



SCRIPTURE
UNION
SOUTH AFRICA

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7-day Easter Family Devotional

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Dear parents

Our Easter family tradition has been to gather at our local church for short evening services on the Monday to Thursday of Holy Week. Then on Friday morning we have joined a Good Friday service, coming together again on Sunday morning to celebrate the miracle of Christ's resurrection! Even for our family that is a lot of gathering for one week!

This year things are very different because of the Corona Virus restrictions that are in place. However, this is still a crucial time in the Christian calendar and so I want to share with you what our family will be doing in the hopes that it will spur you on to do something similar.

We still need an Easter rhythm

Our family is going to gather each day for 15-20 minutes. The time will be interactive and will involve our children with prayer, bible readings, questions and explanations. We will listen to what God is saying to us as a family. Sometimes we will meet in the morning and other times in the evening, depending on the day.

My hope is that we can enter the story of Christ's final week and walk the last few days of his journey on earth with him. The gospel themes of forgiveness, sacrifice, perseverance, love, and restoration are woven into these narratives. They are rich opportunities to be challenged about what it means to fully accept the work that Christ has done for us on the cross.

Grant Peers

Scripture Union South Africa,
Western Cape Regional Director



How to use the material

1. Day and theme

There is devotional material for 7 days (Monday to Sunday). The theme for each day is in the top right of the page.

2. Open in prayer and read the Bible

Read the passage together as a family from a translation that will be understandable for all who are participating. Share the responsibility by getting your children to do some of the reading.

3. Insights

These thoughts are intended to open our hearts to the passage. If your children have pressing questions then (within reason) follow their interest. If you don't know the answer to their questions then simply say so (and then do some investigation later)! The insights are not designed to be read, but to help you talk well about the theme for the day. Depending on the age of your children you may need to adjust the language that you use in your explanation.

4. Object lesson and Memory Verse

Each day there is a simple object lesson that you can use to illustrate the message of the day and to encourage discussion. Each one requires a small amount of preparation. The memory verse will help to embed the truth of God's Word deeply into their hearts too.

Note: there is no object lesson on Thursday because of the suggestion to have a family Tenebrae service.

5. Questions

There are two questions that would suit younger children and two that would suit older children. The idea is to provoke their thinking. Use other questions that may come to your mind too.

6. Parents to ponder

Although this is a family devotion, you as parent(s) may want to go a bit deeper by thinking on the points in this section. Perhaps this would even be helpful in drawing in your teenager!



Open in prayer and read Matthew 21:1-11

Insights

Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem as a king. How do we know this?

A. The crowd threw their cloaks on the ground and waved palm branches which they had done in the past to welcome other kings (e.g. 2Kings 9:13).

B. The crowd sang 'royal' songs and welcomed Jesus as the "Son of David" - if your father was a king then it would mean that you could also be king.

C. Jesus arrived on a donkey which was the way that the prophet Zechariah had predicted the Messiah-King would arrive (Zech 9:9-10).

But arriving on a donkey also showed that Jesus was a DIFFERENT kind of king - a humble, servant king. He came to conquer death and lead his people in victory over sin. Many leaders today use their power for themselves. Jesus used his power to serve others.

Object lesson and Memory Verse

Addendum 1 A. We have hearts that stray

Questions

For younger children

1. Who did people think Jesus was?
2. What does it mean to serve?

For older children

1. Why is it good to have a king (leader) who puts his people (nation / organisation) first?
2. What would it mean if you chose to let Jesus be your King?

Parents to ponder

The crowds wanted a king like David, a king who would free them from the tyranny of their foreign Roman rulers. In their eyes Jesus was even better than David because he had supernatural (super hero) powers! Are you sometimes like the crowd, wanting Jesus to fit into your agenda? It seems like the Corona Virus needs a super hero kind of solution. Are you prepared to follow Jesus as he brings his answers to the Corona Virus?

Close in prayer



Open in prayer and read Matthew 26:6-13

Insights

While Jesus was having dinner with his friends and disciples, Mary came forward and poured very expensive perfume (about R50,000) on his feet. Imagine how it would have smelt in that room. Really sweet! Judas complained because he thought that it was a terrible waste. But Jesus defended her for what she did.

