

“We all love a happy ending—we all want a happy ending. This short, engaging, often funny and sometimes surprising book shows you how you can find yours. This will help you see Easter—and life—in a whole new way.”

REBECCA MANLEY PIPPERT, Speaker; Author, *Out of the Saltshaker* and *LiveGrowKnow* DVD curriculum

“A great little book to give away at Easter. Everyone longs for a happy ending in life, and Jonty unpacks the Bible’s answer with warmth and clarity.”

MATT FULLER, Senior Minister, Christ Church Mayfair; Author, *Perfect Sinners* and *Be True to Yourself*

“We all love a story with a happy ending, because we all long for happy endings in our own lives. In this clear, compelling, creative and concise book, Jonty Allcock shows that only Jesus can bring us the happy ending we need because he has smashed death by his own death and resurrection. All who read this book will discover the truth, wonder and significance of the Easter story afresh, and find the hope and happy ending they crave.”

JOHN STEVENS, National Director, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC)

“‘They think it’s all over... It is now!’ The greatest stories in history often come with a double ending. Jesus’ story is no different, and nor is ours. In this beautiful little book, Jonty Allcock shows how Jesus offers us a glorious Sunday ending to wipe away the pain of our inevitable Friday ending, if we will accept it. A simple but ingenious analogy to help explain the story of Easter and salvation.”

JENNIE POLLOCK, Writer and editor

JONTY ALLCOCK

HAPPILY
EVER AFTER

HOW EASTER CAN CHANGE
YOUR LIFE FOR GOOD

the goodbook
COMPANY

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The Power of an Ending

Endings have great power. A good one leaves you deeply satisfied and joyful. It just feels so right. But a bad one can leave you frustrated and disappointed. It wasn't supposed to end this way.

I learned this the hard way.

It was school sports day, and I was about to run in my first ever race: a 60m sprint. I was six years old, and to be honest I made a really good start. By the halfway point (to my great surprise and joy), I was quite a long way ahead. My legs were pumping, my arms were flying and my heart was pounding.

It was an amazing feeling.

But then I noticed something suspicious ahead of me. Two adults were standing at the end with a ribbon right across where I was about to run. What was that about?

Were they trying to trip me up as I finished? I wasn't going to fall for that sort of trick—so I ran right up to the ribbon and then stopped. Just before it.

I raised my hands in triumph and turned around just in time to see all the others kids rush past me. I came last.

A great start. A strong middle. But a disastrous ending.

When my mum tried to console me by reminding me of my great start, it didn't help. When she assured me that I was fastest through the middle section, I didn't care. The ending was all that mattered—and that had been a disaster.

Thirty years on I think I've recovered from that moment—but this pattern is repeated over and over in our lives.

Our lives are made up of a series of mini-stories, each with their own mini-ending. And these stories then weave together to make up the one big story of our lives, which builds towards one ultimate ending.

“The End” has great power.

We hope for happy endings for ourselves and for those we love. We go to a friend's wedding, celebrate their love and hope they will live happily ever after. We watch our favourite sports team, get more and more excited as they get through each round, and shout with delight when they win the cup.

Some happy endings are small—you get to the baker's just in time to buy the last doughnut. Others are bigger—your house renovation is finished after six months of chaos and dust. And some are lifelong—the safe birth of a much longed-for child.

Some endings are really, really good simply because the starting point was really, really bad. Sometimes it is only the thought of the ending that gives hope...

FAIRYTALES

This is what makes fairytales so enduringly popular. They take you on a journey from darkness to light; from night to day; from sorrow to joy. They're based on the idea of a hope-creating ending.

You read them with this sense of security: no matter what terrible disasters befall the characters, it will all be ok in the end.

You're waiting for the moment when everyone lives happily ever after and the hope that has been building comes to pass.

The deeper the sorrow—the brighter the joy; the harder the battle—the sweeter the victory.

These are the sorts of endings we look for in stories: endings that make sense of all the mayhem that has come before.

These sorts of perfect endings resonate with something deep within us.

HOPE-CREATING

Every parent who has taken their children on a long car journey has tasted this. The repeated question from the back seat is “Are we there yet?” That’s a question that expresses a deep and profound longing for “The End”.

