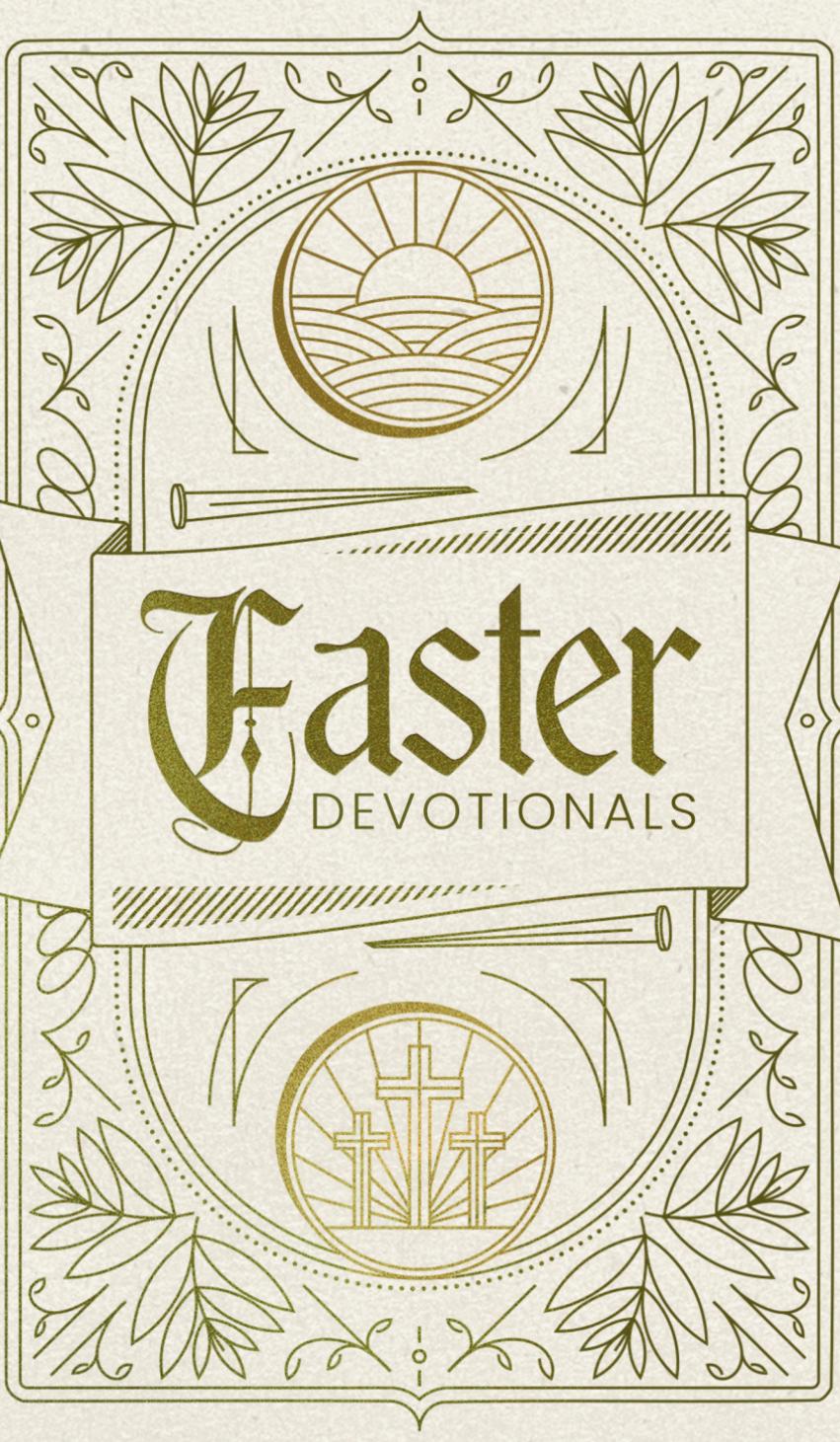


Easter
DEVOTIONALS



Passion Week Devotionals
Rancho Murieta Community Church
2025

Instructions

The following devotional is written for you to read, consider, journal and pray through the Easter story. With eight daily devotionals, beginning on Palm Sunday, we will walk through the events and issues of Passion week as a congregation. Plan to spend a few minutes daily, in quiet, with a Bible, this journal and the Lord. The Bible texts will all come from the book of Matthew in chronological sequence. May you see God's glory and grace through the sacrifice of Jesus in a fresh way!

