THE Easter CODE

7-DAY SAMPLER

O. S. Hawkins

THE Easter CODE

A 40-DAY
JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

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O. S. Hawkins

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INTRODUCTION

Ash Wednesday begins the Lenten season for millions of professing Christians around the world. It is marked by a period of self-denial during which adherents, for the forty days leading up to the celebration of Easter, will endeavor to "give up" something for God. Many observers believe that "giving something up" for Lent is the path to pleasing God. But the Bible clearly teaches that grace can never be earned, for it is the "gift of God, not of works" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

The Easter Code is a call to freedom during the days of Lent. As we focus on repentance of sin and consecration of ourselves afresh and anew to God, it is a reminder that this is a 365-day-a-year discipline, and not simply a 40-day period of testing. We are called to a lifestyle of dedication and discipline. Remember: we are cleansed and made pure only through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, not through any feeble attempt of our own to please a holy God. While fasting, abstinence, and self-denial are worthy goals for all believers, they can never bring us into favor

with God apart from His unmerited grace upon us. Salvation is not about guilt. It is all about grace!

In the pages of devotions that follow, we will be walking with Jesus along the journey to Jerusalem. Matthew records, "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that *He must go to Jerusalem*, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised on the third day" (Matthew 16:21, emphasis added). Along this journey with Jesus we will be visiting *places* He went, *people* with whom He spoke, *parables* He told along the way, *promises* He left for all posterity, and the powerful and expressive *prayers* He offered.

The journey to Jerusalem culminates on a Roman cross outside the city walls of Jerusalem, but it doesn't end there! This is why in our evangelical world we do not use the symbol of the crucifix but always an empty cross to signify that death and the grave could not hold Jesus down. He arose, the ever-living Lord and Savior.

While traditional Lenten devotionals omit the Sundays from Ash Wednesday to Easter and consist of forty devotions, *The Easter Code* consists of forty-two, including Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, with its promise of the second chance. Each devotion contains a devotional thought, a "code word" for the

day, a Scripture, and a daily prayer. The code word helps unlock the blessing of each day's reading. Write it down, keep it with you, and ponder its meaning. Claim the Scripture as your very own, climb upon it, and stand there throughout the day. Make the daily prayer a part of your own walk with Christ as you repeat it often.

Now it is time to begin this great adventure of walking with Christ daily . . . on our own "journey to Jerusalem"!

ASH WEDNESDAY

As we journey through this day in the normal traffic patterns of our lives, we will see men and women with ashes in the form of a cross on their foreheads. It is a visible reminder on this Ash Wednesday that "dust [we] are, and to dust [we] shall return" (Genesis 3:19). Today begins a period of fasting and self-denial. It is a good reminder that the only way to please God is not by what we do—or refrain from doing—but by accepting His gracious offer of forgiveness made possible through Christ's shed blood on the cross.

Salvation is God's work, not our work. "For by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:8a). Our salvation begins with Jesus—not with us. It is not His response to any good works we may do or evil works from which we've refrained. Salvation is provided for us wholly because of His grace, His unmerited favor toward you and me. The Father did not send His only Son to die for our sins because we kept begging and pleading for Him to do so. It was by His grace alone.

Salvation is God's work in God's way, not our way. It is "through faith . . . not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8b). I want to shout those words on this Ash Wednesday—"Through faith . . . not of yourselves . . . not of works!" No amount of doing

good deeds or abstaining from certain pleasures can earn God's favor. Salvation is wholly by grace, through our faith in Christ alone . . . God's gift to us.

CODE WORD: DONE

No matter what you do or don't do, or what you give or give up, your salvation is not spelled D-O but D-O-N-E! Today remember that Christ paid a huge price to redeem you. It is already done! Your part is to receive this gift by faith.

A PASSION PROCLAMATION

[It is] not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.

Titus 3:5

Lord, thank You for giving me what I never deserved—grace! And for Your mercy in not giving me what I do deserve. No wonder we call it "amazing grace"! In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 1: THURSDAY

Repentance has become one of the forgotten words in our English vocabulary. Yet it was the message of all the prophets. It was the message John the Baptist preached in the Jordan Valley. It was the message of Jesus as He commenced His ministry, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). It was the message that birthed the church at Pentecost and the message of all the apostles. The Lenten season begins with a call to repent for each of us.

