



EASTER

Preparation Guide
6 weeks of devotions
March // April 2025
The Sanctuary Fellowship

THEY FOUND THE STONE ROLLED
AWAY FROM THE TOMB, BUT WHEN
THEY ENTERED, THEY DID NOT FIND
THE BODY OF THE LORD JESUS.

adapted from Holy Week Devotional
Bridgetown Church, Portland, OR

Intro

This 6 week devotional was adapted to help you concentrate on the cross of Jesus as we get ready for Easter, starting the week after Ash Wednesday and ending Easter week. Each day, you will find the same components: a text from the Gospels, a Psalm, a devotional, a short prayer, and a few reflection questions.

If you are able, begin each reading by closing your eyes, opening your hands, opening the Bible, and pray to welcome the Holy Spirit and what he wants to say to you that day. The Gospel text will frame the day's focus in each devotional. The Psalm and prayer are meant to help guide you in prayer, as you practice God's presence and remember the One who draws near. You can end each time by praying or journaling through each of the question prompts.

Our hope is that you journey with us this Easter season. We pray that each week gives you an opportunity to immerse yourself in the Easter story by prayer and reading the Scriptures and spending time in the presence of the Father through prayer. As we look back at what Easter means, we also eagerly await his return. We hope you'll gather with us for worship and to celebrate Easter on Sunday, April 17.

Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

Jesus Curses the Fig Tree

Judas Betrays Jesus

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

The Crucifixion of Jesus

The Resurrection of Jesus

Week 1- March 9

Week 2- March 16

Week 3- March 23

Week 4- March 30

Week 5- April 6

Week 6- April 13

Week 7- Easter Sunday, April 20

March 9 | Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem

As Jesus entered the city on a donkey, an event often called the triumphal entry, an electricity was moving through the crowd. People had heard of Jesus: a miracle-working, sin-forgiving, Kingdom-of-God-preaching rabbi from the line of David. Could he be the triumphal king of whom the prophets spoke? There was a stirring hope that Jesus might finally rescue Israel from Roman occupation.

So they pulled out all the stops for Jesus' royal entrance — a path of cloaks like a red carpet and palm branches like flags at a parade — all while they cried out "Hosanna!" (or "God save us!"), a cry of both praise and petition, over and over.

No one in the crowd anticipated the week would end with Jesus, mocked and beaten, breathing his dying breath on a criminal's cross. How could this have been a triumphal entry? Jesus came to Jerusalem to rescue people in a way far more glorious than they could grasp. He would indeed triumph, but over more than just Rome — over all sin and death! But we're not there yet in the story. We're still at the beginning of Holy Week, on Palm Sunday, echoing the cries of the crowd: Hosanna, God save us!

Readings

Psalm 118

Mark 11v1-11

Prayer

Hosanna! My help and my deliverer: I welcome you.

I cannot see how you are working: I welcome you.

I set aside my expectations: I welcome you.

With praise and honor: I welcome you.

Hosanna! Jesus Christ, King of Kings: I welcome you.

Reflection Questions

As you pray "Hosanna! God save me!" today, what are you petitioning God for? What are you praising God for? Is there a specific area in your life that the Spirit may be inviting you to welcome Jesus into today?

March 16 | Jesus Cleanses the Temple

“My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” Imagine: a place where all kinds of people may dwell together, praying to their Creator who loves them, united in adoration and praise.

“But you have made it a den of robbers.”

Standing between God’s divine presence and a working class worshiper was not just his own sin, but a merchant selling a temple-edition sacrificial dove for a 400% markup. In the end, Jesus’ death would rip apart all barriers to God’s presence. As Jesus tore through the temple, he got rid of everything trying to separate us further from God. Did he cleanse the temple of merchants to humiliate them? No. He did so for the sake of the temple and its people: a house of prayer for all nations. That’s who they are and who they were made to be.

Today, *you* are God’s temple, the place where his Spirit dwells. When we come together, *we* create a house of prayer for all nations. He cleanses and cares for us for our sake, and the sake of the world.

