

FLIP SCRIPT

Week 1 Group Guide Devoted to God's Word

Open With Prayer

God, as we head into the Easter season, we thank you for bringing us together to find connection and growth. As we approach Easter, believers like us throughout the world will remember the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In these great events a power broke into our world that has changed everything and imbued humanity with abundant life and incomparable joy. By your grace, may we partake of that life and joy together. May we encourage each other as we follow our risen Lord. Amen.

Icebreaker

If a friend or coworker casually asked a room full of people what Easter is all about and you were present, what would you do? Take some time to imagine and share what you might say, or whether you would speak at all. What if the question was about the cross and why it's such "a big deal"? What if one of your children were to ask? How would you respond?

Introduction

Everything in our faith revolves around the events of Easter. If Christ has not been raised from the dead then we should all go home. If he has been raised from the dead, then he must be the center of our lives. That's Christianity. And that is the impulse behind all evangelization—the declaration that a new king has emerged in this world—and our task is to join his kingdom. Not a kingdom of this world, but instead, a kingdom of forgiveness, love, compassion, nonviolence, and mercy. And when we join THIS kingdom, we are joining with the power that is making this whole universe right and good and just; we are joining with the son of God. What's our job? To draw more and more people into that great kingdom for the sake of transforming the world.

In a time when lots of people are leaving the church this should bother us deeply, especially as we approach Easter Sunday, when we hear people like the Apostle Peter, whose whole life became drawing people into this great kingdom led by this crucified and risen king. This is still our task. This is still our job. And we should never sit bored or wondering what we have been called to do. The Good News is the English translation of the Koine Greek word Euangelion (eu "good" + angelion "message"). And the good news is that Jesus was crucified and then risen from the dead. Death could not hold him—as we often sing. And that good news still needs proclaiming.

As we head into this Easter season, read these scripture passages and notice how the Lord is speaking to you as you read. Then discuss together what you are sensing as you read.

Scripture Study

The Reading for April 4: John 14 & 15

Jesus comforts his disciples, promises the Holy Spirit, tells them they will bear much fruit that lasts, and warns them about opposition from the world. What stands out to you from John 14–15? Look specifically at John 14:9 for a moment. What does it mean that "anyone who has seen me (Jesus) has seen the Father"?

The Reading for April 5: John 16

Jesus teaches his disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit and the joy they will have after they have grieved. How much do you rely on the Holy Spirit in your own life? Discuss.

The Reading for April 6: John 17

The priestly prayer of Jesus. He prays for himself, for his disciples, and for all future believers. You have probably already read this chapter. But now, try reading it in The Message translation. How can Jesus' prayer help to shape your prayers?

The Reading for April 7: Matthew 21

The Triumphal Entry, Jesus cleansing the Temple, and words of judgment against the enemies of Jesus. If you have had a chance to read Matthew 21, share what words, phrases, or parables are speaking to you today.

The Reading for April 8: Matthew 22

Parables of coming judgment and Jesus showing that he is wiser than the attempts of his enemies to trick him. Focus in on verses 34–40. How are you endeavoring to obey these two great commands of Jesus in this season of your life? In what tangible ways are you loving God and your neighbor?

Lastly, here's a poem by Christina Rossetti titled "Good Friday." She wrote it back in 1866. Christina longed to have a passionate faith. Noticing she didn't feel moved by the cross of Jesus, she wrote this poem as a way of leaning toward a life of faith that touched her heart and captured her imagination. At the end of the poem, she refers to herself as a "rock" because she has felt so unmoved. She is asking God to change her heart—to make her life responsive to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—for the redemption of the world. Read it prayerfully with the intent of growing closer to Christ this Easter.

GOOD FRIDAY

Am I a stone, and not a sheep,
That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy cross,
To number drop by drop Thy blood's slow loss,
And yet not weep?

Not so those women loved
Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee;
Not so fallen Peter, weeping bitterly;
Not so the thief was moved;

Not so the Sun and Moon
Which hid their faces in a starless sky,
A horror of great darkness at broad noon –
I, only I.

Yet give not o'er,
But seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the flock;
Greater than Moses, turn and look once more
And smite a rock.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank you for your love and mercy poured out in Jesus.
This week, give us a felt sense of your nearness. May we rely on
your Spirit, may we walk in your love, and may we be people of
your extravagant mercy as we passionately obey and follow you.
Amen.



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Week 2 Group Guide

Open With Prayer

God, as we head into Holy Week, we thank you for the cross and for the resurrection. Christ died, and Christ is truly risen! We believe that Jesus rose, not in myth or metaphor, but in his real flesh and real blood. This is your glory—and our glory as well! We rejoice that you have rescued us from death's power and, with confidence in your power, we pray that we will live not in fear, but with courage, and through this holy courage may we live boldly as disciples of Jesus all our days. Amen.

Icebreaker

Have you ever seen a famous person? What was the experience like? What must the experience have been like for people seeing Jesus on that very first Palm Sunday?

Introduction – The Master Has Need of You

We now enter what has been called Holy Week or Passion Week. This is the week that starts on Palm Sunday (which we read about last week in Matthew 21).

