

Clevedon Baptist Church

Holy Week Prayer Guide

2nd – 9th April 2023



Introduction

This guide covers the eight days from Palm Sunday to Easter Day, often referred to as Holy Week.

We have recently been studying the letter of James together, and one of God's promises to us through James is:

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you (James 4:8)

So we encourage you to set aside some extra time each day to draw near to God, by working through the material in this guide, and being expectant that God will draw near to you as you do this.

If you are part of a small group or a ministry team within CBC, you may want to find a way to use the guide together, or to share with one another what God says to you during the week.

Format for each day

Each day there will be several things to do. Please try to do all of them each day – it should only take around 20 minutes, but the more time you give the better:

1. There are some verses to read from *John's Gospel*

If you don't have a Bible of your own, you can find the words online at <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%201&version=NLT>

There is then a written reflection to help us think about the Bible passage

2. We will be encouraged to **pray** in three ways:

- A brief written prayer is provided to help us begin to respond to God's word
- Please add your own words too, and listen to what God may be saying to you through the Holy Spirit
- We will then be encouraged to pray for some specific people or issues

3. There will be opportunities to **respond** in other ways:

- Through a video, usually of a worship song to listen to or join in with
- Finally, there are one or two questions to ponder each day

We pray that, as we draw close to God this week, we will encounter him more deeply, and be enabled to love and serve him more passionately.

Palm Sunday (2nd April)

Bible reading: John 12:12-19

Reflection (Jesus enters Jerusalem)

Jerusalem is full for the Passover festival, the annual celebration of how God saved his people, when each family had smeared the blood of a lamb on the doorframe of their home. The crowds come out to meet Jesus, using words suitable for a conquering king. So here is Jesus, a king riding on a donkey, but also the lamb of God coming to bear the sins of the world (John 1:29).

Some wave branches, some chant slogans from the Scriptures, and some bear testimony to what Jesus has done for Lazarus. But some are angry – they have already decided that Jesus needs to die (John 11:53) but they can't see a way to achieve this when he is so popular. So here is Jesus, polarising opinion, walking purposefully into conflict.

John tells us that his disciples didn't see the significance of what was going on. Later, once Jesus had been 'glorified' they would understand. We might think that this is a reference to Jesus ascending to heavenly glory after his resurrection, but John also presents Jesus' crucifixion as the time when he is glorified (John 17:1). So here is Jesus, not looking for glory (John 8:50), but showing what true glory looks like (John 1:14).

Here is Jesus on Palm Sunday. He is here for you. Where are you: waving branches and shouting praises? hanging back, avoiding conflict? whispering resentfully? feeling confused? searching for glory in the wrong places?

Prayers

Written prayer: *True and humble king, hailed by the crowd as Messiah: grant us the faith to know you and love you, that we may be found beside you on the way of the cross, which is the path of glory. Amen*

My own prayers of response ...

Prayer suggestions: *Pray for those who lead us – in CBC, in the Baptist Union and other churches, in our national life and the world of politics, in our families and places of work/study. Pray that they will not seek glory for themselves but will see and testify to the glory of Jesus. Thank God for those we know who are doing that.*

Video link: <https://youtu.be/xJwMZX8bp0U> (*Praise is rising*)

Questions to ponder today

Where would you like to be in your relationship with God? Can you talk to him about this?

Monday 3rd April

Bible reading: John 14:1-6

Reflection (I am the way, the truth, and the life)

Not letting our hearts be troubled can be easier said than done – however much I try not to be anxious, my gut does not always do what it's told! But Jesus helps by emphasising two perspectives.

The personal perspective. Jesus says: trust me, look at me, know me. I am going to do what you cannot do. You can rely on me. You may not know the way, but you can know me, and I am the way. You may not know what to believe but you can believe me, for I am the truth. You may be anxious about your life, but I am the life, and I have come to give you abundant life. So stop looking at yourself and look at me.

The heavenly perspective: this world, and all that troubles us in it, is not the real thing. At the conclusion of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis wrote:

All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Jesus uses different language, but he is making a similar point: he is going ahead of us, along a way which includes the cross, in order to prepare a home for us in his Father's presence. Old translations talk about there being 'many mansions' there, but the point is that it will be the real deal, far better, brighter and more glorious than anything any of us have yet seen.

