

GARDENS AND GRAVES



GARDENS AND GRAVES

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GARDENS AND GRAVES

RESOURCE GUIDE

BOOKS

Journey to the Cross by Paul David Tripp
From the Grave by A.W. Tozer

RIGHT NOW MEDIA

Easter by J.D. Greear
Good Friday and Easter by Francis Chan

APPS & WEBSITES

Blue Letter Bible
Step Bible
Verses App

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“

*Seek a relationship
when you pray, not answers.
You won't always find answers,
but you will always find Jesus.*

”

Mike Schmitz



GARDENS AND GRAVES

A JOURNEY OF BEHOLDING

Easter is one of the most important times of the year for believers. In the seasons of the church, what begins with Advent and the holy waiting for Jesus' birth culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus. These two events are hinge points of the Gospel. Jesus' journey to the cross and subsequent death for the sins of mankind provides the perfect sacrifice of atonement. This spotless lamb, led to the slaughter, provides hope for the world. In the darkness of his death, we sit in the somber realization of the weight of our sin. His resurrection brings hope because it not only proves that Jesus is who He said He is, but because we serve a risen savior who defeated death, hell, and the grave to restore us to the Father.

Our journey through the Easter season will follow the path of mankind from the first garden - Eden, to the Garden of Gethsemane, to the grave of Jesus, and finally to the restoration of all things when Jesus returns for His church. The season of Easter is an opportunity for believers to pause, breathe, reflect, and worship. A chance to behold.

In our modern culture, we rarely take the time to stop and savor. We move around from event to event, scroll haphazardly through social media, and glaze over at the 24 hour news cycle. We seldom turn off the noise to simply behold the moment. This is our invitation for Easter. Slow down, tune in, and behold the wonder of a savior - wholly God and wholly man, who would live a perfect life, die a gruesome death on the cross, and raise to life. This guide is an invitation to pause and reflect. To see and be seen.

The original idea of the word behold meant to thoroughly hold in one's gaze. It was an invitation to maintain presence. To retain attention towards something. As we progress through the Easter season, we will invite the opportunity to behold Jesus. From gardens into graves and graves into gardens, God beholds us - he maintains and holds us in His gaze. Will you receive His invitation to gaze back at Him intently? To hold space for His love and presence? Join us on this journey of beholding.