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Sunday

Devotional 1

Title: Here Comes The King

Passage: Matthew 21:1-11

Walkup music has become a thing. Baseball hitters have a favorite “theme” song played as they take their place in the batter’s box. The specialized music is a means to honor the player before they hit. The musical choice is personalized often telling a story of the players preferences, background or reputation. Today’s text tells the story of how Jesus started the most important week in history. This is Jesus’ walkup music to the Passion week, the days leading up to His victory over sin and death. It was a time of honor and pageantry. In the days to come, the story will turn even more dramatic, but without the honor.

The picture and phrases of Jesus’ entry tell a story of who is being honored, not just a man but God incarnate. Jesus is declared, the Messiah, the Son of David. Beyond titles, details in this story fulfill prophecy about the coming King. An example is, Jesus riding on a colt is spoken about in Zechariah 9:9.

Good music is not just made by a “great beat” but powerful words and phrases. Jesus is exalted as a King and Savior verbally by the crowds. A repeated key word chanted by the crowd is, Hosanna, transliterated “O Save.”

This means the work of Jesus, as Savior, would come for you and me.

While the people gave Jesus a mini parade of entry into the city worthy of a King, the victory was not over what they were expecting. Instead of a political or military victory, Jesus' triumph would be over the enemy of sin, bringing salvation to his people through a pure and righteous sacrifice on the cross.

As you read the story try to put yourself in the crowd. Imagine the excitement. Find the tension. Feel the growing buzz.

Journal

What stands out to you about this triumphal entry?

Express the emotions you imagine were taking place within the crowd?

Individuals were asked to allow Jesus to borrow a donkey and colt. Imagine the satisfaction they must have felt later realizing, in sharing their everyday items, which were used to fulfill prophecy. What is your attitude toward "your stuff" being used for God's glory? Are you hesitant? Why?

It is easy to take for granted people who are important to us. To whom do you feel led to express honor and appreciation? How will you do that TODAY?

Write a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to Jesus. You may find inspiration from the phrase Hosanna (O Save) in the highest.

Monday

Devotional 2

Title: Cleansing The Temple

Passage: Matthew 21:12-17

Have you ever gone to an event and been shocked at the prices at the concession stand? A soft drink \$8, a hot dog \$10 and a box of candy \$5. It feels like the concession stand is just taking advantage of a captive and hungry audience. This can be so frustrating when you're at the event to watch, participate and celebrate only to feel robbed in purchasing a meal.

Very few things made Jesus mad, but exploitation of people at His Father's house is one of them. When people came to worship at the temple, sacrifices were made. Small animal among other things were brought or purchased for the sacrifice. Bringing the animal was no big deal if you lived around the corner, but imagine walking a couple days with your family to celebrate and worship. Adding even a few pigeons to your pack would be near impossible. It is easy to envision how the business of selling animals to sacrifice began.

I don't think the issue was selling the items of sacrifice. Jesus was irate at people being taken advantage of when trying to do a spiritual act of obedience through worship at the temple. The most precious parts of

worship have no monetary cost.... they are our hearts, our praise and our being. Protecting others from exploitation, inside and outside of the church is a noble and spiritual endeavor. If like Jesus, are we moved to action when the poor, crippled, orphans, or widows are taken advantage of. But what about ourselves?

What should our reaction be we are devalued? How could we be like Jesus in these events too. First and foremost, Jesus showed grace and mercy. He did not make it about fair or right. Think about how Jesus responded to being arrested? He didn't fight the injustice inflicted on himself as he did abuse inflicted on others.

Journal

What moves you to anger? Is it for the mistreatment of others or yourself? Where do you see exploitation?

