

The Friday before Easter, traditionally known as Good Friday, is a very important day in the life of those who follow Jesus. It's a time to remember the suffering, trial, and execution of Jesus, and what these mean for us. We encourage you to gather together with your small group, your family, or a group of friends to remember the price that Jesus paid for all of us. This guide is intended to help you with this time together.

How you use this guide is largely up to you. It contains a number of different options of how to celebrate Good Friday, some which may be more familiar and comfortable than others. We trust that as you read through this guide you will discover what elements will work best for your gathering.

It is not expected or possible for you to do everything included in this guide. There is also no single order or method of how to follow this guide. This guide is just that, a guide. Yet, it should be possible for you to engage in a meaningful way with several of the options listed. The elements listed in this guide fall under three general categories; reading and engaging with the story of Good Friday, prayer and reflection, and experiential activities.

Reading and engaging with the story:

Telling the Story - a walk through of the events of Jesus' death

Lectio Divina - a practice of contemplatively reading the Bible. If you have never tried this practice before, it is a wonderful way of engaging deeper into the Bible.

Prayer and reflection:

Jesus' Prayer - praying through and reflecting on Jesus' prayer just prior to his arrest.

The Garden - a prayerful reflection of the events of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The Trial and Suffering - reflecting on some images of the suffering that Jesus endured during his trial.

The Final Words - Praying through and discussing the final words of Jesus as He hung on the cross to die.

Experiences:

Sharing a Meal - Purposefully having a meal in which you not only share food but also your thoughts, what is happening in your life, and your reflections on Good Friday.

Communion - Share communion together as we remember the life and death of Jesus, as instructed during the Last Supper.

Foot Washing - Following in the example of Jesus, wash each other's feet as a sign of humility and service.

Lighting Candles - Pray together praising God for who he is, thanking God for what he has done, and asking him for help for the future, concluded by lighting candles.

Tell the Story

One of the key pieces of Good Friday is retelling the story of what happened to Jesus over two thousand years ago. It is necessary we remember the pain and humiliation of this

story and do not simply jump from celebration (Palm Sunday) to celebration (Easter). Before the victory of Easter Sunday, Jesus had to walk through the events of Good Friday.

Take turns reading the story of the events that took place on the way to the cross.

Plot Against Jesus - Matthew 26: 1-5

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus - Luke 22:1-6

Jesus Washes the Disciples Feet - John 13:1-30

Last Supper - Luke 22: 7-38

The Garden of Gethsemane - Matthew 26: 36-45

Jesus Arrested - Matthew 26:47-67

Jesus Before Pilate - John 19:1-16

Soldiers Mock Jesus - Matthew 27:27-31

Crucifixion of Jesus - John 19:16-27

Death of Jesus - Matthew 27:45-56

Burial of Jesus - Mark 15:42-47

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a practice of contemplatively reading the Bible. Lectio Divina, which is Latin for 'Divine Reading', is an ancient Christian practice where the Bible is slowly and intentional read so we are able to listen deeply to the

word of God. It is easy in our fast paced and often loud lives to miss the still, small voice of God. The practice of Lectio Divina is a way of helping us hear that voice.

There are several different steps in the practice of Lectio Divina.

- First, have someone read the text out loud slowly while everyone else listens (does not read along).
- After this first reading, read the text again aloud but this time listen for a word or a short phrase that sticks out to you. After a moment, have each person share what word or phrase stuck out to them. People do not need to be elaborate on their answers, the point is to have an initial reaction to the text.
- Have someone else read the text out loud again, this time instructing everyone to listen for where they find themselves in the text or how does this passage of Scripture speak to them. Have everyone share their responses in the form of "I see . . ." or "I hear . . ." or other personal responses.
- Finally, read the text out loud again, this time listening for what this text invites me to do in response. Have everyone share their response in the form of "I believe that God wants me this week / today to . . ."

This process is intended to take some time and should not be rushed, so feel free to leave plenty of space between readings and responses.

Use this method to read through Matthew 26:69-75. Read this entire segment of Scripture each time.

