

EASTER HAPPENS

Did you hear the Good News? **Easter has begun!**

It's not "over until next year." It's now.

May the Father pour out His resurrection power today in your life. Where you figured nothing could ever change. Where dreams have vanished, plans haven't materialized, visions have died. All of them good, and some clearly of God.

Just like Jesus on Good Friday.

But wait. Maybe you're not ready for this. After all, "Friday's here but Sunday's comin'" is easy to say about a story from the past that you've already read. But when you're in the midst of great pain, the Story comes alive, if only in your nightmares. The promise that Sunday's deliverance is at hand can seem remote at best and cruel at worst, when you keep hoping and praying with no sign of change.

Sure, you can believe it happened then, like the Bible says--after all, you're a Christian...

But what if a Story is true not because it happened, but because it happens?

If so, the question for us today is not, Did Jesus really rise from the dead?, but rather, How has His resurrection happened in my life already? Indeed, What are my unfulfilled Good-Friday hopes?

The older I get, the more frustrated I get with God's "slow" timetable for my deliverance—and the more I understand why God requires an unblemished animal for sacrifice. I'll give you a clue: It's not because He's into Martha Stewart. Why, indeed, did He require that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, and not Ishmael? After all, Ishmael was just from a slave girl, not the heralded son of his wife Sarah. Ishmael was expendable. His would've been the thrifty sacrifice.

But the Father's not thrifty when it comes to equipping His children to heal a broken world. If God's going to use something for His purposes, it's got to be cleansed of self-centered human purposes—the greater the purposes, in fact, the deeper the cleansing. Just as the steel for the most significant battle must go through the hottest fire, so the plan God wants most to use in your life must be refined the most deliberately. It's the Child of Promise who must be sacrificed, the one through whom God plans to bring about His ultimate plan on earth Who must be offered up.

The word "holy" comes from a root word meaning "to set apart," or "to distinguish from others of its kind." On Good Friday, God demonstrated how He sets us apart for His purposes, how He cleanses natural things for His supernatural work. Hint: Another word for "holy" is "sacred"—the root of "sacrifice." Being made holy and ready to be used by God, is not about trying, but about dying.

For example, want to purify your sexual desire for God's purposes? It's simple—but not easy: Bring it to the cross. Get on your knees and offer it back to God to "sacri-fy" it. Put it back in His hands where it came from, and let it die (Rom. 6:12-14). Trust He will resurrect your sexual desire in His time, when He's made you a more suitable vessel for it. "But why?" you protest; "There's nothing inherently wrong with sexual desire. In fact, God gave it to me!" True, and Halleluia! In fact, that's precisely why it needs to be sacrificed. The Enemy doesn't waste time with things of human design. They won't accomplish much for God anyhow. The Enemy focuses on things *God has given us*, in order to sabotage His plan for you the more destructively.

On the Cross, God showed us clearly: it's not even the things that are dearest to you, but precisely *what's dearest to God* that must be set apart from the world for His purposes—and thereby, endure the most severe refining.

This past Lent, God began showing me every aspect of my life that He has destined for His purposes, and how it's had to go to the cross and die--starting with my very life. Conceived during WWII amid all its tragedy and uncertainty, I was scheduled to be aborted (I tell the story in *Healing the Masculine Soul* with a pseudonym). 47 years later, my son himself virtually died in the birth canal, when I was fainting and falling to the hospital room floor (see the introduction to *Sons of the Father*).

My childhood innocence was lost, and now has been restored, partly through the Father's Spirit in that boy. After much family discord during my rebellious hippie days, I have been restored to sonship by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14-16). My ministry after seminary at an oldline denomination fell apart after eight years of pastoring, and I was out on the street; today my ministry is world-wide. My first marriage ended in divorce; today I enjoy a partnership and family I could never have imagined possible. Not long ago, my self-worth crumbled as every ministry organization I participated in--from seminary to denomination, men's ministries to publishers--at best ignored my work, Yet individuals from around the world continue to thank me for letting the Father use me for His healing in their lives.

I don't mind bragging about my Father like that. "This power working in us," as the Apostle Paul declares, "is the same as the mighty strength which he used when he raised Christ from the death" (Ephes. 1:20). Halleluia! I'm not waiting

on some archaeologist or biblical scholar before I believe that Easter happened. Because it happens all the time in my life! And I expect it to happen even more.

True, any one of these many “resurrection” blessings could easily have not happened, and I know many other people who have suffered similar losses with no apparent deliverance like mine. I don’t pretend to understand why that’s true. But I do know that the more I experience God’s resurrection power, the more I pray and work for others to experience it, too. I’m beginning to trust my Father’s fierce love. Because I know that He’s not finished bringing His best plans in me to the Cross.

Over the years, I’ve written 5 books, each of which took at least a year to write. I sincerely believe God led me to write each one of them. Only three have been published, and of those, only one is still in print—even as readers from around the world have told me how deeply the other two have ministered the Father’s heart to them. Two of my books have never been published, and recently one of these, after 17 years of my re-writing and laboring to publish it, seemed on the threshold of resurrection. The acquisitions editor praised it as “a winner” and “a powerful statement for our time,” and took it confidently to his senior editors—who rejected it as “too hot to handle.”

We go back to the cross. Frustrated? Sure. Bitter? Envious of others’ successes? Feeling abandoned by God and spitefully ready to quit writing altogether? Well, hey--yes,,sometimes.

After that latest rejection, in fact, I went to the Father and once again demanded--humbly on my knees, of course--“Why don’t you publish these books now!?”

This time, unlike the others, I heard a clear and measured response: “For your protection.”

I knelt there, stunned. You’d think a guy my age would’ve picked up the hint by now.

But it’s time to die again. *Alright, Father—I give up. Not to the circumstances, but to You. Forgive me. Make me ready for when You’re ready. Until then, I lay it all down before you. The books are yours anyhow. In fact, it’s not about the books. It’s about You. Take my hands off your plan, wrest it from me if you have to, so you can use those books fully for your Kingdom purposes.*

“Give yourselves to God,” as Paul exhorts, “as those who have been brought from death to life, and surrender your whole being to him to be used for righteous purposes” (Rom. 6:13TEV).

The great benefit of aging—besides the 10% senior discount at Ross Stores on Tuesdays--is that you don’t have the energy to do it yourself any more. Getting older has a way of revealing what’s been true all along, but you couldn’t see it because your youthful energy let you fancy you didn’t need to.

Learning to die is easier when you get older. You learn that dying, like Good Friday and Easter, is not an event, but a lifestyle—one that overflows with new life when you let Jesus be the Teacher.