But what really is behind this word? Repentance is not remorse, being sorry for our sin. The rich young ruler went away "sorrowful" but didn't repent (Matthew 19:16–22). It is not simply regret, wishing that some moment could be lived over again. Pilate washed his hands, regretting his evil deed, but he didn't repent (Matthew 27:24). Repentance is not reform, that is, trying to turn over a new leaf. Judas reformed by returning the silver coins of betrayal but didn't repent (Matthew 27:3).

Repentance emerges from a Greek word meaning "to change one's mind," which results in a change of will, which in turn results in a change of action. While repentance begins with a change of mind, the real proof will be found in a change of attitude and action.

CODE WORD: CHANGE

Begin today to change your mind about your *sin*. It is not some vice to be laughed off. Sin is so serious it necessitated the cross. Also change your mind about your *self*. You cannot please God through self-righteousness. Finally, change your mind about your *Savior*. Jesus is not just some teacher or prophet, but He is God, who clothed Himself in human flesh and gave Himself for you.

A PASSION PROCLAMATION

Repent . . . , that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Acts 3:16

Lord, I can't excuse my sin by claiming everyone else is doing it, nor can I minimize it by asserting it is not as bad as someone else's. I confess: I have sinned against You, and I am wholly dependent on Your grace and mercy. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 2: FRIDAY

The essence of biblical repentance is beautifully embedded in the old and often-repeated story of the prodigal son. The young man found himself not only broke—having left his family home and spent his inheritance—but broken. While feeding swine in a pigpen, he actually longed for the husks they were eating, and he "came to himself" (Luke 15:17). This first step in the repentance process, this change of mind, brought about the second step, a change in his will, his volition. In the next verse he exclaimed, "I will arise and go to my father." Once his mind and will were changed, his actions were sure to follow. Thus we read, "He arose and came to his father" (v. 20).

Repentance is a change of mind. That is it! And how do we know that we have truly changed our minds? Our volition will be changed as well, and our changed actions—resulting in a new life direction—will follow as naturally as water running downhill.

Repentance and faith are inseparable, born at the same time. They are two sides of the same coin. Repentance alone will not get you to heaven, but you can't get there without it. No wonder Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

CODE WORD: PROBE

Ask God today to bring to the surface of your heart and mind that thing that displeases Him and for which you need to repent. Then change your mind about it, and your will and actions will follow.

A PASSION PROCLAMATION

Search me, O God, and know my heart . . .
See if there is any wicked way in me, and
lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalm 139:23–24

Lord, I am willing; I am willing to be made willing! Grant to me repentance and faith today. I throw myself upon Your mercy and stand in Your grace. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 3: SATURDAY

I love the way the apostle Paul framed the subject of repentance: "The goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Romans 2:4). Once, when our daughters were small, my wife and I rented a vacation home deep in the Smoky Mountains. That first night in that strange place was, as author and educator James Weldon Johnson put it, "blacker than a hundred midnights down in a cypress swamp"![1]

I was awakened in the middle of the night by the cries of our little seven-year-old at the top of the stairs. I bounded up the stairs to find her disoriented and scared in the darkness. I took her by the hand and led her down the stairs into the security of our own bed, where she soundly slept the rest of the night away.

And so it is that our dear Lord finds us in the night, often disoriented by the issues of life. He takes us by the hand, and, as the Bible says, His own goodness "leads [us] to repentance."

When all is said and done, what difference will it make if we drive luxury cars, eat vitamin-enriched foods, live in palatial homes, and are buried in mahogany caskets if we rise up in judgment to meet a God we do not know? Let His goodness take you by the hand today. He will lead you to repentance.

CODE WORD: HAND

It may be that for too long you have called all the shots. Put your hand in His hand today. Go ahead, do it. He will lead you to repentance.

A PASSION PROCLAMATION

The goodness of God leads you to repentance.