Readings

Psalm 27

Matthew 21:12-17

Prayer

Father, Son, and Spirit, I offer myself wholly to you.

Father, search me and know my heart.

Jesus, see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Holy Spirit, come and make your home in me.

Reflection Questions

As you pray for the persons of God to search you and know you completely, what comes to your mind?

What would it look like or feel like to be a person freed up (or put another way, “cleansed”) to access life in the Spirit without barriers? How might life be different?

Consider the things that make you feel far from God or his people. Are any of those things barriers God wants to tear down?

March 23 | Jesus Curses the Fig Tree

When reading about Jesus cursing the fig tree that was not yielding its intended fruit, it's entirely possible to think that he may have been experiencing a case of "hangry." But, reading this story in Mark, along with Jeremiah, Micah, and Matthew, the fig tree becomes a symbol that points to the larger story of Israel.

The fig tree's unfruitfulness and Israel's ongoing unfaithfulness helps us to see God's perspective on it all. Mark places Jesus at the center of the temple, rightly disappointed and frustrated at how a place of worship was only a false image of misplaced love. Jesus's invitation here in Mark 11 is: "Have faith in God...embrace this God-life, and you'll get God's everything."

The truth is, when we purpose ourselves to see our life's circumstances as God sees them, we're going to live with greater peace and joy. Where we once may have only seen limitations, we're going to see potential. Where we once only saw an oncoming defeat, we got to see a coming victory.

You can't touch faith, but it can move mountains. You'll gain courage and strength as you see the glorious future God has for you.

Readings

Psalm 16

Mark 11v12-25

Prayer

Jesus, would you come close to us as we remember ways we have not been faithful to you. Would you come gather us, cleanse us of all unrighteousness, so that the weight of any festering fear and unbelief would simply wither away. Would you give us faith to trust you and remain in your love by the renewing of our minds.

Reflection Questions

What are you sensing God inviting you to have faith for?

In what ways could your community, friends, or family come alongside you in this?

How are you wanting to encounter God's love in the challenges you are facing?

March 30 | Judas Betrays Jesus

There was something about how Jesus was wholly present that tended to bring out deep responses from people around him. What comes out in these moments is often not what we expect – deep rage from the Pharisees, deep gratitude from the outcast, deep sadness from the rich. On Holy Wednesday we remember two such juxtaposed moments: Judas' betrayal and Mary's anointing. It is baffling how Jesus let people who could hurt him get close, but he was neither naive nor flippant about it. He knew the cost and the reward: Judas' betrayal would bring his death, but Mary's pouring of oil illuminated his title *Messiah*, or The Anointed One. While both actions shocked their observers, Jesus knew what dwelled in his friends' hearts. In the same way, Jesus is not surprised by our responses either. Rather, he welcomes us and them.

What kind of love is this? That our Savior would welcome in his betrayer, call him friend, knowing that he would send Jesus to the terrible death of the cross.

What kind of love is this? That our Savior would endure this betrayal, and he would even go so far as insuring that it would happen, so that you and I in all of our sin and betrayal could come to God through faith- and God calls us his friends now!

Readings

Psalm 139

Matthew 26v14-25

John 12v1-11

Prayer

You who bring out the deepest parts of me,
Draw near now. But do so gently, please,
For I'm not sure what may surface.
As best I can, Jesus, I trust and love you.
Have your way.

Reflection Questions

As you consider the idea of Jesus' presence bringing out a deep response from you, what do you want it to be?
What do you fear it to be?

Apr 6 | Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

After Jesus and his disciples ate their last meal before his crucifixion, Jesus washed their feet and said: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 16v34-35. In Latin, the word for command is *mandatum*, which is why we call this day Maundy Thursday.

Jesus' act of foot washing is a practice that reminds us of the extreme humility of covenant love. As disciples of Jesus, we are to follow his example and love one another through radical acts of kindness that require humility. What would it look like for us to serve one another with this heart posture? How might our city see the love of Jesus through us as we serve them?

