



A N EASTER JOURNEY

AN EIGHT DAY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE 2018





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A N E A S T E R JOURNEY

Easter is a season filled with celebration and remembrance. It is a time to recall the events that changed our lives -- and all eternity. Eight days in Jerusalem so many years ago, defined the Christian faith and changed the future for every single follower of Christ from that moment on.

In a season with so much to observe, we don't want to miss the moments that defined Jesus' journey.

His triumphal entry to Jerusalem.
The last supper with His beloved disciples.
His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane.
His arrest, trial, and subsequent crucifixion.
Peter's denial of his belief in Jesus.
Christ's death and resurrection.

These are the moments that define the story of Easter, and they're the moments that we'll journey through together over the next eight days. In remembrance, reverence, and awe of what the season of Easter means for our faith.

DAY ONE

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

READ

Mark 11:1-11

UNDERSTAND

When you picture royalty coming into a city, how do you see it? With loud declaration and fanfare? With fancy clothes and a large entourage? With wild pomp and circumstance?

While all that may be true today, it's certainly not the way Jesus made his triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday. His entrance wasn't marked with the kind of riches or fanfare you might expect from a coming King. No, His was an entrance that declared a new kind of King had arrived—an eternal King. The kind of King who came in peace and humility.

Riding on the back on a donkey, Jesus was greeted by those who believed with declarations of His glory and shouts of celebration for the arrival of their long-awaited savior. With palm branches laid down to line His path, the coming King marched forward to meet His fate. A fate that would change the course of our lives.

As we commemorate Palm Sunday this year, don't miss out on the chance to celebrate the humble entrance of our Savior, who rode forward toward a difficult destiny because of His great love for us.

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

What sticks out to you about the way Jesus made His entrance into Jerusalem?

What do you think was going through Jesus' mind as He entered the city that day?

Just as the people did back then, how can you celebrate who Jesus is and what He's done in your life this Palm Sunday?

PRAYER

God, today we celebrate the start of Easter Week by remembering and celebrating Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for sending Him as symbol of humility and peace to Your people. As we remember Palm Sunday this year, we pause to celebrate the arrival of Jesus—the Savior whose triumphant entry changed our lives.

FAMILY TIME

Today, take time to create some palm branches of your own with your family. Get creative! Draw them, create them out of supplies you have at home, or even get outside and see what you can find to put together your own homemade palm branches.

As you work together to make your palm branches, talk as a family about what Palm Sunday means for your faith. Talk about how the palm branches were used to recognize Jesus' entrance as King and to celebrate His arrival. Then, have each person in your family write some of the things they want to celebrate about Jesus on their own palm branches. Maybe it's His love. Maybe it's the fact that He's given you a family. Maybe it's the salvation He offers. After you write yours down, put your palm branches on display so you can remember throughout the week to celebrate all that Jesus has done in your lives.

DAY TWO

JESUS' ANOINTING AND THE LAST SUPPER

READ

Mark 14:1-25

UNDERSTAND

For Jesus, the days recorded here are marked with great significance. Though the disciples may not have understood it, Jesus knows that as time marches on, He too marches on toward His death. Moments that seem insignificant or unclear to His followers are moments that Jesus knows are preparing Him for what's to come.

As the woman came to honor Jesus with the pouring out of her perfume, those around were left baffled. What they saw as a waste of time and money, what Jesus saw was a moment of significance. This was an anointing of His head for the burial to come. When Jesus asked them to prepare for their supper together, the disciples saw nothing out the ordinary, but Jesus saw it as His last opportunity to share this meal with His closest followers. "As Jesus broke the bread of what would be His broken body and shared the cup of what would be His blood spilled out, He did so to establish for His followers—both then and now—the sacrifice God was about to make to reconcile His people back to Him."

His followers—both then and now—the sacrifice God was about to make to reconcile His people back to Him. Though the disciples may not have understood the significance of the act at the time, Jesus certainly did.

How often are we like the disciples in this way? How often do we miss the significance of what Jesus is doing in our lives right now? How often do we miss out on what He's trying to teach us? As we move toward Easter this week, don't miss the significance of the season. Pause to remember just how much Jesus has done in your life during this week alone. Ask Him to keep your eyes open to the significant work He's doing in your life.

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

Why do you think the followers of Jesus didn't understand the significance of the things happening in this passage?

Think back on your journey of faith. What significant moments do you think you may have overlooked? What significant moments do you remember?

How can you keep your eyes and heart open to the significance of Easter this week?

PRAYER

God, thank You that You are always teaching us to see You in new ways. Though we may not always see how You're working in the moment or what You're doing in our lives, we know that You are moving on our behalf all the time. Thank You for the significance of your sacrifice for us. Amen.