Romans 2:4

Lord, I am amazed at Your love for me. You are a good God, and I put my hand in Yours today. Lead me in the way I should go. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 4: MONDAY

The Bible says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Who is this "Word"? It is God Himself, stepping out of heaven, clothing Himself in human flesh, and physically invading human history. John leaves no doubt concerning this identity: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*" (John 1:1, emphasis added).

Jesus came down to where we are so that we could one day go to where He is! He came not clinging to the brightness of His glory, not shunning us for our sinful condition, but humbling Himself and taking on a garment of flesh. By doing so He can say to you and me, no matter our emotional condition, temptations, or pain, "I understand."

He "dwelt among us, . . . full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus is full of grace. Because of His sacrifice, we don't get what we deserve, and that is called grace. And He is full of truth. It is only when His grace leads us to know the truth that we are truly free.

But that is not all. "We beheld His glory" (John 1:14). Paul said it like this: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). Have you personally beheld His glory *in you*?

CODE WORD: CONDESCENSION

When Jesus came and took on flesh, it was one of the most amazing acts of condescension to be found anywhere at any time. As you think of this code word today, marvel at how much you mean to Him.

A PASSION PROCLAMATION

"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."

John 14:18 KJV

Lord, You humbled Yourself in coming to earth so I could go to heaven. And one day, because of Your marvelous grace, I can go to where You are because You came to where I am. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 5: TUESDAY

We had a really good start. Life began in a perfect paradise. The climate was never too warm and never too cold. We had no heartaches, no worries. We felt no aches or pains. We were doing wonderfully well—*until* we disobeyed and ate the forbidden fruit and were expelled from the garden.

The first evidence of this demise came when Adam and Eve saw "that they were naked" (Genesis 3:7). They had been naked all along, but not until sin came did they take their eyes off God and put them on themselves. This is always what sin does. Before, God had been the center of their attention and devotion. Sin entered the picture, and their focus became centered squarely upon themselves.

Their first impulse? Grab some fig leaves and cover their nakedness. But God in His grace intervened because all the human mechanisms we use to try and cover our sin never suffice. He took an innocent little animal, killed it, and covered Adam and Eve with its skin. When that animal breathed its last breath, it became the first to know the expensive toll that sin takes on one's life.

God placed our first parents in a perfect paradise. We fell. God drove us out. And you and I have been trying to get back into His presence ever since. The

account begins with paradise lost in Genesis and ends with paradise regained in Revelation. Right now we are exiles from Eden. But we are making our way back home through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

CODE WORD: SACRIFICE

"Without [the] shedding of blood there is no remission [of sin]" (Hebrews 9:22). Just as a sacrificial animal covered the sins of Adam and Eve, so the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is the only covering for our own sin.

A PASSION PROCLAMATION

"The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."

John 6:37

Lord, I come to You now admitting I can do nothing in and of myself to cleanse my sin. I trust today in Your shed blood to cover me and cleanse me. Hosanna!

DAY 6: WEDNESDAY

The Old Testament conceals Christ. The New Testament reveals Him! And there is no more vivid and visual foreshadowing of His substitutionary sacrifice for your sin than is found in the account of Abraham's sacrifice of his own son Isaac (Genesis 22:1–14).

God had promised Abraham he would be the father of a great nation. There was only one problem: he and his wife were old, beyond childbearing age, and his wife, Sarah, had spent a lifetime unable to conceive (see Genesis 17). And then they got their miracle: Isaac was born!

This was all too quickly followed by a time of testing: "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love . . . and offer him . . . as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:2).

Along the journey up Mount Moriah, the lad asked, "Father, where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" Abraham responded in faith, "The Lord will provide the lamb" (paraphrase of Genesis 22:7–8)

In obedience to God, Abraham built the altar and placed his son upon it. And just at the right time God was faithful to His word: "Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram

caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day" (vv. 13–14).

CODE WORD: PICTURE

Today as you look at a picture on your desk or on your phone, let it be a reminder to you of this beautiful picture of Christ taking your place, dying your death, so you can live His life today!

