



*21 Day Challenge
Devotional Guide*

21 Days Of Anticipation

by Cari Roush



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21 Days of Anticipation

Introduction

Remember when you were a kid and you couldn't wait for school to let out for the summer? Those final weeks in May seemed to pass so-o-o slowly! Or perhaps you recall the excitement that built over the family vacation, summer at Grandma's, the school field trip? For me, it was the anticipation of Christmas morning. Nothing quite compared to the excitement this day brought. Not because my family was rich or the gift would be lavish. They were not. But the waiting, the gift shaking, and the guessing were all part of the anticipatory experience! I simply couldn't wait! And at the Jones' house we frequently opened gifts early because none of us could wait!

As an adult I remember the excitement that built as I awaited my wedding day, my first home, and certainly the arrival of our kiddos! Hopeful anticipation is part and parcel of our lives.

Clearly our Lord has hard-wired us to live anticipatory. However, if we're being honest, there have certainly been times when the reality was quite a disappointment from the exciting anticipation stage. The expectation far exceeded the actual event. I suppose that is because we still live in a broken and sinful world.

However, when we begin to consider all the exciting things yet to come for the believer, the opposite will actually occur. The anticipation stage won't hold a candle to the reality itself! The Apostle Paul addressed this in his letter to the Corinthians:

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

In the midst of an increasingly difficult time to stay encouraged and upbeat, I can hear our Lord saying, *“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.”* (Colossians 3:2)

So, for the next 21 days, let's consider several of the various promises our God has already given us in His word. Exciting things we can definitely anticipate! In many ways, gifts waiting to be unwrapped. Let's get started...can't wait!

Day 1: The Gift...Flight via the Rapture

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Wow! Can you get your head wrapped around this next event (gift to be unwrapped) on God's calendar?

What a sweet gift of comfort and excitement! In 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, we are told this will occur with such rapidity that it will be "in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye."

To better understand this passage, consider the following:

1. This passage is written to believers.
2. The assuredness of the rapture is as certain as the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord.
3. We need not grieve the passing of fellow Christians as the world grieves, for we have this hope. Do we still grieve? Yes, but not at all like the world grieves who have no certainties to hold onto.
4. We know the sequence of these events: 1) The dead in Christ rise first. Their physical bodies reunite with their souls already in the presence of the Lord.
2) Those of us alive will be caught up to meet them in the air.
5. The Latin word for "caught up" is "rapturo" from which we derive our English word rapture.
6. The trumpet call of God signals us home. We will without doubt hear our Lord's call!

If this all seems a bit far-fetched to you, then it's time to be reminded afresh of who your God is. He seems to love the outlandish and nothing is impossible with Him!

Challenge: Spend at least a few minutes today contemplating this exciting event soon to come! We will literally get to defy gravity and be gone! Because this could happen at any moment, is there someone who needs to hear the gospel today? Give them a call.

Prayer: Father, as the Day draws nearer, may I be found faithfully serving while expectantly listening for Your trumpet blast! I can't wait!

Day 2: The Gift...Sight

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.”

1 Corinthians 13:12

I find it fascinating that we're delivered this incredible nugget (gift to be unwrapped) buried in what Bible scholars call "The Love Chapter." Certainly seeing our Lord face to face is implied after the rapture of the church into glory, but in the context of 1 Corinthians 13 it seems odd.

Love. We throw this word around so carelessly. We love Grandma while we also love hot dogs! Yet, in this passage we are taught the following truths:

1. No spiritual gift has value if not used in tandem with love.
2. Love will never end. Don't you "love" that picture? We will continue to feel and express love in heaven.
3. When "the Perfect comes," we will finally get it. The questions and doubts that cloud our minds will be made perfectly clear.
4. When we see our Lord face to face, we will know fully as He already fully knows us.
5. How? It's simple. God is love. (1 John 4:16) When we look upon the Divine Face of Love we will know we are fully loved and we will fully love. Him. Our faith becomes sight.

Until that day, we are given the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22). Therefore, we can love others in the power of God in us. We may not fully understand it, but we can most certainly do it!

Challenge: Who do you need to express God's love to today?

Prayer: Father, forgive me all the times I have taken Your love for granted. Forgive me for those times I have not allowed Your Holy Spirit to love others through me. Fill me with Your love as I await that moment I finally see You face to face!