Jesus' Prayer

One of the last things Jesus did while he was alive was to pray (found in John 17:1-26). This prayer was for himself, for his followers and for all of the people who would believe in him throughout time. Read this prayer out loud one section at a time, a different person reading each part of the prayer. Discuss each area of the prayer together, talking about your reaction, personal understanding, and response to Jesus prayer for himself, for his disciples and for us all.

The Garden

Read Matthew 26:36-46 out loud. Then read each of the statements below and answer the questions as a group.

The failure in the Garden: Keep watch with me and pray .

. . .

Jesus, entering into the darkest night of his life, asked his friends to stay awake and to pray. Yet, three times Jesus found them sleeping, concerned more with their own rest than with keeping watch with him. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" But Jesus was left alone.

Have your friends or family ever let you down during a time of need? What is your reaction to knowing that Jesus was let down too?

The feelings in the Garden: Loneliness, Fear, and Anguish

The garden for Jesus was a place of loneliness and fear as his best friends slept and the weight of the world was on his shoulders. Jesus prayed that the cup of suffering would pass from him, but it did not. In the garden Jesus was alone, afraid, and in anguish.

When have you felt alone, afraid, or in anguish? What does it mean for you that Jesus felt the same way in the garden?

The strength in the Garden: Confidence and Trust in God
Jesus prayed to God his Father that the task might be completed some other way, if it was possible. God remained silent and gave no answer, which is an answer after all. Yet, Jesus knew his Father and so he trusted Him. Let this cup pass, Jesus prayed. Not my will, but yours be done.
When was a time that you prayed for deliverance but received none? What does it teach us that Jesus submitted his will to God, no matter the costs?

The arrest in the Garden: The hour has come
One of Jesus' friends, who had followed him for years, gave him into the hands of his enemies. The garden, which should have been a place of rest, was just the dreadful calm before the storm. But Jesus does not run away from the coming tide. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to embrace the role God created for him.
What paths has God asked you to walk down that are challenging? What does it mean for your life that Jesus walked the darkest path of all?

The Trial and Suffering

Jesus did not die gently or easily. He was ripped from his life with brutality. Read each statement and passage of Scripture below, and answer the questions together.

The Witnesses' Lies (Mark 14:56)- The testimony of the witnesses are paid for, but even still their stories doesn't match up. It's all an elaborate sham intended to bring about only one conclusion, the death of Jesus. The trial is stacked against Jesus, but he doesn't defend himself.

Have you ever had lies told about you? How do you defend yourself when attacked?

The Accuser's Questions (Matthew 26:62-63) - The question is the right one but for the wrong reason. They only ask the question to trap Jesus, not to seek the truth. If they had only listened they might have realized that Jesus was the one they had been waiting for.

When do people still ask questions about Jesus, not to find truth, but to convict or to judge? When you ask questions, what is your motivation?

The Crowds Rejection (Luke 23:20-23)- The crowds, which were cheering only days before, have turned bloodthirsty. Pilate tried several times to set Jesus free, but the crowds chanted all the more, "Crucify him!" The hearts and minds of men can be fickle, cheering in victory one day and chanting for death the next.

How fickle is your heart and mind toward Jesus?

The Flogging (Matthew 27:26)- A whip cracks and skin is ripped apart. Jesus, whose death sentence has already been decided, is forced to suffer the brutality of Roman torture, pain for pain's sake.

What pain are you enduring in your life? What is your reaction to the extent of Jesus' pain?

The Mocking (Matthew 27:27-31) - Jokes, punches, spit and cruelty. They crown him with thorns. They robe him in rags. They give him a stick as his royal scepter. They bow down to him in mock worship. "All hail the king of the Jews!" they cheer, enjoying their cruel game. Jesus does not resist and the game soon wears old. They rip the robe off, take away his "royal staff," and lead him to the cross to die.

Are you worshiping the Jesus that is revealed in the Bible or just a parody of Jesus?

Think of all that Jesus endured. What is your reaction to knowing that this was all for you?

The Final Words

There are seven sayings Jesus spoke while on the cross to die. Read each of these sayings out loud. After each one discuss each of the follow questions:

What does this saying reveal about Jesus' humanity?

What does this saying reveal about Jesus' divinity?