How could Jesus think this was okay? His words tell us that she was probably doing more than she understood herself (until after Jesus has died). Her action gives a future picture of what is going to happen to Jesus - he is going to die and have perfume poured on his body before he is laid in a grave.

Object lesson and Memory Verse

Addendum 1 B. Jesus is God's gift

Questions

For younger children

1. What does the cost of the perfume tell you about Mary's love for Jesus?
2. Why do you think Jesus had to die?

For older children

1. Do you think the disciples were surprised by Jesus' words?
2. Why do you think Judas is so upset? What does that tell us about his heart?

Parents to ponder

When Jesus says, "you will always have the poor among you" he is quoting from Deuteronomy 15:11. If you read Deuteronomy 15 you will see that God is confronting selfishness and tighfistedness within Israel. The point was that there was no reason that any Israelite should be in need. God called them to show a generous, sharing spirit to each other. It is NOT an excuse to allow poverty. In fact, it is the exact opposite!

Jesus is rebuking the love of money/wealth that is the cause of much of the poverty that we see around us. How is the Corona Virus crisis indicative of how many of us in this world are captive to the love of money (and capitalism!)?

Close in prayer



Open in prayer and read John 13:1-14

Insights

Washing feet was the job of the lowliest servant. In those days people wore sandals all the time and the roads that they walked on were full of animal droppings and other stinky things. No one in their right mind would VOLUNTEER to take on that job. When you came into someone's home there was a servant appointed to wash feet, but it was never the master who did it.

Jesus chose to wash his disciples' feet because he was the Servant-King!

Peter didn't want his master (Jesus) to wash his feet. He thought that Jesus was too great for that job. But Jesus told Peter that, unless he was prepared to accept this service from Jesus, he would not be able to accept the GREATER service that Jesus would offer in his death on the cross. The greatest act of service that Jesus would do for the world was to meet our greatest need - forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with our Father.

Object lesson and Memory Verse

Addendum 1 C. Back words

Questions

For younger children

1. What is the dirtiest job that you can think of doing?
2. Why do you think Jesus chose to wash his disciples' feet?

For older children

1. What kind of other 'dirt' do you think Jesus came to wash away?
2. What would it mean for you to allow Jesus to become your Servant King?

Parents to ponder

Jesus calls us to serve each other in the same way that he served us. There was no service that was too much for Jesus. He was prepared to do that which was beyond the accepted call of duty. His call is that we would do the same for others.

How is Christ calling you to serve? What would it mean for you to go beyond the accepted call of duty? Is there a way that you could respond to the Corona Virus pandemic in this way?

Close in prayer



Lord, are you going to wash my feet? (John 12:6)

Open in prayer and read Matthew 26:17-30

Insights

The Passover was a meal that the Jews shared together to remember how God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. At the first Passover God commanded the Israelites to kill their best lamb and put some of the blood on the front doorposts of their houses. That night the oldest male in all Egyptian homes died. When God saw the blood on the doorposts of the Israelite's houses, he knew that a lamb had died instead. Death 'passed over' that home. Every year they would eat a meal of lamb to remember how a lamb died so that death could pass over them.

Jesus institutes a new remembrance that is even greater than Passover: he broke a piece of bread because his body would break to mend God's broken world; he poured a cup of wine because his blood would flow and so that our sins could be washed away.

This is the wonderful offer of salvation: human beings who are broken and hurting can pass from death to life. Jesus died the death we should die so that we can live. We can be forgiven and made whole again through Christ's death on the cross.

Questions

For younger children

1. Why is it important to remember special occasions (like birthdays)?
2. Why do we need to remember Jesus' death?

For older children

1. How is the Passover meal like the Last Supper?
2. What does it mean to you when you take Communion / the Lord's Supper?

Parents to ponder

Many Christian denominations remember the way the darkness gathered around Jesus on Thursday evening in a Tenebrae service. There is a description in the addendum at the end of this document of how you can have your own Tenebrae service at home with your family.