FAMILY TIME

Communion can be an abstract concept for children to grasp. Today, make time to read Mark 14:22-25 together as a family. Talk about what these verses mean for us as believers and share with your children why Communion is still a sacrament that churches around the world do to come together to receive the blessing that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross provides. It's a great way to start a conversation with your children not just about Communion, but about the salvation offered to them because of Christ.

To add a little something fun to this conversation, print out some coloring sheets. A simple Internet search of the phrase "Communion Coloring Page" will give you plenty of options. Print out a few for your kids to fill in while you have this conversation. Then, put them up on the fridge as a reminder of what you talked about this week.

DAY THREE

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

READ

Mark 14:32-42

UNDERSTAND

Jesus is rarely more relatable than in these moments in the garden of Gethsemane. He knows the future that awaits Him. He alone bears the weight of what's to come. And as His soul feels "crushed with grief," He does the only thing He knows to do: Pray.

In a moment that reflects His humanity, Jesus steals away, falls on His face, and cries out to God to change His fate. He knows the suffering that is to come, and He knows that God is capable of taking it away. And so He prays that God would move on His behalf and take this suffering away.

Who of us hasn't felt this way? Who hasn't faced an uncertain future and begged God to change the path ahead? Who hasn't walked a road of suffering and pleaded with God for a different way? Who hasn't felt crushed by the weight of their circumstances and cried out to God for relief?

At some point or another, we've all been like Jesus in this moment. But as Jesus closes His prayer, He does so with a declaration that changes things: "Yet I want your will to be done, not mine." How might our own prayers change if we closed them all with this declaration? What might our lives look like if, even as we cried out to God, we submitted to His will because, like Jesus, we believed that His will and His way was ultimately for our good? It's the ultimate act of trust to say that even when things don't go the way we want, we still believe God's will is for our good.

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

What's one thing in your life that you've prayed and pleaded with God for?

What was the outcome? Did you feel disappointed or frustrated? Did you still see God's goodness?

What's one thing you're praying for right now? This week, try adding Jesus' closing statement ("Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.") to that prayer.

PRAYER

Lord, we confess that sometimes we don't understand the way You're working. Sometimes we question Your goodness when our prayers feel unanswered and our circumstances feel heavy. Thank You for not leaving us in those moments. Help us to see Your goodness. Help us to want Your will more than our own.

FAMILY TIME

Bedtime is a great time to incorporate a little prayer time with your family. As you go through your nightly routine with your kids, start making prayer a part of what you do before bed. As you tuck your kids in this week, take just a minute to pray together. Ask them who they want to pray for, what they want to talk to God about, and even what questions they might have to ask God. Remember, nothing is off limits in prayer!

The goal here is to help your kids understand that they can talk to God about anything that's on their hearts—the good and the bad. Model this for them in your own prayers and encourage them to be open as well. As you continue this bedtime prayer routine, watch how the prayer life of your family begins to develop as your conversation and closeness with God grows.

DAY FOUR

THE BETRAYAL AND ARREST

READ

Mark 14:43-65

UNDERSTAND

As the Easter story unfolds in the book of Mark, the passages become increasingly more difficult to read. Here, Jesus is betrayed by Judas, a disciple whom He loved. He's taken away, arrested and deserted by His followers. He's then put on trial, falsely accused while knowing He's guilty of nothing. Ultimately, He's sentenced to death and beaten publicly.

It's a terrible fate, and yet Jesus accepts it with only a declaration that He is in fact who He says He is—the Son of God—and that God will do all He said He was going to do.

Even though these stories detail the betrayal, arrest, and beating of Jesus, underneath the surface they also show His great love for us. He was given opportunity after opportunity to reject His Father and deny who He was, but He chose the Truth instead. Why? Because Jesus knew then what we know today: His death was for a greater purpose. His death was for us.

Take a moment to read through this passage again. As you do, pause after every difficult thing that happened to Jesus—the betrayal, the arrest, the trial, and the beating. Thank Him that He endured each one for the sake of your salvation.

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

Have you ever felt betrayed or misunderstood by a friend or even a family member? How did it make you feel?

How does it change the way you read this passage to know that Jesus went through these things with you in mind?

What can you do this week to pause and remember the way that Jesus suffered for our salvation?

PRAYER

God, thank You for what you endured on our behalf. The suffering and pain we experience here on Earth is only a fraction of what you experienced through your Son's suffering and pain. What a gift to know that You did it all for us. We are so grateful for Jesus and what He did for us.

FAMILY TIME

One of the best ways to teach your children about the importance of what Jesus did for them is through serving others. Jesus endured difficulty, pain, and suffering in order to ultimately serve us. And He did it because He cared about us! While we don't have to endure the same kind of hardship to show God's love to others, we can sacrifice some of our time, energy, and resources to show them we care.