Day 3: The Gift...New Clothes

Read: Revelation 3:5, 4:1-6a

Okay, I'll be the first to admit it. I love a new outfit! I love the hunt (shopping), the find, and mostly, wearing it. Sorry guys, this one might be better suited (no pun intended) for the female audience, but perhaps you can still appreciate the feeling that putting on new clothes brings.

Remember the passage in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, this change of clothes happens "*in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye.*" The trumpet blast and the new apparel all occur simultaneously! In flight.

Our need for pure and clean raiment goes all the way back to the garden (Genesis 3). What is it Adam and Eve immediately do after sinning against the Lord? That's right, they grab a fig leaf to try and clothe themselves. They could no more cover up their sin than we can. Notice that a blameless sacrifice was needed to rightly clothe them. Yes, there is a complete lesson in and of itself here, but I will move on.

Romans 13:14 says, "*clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ*" (NIV). The moment we give our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ and accept the ultimate gift of salvation, we are clothed in Jesus and at the moment the trumpet blasts from heaven, our faith becomes sight and we will be rightly dressed for the occasion to come. Actually we will be righteously dressed. There simply are not adequate words for the enormous cost of this new outfit!

*"For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin,
so that in Him we might become the righteousness
of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21*

Challenge: Have you accepted the Lord's gift of salvation or are you still trying to fig-leaf your way through life?

Prayer: Oh Lord, thank you for your gift of salvation and the adornment of Your righteousness. A perfect fit!

Day 4: The Gift...Crowns

Read: Revelation 4:1-4, 9-11

If you haven't yet figured it out, it would appear that those twenty-four elders are the raptured redeemed. Us. In Revelation 4, we have already received our crowns and are immediately casting them before the throne of our Lord.

In this passage we are not told how we received our crowns, but it clearly happens right after the rapture. However, there are plenty of other Bible passages that further explain these rewards. So, we'll actually take a couple of days to look at some of the various ways we are guaranteed some incredible headwear.

Read: 1 Thessalonians 2:19

One of our crowns will be given based upon other people. People we have had the honor and privilege to lead to Christ.

Read: 2 Timothy 4:8

Revealed here is a crown for those who have "loved His appearing."

Read: Revelation 2:10

There will be a crown for those who remain faithful. No matter what. Even unto death. A crown for all those martyred for the sake of Christ.

Challenge: Don't just close this one up today without some honest self-evaluation. Are you actively leading others to Christ? Are you truly excited for the return of Christ? Are you determined to remain faithful? No matter what!

Prayer: Father, forgive me for so often falling short of my calling. May Your Holy Spirit rise up within me so I am always ready to lead someone to You. May I remain faithful to Your calling upon my life. Please help me want what You want and love how You love! Until You call me home! I pray, I can't wait!

Day 5: The Gift...More Crowns

Read: Revelation 4:1-4, 9-11

Yesterday we began the dialogue of the crowns the Lord will present to us as a reward for our faithful service to Him in the here and now. Today we'll consider a few more areas of our lives that are important enough to our Lord to promise us rewards yet to come.

Read: Matthew 10:40-42 & Hebrews 6:10

We will clearly be rewarded for how we treat and serve others in our lives.

Read: Matthew 5:11-12 & 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Our reward is great when we suffer for the cause and name of our Lord. Our crowns will be "*an eternal weight of glory.*" That's pure gold. One heavy crown!

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:25-27

We will be rewarded for how we "run the race" of our lives. Are we good stewards of all God has given us or not? A steward is merely a manager.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul writes, "*For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ.*" These words written to Christians reveal that the believer will one day stand before the Lord. This is not to determine entrance into heaven, that's already determined in our earthly lives before our death or the rapture.

The purpose of the Judgment Seat of Christ is to reward the believer for a faithfully lived life on earth. Space prohibits me from sharing more, but there are more verses out there regarding our rewards. The Lord addresses the use of our spiritual gift(s), how we use our time and money, how effectively we control the old nature. Eternity will reveal whether we have been a faithful steward or not. It's exciting just to think about these crowns yet to come!

Challenge: In what ways are you serving and managing your time and resources wisely for the Lord? Do you need to make some scheduling changes to ensure your good management?

Prayer: Father, thank you for the myriad of earthly blessings you bestow on me every day. Help me be wise and faithful with all you've given me.

