



THE WEEK BEFORE
EASTER

8 DAYS TO VICTORY!

THINKING ABOUT EASTER WEEK:

The Easter holiday is a unique moment in our calendars. Meditating on the Biblical narrative takes one through the emotions of sorrow, pain, remembrance and celebration. The story of Christ can, if we are willing, change all the rest of our days - - and eternity.

Indeed, Easter is a long holiday weekend, consisting of bunny rabbits and chocolate, but there is so much more that we should not miss:

- Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem
- The last supper with His disciples
- Christ's heartbreaking prayer in the garden of Gethsemane
- The arrest, mock trial and horrifying crucifixion
- Peter's denial of his belief in Jesus
- The Saviour's death and resurrection

These moments define the story of Easter. Spend the next eight days in remembrance, reverence and awe of Jesus. HE IS RISEN!

DAY ONE:

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

READ:

MARK 11:1-11

CONTEMPLATE:

Think about the Queen of England coming to Canada. There is fanfare, non-stop ceremony, pomp and circumstance. It's a spectacle before, during and after the event.

Jesus, the King did not arrive in the city of Jerusalem that way. No political glad-handing or royal honouring. Jesus is a new kind of King, not concerned about what humankind considers royal, but focused on what God considers royal; humble, peaceful and faithful.

By riding on the back on a donkey, Jesus, declared His kingship and was greeted by people who shouted for joy for their long-awaited saviour. But the people wanted a saviour on their terms; in less than a week they would waffle and claim another as the king.

Today is referred to as Palm Sunday, don't miss out on the chance to celebrate the humble entrance of our Saviour into your life, who rode forward toward a difficult destiny because of His great love for us.

RESPOND:

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 has done in your life today?

PRAYER:

Spend some time in prayer thanking God for sending Jesus as the true King.

Thank our Father for Jesus':

- humility and holiness
- obedience and conviction
- unconditional love in spite of our fickleness
- plan to provide salvation for you

DAY TWO:

ANOINTING AND LAST SUPPER

READ:

MARK 14:1-25

CONTEMPLATE:

Some moments in life seem insignificant or unclear; this was the case with Jesus' followers who were unaware of the spiritual event that was at hand.

A woman came to honour Jesus by pouring out of perfume. Those around saw a waste of time and money, but Jesus saw significance, 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 in symbolism of what would be His broken body and shared the cup in recognition of what would be His blood spilled out, He did so to commemorate for 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:

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:

Ask God to open your eyes to the significant things He is doing in your life.

DAY THREE:

IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

READ:

MARK 14:32-42

CONTEMPLATE:

In the garden of Gethsemane, we see a side of Jesus that we can relate to. He knows the future that awaits Him, He alone bears the weight of what's to come and as His soul feels "deeply distressed and troubled," He does the only thing He knows to do: Pray. In a moment that reflects His humanity, Jesus gets 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. 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 not what I will, but what you will."

RESPOND:

How might your own prayers change if you closed them all with this declaration? What might your life look like if, even as you cry out to God, you submit to His will because, like Jesus, you believe that His will and His way was ultimately for your good? It's the ultimate act of trust to say that even when things don't go your way, you still believe God's will is for your good.

PRAYER:

Go to God in prayer and today tell Him all your worries, concerns and pains. Tell Him how you really feel in all your honesty. Wrestle, plead and maybe even shed tears. When you feel it is time to conclude the prayer bring your heart to be able to say to your heavenly Father, "Yet not what I will, but what you will."

DAY FOUR:

THE BETRAYAL AND ARREST

READ:

MARK 14:43-65

CONTEMPLATE:

We think that someone we love should never hurt us. But it happens. Jesus is betrayed by Judas, a disciple whom He loved. He is arrested and deserted by His followers (friends). He is then put on trial, falsely accused while knowing He's guilty of nothing. Ultimately, He's sentenced to death and beaten publicly. All the while Jesus never defends Himself other than declaring that He is the Son of God and that God will do all He said He was going to do.

Indeed, the betrayal, arrest and abuse of Jesus are horrific. But below the surface they show His great love for us. Christ was given an opportunity to reject His Father and deny who he was, but He chose truth instead. No matter the cost. Why? Because Jesus knew then what we know now: His death was for the greater purpose. His death was for us.