As the gospels tell the story, Jesus sends his disciples into Jerusalem to prepare for his triumphal entry. They are told to untether a donkey, and if there is any protest from the owner, they are to say simply, “The Master has need of it.” This is interesting because, strictly speaking, God has need of nothing. God doesn’t need our praise or our good works or anything. But this phrase signals the wonderful truth that God allows us to cooperate with his grace so that we can participate in the work that he desires for us to do. We are privileged to be instruments in his hands. The Lord has need of you and me for the work of his redemption and renewal he is doing in the world.

Holy Week culminates in Jesus’s betrayal, arrest, denial, abandonment by those closest to him, crucifixion, and resurrection. This week, churches the world over will mark and remember these events, calling to mind the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In these great events a power broke into our world that has changed everything and imbued humanity with abundant life and incomparable joy.

Read the following scripture passages that cover four chapters in Matthew and one chapter from John. Notice how the Lord is speaking to you as you read. Then discuss together what you are sensing as you read.

Scripture Study

The Reading for April 11: Matthew 23

Read these seven “woes” as an invitation for us to examine our own ways and beliefs and create opportunities for us as individuals and a church to repent for the ways we have tried

to add to God’s law or avoid parts of it. Jesus began his public rebuke of the religion of his day by warning his disciples and the crowds that while the Pharisees’ tradition was rooted in truth, their practices were not. The modern, evangelical church must also heed the warning of Jesus to convert religious burdens into freeing grace so that it properly reflects the life-giving good news of his gospel. How do you hear the voice of Jesus speaking to you in our present day through these seven woes?

The Reading for April 12: Matthew 24

Reflecting on your reading of Matthew 24, how do we experience hardness of heart toward the work of God in our present day?

The Reading for April 13: Matthew 25

Here are three more important parables that teach on being alert, faithful, ready, and the coming judgment. Focus your conversation together on the last of these parables (verses 31-46). How is the Lord speaking to you personally through these words of Jesus?

The Readings for April 14 and April 15: Matthew 26 and John 18

Peter ended up denying any association with Jesus. And then he did it again. And then he cursed and denied knowing Jesus a third time. That’s the moment when the rooster crowed... and scripture says Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Perhaps we’ve all heard the rooster crow of conviction that reminds us of how we’ve failed to live up to our promise to live faithfully as followers of Jesus. And we’ve all known the bitter tears that follow these failures. When you hear the rooster crow of conviction, you may weep bitterly for a time, but don’t quit following Jesus. This moment wasn’t the end for Peter. Just as Jesus restored Peter, Jesus wants to restore you after any failure. And just as Jesus restored Peter, Jesus can and will restore you. It’s from that place of restoration in our brokenness that we can become wounded healers that are equipped to help others.

Share together ways Jesus has restored you after failures. How have your moments or seasons of brokenness and restoration helped you to become a wounded healer like Peter?

Closing Prayer

Father, thank you for an opportunity to reflect on the events of Holy Week with friends who are fellow believers. Thank you for your love and mercy poured out in Jesus. This week, give us a felt sense of your nearness. May we rely on your Spirit, may we walk in your love, and may we be people of your extravagant mercy as we passionately obey and follow you. Amen.

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Week 3 Group Guide

Open With Prayer

God, we thank you for the cross and for our risen Savior, Jesus. May we renew our commitment to follow the risen Jesus by daily taking up our cross and may we live in the power of your resurrection. Amen.

Icebreaker

What was your Easter weekend like? Did you gather with family or friends? Please share.

Introduction — To Know Christ and the Fellowship of His Sufferings

There is perhaps no painting of the crucifixion of Jesus more powerful or poignant than the famous altarpiece by Matthias Grünewald. Painted in 1512, it masterfully depicts Christ's unbearable agony on the cross (see the right side of this Group Guide for a photo). And yet, this painting was meant to serve as a source of solace and comfort. The original home of this masterpiece was the Monastery of St. Anthony in France. St. Anthony's was a hospital, and the primary ministry of its monks was the care of those suffering from various skin diseases, particularly the plague. Beginning with the Black Death (1347-1351), regular outbreaks of bubonic plague devastated Europe, bringing immense suffering and death. It was to places such as St. Anthony's that the sick and dying came. Grünewald's image of the crucified Christ, pitted with plague-type sores, illustrated to patients that Jesus understood and shared their afflictions and that they, like Paul, could share in his afflictions. Maybe the patients and the monks of St. Anthony's knew something that we have forgotten. They understood that suffering is an opportunity for communion with Christ and one another, and that such communion is the foundation of peace.

Scripture Study

This week we are reading passages that cover the final hours before the cross, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If you've already read all the scripture, take a few moments to share what you are sensing God is saying to you from these passages. If you haven't yet had a chance to read these scriptures, choose a few passages now and read through them as a group and then discuss what stands out to you as you read. What surprised you as you read these passages?

The Reading for April 18: Matthew 27

Judas hangs himself, Jesus stands before Pilate, and the crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus.

The Reading for April 19: John 19

Jesus sentenced, crucified, died, and buried.

The Reading for April 20: Matthew 28

The resurrection and the Great Commission by the risen Jesus.

The Reading for April 21: John 20

The resurrection and the appearances of Jesus.

The Reading for April 22: John 21 & Acts 1:1-11

The ministry and teaching of Jesus after his resurrection and before he ascended into heaven.

Closing Prayer

As a closing prayer, look up 1 Corinthians 15. Have members of your group take turns reading the entire chapter aloud. At the end, say in unison: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Amen!"