Day 6: The Gift...Worship

Read: Revelation 4:9-11, 5:6-14

Worship. This is what we have been created for. In speaking to the woman at the well Jesus said, *“the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”* (John 4:23-24)

Our worship in the here and now is about our heart. It’s not at all about the setting, the music (or lack thereof), or even the people around us. As we worship in spirit and in truth, our worship should be completely unhindered and authentic.

True worship occurs when I allow my spirit to commune with the Holy Spirit in me to bow in humble adoration of the One who gave His life for me. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. We worship the Jesus of scripture.

As I envision the scenes in Revelation where we are worshipping our Lord, it appears that there will at last be nothing to hinder or mar this natural response to seeing our Lord face to face in all of His splendor!

If I’m being honest, my sweetest moments of worship, to date with my Lord, have occurred when He and I were all alone. In those moments I do not feel judgment of others, and there are less distractions around me. I can truly place all of my focus on my Redeemer and Lord.

The beauty of this anticipatory worship yet to come is that we are all together from every tribe and language and people and nation, bowing in unison to rightfully worship the Lamb who was slain, who alone is worthy! Alone with my Lord, yet all together. Wow!

Challenge: How often do you spend worshipping our Lord in the here and now? Determine how to make this happen more often in your life. The more you look into the word of truth and see your Lord high and lifted up, the more often you will naturally bow before Him in spirit and in truth.

Prayer: Father, forgive me for allowing my days to be so full and at times so self-consumed that I do not take time to see You in the word and naturally bow before you. I long to be ready to join the redeemed choir around Your throne in glory. Can’t imagine! Can’t wait!

Day 7: The Gift...Meeting Saints Gone Before

Read: Hebrews 12:1-2

I absolutely love the picture our Lord gives to us in this passage. Hebrews 11 just recounted the faith-filled lives of 18 Old Testament saints by name. Many more than that are alluded to. It is those great saints gone before who now make up that great cloud of witnesses.

Clearly in this context the writer is encouraging those of us still alive on earth living out our lives of faith. Can you hear them cheering you on? They fought the fight and now are in that heavenly bandstand cheering us on to our own victory!

Just think about it, we will spend eternity getting acquainted and hanging out (I assume Abraham hangs out) with millions of incredible brothers and sisters in the family of God. Which ones are you most excited to meet?

I kind of envision our Lord and Savior doing the introductions. "Cari, meet Mary." We'll spend time as I share my thoughts on their lives recorded in scripture while they fill in the blanks. Then they'll share moments when they were cheering me on from the great cloud.

But every conversation will most likely take a turn from sharing our stories to considering and worshipping the "Founder and Perfecter" of our faith. Our Lord! And the party will never end. It will never grow old!

Challenge: Read through Hebrews 11-12:1-2 and be encouraged afresh to remain faithful to our Lord. For "*without faith it is impossible to please Him.*"

Prayer: Oh Lord, help me live a faith-filled life. A life pleasing in Your sight. Give me a fresh glimpse of the great cloud of witnesses cheering me on while my eyes never leave You, The Author and Perfecter of my faith.

Day 8: The Gift...Betrothal & A New Home

Read: Matthew 25:1-13, John 14:1-3

All throughout the New Testament Christ refers to the church as the Bride of Christ. The parable given in Matthew 25 is a picture of the betrothal period. To better understand these passages, I did some research on the ancient traditional Jewish wedding. The engagement would consist of two parts: 1) Kiddushin 2) Nisuin

During the Kiddushin period, the bride is set aside to belong to the groom and no other. At this time the groom goes away to prepare a home for his bride. Jewish Rabbi's refer to Kiddushin as sanctified or consecrated. Let that soak in.

Nisuin is the second part of the betrothal. This word actually means to lift up or elevate. It would always be the groom's father who determined when the groom could call his bride home. It would be a surprise. Consequently, the bride was to be ready.

Out of curiosity, I looked up the word "ready" out of our reading today and discovered this word to be both a noun and a verb. As a noun, we are ready if we are "in Christ," a "believer." When I gave my heart and life to Jesus Christ as an 11 year- old girl, I was ready. As a verb, it is something I do. Am I diligently growing in the Lord? Am I choosing to live in obedience and faith with my Lord?

We're still in the Kiddushin phase of our betrothal. Our Lord has gone away to prepare a beautiful place for us to live forever with Him. When the Father decides, we'll be summoned home. Caught up (dare I say elevated) to meet Him in the skies.