FROM THE GARDEN

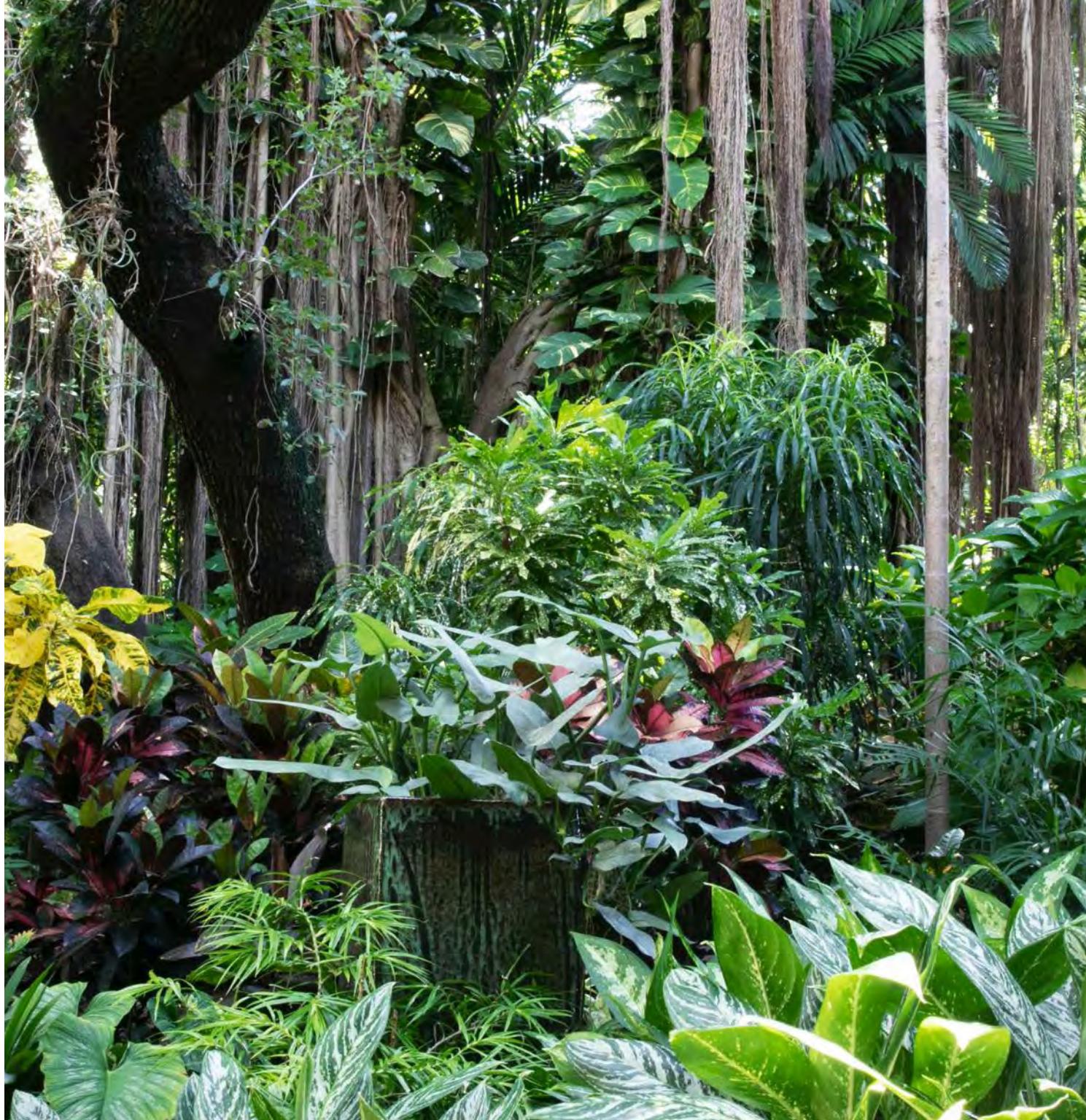


”

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

”

Genesis 3:6-7



—————

“

Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

”

Genesis 3:22-24

—————

The first book of the Bible sets up the beginning of the world, how man entered it, and in short order, we are introduced to the reality of sin. God created man from the dust and breathed His very breath into his lungs. He created Adam and Eve in His own image. He offered them the ability to live at perfect peace and harmony, experiencing the world as it was meant to be. Beyond this, Adam and Eve experienced God's very presence in their midst as they tended the garden.

The weight of what was lost in the fall isn't simply guilt and the entrance of sin into the world. It was the idea that we could no longer commune with the holy and perfect God. God's system was that because of sin, we deserve death. It's only through the shedding of blood from a perfect sacrifice that we can experience even a glimpse of His presence again. Because He is perfect and we are not.

BEHOLD... THE FALL

Work through the following exercise this week as you experience God's presence.

Before you begin:

Breath prayer is a simple exercise that will help us to experience silence and solitude in God.

Find a place that is quiet where you can be unbothered for a period of time.

Put away your phone and other distractions.

Consider lighting a candle.

As you still yourself before God, pick a phrase to be present to God and behold Him. Think of this phrase as you inhale and as you exhale. Consider: "Be still," as you breathe in and "Know God," as you breathe out. Or maybe, "Lord Jesus," as you breathe in and "I'm here," as you breathe out. Use this prayer to still your soul and center it around Jesus. Take time to sit in this posture for 5 minutes (or as long as you are comfortable.)

Use this template each day to work through responses to the narrative of Genesis 1-3.