Prayers

Written prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to lift my eyes to see things which cannot yet be fully seen, things which are not of this world but are eternal. When the path of life is rough and steep, help me to fix my eyes on you, the originator and perfecter of faith, who endured the cross, disregarding its shame, because of the joy awaiting you. Amen

My own prayers of response ...

Prayer suggestions: Pray for Christians in places and situations where it is particularly hard to keep trusting in Jesus. For the church in Ukraine, for believers in places of persecution such as Afghanistan and North Korea (for specific prayer suggestions, see <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/prayer/>)

Video link: <https://youtu.be/D7QZNBmgSMs> (*There is a day*)

Questions to ponder today

Is there someone who I can point to Jesus today? Is there someone who I should pray for today to see Jesus as he truly is?

Tuesday 4th April

Bible reading: John 17:20-26

Reflection (Jesus' prayer for us)

In today's passage we hear Jesus praying for us – for all those people who have believed in him as a result of the witness of his original disciples. And the main thing he asks his heavenly Father is that we will all be *one*. Jesus actually prays that our unity will be so strong that it may be compared with the unity he has with the Father. And he prays that the strength of this relationship – with one another and with God – will result in other people coming to believe in Jesus.

Believing in Jesus is one of the main things John emphasises in his Gospel – he uses the word *believe* almost 100 times. In fact, he tells us that he wrote this Gospel so that people will come to believe and to experience life in Jesus' name (John 20:31). And we can see from Jesus' prayer that it was from Jesus himself that John came to understand how much believing in him matters.

God, and Jesus, really care about people believing. After all, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16) and be called God's children (John 1:12). And now we hear Jesus praying, shortly before his death, that his people may live together in such a way that others may come to believe.

Prayers

Written prayer: *Heavenly Father, your Son prayed that those who believe in him might be one. Help us as your children to watch over each other and to walk together before you. Help us to give ourselves each day to you and to each other, to be truly bound together in fellowship and sacrifice. And help us to work together in the unity of the Holy Spirit so that others may come to believe. Amen*

My own prayers of response ...

Prayer suggestions: *Pray for those who volunteer as community chaplains in the name of CBC and the other churches in our town. Pray for those who serve God through the Foodbank, Changing Lives, and other local organisations. Pray for grace-filled conversations and opportunities to speak about Jesus. Pray for more people to get involved in these activities.*

Video link: https://youtu.be/tlqbRn6dC_Y (*Why we pray*)

Questions to ponder today

How much does unity matter to me? Is there someone who has become detached from Christ's body whom I could encourage?

Wednesday 5th April

Bible reading: John 18:15-18, 25-27

Reflection (Peter's denials)

Jesus knew this was going to happen. He had told Peter this was going to happen (John 13:37-38). Did that mean Peter had no choice, that he was somehow predestined to fail Jesus?

It's more likely that Jesus' words were a warning: there are other examples in the Bible of God giving people a message about the future, in the hope that they will change so that the predicted event doesn't happen (e.g. the people of Nineveh when Jonah preached to them).

You might expect that, at least by the second denial, Peter would pause and get a grip. Or perhaps run away to a place of greater spiritual safety. But that doesn't seem to have been Peter's style!

In Luke's Gospel, we are told that Jesus looks at Peter, who goes outside and weeps bitterly. John does not tell us that, but he does tell us how, after the resurrection, Jesus gives Peter the opportunity to tell him – three times – that he loves him (John 21:15-17).

We are all different. We may or may not be impulsive like Peter. But we all have our blind spots; we all have weaknesses which make us susceptible to temptation and sin. Often that means that we keep on making the same sort of mistakes.

Prayers

Written prayer: *O Lord Jesus Christ, look upon us with those eyes of yours with which you looked upon Peter in the hall; that with Peter we may repent and by your same love be forgiven; for your endless mercy's sake. Amen*

My own prayers of response ...

Prayer suggestions: *Pray for our BMS link missionaries:*

Jane in Mozambique - <https://www.bmsworldmission.org/people/jane-edwards/>

Joy in Nepal - <https://www.bmsworldmission.org/people/joy-ransom/>

Judy in Thailand - <https://www.bmsworldmission.org/people/judy-cook/>

Video link: <https://youtu.be/KlhJLx4AtpI> (*Therefore I know*)

Questions to ponder today

Is there a mistake you keep on making? Is there something God is trying to warn you about?