Instead of the Object Lesson, why not consider doing this together as a special celebration of the meaning of Easter. There are a couple of items you will need, so make preparation beforehand.

Close in prayer



Open in prayer and read John 19:16-30

Insights

The Jews are really upset about the sign above Jesus' head. The sign read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". They are so offended that they go to Pilate to complain. It seems quite petty!

Why are they so offended? It is exactly what they have been trying to deny all through Jesus' life – that he was the Messiah of Israel. Pilate did not realise it at the time, but he was making a perfectly true statement. Jesus was the King of the Jews, the Messiah of Israel

As Jesus dies (gives up his spirit) he says "It is finished". In the original language "It is finished" is a single word that was written on an account once it was paid in full. What is finished? Jesus has finished the work that the Father gave him to do (17:4). There is nothing else that needs to be done so that we can be God's children – Jesus did it all, he rescued the whole world.

Object lesson and Memory Verse

Addendum 1 D. Jesus died for our sins

Questions

For younger children

1. In what 3 languages was the sign above Jesus written?
2. Why did the soldiers decide to gamble for Jesus' garment?

For older children

1. Why do you think Jesus died by crucifixion (a criminal's death)?
2. What do you think it means that prophecy was fulfilled even in Christ's death?

Parents to ponder

There is a beautiful and tender exchange among Jesus, his mother Mary, and John at the foot of the cross. Jesus makes his mother and John into mother and child, and John takes her into his home. The gospel challenges the individualism of even the nuclear family unit. How might Christ be calling you to open your nuclear family to others in this Corona Virus pandemic?

Close in prayer



Open in prayer and read Matthew 27:57-65

Insights

Jesus was dead and buried. What a shock! Jesus' friends must have been so confused and upset. They had left everything to follow him, they had devoted their lives to him and now he was dead. How could Jesus die? Surely something had gone wrong? What about all the things he had said? They were left hopeless and alone. Imagine how they must have felt

Jesus was buried in a tomb, a small dark cave carved out of rock. His mother (Mary) and Mary Magdalene must have been aching with sorrow as they longed to just put fragrant spices on the body and give him a proper burial.

The Jewish leaders were determined that there would be no more tricks. A HUGE stone was put across the entrance to Jesus' tomb, a special mark (seal) was put on the stone (so they could see if someone moved it) and it was guarded by brave soldiers. No one was coming out of that tomb!

Object lesson and Memory Verse

Addendum 1 E. I forgive you

Questions

For younger children

1. What did you read earlier this week about Jesus' being prepared for death?
2. How would you feel if you never got to see your best friend again?

For older children

1. How would you have felt if you were one of Jesus' disciples?
2. How do the measures taken by the Jews help PROVE the resurrection?

Parents to ponder

Joseph of Arimathea, like Nicodemus (John 3:2) was a secret disciple of Jesus (John 19:38). He had a healthy fear of the Jewish leaders. The death of Jesus was now clear evidence of the extent to which they would go to eradicate those who perverted their pure religion. This kind of religious persecution is still a reality for many Christians around the globe. Persecuted Christians have had years of experience meeting in homes, sharing in small groups, and keeping a careful watch.

For different reasons (Corona Virus restrictions) Christians the world over are facing the same realities today. Many Christians have had to rely on what they can do at home rather than on the provisions of a church leader. This is a test of the depth and firmness of our faith. Pray today for those who still face persecution because of their faith. Also, consider how the restrictions of COVID-19 are testing the foundations of your faith.

Close in prayer

After three days I will rise again (Matt 27:63)



Open in prayer and read Matthew 28:1-15

Insights

Everything felt completely hopeless. But then hope dawned. It was literally at dawn that hope dawned! The ladies who came to the tomb were there to put spices on Jesus and wrap his body properly for burial. But they found the tomb was empty. At first they could not understand. They thought someone had stolen his body.

The stone had been rolled away and the tomb was EMPTY! The angels who were at the tomb announced to them the good news: Jesus has risen from the dead. They invited the ladies inside to see with their own eyes! What an incredible thing to behold. What a roller coaster of emotion from utter gloom to leaping-for-joy gladness!