Somewhere back in time. Really before time began, God the Father asked our Lord, "Do You take (fill in your name) to be Yours?" And our Lord replied, "I Do."

Challenge: Are you ready should the Lord return today? Romans 10:9 says, *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Prayer: Thank you Lord for Your gift of salvation, eternal life, and a home to come with You. I'm ready.

Day 9: The Gift...Wedding Day

Read: Revelation 19:6-9

Wedding Day. Definitely a day to anticipate. From the time my husband proposed until our wedding day occurred, nearly one year passed. At one point during that year I felt I simply could wait no longer and asked my parents if we could move up the date. They said “No.” Nonetheless, the day finally arrived and I had spent an entire year preparing for the big day.

For the New Testament believer, we have a wedding date on God’s calendar. Here in Revelation, the day has finally arrived! We’ve been summoned home, received our rewards, spent much time in worship, and met so many of the guests. During this time, the Lord has poured out His judgments upon the earth, is victorious, and ready for the wedding.

As a bride, one of the most important components of a wedding day is the dress. This day will be no different. We’ll be dressed in fine linen, bright and pure. The dress of fine linen will represent the righteous deeds I’ve done for my Lord.

Do not be confused, we are only at this wedding by the grace of God. “*God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*” (2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV). At the wedding of the Lamb, our attire seems to vary, reflecting the choices we made on earth to live lives of righteousness. Once we are a part of this family, we are expected to act like it!

2 Peter 3:14 says, “*Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace.*” I looked up the word “diligent.” Here is the definition:

Earnest, energetic, painstaking worker, consistent, self-disciplined.

Do those words describe your day-to-day life? My mom used to say, “be careful how you live. You don’t want to show up for the wedding in a mini skirt when there’s a dress with a long flowing train to be worn.” Good motherly advice and good theology.

Challenge: Are you making concrete godly choices in your everyday life? Righteous choices reflective of who you are in Christ? It’s time to say yes. To the dress.

Prayer: Father, forgive me for being so consumed at times with the here and the now. Lead me to live my life diligently. For You. Until You call me home. I hope it’s soon!

Day 10: The Gift...A White Horse

Read: Revelation 19:11-16

I am neither an equestrian nor a soldier. However, the day will come when I will ride a beautiful white horse following my Lord into battle. This will truly be a Good vs. Evil War. Of course it's hardly an actual war. Jesus speaks and it's game over.

Did you notice that none of us are carrying any weapons into this battle? The only needed weapon is that sharp sword proceeding out of the mouth of our Lord.

Hebrews 4:12 says, *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”* When the Lord speaks, it is done!

The Apostle John said, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* (John 1:1) In Revelation Jesus is called “The Word of God.” In Ephesians 6, Paul tells us to pick up the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God

All too often we forget the power of the scripture we hold! We leave it on the shelf unstudied, unread, unmemorized and then actually wonder why our lives are so powerless.

Brothers and sisters, may we treasure, study, love, devour, and obey the sharp sword proceeding from the mouth of our Savior! Let's begin afresh to live lives of victory. In the Word!

Challenge: Determine to dedicate time every day to study, read, memorize, and obey the Word of God. It is the part of our Lord we actually can see and touch. Our faith need not be blind.

Prayer: Father, thank you for reminding me afresh who You are! Faithful, True, Word of God, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Keep my eyes and ears completely on You!

P.S. I am kind of excited to be an equestrian in eternity. Hmm. There's never any dull moments with you Lord!

Day 11: The Gift...A Place in the Kingdom

Read: Revelation 20:1-6, Isaiah 24:21-23

Following the 2nd Coming of our Lord, Satan will be bound for 1000 years. During this time Jesus Christ will set up His earthly kingdom.

In today's reading we are given only a few details of this time period to come. Many of the Old Testament prophets were given incredible nuggets regarding the Millennial Reign of Christ. We will look at a few of those in the days to come.

For today, let's consider what we do know from this passage:

1. The Lord Jesus will literally set up an earthly kingdom that will last for 1000 years.
2. Satan will be bound for 1000 years.
3. We, the believers, will reign with Christ for those 1000 years.
4. All believers, of all time, are blessed to participate in the 1st resurrection.
5. For us, the believer, the 2nd death has no power.