What can you do to be a support and advocate for those being exploited?

Consider taking action this week. Call a local agency (Alternatives Pregnancy Center, a food bank) and see what you can give, do or pray to increase their effectiveness.

Tuesday

Devotional 3

Title: Correcting The Religious Leaders

Passage: Matthew 21:23-46

Have you ever gotten in trouble for doing the RIGHT thing? Sounds crazy doesn't it. I heard a story of gentlemen who started a new job. Over the first few day's co-workers tried to "teach" the new worker how to cut corners, give half effort, maximize breaks, and use company product for personal use. When the new worker didn't go along with status quo and made a point to work hard and be honest, there was tension with the current employees. The management loved him, but the workers were angry because their character was revealed.

In today's Bible text the tension with the establishment (pharisees) is increasing. The pharisees start by trying to trick Jesus. Jesus won't be trapped; He asks a question instead of answering one. The pharisees, while trying to set a trap are caught in their own. If they answer that John's authority came from the Lord, they are endorsing that Jesus is who He says He is. If they say John was just asking as a man on his own, the crowd who saw John as a prophet of God would be angry. Jesus knows that the pharisees do not listen to Him and do not believe He is God's son. The ironic piece is that the "religious leaders",

who have Jesus in their presence, would rather protect their system than sincerely follow God.

The parables in the text reveal how the pharisees outwardly act as if they are great worshippers of God but there is a disconnect between their words and actions. Their hearts are not humble before the Lord but proud of their fulfillment of their own rules.

One of the powerful and pointed statements is in verse 31. Jesus states that “tax collectors and prostitutes will go into heaven BEFORE the religious leaders.” What Jesus is saying is there is no past sin too big not to be forgiven. Anyone who sincerely turns to God can be forgiven and used. There will be people who through lip service vocalize their Christian faith who will fall behind those who modern culture condemns. What God desires is our sincere humble surrender, to connect words and actions, no matter our past failures.

Journal

Environments can have tremendous pressure to not disrupt status quo. Is there an environment (work, school, or family) where you feel like you have to change your behavior from what you believe God wants to fit in?

How do you best “hear God’s voice”? God speaks primarily through the Bible, His written word but also through wise Christian friends, spiritual leaders and the Holy Spirit. What can you do to create more margin to hear God and not walk through the motion of faith like the pharisees?

Have you ever felt like you couldn’t be used by God because of your past choices, that somehow you disqualified yourself from ministry? What does this passage say about repentance of past sin?

Write a prayer to the Lord. Consider if there are items which you need to be forgiven for. Maybe ask Him where and how He desires to use you for His glory. Ask for strength to walk in love and truth no matter what others are doing around you.

Wednesday

Devotional 4

Title: The Imminence of His Return

Passage: Matthew 24:1-36

Today's passage is a long discourse Jesus makes about what is coming following His death and resurrection. From the physical destruction of the temple to the pending famines and earthquakes. Many events are to take place before Christ's second coming. These are hard passages and concepts which theologians often don't agree upon. So, why did Jesus share these things? What I am to see, learn and trust in?

First, following Christ's resurrection things would be different. The Temple (focal location for worship) will not be a physical building, but in every believer through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, the influences and control in the world will not instantly get better. There was a hope and perspective that the Messiah would lead an earthly revolution. Christ is preparing the people for the opposite. The time between Christ's ascension and second coming, the state of the world will only get worse. False prophets, antichrists, warring nations, natural disasters, and the persecution of Christ-followers are some of the trials to be prepared for. The most important point Jesus is making is no matter what happens know I will return in power and glory to usher my people to a better place.

Jesus was planting hope that as powerful as His death and resurrection is, these are signs of the future resurrection of His people too. There would be opposition to the disciple's work. As a Christian can you relate? Do you feel your faith is supported by what is going on around you in the world? Many of us feel a challenge from the values and examples from the world but culturally and politically. Christ doesn't want His people to rely on anything or anyone other than Himself. Jesus doesn't want us to give up or cave in but to stay strong in Him.