Pray this prayer:

“God, I am committed to beholding you. You have given me your word and your wisdom. Help me to stop and see. Help me to maintain presence with you and experience your overwhelming love for me. Help me to experience your character and presence today. I am committed to beholding. Amen.”

Read the text - all of Genesis 1-3 each day.

Ask God to illuminate His word to you and anything that should stand out.

Pay attention to specific words or phrases that catch your attention.

Write any of these words down.

Use your imagination to “put yourself into the story.”

Spend time wandering in your mind.

Write down thoughts/journal about the prompts on the next page for each day.

Go wild - God gives us a sanctified imagination to experience Him and His world. Try to place yourself in the action.

THOUGHT/JOURNAL PROMPTS

Sunday: What it looked like before God spoke.

Monday: If you were watching God create during each of the days,
what would you experience?

Tuesday: What was it like when God created Adam and Eve?

Wednesday: Imagine Adam naming all of the animals and
experiencing Eden for the first time.

Thursday: What was the experience of the temptation like?
What were Adam and Eve experiencing?

Friday: When Adam and Eve saw the world through new eyes -
what did they experience? What was it like to be confronted by God?

Saturday: When God pronounced the curses, created clothes, and sent
them from the Garden - what emotions and feelings did they experience?

Take time to pray, thanking God for His revelation.



THROUGH THE GATE TO THE GRAVE





Each day this week, we will focus on beholding one aspect of the Crucifixion story. This won't line up with the actual timeline of the week, but will guide us through aspects of Jesus' final hours before his death. Each day, there will be a scripture reading and an opportunity for you to write a prayer of beholding.

SUNDAY

PALM SUNDAY

“Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

“Say to the daughter of Zion,
‘Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Matthew 21:1-11

SUNDAY

PALM SUNDAY

Jesus' Triumphal Entry marks the beginning of Holy Week. Jesus and His disciples returned to Jerusalem at the beginning of Passover and He was greeted with shouts of Hosanna, or "Pray, save us," while people spread cloaks and palm branches for our donkey-fixed-savior rode in. Royalty would ride horses or chariots. Our King chose a simple donkey. Royalty would be met with kneeling and shouts of adoration. The people cried for salvation and paved the way with humble cloaks and branches. This unconventional approach reminds us that our enthroned King, Jesus, is always after the heart of His people.

As we behold Him today, let us remember that He is enthroned in our hearts.

Write a prayer today that reflects His kingship and the cry of Hosanna. Use the words below to begin.

Lord, today I behold you. My heart is set before you...



"When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?"

He said to him, "You have said so."

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Matthew 26:20-29

MONDAY

THE LAST SUPPER

Before Jesus was betrayed, he ate the passover meal with His disciples. Jesus gives the disciples final instructions, washes their feet, and finally takes part in the first communion with them (see also Mark 14 and Luke 22). The symbols of His body and blood couldn't be fully grasped by the disciples at this point. Jesus often spoke in symbolism. How could they know that in short order, His body would truly be broken and His blood poured out?

As we reflect on the last supper today, spend time writing a beholding prayer about His broken body and blood poured out for you. Use the starting phrase below to write your prayer:

Lord, today I behold you. As I reflect on your body and blood...

TUESDAY

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

As we reflect on the Garden of Gethsemane, we see two narratives. Jesus goes to pray to the Father three times asking for the cup of suffering to pass from Him. At the same time, He entreats His disciples to keep watch and pray with Him. Each time, they fall asleep, and each time, He prays for the cup to pass from Him, yet acknowledges God's will. This beautiful moment encapsulates His perfect submission to the Father, while also showing His humanity. He knows what is coming, and rather than running away, He submits to the Father. Unfortunately, the story of the disciples is a familiar one for many of us. How often do our good intentions turn into inability to keep from falling asleep in the face of what God is doing?

Spend some time writing a beholding prayer, acknowledging your need for a savior and thanking God for His perfect savior, Jesus Christ.