I find it hard to be patient with that question. When it’s asked for the hundredth time in the space of ten minutes, I find it hard not to become sarcastic. “No darling, the car is still moving at seventy mph along the motorway. It really is unbelievably obvious that we’re not there yet. You will know we are there because we will stop. I will turn off the engine and say, ‘We’re here’. Why don’t we wait for that moment?”

“OK... but are we there yet?”

It’s deeply annoying on a car journey, but it’s a question we never stop asking. As situations arise and struggles come our way, we find ourselves asking, “Are we there yet?”

We may not be entirely sure where “there” is, but we know that “here” is hard and “there” is better, and so we long for an end of “here” and our arrival at “there”.



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It just feels so right.



HOW LONG?

In the Bible there's a version of this question. You find it in several places, and it's beautifully honest: *How long?*

*How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

Psalm 13 verse 2

Here's someone who's in a place of sorrow and struggle, and they're longing for it to come to an end.

Sometimes it's only the thought of an ending that enables us to keep walking through the rain. These are the endings that are precious to us. The clouds break and the sun comes out and the pain is over. Finally over.

NOT JUST HAPPY ENDINGS

But of course, not all endings are happy endings—not in films, not in books and not in life. Some endings have the power to take something good and completely ruin it. This is when endings are at their most destructive. They can crush dreams, shatter hopes and mock our ambitions.

Maybe you can think of some endings like that in your own life. Your job was great—until they made you redundant. Your holiday was perfect—until you broke your leg. Your relationship was for life—until she found someone else.

“The End” casts its shadow over our lives. When things are good, we desperately try to act as if there’s no end coming. We scrunch up our eyes and try to live in the moment. We’re told to capture the present and enjoy every second. We live in a culture that idolises “now” and suppresses any thought of an end. This is some of what lies behind the trend towards “mindfulness”, encouraging us to live in and enjoy the present.

I’m sure that there are some benefits in the advice to slow down and be more intentional, but every tick of the clock, every setting of the sun, and every church bell that rings tells us the same story: the end is coming. Time is like sand running through our fingers—and when you stop to think about it, that can be terrifying.

There is a short poem by the hymnwriter Henry Twells, engraved on a clock in Chester Cathedral, that says:

When as a child I laughed and wept, time crept.

When as a youth I waxed more bold, time strolled.

When I became a full-grown man, time ran.

When older still I daily grew, time flew.

Soon I shall find, in passing on, time gone.

It speaks of the relentless and unstoppable march of the end. The closer it gets, the faster it seems to come. In some ways this may seem gloomy, but there’s no point in trying pretend that it’s not this way.

Every single thing in this world has an end. Everything has a “Best before” date. Nothing lasts for ever.

The Bible tells it straight. It’s not a book of sickly sweet slogans that aren’t true. It’s realistic and honest about the world we live in. Look at what a man called James says:

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. James 4 v 14

In another part of the Bible, we read this blunt assessment of human life:

Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: as one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. Ecclesiastes 3 v 19

Here lie the greatest kingdoms, the strongest empires, the most powerful dynasties. All of them swept aside by “The End”.

Human history is punctuated by these two little words. There is no hero, no king, no warrior and no billionaire that can withstand their approach. They can sometimes be postponed but can never be cancelled. In “The End”, these are the last words on every human story.

The words of James and Ecclesiastes, quoted above, aren’t written in the Bible so that we all become despairing. They’re calling us to wake up and see reality.

Our stories will come to an end. Many choose to ignore that—but is that really wise? Perhaps true wisdom, and the perfect ending we seek, is not found by ignoring the reality of our end but by embracing and understanding it more carefully.

OUR STORY

The great question of life is not “Will it end?” (We know it will.) But will it have a good ending or a bad one, a sad ending or a happy ending?

We know that life isn’t actually a fairytale—and in our own lives we may have found that happy endings are rarer than sad endings. And even our happiest endings aren’t “ever after”, because we know that the ultimate end is coming—the end of life.

Will that be happy? Or sad?

In order to try and find answers, I’d like to take you back 2,000 years and to events that took place in a distant land. At first sight it may seem that this has nothing to do with us—but the connections we’ll discover run deeper than you know.

The events of the very first Easter hold the key to how our own story ends. As we’ll see—Easter really can change your life for good.