One last point before you dig into the text yourself. Are we to use today's earthquakes, evil leaders and rising of nations as signs of Christ's second coming? Yes and No. Verse 36 seems pretty clear, as far as the timing of Christ's return "no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." The second coming cannot be predicted but the issues of the day should be a reminder that Christ is returning SOON and we need to be ready. God desires to be your strength and hope as you persevere in whatever hardship the world throws your way.

Journal

What questions do you have from this passage?

What were your expectation upon becoming a Christian?
Did you think the Lord would take away trials or
strengthen you in them?

Would it motivate or demotivate you to know Jesus is not
returning for a couple thousand years? Why?

What would you do, share or confess today, if you
thought Jesus was coming for you tomorrow?

Thursday

Devotional 5

Title: When Relationships Don't Meet Expectations

Passage: Matthew 26:20-75

Think about a time when an important relationship in your life did not meet expectations. A situation where you were crushed because of abandonment, disloyalty, abuse or betrayal. Really, take a moment to ponder. Do not move on until you have a name, a picture and a situation in your mind.

While easily the most important and fulfilling thing in life, relationships are not easy. We struggle to protect intimacy with the Lord, we regret things we say and do, to people close to us, and we get our feelings hurt by people we trust. Jesus did too.

Thursday of Passion Week was a huge day. Jesus had the last meal with the disciples. He instituting the pattern of communion which we celebrate in remembering Him and His sacrifice. Peter challenged the idea that he would deny his relationship with Jesus. Jesus was arrested through the betrayal of Judas, a man who had walked close to Jesus for a couple years. When arrested officials ignored Jesus' innocence paving the way for His execution.

It clearly seems the Father had a plan for Jesus' perfect sacrifice. Jesus didn't resist the pain He would endure physically, spiritually and relationally for you and me. I am struck in how difficult it must have been on Jesus to endure two people so close to Him who turn their back on Him.

Judas sold out Jesus for some money. Really?! Was Judas that cold, selfish and greedy all along? Jesus knew it was coming, and Judas had planned out the transgression, telling the officials what they want to get paid and run from all this faith stuff for good. But could he? Judas ended up taking His own life, likely because of the guilt of turning on a good and innocent Savior who he realized was more than just a man. Judas had some evil in him, which must have been easier for Jesus to deal with than Peter.

Peter, the brash leader of the band, cowered before men, afraid of his faith because he was scared of the consequences of being connected to Jesus. The man who once said, "I would never", turned into a broken manly man. As badly as this must have hurt Jesus, Jesus leads the care in Peter's redemption. Check out John 21:15-19 if you need a refresher on the conversation Jesus and Peter would have.

So, what can we learn about relationships from this Bible text? A lot. There are both good and evil people in this world, both will let us down and hurt us. But learning to

respond like Jesus to these hurts is a key in developing and sustaining great relationships. Jesus didn't minimize Peter's denial, but he didn't characterize Peter by it either. Jesus challenged Peter to be more. Jesus saw the potential and humble brokenness of Peter and challenged him to fulfill his calling to build the church.

Journal

What are the major themes in this Bible text (there are many)?

How are you doing in relationships? Is there a past hurt you are holding on too which is blocking close healthy relationships?

What questions do you have about the circumstances of this day?

What in Jesus' response most surprises you?

Peter took a failure, was broken before the Lord, and allowed God to redeem his weakness. Is there a mistake you need to own and allow God to heal you from?

Consider taking communion as an individual or family as a remembrance of what Jesus taught in the upper room.

Friday

Devotional 6

Title: A Dark Day That Became GOOD FRIDAY

Passage: Matthew 27:1-61

Of all the suffering and punishment Jesus accepted for humanity, the separation from the Father may be the most painful. Theologically this is really significant. God is holy, He is not only without sin, he is ALWAYS separate from sin. At the moment on the cross where Jesus took the punishment for our sin, God (the Father) separated or forsook Jesus. This is the cry of Jesus, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" It is easy to move past this point. Today's let's not.