For those reasons alone, we should stop and thank our Lord and Savior! No, we cannot get our heads fully around this 1000-year period of time. But God is not a man that He should lie (Numbers 23:19). Consequently, whether I can fully get it or not does not nullify the truth.

For a literal 1000 years we will live on earth with Christ in our resurrected bodies sharing in responsibilities of the kingdom.

At present, we are called to be Ambassadors for Christ, going into all the world spreading the gospel message of salvation.

It's possible our charge during this millennial reign of Christ will be similar. May we be found faithful today in our calling for soon we will hear our Lord say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Master.*" (Matthew 25:23)

Challenge: Do you live daily aware of your calling and charge? Are you being faithful today with what God has entrusted to you in the here and now?

Prayer: Father, may I be found faithful over all you've given to me. May I be bold to proclaim the gospel truth today. Thy kingdom come!

Day 12: The Gift...Kingdom Peace

Read: Isaiah 2:2-4

Imagine a world dominated by righteousness and goodness, a world where there is no injustice, where no court ever renders an unjust verdict, and where everyone is treated fairly. Imagine a world where what is true, right, and noble marks every aspect of life, including interpersonal relations, commerce, education, and government. Imagine a world where there is complete, total, enforced, and permanent peace, where joy abounds and good health prevails, so much so that people live for hundreds of years. Imagine a world where the curse is removed, where the environment is restored to the pristine purity of the Garden of Eden, where peace reigns even in the animal kingdom, so that *“the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them”* (Isa. 11:6). Imagine a world ruled by a perfect, glorious Ruler, who instantly and firmly deals with sin. Humanly speaking, that description may seem far-fetched, a utopian fantasy that could never be reality. Yet it accurately describes conditions during the future earthy kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹

Our Lord and Savior will reign on the throne of David from Jerusalem. The twelve apostles will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Both the church-age and tribulation saints will rule over the Gentiles (Revelation 5:10, 7:13-15). During these 1000 years our Lord, both physically and spiritually will reign. We will be privileged to be right there with Him!

“And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; His kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.” Daniel 7:27

Challenge: Worship your Lord. Today. Do not wait until tomorrow.

Prayer: My Lord, I wait expectantly for that day. A day when all will travel to Mount Zion and be taught by You. Wow!

¹ John MacArthur, *Revelation 12-22: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2000), Rev. 20:1

Day 13: The Gift...Kingdom Joy

Read: Isaiah 65:18-25

Earthly Jerusalem will be restored. The heavens and earth will be restored from man's abuse and the tribulation judgments. Many aspects of the curse will be reversed. People will live to a great age, but death will still occur. Animals will revert back to vegetarianism and no longer fear man. Mankind will enjoy the fruit of their labors. Israel will finally inhabit the Promised Land fully. Nations will no longer be at war. All disagreements will be judged by the Lord Himself!

Now comes the most difficult part to grasp. There will be many born during this 1000-year era who will yet reject Jesus Christ and His gift of salvation. Remember, Satan is still bound. They cannot blame him. This speaks volumes of the depravity and selfish, sin-filled nature of mankind. Apart from the atoning work of Jesus on the cross, man is lost. Utterly lost! A near perfect world will not change that.

I am so thankful that as an 11-year old young girl, I knelt by my bed and asked Jesus to forgive me of my sin and shame. I asked Him to be my Lord and Savior. At that moment I went from darkness into light. I was utterly lost, but now I can see.

I love the words of the old hymn Amazing Grace. Sit back and let these words be yours today.

Amazing grace—how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come,
Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.²

Challenge: Are you certain you have accepted the Lord's gift of salvation? If not, do not delay another moment. Confess your sin and receive Him today!

Prayer: Apart from You, Lord, I have nothing. Thank you for your gift of salvation. Thank you that now I see! Utter joy!

²John Newton, 1725-1807, From Carrell & Clayton's Virginia Harmony, 1831, Arr. By Norman Johnson, 1928

Day 14: The Gift...A New Home

Read: Revelation 21:1-3, 10-21

To date, my husband and I have lived in 8 different homes. This over the course of our 38-year marriage. I always wanted a new home, but in each instance the Lord led us to a “fixer-upper.” This was before Chip and Joanna Gaines made it chic.

But the day is coming when my Groom will usher me into an incredible new home, made just for me. This home will never grow old or need repair!

