



COUNTDOWN^{to}
the
CROSS

Prayer Guide March 24th - 30th

Sterling Wood Church

COUNTDOWN TO THE CROSS

PRAYER GUIDE

As we prepare for Easter Sunday, this prayer guide will walk you through some of the events of the last week of Jesus leading up to the cross. Imagine being one of the disciples walking with Jesus as he prepares to lay down his life.

Register for 24 Hours of Continuous Prayer

March 29th 8:00 am to March 30th 8:00 am

Scan QR code or visit our website:

sterlingwood.org/events/countdown-to-the-cross/



DAY 1

THE CITY CELEBRATES, BUT JESUS WEEPS

SCRIPTURE

Luke 19:28–44 ESV

28 And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’ ” 32 So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. 33 And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34 And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” 35 And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36 And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. 37 As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, 38 saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” 39 And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” 40 He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” 41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

REFLECTING ON THAT DAY

Our last week with Jesus begins with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Adoring crowds praise him and lay down palm branches and their own cloaks on the ground in front of him. He is hailed as a victorious king.

Don’t be fooled by the celebrations. In seven short days, the crowds will no longer be shouting, “Hosanna!” They will be shouting, “Crucify Him!”

As Jesus looks over the city, he weeps for its lostness. Even though they have celebrated him, he knows that they will not truly know the time of their “visitation” (Luke 19:44).

Day 1 continued---->

DAY 1

THE CITY CELEBRATES, BUT JESUS WEEPS

REFLECTING ON TODAY

Take a moment today to reflect on what Jesus would see if he gazed over our community. What would he weep over? What would make his heart heavy?

PRAYER

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the eyes to see what Jesus saw looking over Jerusalem. Pray today over your community with the eyes of Jesus. Allow your heart to be broken for the things that break his heart. Cry out for the power of God to move in our neighborhoods and city. Ask God how you can be a part of his redemptive work.

DAY 2

LOOKING FOR FRUIT

SCRIPTURE

Mark 11:12-17 ESV

12 On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 13 And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 16 And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

Day 2 continued---->

DAY 2

LOOKING FOR FRUIT

REFLECTING ON THAT DAY

On Monday, we see a different side to Jesus. It is shocking for those who have been following him. First, he curses a fig tree because it didn't have fruit on it (even though it wasn't the season for figs). Immediately, the fig tree withers. It is not hard to believe that Jesus could curse a fig tree and it have an affect, but his disciples are shocked at how quickly and powerfully his curse works on the tree.

Then, in a truly dramatic moment Jesus enters the temple and drives out the money changers and tradesmen. These people who had profited off the worship of God's people with unfair trades inside the temple were suddenly thrown out. He turned over their tables and ran them out of the courtyard.

REFLECTING ON TODAY

When Jesus arrives, he expects fruit on the tree and prayer in his Father's house. When Jesus inspects the tree that is your life, will he find the fruit he is craving? Don't tell him it is out of season. He expects our fruit to always be in season. If he came to our church, would he find us engaged in the things that matter to us, like the money changers, or would he find us engaged in the things that matter to him, prayer for the nations?

PRAYER

Pray today in repentance for the ways your own life has not born fruit. Ask the Lord to increase your fruitfulness through his Spirit. Pray that God would raise up a passion for prayer and seeking him in our church. Pray that God would revive the Spirit within us to be persistent and fervent in calling out to him.

DAY 3

LAYING DOWN HIS LIFE

SCRIPTURE

JOHN 12:23–26 ESV

23 And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

REFLECTING ON THAT DAY

On Tuesday, we hear Jesus say many things about the future as he teaches on the Mount of Olives. Some of the gospels share Jesus’ grim warnings about the future tribulation and the end.

Here, we see Jesus is very aware of what he will face as this week ends. He is going to lay down his life, but not meaninglessly. His sacrifice will be like a seed that bursts out of the ground bearing abundant fruit.

He tells us that this paradox is true for our own lives. If we wish to hold onto our lives, it will remain a seed. It will be no life at all. But if we lay down our life, then we will gain real life.

REFLECTING ON TODAY

Which side of the paradox Jesus lived out are you holding on to? Are you desperately clawing to hold on to this life and all it has to offer? Trying to get more from life, more from work, and more from play? Or are you laying down this life like a seed for the fruit it will bear? Using this life, work, and play for his glory? One is a life of fruit, and the other is holding onto the dead seed.

PRAYER

Thank Jesus for laying down his life so that our salvation could be the fruit of his sacrifice. Ask him to help you lay down your life for him. Ask him to show you how the areas of your life can each be used for his glory.