Find a way to serve those in need as a family this Easter season. Maybe it's through volunteering at a local ministry. Maybe it's by making cards for those who are sick or in need in your congregation. Maybe it's delivering Easter baskets or meals to those in your community who will go without this holiday. Whatever it is, find something you can do together as a family to share God's love with others this Easter.

DAY FIVE

PETER'S DENIAL

READ

Mark 14:27-31; 66-72

UNDERSTAND

Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? Maybe they lied to you, or said something that hurt you, or acted in a way that caused you to lose your trust in them. If you have, then you know exactly how Jesus felt in this moment. After all He'd done to show His love to Peter—his beloved friend and disciple—when the rubber met the road, Peter turned his back on Jesus.

But let me ask you this: Have you ever been the one to betray a friend? Maybe you were the person who lied, or the one who said something hurtful, or the one whose behavior caused broken trust in your relationship. If you have, then you know exactly how Peter felt in this moment. You know the fear, regret, and guilt he felt when he realized what he had done.

If we're being honest, we can all probably relate to both sides of this story. At some point or another, we've been both the person who was wronged and the person wronged someone else. But what Peter's denial of Jesus can teach us is that there's hope on both sides of the story. For the ones who have been hurt and betrayed, there is healing and forgiveness. And for the ones who have betrayed others, there is forgiveness and restoration that comes with true repentance.

Don't miss the opportunity this season to be a person that both extends the kind of forgiveness that Jesus offers and also repents and receives the kind of forgiveness that Peter needed. Because of Easter, forgiveness and restoration are ours. Don't let this season go by without grabbing hold of what's already yours and walking in freedom from the hurts and betrayals of your past.

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

In what ways have you been hurt or betrayed by someone in your life? How did you respond?

In what ways have you hurt or betrayed others? How did they respond?

What do you need to do to either offer or receive forgiveness and freedom this week? Pray that God would give you the courage to do it.

PRAYER

God, thank You that no matter how many times we wrong You, You receive us back time and again. Just as Peter, we have been guilty of hurting and wounding others. And just like Jesus, we've felt the sting of betrayal in our own lives. This week, we ask for your forgiveness to wash over us. Restore what's been broken and let us walk freely away from the hurts that have held us down in the past. Thank You for this freedom.

FAMILY TIME

It's never too early to start teaching your children the art of forgiveness. Find a time this week to have a "Moment of Forgiveness" as a family.

Gather together and explain to your kids how important it is both to offer forgiveness to those who have hurt us and to ask for forgiveness from those we've hurt. Share some examples of how you've done this in your own life to help them understand. Maybe it's a time you had to apologize to your parents for something you said. Or maybe it's a time you had to forgive your spouse for hurting your feelings. Or maybe it's simply a time you had to ask for God's forgiveness when you messed up or made a bad choice. The goal is to help your kids understand what it means both to ask for forgiveness and to forgive someone else.

Then, let them take a turn! Ask them to share something that they either need to forgive in someone else or that they need to ask for forgiveness for in the moment. Remember, these don't have to be big confessions; just simple, small things are fine. The hope is that this will start a regular conversation and habit of forgiveness in your family going forward.

DAY SIX

THE CRUCIFIXION

READ

Mark 15:1-32

UNDERSTAND

Growing up in church, our families may often wonder why this particular day in the Christian faith is called “Good Friday.” As we commemorate this day and read Scriptures detailing the brutal crucifixion and death of Jesus at Calvary, it’s hard not to wonder why such a terrible scene is called anything but horrible.

Growing up—both in age and faith—helps our families discover more and more just how good that Friday is for those who believe in Jesus. Every beating, every cruel word, every nail, every mocking insult—Jesus took them all with the supernatural grace of God and the weight of our sins upon His shoulders. What the world meant for evil, God turned to good—Good Friday, in fact.

While pondering the crucifixion on this Friday, remember the pain of what Jesus endured on our behalf. Remember the weight of sin He took from our shoulders and placed on His own. And remember that He did it for His glory and our good.

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

In the past, what has “Good Friday” meant to you? Have you ever given much thought to the name?

How does it make you feel to know that Jesus endured the crucifixion for your good?

What does it mean for you personally to have freedom from your sins thanks to Jesus’ crucifixion?

PRAYER

God, there are so few words we can say to thank You for the death of Your Son on the cross. Jesus’ death was ultimately for good because You love us. Thank You for the forgiveness of our sins. Thank You that even today, You take the things that the world meant for evil and turn them into good. We are so grateful for Your love.

FAMILY TIME

If you’ve never had the opportunity to present the opportunity for salvation to your children, this is a great time to start that conversation. This can be a heavy subject for kids of a certain age to grasp so remember to keep your language clear, simple, and kid-friendly so they’ll be able to follow along.