This beautiful residence for the Bride of Christ appears to be 1400 miles cubed (2 million square miles). Streets of pure gold, foundations of costly gems, the walls of jasper (diamonds), and the gates into my home will be solid pearl. All will radiate the glory of God! Never a power outage there.

Regarding these gates of pearl, J. Vernon McGee writes:

“Each gate is a perfect pearl. This is the one jewel that sets forth the church. The pearl is different from all other precious gems, for instead of coming from the earth, the pearl comes from the sea and it comes from a living organism. A little grain of sand or some other particle begins to cut into the side of a living organism. To protect itself, the organism sends out a fluid to coat the object. Layer upon layer coats it until a beautiful pearl is formed.

The New Jerusalem is the home of the Church, and the gates of pearl are there to remind us throughout eternity that we were a little grain of sharp, dirty sand that was a hurt in the side of Christ. We were not attractive; we were in rebellion against God, walking according to the course of this world. But Christ took that ugly thing—which was you—and covered it with His righteousness. The beauty was not in the grain of sand, but in what the organism puts around it. We have no value in ourselves, yet we are the pearl of great price. Christ gave His life to get us, and to Him we are precious.” ¹

Challenge: Read Matthew 13:45. The price for our new home, beyond our reach. A gift.

Prayer: Once again, O Lord, there are no adequate words to convey my heartfelt love and appreciation for You! As the ancient Hymn records, “O come, O come, Emmanuel.” ²

¹J. Vernon McGee, *Reveling Through Revelation*, pp. 101, 102

²John M. Neele, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, 12th Century

Day 15: The Gift...Happily Ever After

Read: Revelation 21:3-4

I didn't cry for over 20 years. Not for lack of sorrow and no, I'm not exaggerating. Yes, I have attempted to psycho-analyze myself, but at the end of the day, it was mostly about control. Over the course of time, I built up quite the impenetrable wall around my heart. Here's the bitter pill to swallow for all my fellow wall-builders: when we hold all the negative emotions of life at bay, we will also inevitably hold off all positive emotions of life. We cease to feel.

Thankfully, my Lord simply loved me too much to allow me to live any longer in that pitiful state. The day did come when the wall came tumbling down. My first tears in years were over the obvious—my sin, my shame, my pride. At times I felt the tears would never end, but when they did my Lord was ever-faithful, and for the first time in a long time I felt the emotions of love, joy, peace....

Here's the bottom line. We live in a fallen, broken, messy world that is chock-full of pain and hurt and sorrow. Our Lord needs us to "feel" it. Not because He doesn't love us, but because He does love us and He has a job for us to do. He chose to enter into our broken, messed-up world to redeem us out of it. In order for me to grow, to be more like Him, to love others like He loves, I needed to feel some of that pain and hurt He endured for me. I also needed to feel His loving embrace!

Here's the anticipatory part: The day is coming when our Redeemer will call us home and wipe every tear from our eyes. He will eliminate death, pain, sorrow, and tears! A true happily ever after! Oh, it's comin'!

In the meantime, cry out to your Lord. *"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."* (Psalm 147:3) *"Weeping may tarry for the night but joy comes with the morning."* (Psalm 30:5)

Challenge: Read Isaiah 53 and be reminded afresh of what our Savior endured for us!

Prayer: Until that day when you wipe those tears from my eyes Lord, may every tear I cry and every hurt I feel be for You. Until these things finally pass away, thank you that I can cry out to You. Just a taste of heaven to come!

Day 16: The Gift...Our Inheritance

Read: Ephesians 1:3-14

Webster defines inheritance as: An acquisition of a possession of value by transmission from parent to child.

In an earthly sense, when a child is born or adopted into a royal or wealthy family, that child immediately begins to enjoy the bounty of just being a part of that family. Not until the parents are gone does the child have access to the entire inheritance.

Our spiritual lives are quite similar to that. When we are born again into God's royal family, we immediately begin to enjoy the daily gifts of just being a member of that family.

Here in Ephesians 1 we are reminded of our inheritance to come and given a glimpse of what that entails. We are able to enjoy, in part, what we one day will have full access to. Consider Paul's list here:

1. Blessed – We are pronounced happy.
2. Chosen – We are selected.
3. Predestined – God determined in advance.
4. Adopted – A legal part of the family.
5. Redeemed – We have been ransomed.
6. Forgiven – We have received a pardon.
7. Rich in wisdom & insight – Wealthy in mental action and discernment.
8. Sealed with the Holy Spirit – Secure in our Lord.