Jesus' resurrection was the final and ultimate proof that everything that Jesus had said was true. He really is God's appointed King. It looked as though it was all lost (at his death). But he rose again. He really is 'the resurrection and the life'. And in the same way, ALL his promises are trustworthy: 'whoever lives and believes in me will never die'.

Object lesson and Memory Verse

Addendum 1 F. The empty tomb

Questions

For younger children

1. How would you have felt if you arrived at the tomb first?
2. How do you think we should celebrate the resurrection of Jesus?

For older children

1. What does it mean to you that Jesus rose from the dead?
2. What other things has Jesus said that you can trust fully?

Parents to ponder

Are there statements that Jesus has made that you have been inclined to doubt? These are very uncertain and fear-filled times in our world. What would it mean for you to take Jesus as his (completely believable) word? Read Matthew 6:25-34, 11:28-30 and John 6:35, 10:27. Circumstances can become overwhelming, but the resurrection is the foundation of our hope in this world.

Close in prayer



Addendum 1: Object Lessons and Memory Verses¹

A. We have hearts that stray

What you need: something woollen / picture of a sheep

What's this? It's wool, which comes from a sheep. Did you know there is a verse in the Bible that compares us humans with a sheep

We all like sheep have gone astray. Sheep can be quite silly or stubborn, or silly and stubborn. (Isa 53:6)

They are lousy at listening to their shepherds. And they easily wonder off into dangerous places. Well, the Bible says that we are like sheep. God is our shepherd and he has a path for us, but because of something called 'sinful hearts' we tend to be silly or stubborn, or maybe silly and stubborn. Loved as we are, there's something wrong with us, which is why we need someone to come rescue us. Can you think of a time you did something you knew that was wrong, but you did it anyway?

B. Jesus is God's gift

What you need: - a ball

What's this? That's right - a ball. We can kick a ball, but did you know that you are standing on a huge ball right now? That's right - planet earth, the world that God made, filled with billions of people. What does God feel about all these people?

God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son; whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

We believe in One God, who is Father, the one and only Son and the Holy Spirit. Well, the Father sent his one and only Son to this world 2000 years ago, giving him to us as the greatest gift. And Jesus gave himself up for us on a cross. As we trust in him we begin a relationship with him, and we never need to fear about being apart from him ever again. We will be with him forever.

What love - he'd rather die than live without us! Isn't that amazing? Have you trusted in Jesus yet?

1. the object lessons are from REACH-IN Introducing our kids to Christ, Terran Williams and <https://www.focusonthefamily.ca/content/three-fun-object-lessons-that-help-explain-easter-to-kids>



C. Back words

What you need: – list of sentences:

- Let your sister choose which TV program to watch
- Give your old toys to someone who needs them
- Let the others get a piece of cake before you do
- Clear the supper table without being asked

Read the first sentence from the list above, but read it backwards (i.e. read from right to left). Ask your kids to see if they can decipher the correct meaning of the sentence. Note: they only need to get the basic idea of the sentence, not word for word. You can read the backwards-sentence multiple times if necessary. Continue playing until all four of the sentences have been read.

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.
(Matt 20:26)

The world tells us that first is best and last is worst, but Jesus teaches us to do things backwards. The game we played helps us to think about how difficult it is to put others first. Have you ever done any of those things for someone? How did it turn out? What are some other ways you can serve others or put them first? Jesus showed us how to put others first by washing his disciples feet.

D. Jesus died for our sins

What you need: – a nail (in Jesus' hands)

What's this? It's a nail. You get big nig nails. One of the saddest day in history is when people crucified Jesus. They stuck massive nails in his wrists and ankles and pinned him to the cross. But what these people did not realize is that God was doing something wonderful

By Jesus' wounds you have been healed. (1 Pet 2:24)

Our sins deserve to be punished. But somehow God put all the punishment we deserve on him. Now we can be healed of our sin – instantly forgiven, and in fact as we trust in Jesus he gradually frees us from the power of sin. It's like the spiritual disease we have called 'sin' gets cured by faith in Jesus. Isn't that amazing? What do you feel about Jesus dying on the cross?