RESPOND:

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:

(If you are able, can you find a place to kneel in prayer?)

With heartfelt expression, thank God for:

- what Christ, the Son endured for me
- what God, the Father endured for me
- recognize that my pain, though real, is only a fraction of the pain that Jesus went through on my behalf
- this opportunity to commit my life in a fresh and new way
- for the many more blessings that are bestowed because of Christ's death

DAY FIVE: **PETER'S DENIAL**

READ:

MARK 14:27-31; 66-72

CONTEMPLATE:

Isn't it easy to have a higher opinion of yourself than is actually true? Do you often believe your own P.R. that your faith is stronger, your commitment more robust, your opinions are more accurate than everyone around you? You should lead, you should be listened to?

The fact is we are all unified in this area: we have all weakened in our faith, wandered in our commitment, thought and spoken ill of God and other children of His. Betrayal is not far from each one of us. We know exactly how Peter felt in this moment, including the fear, regret and guilt.

This is the most humbling part of the gospel. Jesus while betrayed Himself, created a place of forgiveness and safety for both victims and victimizers. If you have been hurt and when you've hurt others...there is restoration.

RESPOND:

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:

Today, pray with confession and thanks. Admit to how you have not lived the life you vowed to the Lord and then, realize and embrace His restoring forgiveness. Consider that your acceptance by God has nothing to do with your righteous or unrighteous actions. His forgiveness comes completely from a place of LOVE. Praise God that you, like Peter are broken, yet are repaired, restored and redeemed by God!

DAY SIX: THE CRUCIFIXION

READ:
MARK 15:1-32

CONTEMPLATE:
After reading the passage, how can today be referred to as “Good Friday”? It is a day of physical brutality and spiritual emptiness. Yet there is hope in the unseen.

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 contemplating 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. Remember that He did it for His glory and our good.

RESPOND:
Make a list of your feelings you have knowing that Jesus endured crucifixion for your good? _____

Now, write out what it means for you personally to have freedom from your sins thanks to Jesus’ crucifixion?

PRAYER:
Today’s time in prayer may be difficult, or emotional, or painful, or numb. We all process differently and we all are at different places of spiritual tenderness.

- pray today in thankfulness. (*many or few words is ok*)
- thank God for the death of His Son
- for the forgiveness of all your sin
- that God always takes that which was meant for evil and turns it into good
- that you will move forward in your life in full trust and faith because of God’s care and concern

DAY SEVEN: **JESUS' DEATH & BURIAL**

READ:
MARK 15:33-47

CONTEMPLATE:
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 is so much more still to come. But imagine what this moment in time must have been like for the people who witnessed it. Imagine how His disciples must have felt, knowing the man they had 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! Remember that, just as the disciples didn't know that God was still working on 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:
Even though you now know what happened in the story, you can relate to how the disciples felt in that moment of uncertainty. Everyone has experienced the doubt, fear, and disappointment that comes when the story doesn't turn out the way we hoped it would. Are you in a season where you do not know the answer or how it will turn out? How do you need to think right now?

PRAYER:
Pray today in faith. Even if you have to declare what is beyond your sight (*because that's what faith is!*). Acknowledge that God is the author of your story. Trust that the direction of your life is safe in His hands. Pray remembering that God is with you in the waiting, in the pain, in the unknown and you can totally trust Him with your future.

DAY EIGHT: JESUS' RESURRECTION

READ: MARK 16

CONTEMPLATE:

Though the journey leading up to Easter Sunday was long, arduous and full of uncertainty, the ending is 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.

The end of the story is now the beginning for those who believe and become disciples of Jesus. Death is defeated and we journey in this life with the hope that spans eternity!

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

will do what He says He will do in your life. That's what Easter means for you.

RESPOND:

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 is one way you can remember and keep the lessons of Easter engaged in your heart and life?

PRAYER:

Pray that God would let you carry with you this sense of awe, wonder, and celebration over what He's done through Jesus.

Thank Him again and always for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Thank God humbly that he has changed your life and dedicate your remaining days to Him.