The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of more to come. We would be rich indeed if we only had God's mercy in this life, but there is more—so much more still to come!

O child of God, do you realize how very rich you are? Do you live daily in the knowledge and assurance of the family to which you now belong? The apostle Paul begins this letter with a sweet reminder of who we are in Christ. He finishes out this letter reminding the believers what our lives should subsequently look like. We are a part of God's family. Let's begin to act like it.

Challenge: Read the rest of Ephesians and be reminded what our lives in Christ should look like. Each new day we should resemble our Father more than the day before.

Prayer: My Father, give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation and knowledge of You. May the eyes of my heart be opened that I might fully know who You are and the glorious inheritance to come. Empower me to live as the child of God I am.

Day 17: The Gift...Water of Life

Read: Revelation 21:5-7

The human body can last approximately 3-5 days without water. After that, the organs will begin to shut down. The latest statistic says that 29% of the world's population does not have safe or fresh drinking water.

But the day is coming when our Lord makes all things new and this will no longer be the case. For those who conquer will be provided the Water of Life that will literally flow from the throne of God and the Lamb!

When speaking to the woman at the well, Jesus spoke of this water. *“Whoever drinks of this water that I give him will never be thirsty again.”* (John 4:14)

When we accept the salvation our Lord is offering, we are promised that eternal Living Water. Once again, we get a taste today of that refreshing water of life. In heaven, our cup will never run dry.

Jeremiah 2:13 reads, *“For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”*

In what ways are people still hewing out their own cisterns? Every time one places their trust in anything or anyone but Jesus, they are guilty of that very thing. It takes very little time to realize that our own devices are broken, cracked, and do not hold water.

Who is it who will be refreshed by this eternal Water of Life? Those who conquer. Who are those that conquer? The overcomers. Who are the overcomers? 1 John 5:4 tells us it is *“the one who believes Jesus is the Son of God.”*

“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High, God is in her midst; she shall not be moved.” Psalm 46:4-5a

Challenge: Have you placed your trust in Jesus Christ alone or are you still relying on your own cistern to save you? Trust the Living Water today. There's no need to ever be thirsty again.

Prayer: Forgive me Father for foolishly relying upon my own cisterns time and time again. May I wholly trust in You. Alone. The only One. Truly satisfying. Truly refreshing. Truly eternal.

Day 18: The Gift...The Tree of Life

Read: Genesis 3:22-24, Revelation 22:1-2

The Tree of Life. After Genesis 3, we read nothing about this tree until Revelation. Here in the New Heaven and New Earth, it returns.

It appears along the banks of the River of Life. It gives forth a different fruit each month (we learn additional fun nuggets there), and its leaves are for healing. The Greek word for healing is translated into our English word therapeutic. Do not misunderstand this part and presume we will still have sickness in heaven. We will not. Rather, we will enjoy year-round perpetual health.

For those of you experiencing chronic pain, or fighting disease, or fraught with physical ailments, the day is coming when it will end!

Just as Genesis describes the beginning of our present order of life, Revelation gives us a glimpse into the eternal and perfect order yet to come. So much to anticipate.

Genesis

Creation of heaven & earth (1:1)

Start of Satan's tyranny on earth (3:1-7)

Entrance of sin (3:1-7)

Creation cursed (3:17-19)

Tree of Life forbidden (3:24b)

Death is certain (2:17, 5:5)

Sorrow enters our lives (3:16-19)

Revelation

Creation of new heaven & new earth (21:1)

The end of Satan (20:10)

Sin banished (21:27)

The curse removed (22:3)

Access to Tree of Life restored (22:2)

Death is no more (21:4)

Sorrow is removed (21:4)

Challenge: Reread Genesis 3 and Revelation 22 and be encouraged by God's Word today!

Prayer: Thank you Father that You chose not to be done with us because of our sinful pride, but rather You have offered us hope, salvation, and one day, perpetual health! Can't wait to eat this fruit!

Day 19: The Gift...Rest

Read: Revelation 22:1-5

Now for those of you who really know me, you know how much I love to sleep. I'm that early to bed, 10 hours a night, and a nap in between girl. Go ahead, you can judge me. I used to feel guilty about my need for so much sleep until I read of Winston Churchill's similar need. I'm apparently in good company. Nonetheless, I digress. Whenever I read that there will be no night in heaven, I found myself unsure of this as a good thing. That's my favorite time every day.