E. I forgive you

What you need: a magnet

What's this? That's right – a magnet. A magnet has a North pole and a South pole. What else has a North pole and a South pole? That's right – our planet. In fact you can fly from the North pole to the South pole. Now here is a trick question: can you fly from the East pole to the West pole? No! Because East carries on forever and ever, as does West.

As far as the East is from the West, that is how far you have taken our sin from us.. (Ps 103:12)

How far is the East is from the West? It's from forever to forever! Well, when we have done something wrong, we can come to Jesus and say sorry. And guess what – he takes our sin away from us forever and ever away. I am not saying all your problems are gone with people you hurt. I mean, If you steal something, you have to pay that person back. But you don't have to pay God back anything to forgive you. Is there anything you want to ask God to forgive you for?

F. The empty tomb

What you need: two eggs and a bowl. Before doing this activity, empty one of the eggs by making a hole in either end and blowing out the contents. Hide the holes in the eggshell from your children.

When Jesus died on the cross he was placed in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea. When Mary and Mary Magdalene decided to visit His tomb, they expected to find Jesus lying there – but He wasn't in the tomb because He had risen from the dead!

He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. (Matthew 28:6)

Use the eggs as an illustration of what the women expected to find in the tomb, and what they actually found. As you tell the story, crack the eggs into the bowl. First crack the whole egg, then crack the egg that is empty. Were you surprised? The empty egg was (almost) unbelievable, but the resurrection was a miracle. God's showed his power over death by bringing Jesus back to life.

[Note: This may be a good opportunity to do a baking project with your kids if you don't want the eggs to go to waste!]



Addendum 2: Tenebrae²

A service of gathering darkness

The word Tenebrae is Latin for "shadows" or "darkness." It can also be translated as "night" or "death." The Tenebrae service is an ancient tradition in Christian history that took place on one of the last three days of Holy Week: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, or Holy Saturday. The purpose of this service was to remember the somber events that occurred in Jesus' life from the exuberant entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday through the night of Jesus' burial on Good Friday.

Communion / the Lord's Supper is often included in a Tenebrae service.

The most distinctive aspect of the service is the use of seven lit candles. The flames of these candles are extinguished one by one as Scripture readings are shared to tell the story of Holy Week. This gradual descent into gloom is a representation of Jesus' increasing sorrow as the events of Passion Week unfolded. After the last verse is read, the last candle is put out, and the room is plunged into darkness. After a minute of quiet meditation one of the candles is relit representing the hope of the resurrection.

What you will need

- 7 candles,
- matches,
- a bible,
- a darkened room, torch (depending on how dark the room is),
- If you are going to include Communion / the Lord's Supper then grape juice/wine and bread/wafers.
- You may also want to intersperse the readings with two or three appropriate songs – sung or MP3s.

2. Explanation and readings taken from GotQuestions and Calvin Institute of Christian Worship



Tenebrae: Format and Readings

Light all 7 candles

The Shadow of Betrayal:

Mark 14:10-21

Extinguish candle 1

Share Communion / the Lord's Supper

The Shadow of the Agony of the Spirit & Arrest:

Luke 22:39-48, 54

Extinguish candle 2

The Shadow of Denial:

Luke 22:54-62

Extinguish candle 3

The Shadow of Mockery:

Matthew 27:27-31

Extinguish candle 5

The Shadow of Accusation:

Mark 15:1-15

Extinguish candle 4

The Shadow of Crucifixion:

Luke 23:32-43

Extinguish candle 6

The Shadow of Death:

Mark 15:33-39

Extinguish candle 7 (Christ Candle)

The Shadow of Burial:

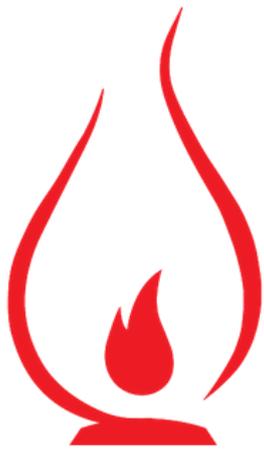
John 19:38-42

SILENT MEDITATION (approx 2 minutes)

Relight candle 7 (Christ Candle)



What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus



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