While there are plenty of great resources out there to help you have this conversation in a kid-friendly way, you can start with the simple ABC’s:

A - Admit to God that you’ve sinned and disobeyed Him.

B - Believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose again.

C - Choose to trust Jesus and ask Him to lead your heart.”

However you go about the conversation, remember that it’s important for your children to know that God loves them no matter what, that He wants a relationship with them, and that He sent His son Jesus to take our place so that He could offer us forgiveness and have that relationship with us forever.

DAY SEVEN

JESUS' DEATH & BURIAL

READ

Mark 15:33-47

UNDERSTAND

Living on this side of the story, we have the vantage point of reading about Jesus' death and burial knowing that the story isn't over. We know that this is only the beginning of the story. We know there's so much more still to come.

But imagine what this moment in time must've been like for the people who witnessed it. Imagine how His disciples must've felt, knowing the man they'd dedicated their lives to follow was now dead. Surely they were afraid that what happened to Him might now happen to them. They probably wondered if Jesus was even who He said was all along. Maybe they even felt frustrated or disappointed in the outcome. Certainly they didn't know what was going to happen next!

Even though we now know what happened in this particular story, we can all probably relate to how the disciples felt in that moment of uncertainty. We've all experienced the doubt, fear, and disappointment that comes when the story doesn't turn out the way we hoped it would. We all know what it means to feel like the story is over—just the way so many of Jesus' followers did back then.

Remember that, just as the disciples didn't know that God was still working in their behalf, we too can trust in His promise to finish the work He's started in our lives. The Easter story proves it!

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like the story was over? That things weren't turning out the way you thought they would?

How do uncertain circumstances make you feel about God?

This week, what's one thing you can do to remember that you can trust God in a season of waiting or uncertainty in your life?

PRAYER

God, we confess that we're not always sure how You're working. Sometimes things feel uncertain and our stories don't go the way we want them to go. And in those moments, it's easy for us to forget that You're the author of the story, and so we can trust that You are writing it for our good. Today, we pray that You help us remember that You're with us in the waiting, and we can trust You with our futures.

FAMILY TIME

The best way to understand what it feels like to wait is to actually do a little waiting, right? This week, try a little at home experiment to talk to your kids about what it means to wait on something good to come.

We recommend trying your own version of the infamous Marshmallow Experiment. (Of course, replace marshmallows with any kind of candy or treat that your kids enjoy!) Place just one marshmallow in front of each of your kids and tell them that they can't eat it for fifteen minutes (adjust the time down for younger children). If they can wait the fifteen minutes, they'll get an even better treat! Then, walk away from the table and leave them with the marshmallow for fifteen minutes. When you return, give the extra treats to those who trusted your word and waited to see what was next.

Once you're done with this silly experiment, have a conversation with your kids about what it feels like to wait on the promise of something better. Ask them how they knew they could trust you when you told them there was more to the story. Then, talk to them about how they can trust God in the same way.

DAY EIGHT

JESUS' RESURRECTION

READ

Mark 16

UNDERSTAND

Though the journey leading up to Easter Sunday was long, arduous, and full of uncertainty, the payoff was certainly worth it. After so much pain and suffering, after death and disappointment, here God proves Himself victorious once and for all with Jesus' resurrection from the grave.

What was once the end of the story for all of us is now only the beginning for those who believe in and follow Jesus. Death has been defeated, and we can walk forward in this life with a hope that spans eternity. Now if that's not something to celebrate, what is?

As the Easter week closes, don't miss what this final day of celebration means for your life. Because Jesus died and rose again, you can have eternal life with God. You can walk freely in the world knowing that this world isn't all there is for you. You can live in the full assurance that God is who He says He is and He'll do what He says He will do in your life. That's what Easter means for your life and the lives of anyone who believes in Him.

The Easter story may end here, but it doesn't have to end in your heart. Pray that God would let you carry with you this sense of awe, wonder, and celebration over what He's done through Jesus.

RESPOND

Questions for Discussion:

How does knowing that Christ defeated death give you new hope?

What does it mean to you to know that eternity in heaven is possible because of Christ's death and resurrection?

What's one way you can remember and keep the meaning of Easter alive in your heart after the holiday season?

PRAYER

God, You are the defeater of death. You are the giver of life. You are the hope of our hearts. Thank You for what You did through Your Son Jesus thousands of years ago. Thank You for what it means for us still today and into eternity. We love You.

FAMILY TIME

What better way to end the Easter season than with a good, old fashioned Easter egg hunt? Have a little fun with your family by hiding a few Easter eggs around your house or yard. Fill some with treats like candies or gum, but fill others with a few handwritten Bible verses that celebrate the Easter story.

After the hunt is over, gather your family together to take stock of the treasures they've found. Read the verses hidden in the eggs together as you uncover them and talk for a moment about what they mean both in the story of Easter and in your lives today.