DAY 4

A BEAUTIFUL ANOINTING

SCRIPTURE

Mark 14:3-11 ESV

3 And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. 4 There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? 5 For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. 6 But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. 9 And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. 11 And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

REFLECTING ON THAT DAY

Wednesday brings one of the most emotional and beautiful moments of our last week with Jesus. While Jesus is reclining at the table after dinner, Mary Magdalene, a woman with a very scandalous past barges in and pours expensive perfume over the head of Jesus. She then begins to wipe Jesus' feet with her hair as she weeps over him.

Some in the group comment about the wasteful use of this expensive perfume. Others comment about the reputation of the woman. Jesus sees neither wastefulness in the pouring nor worthlessness in the woman.

He declares that she has done something beautiful in anointing him for burial. Something that will resonate through history. He also declares that she is forgiven.

DAY 4

A BEAUTIFUL ANOINTING

REFLECTING ON TODAY

How does your worship of Jesus compare to Mary's outpouring of love on her Savior? Our worship of Jesus should not be totally controlled, measured, and neat. It should be as abundant as his grace. It should be poured out with the same generosity that his life was poured out for us. No one seems to get that quite like Mary. She understood forgiveness because she understood her sin.

PRAYER

Spend time today "pouring out the perfume" of your praise to Jesus. Maybe turn on some worship music and sing praises to him. Perhaps, write a love letter to Jesus. If you find yourself lacking in the emotion or worship, spend some time reflecting on how desperate your life would be without the forgiveness of Jesus.

DAY 5

THE LAST NIGHT

SCRIPTURE

John 13:1-14 ESV

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you."

Day 5 continued---->

DAY 5

THE LAST NIGHT

11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

REFLECTING ON THAT DAY

This days ends in disaster. Our beloved Jesus is arrested by a mob in the garden. The mob is led to him by one of his own. Not just a follower, but one of the twelve.

Jesus has been hinting all along this week that it would end in his death. He talked about laying down his life, being lifted up, even being anointed for burial. He knew this moment was coming. So how does he spend his final hours?

He washes his disciples' feet, and he prays. Washing their feet is something that just should not happen. He is their Rabbi, their chief. That is a job you give the lowest slave in the house. Certainly, there could be someone else to do it.

And if he really is going to die, shouldn't he be having some meetings with the leaders? Maybe he should set some things up for after his death. He could possibly even hide or run. Why spend the time just praying? I mean that isn't actually strange for him. He has made time in every situation to pray. He has often snuck off on his own. He has gotten up early and stayed up late all to talk to the Father. Maybe that is the most important thing.

REFLECTING ON TODAY

The last few hours before Jesus' arrest were spent in humble service and in prayer. Where do these all important activities fit in your daily schedule? How do they rest on your priority list? If you had only a few hours left, would you turn to service and prayer? Perhaps our priorities need to be readjusted to match Jesus'.

PRAYER

Pray that God would develop in you a heart of humility and prayer. Ask him to show you how you can be "washing the feet" of others in service. Spend time praying for those in your life who need him just as Jesus spent time praying for his disciples.

DAY 6

REACHING THE CROSS

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 27:45-61 ESV

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. 51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. 54 When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" 55 There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, 56 among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. 57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. 58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

DAY 6

REACHING THE CROSS

REFLECTING ON THAT DAY

We have reached the low point of this week. They have taken our Jesus in the middle of the night like a criminal. His trial before the religious leaders was a farce. The witnesses couldn't agree, and oh the way they treated him was horrid. They struck him and spit upon him.

Now Jesus hangs on a cross. His wounds laid bare to the sun. His blood pours out onto the ground. He shouts these words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

What does it mean that God has forsaken him? He has always walked in communion with God. He even said he only spoke what he heard the Father saying. He only did what the Father told him to do. How can he go into a tomb now forsaken by God?

REFLECTING ON TODAY

We know that Jesus had no sin of his own that would warrant rejection by God. What was it he experienced on the cross? Isaiah tells us.

Isaiah 53:4–6 ESV

4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He bore all of our sin on himself on the cross. He endured the separation from the Father that was ours. Reflect today on how much Jesus has taken onto himself for you.

PRAYER

Spend time both confessing sins before the Lord today and celebrating the great forgiveness that you have in Jesus.

DAY 7

A DAY IN DARKNESS

Scripture

Matthew 27:62-66 ESV

62 The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' 64 Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." 66 So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

REFLECTING ON THAT DAY

It is a dark day. Jesus lies in the tomb. The rulers have put a guard on the tomb and sealed the stone to keep his disciples from getting to his body. Now we wait.

REFLECTING ON TODAY

At the time, Jesus' disciples were scattered and scared. They did not comprehend what would happen the following day. We don't live in that uncertainty. We know the end of this story. Tomorrow, we celebrate the risen Jesus. We have hope because he did not stay in the tomb. Do you walk in hope and joy knowing that Jesus has risen, or do you walk in fear and doubt as the disciples did that Saturday?

PRAYER

Pray that the Lord would renew your hope and joy. Celebrate what we will see tomorrow as we worship the risen Jesus!