Lord, today I behold You. Forgive me for the times I've sinned by...

Thank you, Jesus for...

"Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them,

"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."

And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

Matthew 26:36-46

WEDNESDAY

JESUS' BETRAYAL AND ARREST



“While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.” And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”

At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”

Then all the disciples left him and fled.”

Matthew 26:47-56



WEDNESDAY

JESUS' BETRAYAL AND ARREST



Judas has carried out his plot, a soldier's ear is severed, and Jesus is arrested. As we're reading this, we know what is going to happen. We know this leads to Jesus' eventual crucifixion, but can you feel the cold desperation? The what ifs? The disciples surely felt it, or they wouldn't have taken up swords.

Jesus' answer is miraculous and it shows that His obedience in Gethsemane is complete. This is how the scriptures are fulfilled. How often do we live in the tension of the moment, thinking, "how will this all work out?" And how often does Jesus need to remind us that all things work out when we follow Him?

Write a prayer of beholding, laying your tensions and needs before Him, as well as confessing your trust in Him.

Lord, I behold your presence today. I confess that I am holding on to unbelief in...

Help my unbelief by...

THURSDAY

PETER DENIES JESUS

One disciple betrays Jesus, the other denies Him. Peter, who was shocked by the accusation, finds himself doing the thing he said he would never do. We can debate about why. Was it because he was worried he would be crucified also? Maybe? Was it the heat of the moment and he didn't want the shame of the crowd heaped upon him? Probably. The bottom line is that this moment set up a hard truth and beautiful restoration. That in his deep brokenness and bitterness at himself, Jesus was ready to embrace him with open arms. The weight of that moment must have been staggering. But that weight made his restoration even more staggering.

Spend time writing a prayer of beholding surrounding the ideas of denying Christ and being restored by Him. This might not be public denial to others, but even unintentionally denying His gifts, salvation, or forgiveness.

Lord, I behold you today. In my deepest denial I see you...

Thank you for restoring me wholly. You have...





THURSDAY

PETER DENIES JESUS


“Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.”

But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” And again he denied it with an oath: “I do not know the man.” After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.”

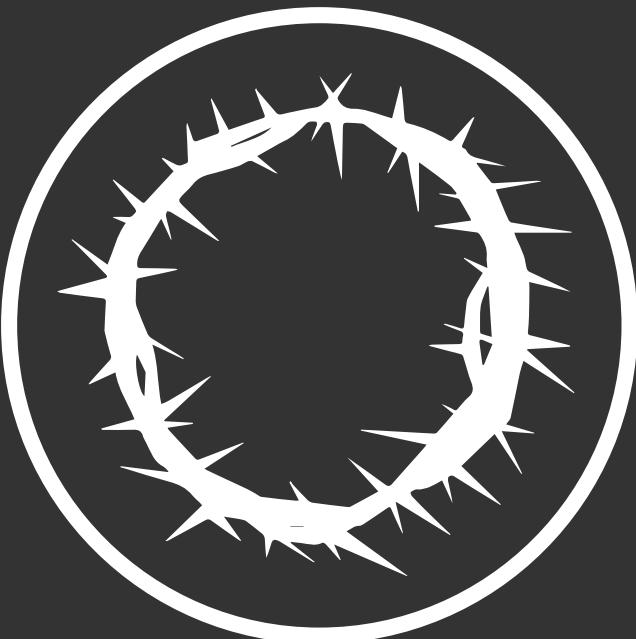
And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.”