Jesus, has ALWAYS been with the Father. But in this moment the Father and Spirit has no place with Jesus because of the sin of the world Jesus would bear. Several times I have seen the pain of a widow or widower who loses a spouse after 50, 60 or even 70 years together. You can physically see the pain and loss in their eyes. They don't know how to live without their loved one. Now back to Jesus. We can only imagine the weight of sin on Jesus, but now picture Jesus doing this without the community of the Trinity. He bore what He didn't deserve and accepted it, for a moment, without the support He had always known.

Journal

What is the greatest sacrifice you have made for another?

What strikes you about the suffering Jesus endured?

The work Jesus did on the Cross is complete. There is no other sacrifice needed to make atonement for our sin. Is there a sin you continually feel guilty for? One that you repeat and almost feel unforgivable because of? While patterns of sin are difficult, we should feel free and forgiven because of what Jesus did on the cross, His complete and final sacrifice for sin. Accept His work by not trying to pay a price you cannot pay.

Write a prayer of thanksgiving based on the sacrifices Jesus willingly made for you.

Saturday

Devotional 7

Title: The Discipline of Waiting

Passage: Matthew 27:57-61

This is the shortest and, in many ways, the hardest text we are studying this week. The concept is not hard but the application can be. Picture a time where a significant circumstance in your life was out of control and all you could do was wait. There was nothing you could do to speed the process or guarantee results. All you could do is wait. The unknowns in life may be some of the hardest things we deal with. Did I pass my test? Are the test results for cancer positive? When will God bring a significant other into my life? A loved one is on hospice but when will they take their last breath.

Waiting is fundamentally about trusting God. Trusting in our inability, that God is sovereign. Trusting in our fragility, that God is powerful. Trusting in our need, that God will provide.

It is hard to know the full mindset of the disciples following Jesus' death. Twice Jesus told them He would rise on the third day, but it appears that in their grief they shut down. Easy to see why. Their leader was gone.

Who didn't shut down, two ladies, Mary and Mary? The strength, service and leadership of women in the Bible is

often understated. These two faithful followers of Jesus went to the grave. Why? Likely to pay respects and reflect. There could also be a practical reason too, to see if anything is needed, that everything is OK. Strong women in our lives are good at that, aren't they? They make sure everything and everyone is OK even when they are struggling.

Within your processing of the Passion week, try to not let your mind move to the celebration of the resurrection. Reflect on the darkness of death and the waiting for what is next. Remember waiting on God is good, we learn to trust Him and not just ourselves.

Journal

What stands out about this Bible text?

How do you typically handle waiting? What makes waiting hard?

What role do other people play in healthy waiting?

Is there an issue you are currently waiting on?

Write out a prayer acknowledging your need and God's power in waiting.

Sunday

Devotional 8

Title: REJOICE, He Has Risen

Passage: Matthew 28:1-20

The Christian faith would be a meaningless religion if not for Christ's resurrection. Let me say that again and let it sink in. All the truth of the Bible, Jesus' teaching, the message of the Gospel hinge on the power and truth that Jesus ROSE from the dead on the third day. That is why Easter is the pinnacle of the church calendar, that is why most worship services are on Sunday (the day of the resurrection).

Why did Jesus wait for the third day? Sometimes even today, people may look like they have died but they haven't. Their heart rate and breathing may have slowed but they could still be revived back to consciousness. Modern medical technology is obviously much more accurate than what was available in 30 A.D. In Bible times, the third day represented that the dead were actually dead. There was no coming back, except for Jesus.

Do you recognize the ladies who speak to the angel in the empty tomb? The faithful Marys are back checking on things again as they did in chapter 27. Again, I think it is wise to note that it was not traditional male leaders who found the tomb empty but females. It was these

two ladies who Jesus meets as they are going to tell the disciples.

God wants to use YOU to love the world in His name. No matter your age, nationality, gender, background, skills or profession He is calling you to serve Him and share the Good News to the world who badly needs it.

Journal

What most inspires you in the Easter story?

What do you think the elders were trying to do in “paying off” the soldiers?

What are some of the most empowering and challenging thing about verse 16-20?

Write out a prayer of celebration to God.



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