIV). The vision is long and complex, filled

"There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'"

Revelation 21:5 (The Message)

with images from the Scriptures' grand story – themes from Genesis to Isaiah and beyond dance before your eyes. You see Jesus, Risen King of Kings and Lord of Lords, in sovereign charge of this present and future vision. You see that all creation will not simply end with utter destruction, nor will human life evolve itself to ultimate perfection. Rather, God's world will be renewed, restored, set right-side-up again and be filled with the presence, glory, and joy of God! The glory of Eden will be renewed, built by the symphony of human history toward an epic consummation. All tears, all fears, will be wiped *away*.

"On earth as it is in heaven..." – the prayer of God's people will be finally answered! Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God, and it will be consummated in a new heavens and new earth! New Creation will come, and God's people will return from their exile to their true spiritual homeland!

Through tears of joy you write: *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'"*

APPLY THIS IN YOUR LIFE

The Kingdom of God is at work in us as we yield to God's great mission in us and in the world. We act in ways that speak of the new day to come – every act of forgiveness, kindness, faith, and healing becomes a demonstration that God's bright future is on the move through us – right now!

A CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we become like our vision of the future. I want to see your future with the eyes of my heart, and work with you to see this world righted in justice, love, beauty, relationships, education, the arts, politics, and families. Use me to reveal to others that your Kingdom is within reach.

SUGGESTED SONG

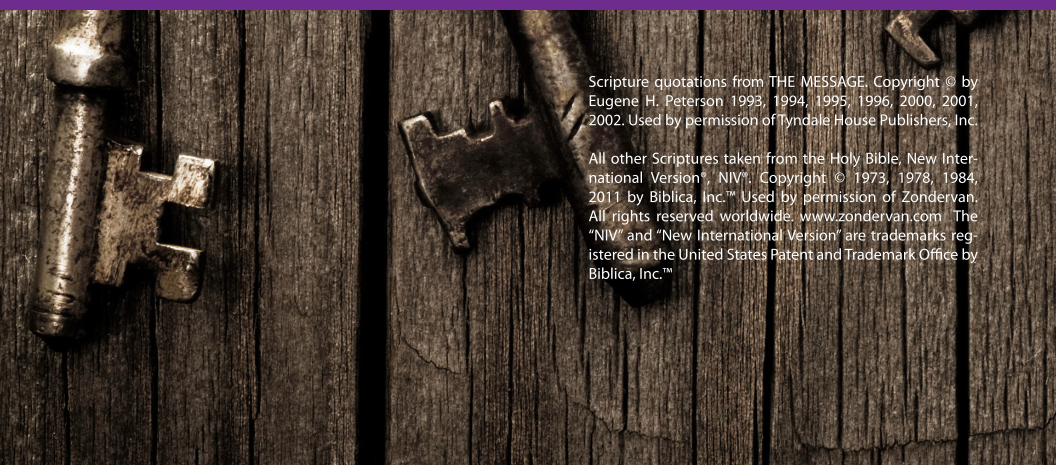
Wonderful (Yoder)





The Vineyard Movement, since birth, has valued seeing individual Christians experience God in their daily lives. Through spiritual practices such as worship, fellowship, mission, the reading and application of Scripture, soul care, family care, healing of the broken, cultural influence, the compassionate ministry of the Holy Spirit, and neighbor-love, the Vineyard community of churches seeks to be intentional about nurturing the lives of those who call us their family. To find out more about the Vineyard, visit www.vineyardusa.org.

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