Matthew 26:69-75



FRIDAY

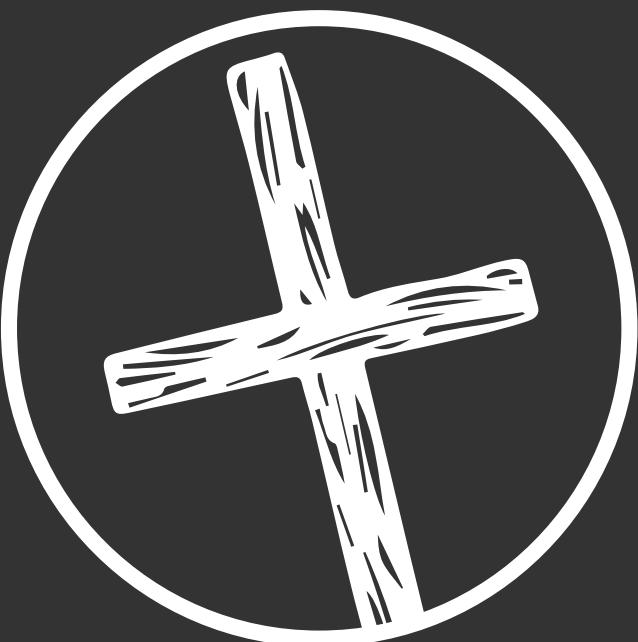
JESUS IS TRIED,
BEATEN,
AND CRUCIFIED



Today read through Matthew 27:1-56.

Write a beholding prayer, expressing your emotions surrounding the events of Jesus' crucifixion.

Jesus, I behold your story. You suffered and died for my sins. I am...



SATURDAY

JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

"When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud 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. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb."

Matthew 27:57-61

As we read this passage, we know what's coming. As the disciples and followers of Jesus experienced it, it must have been a time of deep frustration, despair, and brokenness. The King, the Savior, the Messiah, laid in the tomb. How must that have felt? As we experience the waiting between Good Friday and Easter, let us put ourselves in the shoes of Jesus' followers. Let us experience the heartbreak of waiting.

Write a beholding prayer that expresses the tension of waiting for hope.

Father, today I behold you. I confess that I have struggled to find hope in...



RETURN TO THE



E GARDEN

Easter is the culmination of the Gospels. Jesus has suffered, died, and today, He is resurrected from the dead. He has broken the curse of the grave. And He has opened the path back to Eden. Because of His life, death, and resurrection, we embrace the truth that we have been saved from the penalty of sin, we are being saved from the power of sin, and we will be saved from the presence of sin.

We see the hope of a future in Revelation 21 and 22 where God creates the new heaven and new earth and His presence is among His people fully.