As Jesus washed the disciples' feet on Maundy Thursday he set into motion what would be completed on Easter Sunday. His sacrificial example calls for us to love one another just as he has loved us.

Readings

Psalm 103

John 13v1-3

Prayer

Jesus, you came into the world as a servant, giving your life.

King of all, you bowed low and washed feet.

May we follow your example in humble love.

Strengthen us so that we may serve one another.

And, as we do, may the world know of your great love.

All glory to you Father, honor to you King Jesus, and praise to you Spirit. Amen.

Reflection Questions

How do I feel about serving people in a way that requires humility?

Where can I find opportunities or invitations from the Spirit to sacrificially love and serve my community?

What is one tangible action I could plan this week to actively show love?

Apr 15 | The Crucifixion of Jesus

Apr 13 | Jesus' Crucifixion

What's so *good* about Good Friday? N.T. Wright once said, "in order to speak meaningfully about the Cross one must say at least something about *evil*, the problem which, in classic theology, the Cross has decisively addressed." This statement is relevant to us on Good Friday because the 'Good' in Good Friday cannot be understood without addressing the relationship between the problem of evil and the Cross.

Ironically, Good Friday was and is God's stunning response to the problem of evil in the world and right within our own hearts. God's response didn't carry the justice of "fire from Heaven" that the disciples wanted (Luke 9v54), but the justice of the sacrifice of His one and only Son, the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). As the old hymn goes, "See all your sins on Jesus laid."

You see, Good Friday is the day we acknowledge the grief, surprise, and powerlessness of seeing all our sins laid on Jesus. It's where the megaphone of evil is silenced by the piercing 'Why God?' cry of our Savior on the Cross. It's where we witness the worst injustice in history transformed into the greatest power to bring the lost home. See all your sins on Jesus laid!

Readings

Psalm 22

Matthew 27v32-56

Prayer

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

We want to feel the weight of our sin as we see it laid on Jesus this Friday.

Help us not to rush to resurrection, that we may know the Grace which runs deeper than our sins on Jesus laid.

Reflection Questions

In what area or relationship in your life are you challenged to live more like the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 rather than the disciples in Luke 9:24?

How has Jesus revealed Himself to you during times of suffering and/or sin?

Apr 20 | The Resurrection of Jesus- Easter Sunday

He is risen! Today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus that made the way for our own resurrection! Now, it is all too easy to fall into the assumption that Jesus' resurrection simply refers to a reset, merely a return to a time before the pain we experienced happened – though many of us would settle for that, at times. But in doing this, we forget the creativity and promises of God. After Adam and Eve are kicked out of the Garden of Eden, the rest of the Bible illustrates how God is restoring us to himself. That restoration, though, does not entail bringing us back to the Garden of Eden. God has bigger plans. Instead, we read, all of creation will be made new.

The beauty and glory of Jesus' miraculous resurrection, as the Bible illustrates it, is that we are not raised to life *as it was*, but to life *as it was intended to be*. And more than just a spiritual or mystical experience, like Jesus' resurrection ours will be a *bodily* one, in which every currently disjointed part of us will be brought back into alignment with God's original intention: wholeness, delight, and union. We may only see in part now, but one day we shall

Readings

Psalm 148

John 20v1-29

Prayer

You made all things once and you will make them again!
But newer and with more glory!
Wake me up to the joy and beauty of what is to come!
Let me run in the pastures of your goodness
And watch for signs of your resurrected Kingdom!

Reflection Questions

Think about something in your life that could us resurrection. (e.g. a relationship, a dream, a job, your body, etc.)

What might it mean for it to be raised to life *as it was intended to be*?

What part of the final resurrection, when Jesus returns to the earth for his saved children, are you most looking forward to? Take a moment and thank God for Jesus' resurrection, and the sealed promise of your resurrection!