Thursday 6th April

Bible reading: John 19:12-16

Reflection (We have no king but Caesar)

How many kings can you have? For the first time in most of our memories, we have a King in the UK, but our primary allegiance is to the King of kings (Revelation 17:14), just as our ultimate citizenship is in the Kingdom of Heaven (Philippians 3:20).

The New Testament does not have a problem with there being earthly kings – in fact, we are encouraged to pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-2) – but one of the most chilling statements in the Gospels comes here, from the mouths of religious leaders who are demanding Jesus' death: "we have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

How many friends can you have? Lots, apparently, if you are on Facebook! Recently at CBC we were reminded that if you are a friend of God, that puts limits on your other friendships: "friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God" (James 4:4). And the religious leaders taunt Pilate with the other side of that coin: if you show friendship to Jesus you can't be a friend with worldly powers (John 19:12).

It can be tempting to want to be friends with everyone, and obviously we are not supposed to go around making enemies for the sake of it (we probably all know people who seem to do that, and it's not a good look!). But following Jesus faithfully will mean that we can't be friends with everyone, or everything.

Prayers

Written prayer: *O Lord God, grant us always, whatever the world may say, to be content with what you say. May we care only for your approval. For the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

My own prayers of response ...

Prayer suggestions: *Pray for the children and youth in our church and beyond, for Josh our youth pastor, and for all the children who came to Destination Bethlehem. Pray that they will make good friends, and above all that they will know Jesus as their friend, their king, and their saviour.*

Video link: <https://youtu.be/Of5IcFWiEpg> (*King of kings*)

Questions to ponder today

Where does the true authority lie in my life? What friendships or behaviours might I need to sacrifice?

Good Friday (7th April)

Today's format is in two parts, one to be used earlier and the other later in the day

Part 1: morning/afternoon

Bible reading: John 19:16-27

Reflection (Crucifixion)

John does not dwell on the physical aspects of the cross – he simply states that Jesus is crucified. For his original readers in the Roman empire, that word 'crucifixion' would have been enough to evoke horrific images of suffering and humiliation. It is said that the word was never mentioned in polite society.

Instead of focusing on Jesus' suffering, John tells us about how others behaved: how Pilate and the Jewish leaders argued over the inscription on the cross, and how the soldiers divvied up Jesus' clothes. But also how Jesus behaved towards others: in his agony he shows concern for his mother.

John remarks at how the soldiers' behaviour fulfilled Psalm 22:18, and if you read the whole of Psalm 22 you will see that other verses are echoed on Good Friday.

Question to ponder: how would I have behaved at the cross?

Video link: <https://youtu.be/t1IOG-PwAns> (Good Friday live)

Written prayer: *Merciful God, as we relive the events of this day, it is with awe that we count again the cost of our salvation. Words cannot be found to express our thanksgiving. Accept our adoration, in Jesus' name. Amen*

Video link: <https://youtu.be/14CpHBRd3k> (God so loved the world)

My own prayers of response ...

Prayer suggestion:

Pray for the members and ministry of our partner church, Agape Yzberisht in Albania.

Part 2: afternoon/evening

Bible reading: John 19:28-30

Reflection (It is finished)

Now it is Jesus' turn to echo Psalm 22: expressing his thirst (surely the most extraordinary understatement of his suffering), he is given some cheap wine.

Jesus knows that 'everything is finished', and then he says 'it is finished'.

Finished, completed, accomplished, perfected, fulfilled.

Not 'I'm finished', but 'it is finished'.

The work is done. The price is paid. The prophecies are fulfilled. Salvation is accomplished.

So let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the beginner and *finisher* of faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame (Hebrews 12:2).

Question to ponder: what does Jesus' death mean for me?

Written prayer:

You chose the cross with every breath; the perfect life, the perfect death. You chose the cross. A crown of thorns you wore for us, and crowned us with eternal life; you chose the cross. And though your soul was overwhelmed with pain, obedient to death, you overcame.

I'm lost in wonder, I'm lost in love, I'm lost in praise forevermore. Because of Jesus' unfailing love, I am forgiven, I am restored.