What is your reaction to this saying?

How can this saying deepen your faith?

Matthew 27:46

Luke 23:34

Luke 23:43

Luke 23:46

John 19:26-27

John 19:28

John 19:30

Share a Meal Together

(Materials needed: all of the items for a meal)

One of the central events of Jesus' last days was the sharing of the Passover meal with his disciples.

A person's house in ancient Jewish culture was seen as a representation of the temple, a place where only those who were loved and invited could come. The table in a house represented the altar of the temple and was considered a sacred place. This is actually one of the reasons why so many religious elites in Jesus' day got upset when he ate with prostitutes, tax collectors, and other 'sinners.' Jesus opens the doors wide and invites everyone to eat with him.

Right up to when he is about to die, Jesus wants to spend time with his friends, sharing a meal with them.

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. Luke 22:14-15

Jesus was looking forward to this meal before he suffered. His disciples were far from perfect. One eating at the table with him (Peter) would deny knowing Jesus and another

(Judas) would be the one to betray Jesus into the hands of his enemies. Yet, they are both invited to the table to share a meal with Jesus. You are encouraged to share a meal together with your small group, family, or friends. Instead of the sometimes superficial conversations we have at our tables, use this time to intentionally talk about things of God.

Here are some conversations worth having while you share this meal together. Use these questions as guides and do not feel obligated to use these specific questions or all of them during your time together.

What is God doing in your life right now?

What is one thing that you hope God will do in your life or in the life of CCC?

What is one thing weighing down on you from which you hope God gives you comfort, peace, or deliverance?

Share a story about what the people around the table have meant in your life and how they can help you follow God more closely in the future.

On this Good Friday, tell about how you understand Jesus' sacrifice and what it means to your life?

You may also want to consider ending your meal with Communion (see below).

Communion

(Materials needed: Bread and Juice)

Before Jesus was betrayed he shared a meal with his closest friends. This meal, often known as the Last Supper, is where we see the very first instance of communion. Read this account out loud together (Matthew 26: 17-30).

The early church would celebrate this meal to remember Jesus whenever they met together. *In their homes they broke bread and ate together* (Acts 2:46). Celebrating communion is a central way that people have remembered Jesus and his sacrifice for generations. With the breaking of bread together we remember the body of Jesus that was given and broken for the forgiveness of our sins. With the drinking of the juice we remember the blood of Jesus that was shed on the cross so that we might become children of God.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 out loud. Pray together thanking God for the sacrifice of Jesus, remembering his death until he comes again.

Foot washing (Materials needed: Water basin, towels)

Jesus wanted to show his friends the full extent of his love before he died so He took on the clothing of a servant and washed his disciple's feet.

Read John 13:1-17 out loud together.

The task of washing someone's feet in the first century was considered degrading. Yet, Jesus is setting an example of humility for us to follow. For what reason does Jesus degrade himself in such a way? So that we might know the full extent of his love.

In general, we have trouble showing people that we care about them or that they are important to us. The example that Jesus sets is to serve people in such a way that they would see your love for them.

Foot washing is something that might seem weird or out of place in our culture. For us both parts of foot washing is difficult. It's hard to wash someone else's feet but it is just as hard to have someone else wash ours. The truth is that we really don't need our feet cleaned from a hygienic standpoint. But we all need to humble ourselves to the point where we are able to serve one another and to be served by one another.

Washing one another's feet is a symbolic way of showing this humility and love.

Take turns washing one another's feet, remembering as you do so that this is an act of humility and service toward the person whose feet you're washing and also toward God.

Lighting candles and prayer

(Materials needed: candles and matches/lighter)

An important part of Good Friday is when we intentionally set aside time to pray. These prayers take on a variety of forms and are given for many different reasons. One way that Christians throughout history have focused their prayers is through the lighting of candles. The candle's flame is a symbol that our prayers shine to God in the darkness and that our prayers rise to God like smoke.

Take time to speak prayers to God, thanking Jesus for his sacrifice, for the cleansing of our sins, and for the things we have in our lives that are good gifts from above. Also bring your pain and hurt to God, who is familiar with suffering and can heal all our wounds. After each person prays, have them light a candle.