So I needed to delve a little deeper to figure out how this is heavenly. My discoveries are, in fact, blessings we can surely anticipate:

1. We won't need to sleep in heaven. Our bodies will no longer be cursed and require restorative sleep.
2. For many, night represents darkness and the time much evil is perpetrated. In this regard, there will be no night. No need to fear. Ever. Again.
3. The presence of God is our true source of health, happiness, and rest. We will literally live it 24/7.
4. My work in heaven will be enjoyable and pleasurable rather than depleting, tiring, and exhausting.

Hebrews 4 gives us a glimpse into God's rest. For the believer, we have already entered into God's rest. The word "rest" in this passage is "katapausis." It means "abode." Our heavenly abode is rest. The whole thing. Rest!

There will be no more striving, sweating, fighting to succeed, no more pressure. Will we work? Yes. And it will be restful! That, my friend, sounds delightful!

Challenge: Hebrews 4 is actually a warning for us to not harden our hearts and miss out on God's rest. Be certain today that Jesus is your Lord and Savior. Enter into His rest.

Prayer: O Lord, thank you for times of earthly rest this side of glory and thank you for the hope of my heavenly abode to come! Seems made just for me!

Day 20: The Gift...Jesus

Read: Isaiah 9:6-7

The prophet Isaiah was given this incredible prophecy of Jesus Christ nearly 700 years before our Lord's birth at Bethlehem.

What was not clear to many of the Old Testament saints was the gap in time located in this passage. There is a time lapse between when the child would be born (His first advent) and when the government will be upon His shoulder (this refers to His second advent).

Our Lord came the first time as a young babe born to the virgin Mary. He came humbly to save mankind. When He comes the next time, He will come as King of kings and Lord of lords. There will be no doubt as to who He is! With the same certainty that He came two thousand years ago you can be certain He will come again.

As we celebrate His first advent today, be certain you are prepared for His next coming. He truly is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Of His rule there will be no end!

We do not know when this second advent will occur but we definitely know the how.

“The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

Our loving Lord is quite zealous. For you!

Challenge: Bow today before the Lord. In true humility and with utter gratitude. And Merry Christmas!

Prayer: Lord, at times Your ways are simply too much to grasp, but I've no doubt You are our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. We celebrate You today!

Day 21: The Gift...Service

Read: 2 Peter 3:8-18

We've spent 21 days together, contemplating 21 incredible gifts we can anticipate. Thank you for taking this journey with me. However, it must be noted that God gives us much more instruction regarding our lives today than He gives regarding our future home with Him. Why? I'd suggest because He loves us so much and He knows that our choices today will impact our future.

When our world is such a mess and at times the devastation overwhelming, why does our Lord tarry? Because He is not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance and salvation.

Do we have much to look forward to? Yes. But while we wait we are instructed to be faithfully serving and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Peter says we are to be diligent. One more time, here is the definition:

Diligent; earnest, energetic, painstaking worker, consistent, self-disciplined.

Do these words describe your life? In what concrete ways are you choosing to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord? Is your service for the Lord diligent? God's calling on our lives to serve is, in fact, a gift. My greatest joys in the here and now are when I serve. We have a spiritual gift, we have resources, and mostly we have the indwelling Holy Spirit in us. No more excuses. Let's be found serving when our Lord finally calls us home.

Challenge: Consider your daily schedule. In what ways are you choosing to faithfully serve while you wait for our Lord's return? Do not waste another day. Stay strong. Be encouraged. Make changes that reflect your heart of love for our Lord and others. *"The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all."* Amen (Revelation 22:20)

Prayer: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon'. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:21) Can't wait!

21-Day Devotions

To participate in the 21-day devotions throughout 2021,
do one of the following:

Option 1: Scan the QR where the devotions will post each
day and save it as a shortcut on your phone.



Option 2: Sign up to receive text reminders which includes
a link to the daily devotion.

- Text **devo21** to 94000.
- Enter your name and email. You will receive a “successfully subscribed” message. To see the devotion each day, simply click the link in the text.
- **Note:** there is a 7-day break between each set of 21-day devotions. There will be no texts sent during that week.

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