Video link:

<https://youtu.be/ZJDELcuYX3g>

(Jesus, to you we lift our eyes)

My own prayers of response ...

Prayer suggestion:

Pray for people coping in the aftermath of the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, and for the small groups of believers in these places.



Saturday 8th April

Bible reading: John 19:31-42

Reflection (Death)

John gives us some very specific eyewitness information about the death and burial of Jesus, which rules out any ideas that he was merely in a trance or coma. He also subtly tells us how Jesus died on the same afternoon as the lambs were being killed for the Passover festival.

And he introduces us to Joseph of Arimathea, who is mentioned at this point in all four Gospels, in a way which suggests he must have been well-known in the early church – as if the Gospel writers are saying to their original readers “if you don’t believe that Jesus really died, go and talk to Joseph in Arimathea”. Joseph may have been a secret believer at the time, but the secret was now well and truly out!

Jesus is dead, and although we know that he won’t remain dead, his followers didn’t know that (although perhaps they should have done – see John 2:18-22). Now all that people like Joseph, Nicodemus (and, later, Jesus’ female friends) could do was ensure he had a good burial.

Only a short time before, Jesus had wept at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:33-35), upset and angry at the horror and separation of death. Perhaps that horror and separation is something you know all too well from personal experience, and we must all know those who are affected by bereavement. Today we remember how Jesus knows all about the tragedy of death, and is far from feeling unmoved by it.

Prayers

Written prayer: *I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place: I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face; content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss; my sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross. Amen*

My own prayers of response ...

Prayer suggestions: *Pray for those affected by dying, death, and grief. Pray for those who work in care homes, hospitals, hospices, and funeral homes. Pray too for doctors and politicians who wrestle with ethical issues around the treatment of those who are dying.*

Video link: <https://youtu.be/tgH82w5uBYE> (*Shadows*)

Questions to ponder today

How secret is my belief? Are there people in my neighbourhood or workplace who would be surprised to know that I am a Christian?

Easter Sunday (9th April)

Bible reading: John 20:11-18

Reflection (I have seen the Lord)

John is very interested in what it means to *see*. In his Gospel, you can see Jesus and yet not really see him (e.g. John 20:6; 21:4), yet blessed are those who believe in him without seeing (John 20:29).

You can see something of Jesus, but do you recognise him, do you perceive who he is, do you know him, are you experiencing him? Those are some of the questions John wants us to ask ourselves.

In this passage Mary sees the risen Jesus, but she is also, at first, unable to see him. She even has a conversation with Jesus without seeing who he is, and therefore without the reality of the resurrection affecting her. Perhaps her vision is affected by her tears, or perhaps it is more than that.

Then Jesus says her name. And nothing changes but everything changes for Mary. Her life will never be the same. Now she is able to go and tell others 'I have seen the Lord'.

On this, the most precious and joyful of days, spend some time hearing and absorbing the words of the risen Jesus to you, spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

Be not afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.

Prayers

Written prayer: *God of glory, by the raising of your Son you have broken the chains of death and hell: fill your Church with faith and hope; for a new day has dawned and the way to life stands open in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen*

My own prayers of response ...

Prayer suggestions: *Pray today for the other members of CBC, including the different CBC congregations: Muddy Church, Mosaic Church, Pill, and Poets Mews. Pray that others will be able to see that we have seen the Lord.*

Video link: <https://youtu.be/2Rs529D0HQU> (See what a morning)

Questions to ponder today

What difference does it make to me that Jesus is alive and knows me by name? Is there someone I can share my testimony with?

Cover image of boys in Jerusalem cutting palm branches for festival of Sukkot

Acknowledgements

Prayers on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday taken from *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* © The Archbishops' Council

Prayers on Tuesday and Friday morning adapted from *Gathering for Worship* © The Baptist Union of Great Britain

Prayer on Wednesday by Lancelot Andrewes (1555 – 1626)

Prayer on Thursday by General Gordon (1833 – 1885)

Prayer on Friday morning from “You chose the cross”, by Martyn Layzell (1975 –)

Image on Friday by Neal E. Johnson, Unsplash

Prayer on Saturday from “Beneath the cross of Jesus”, by Elizabeth Clephane (1830 – 1869)