A PASSION PROCLAMATION

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6

Lord, what You promise You are faithful to provide. Like Abraham, I wait in faith, believing You to do "exceeding abundantly above all" I might ask or think.[2] *In Jesus' name, amen.*

DAY 7: THURSDAY

On our journey to Jerusalem, we find another poignant picture of our coming Savior when we arrive at Exodus 12. One of the most important dates on the calendar of our Jewish friends is the evening they celebrate the Passover seder meal commemorating their freedom from death and deliverance from Egyptian bondage. God had sent a series of plagues on Egypt, where God's people were enslaved. The most devastating plague came on the night the death angel passed over every home in Egypt, bringing death to the firstborn of every family.

The Jews were instructed to take a little lamb, perfect and without blemish, slay it, and spread the blood over the doorposts of their homes so that when the death angel came, he would "see the blood" and "pass over" that particular residence (Exodus 12:13). The firstborn in those homes would be saved by the blood of the sacrificed lamb.

It is no wonder that fifteen hundred years later, when Jesus burst forth from the obscurity of the carpenter's shop and appeared in the Jordan Valley, John the Baptist pointed an index finger in His direction and shouted, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Would

you, today, take a moment and behold the Lamb for yourself?

CODE WORD: FREEDOM

The sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus, is what brings true freedom to your soul. Freedom is never free. It is always bought with blood. Rejoice today in the freedom Christ brings. God is not looking for human effort. He is looking to see if you have applied the blood of Christ to the door of your heart.

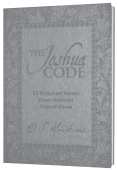
A PASSION PROCLAMATION

The blood of Jesus Christ [God's]
Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 1:7

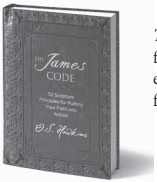
"Dear dying Lamb, Your precious blood shall never lose its power, till all the ransomed church of God be saved, to sin no more."[3] *Hallelujah!*

TRANSFORM YOUR HEART WITH *God's Word*



The Joshua Code is designed to walk you through a year-long journey of meditating on one verse a week in order to recall and recite Scripture at will. Topics include temptation, understanding salvation, prayer, grace, vision, integrity, and more.

The Jesus Code takes you on a journey with one critical question each week to study and meditate on until the answer is firmly fixed in your mind and heart. Those answers will show God's will for your life, and they will help you feel confident as you share your faith with others.



The James Code challenges readers to give feet to their faith with applicable truth from the book of James emphasizing that an effective Christian life is not about faith and works, but is about faith that works.

100% of the author's royalties and proceeds goes to support Mission:Dignity—a ministry providing support for impoverished retired pastors and missionaries.

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LEARN TO BE EFFECTIVE *culture warriors*

In *The Daniel Code*, Daniel steps off the pages of Scripture and into our modern culture today to reveal some timeless principles—a sort of "Daniel Code"—that enable you to not simply exist in our culture but to engage it and survive it as well. You will discover that the same God who ensured Daniel's victories is here for you today.

The Believer's Code invites readers into a 365-day journey. Adapted from *The Joshua Code*, *The Jesus Code*, *The James Code*, and *The Daniel Code*, as well as brand-new applications and takeaways for readers, includes a short devotional reading, scripture, and a Code Word for each day, along with a challenge to put their faith in practice.

The Nehemiah Code Who is not in need of new beginning? Whether it be broken relationships, integrity missteps, or loss, most of us will spend some or much of the next year trying to restore something. The good news is . . . it's never too late for a new beginning.

100% of the author's royalties and proceeds goes to support Mission:Dignity—a ministry providing support for impoverished retired pastors and missionaries.

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JOURNEY WITH JESUS

The Easter Code invites you to travel with Jesus on His way to Jerusalem in the forty days leading up to His resurrection. Along this journey you will be visiting places He went and people with whom He spoke. You will hear parables He told along the way, promises He left for all posterity, and the powerful and expressive prayers He offered.

This forty-day Lenten devotional reminds you that this season is a time to remember Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Draw closer to Christ this Easter season as you celebrate His resurrection.

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