“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Revelation 21:1-4

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

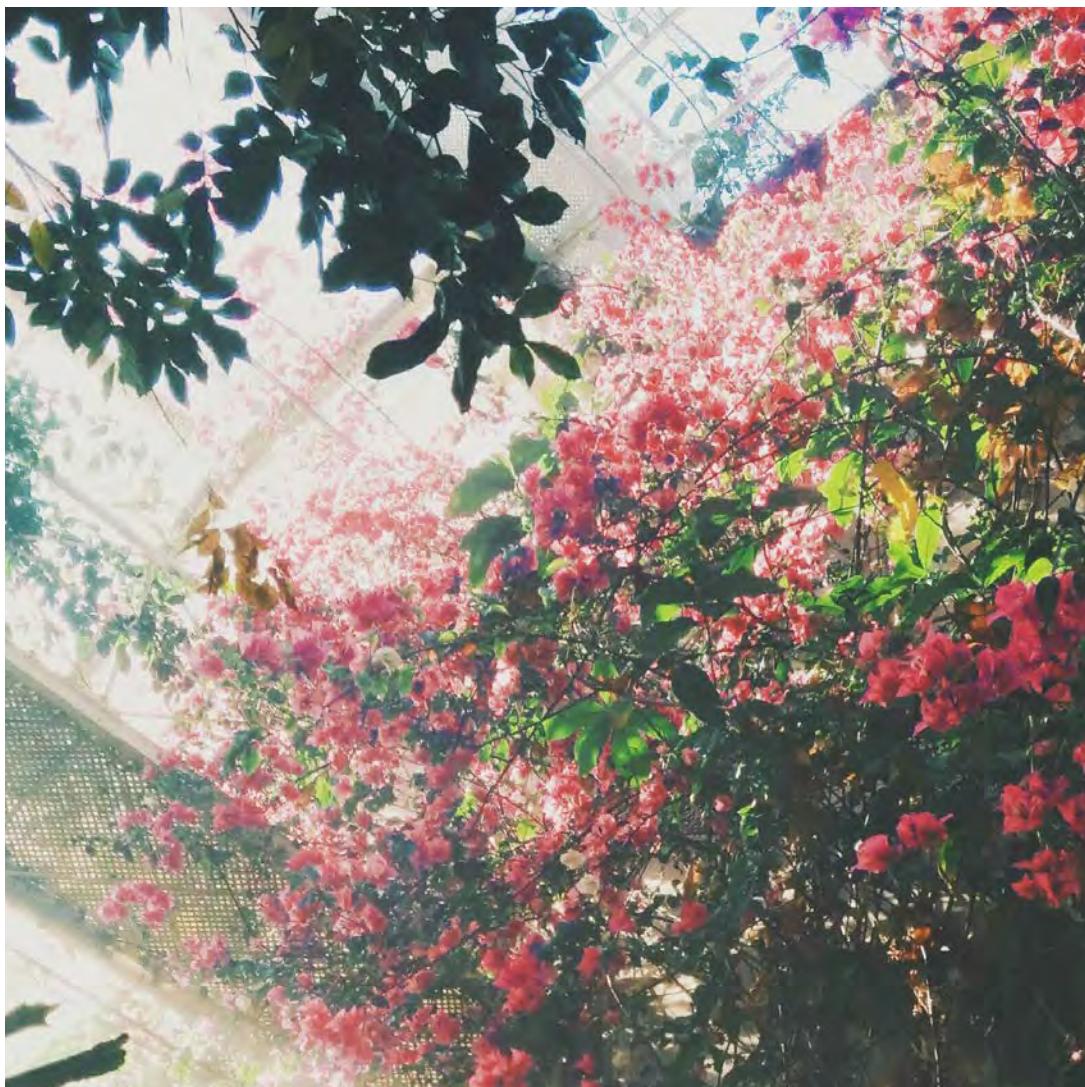
And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

Revelation 22:1-7



We have been saved, we are being saved,
and we will be saved. Because of Jesus'
resurrection, we are promised new life today
and the hope of eternal life with God forever.







THE PRACTICE OF EASTER LIVING

Gratitude is a remarkable gift. The practice this week is to continually behold the joy and hope of Easter through a lifestyle of gratitude. Each day, spend time writing three specific points of gratitude and then write out a prayer of beholding God's presence in the midst of these ideas.

Here's an example:

Monday:

I am thankful for my family - they are a source of joy and light.

I am thankful for my salvation - it is a free gift from God and
I didn't do anything to earn it.

I am thankful for my church - they bear my burdens and point
me towards God.

Father, I behold your presence in my life. Today, you have gifted me with your light and life. Let me gaze upon your goodness. May it take my breath away. Thank you for my family. You have used them to remind me of your faithfulness and goodness in all of life's situations. They are a blessing and I am grateful. Thank you Lord, for my salvation. We just experienced Easter and I am reminded of the beauty of Jesus Christ who died for my sins and rose to defeat death and the grave. Thank you for eternal life in you. Thank you for daily hope. Thank you, Lord, for my church body that I just got to celebrate with. They are a gift and a reminder of a fervent and passionate community. May I contribute as much as I take. May I see your blessings in all of my life today. You are good and your mercy endures forever. Amen.

"And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Revelation 21:5

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

WEEK ONE

BELONG

Have you ever lost anything important? What happened? Did you find it?

What goes through your mind when you lose something?

Do you have a specific process for trying to find it?

GROW

Have someone read Genesis 1. Yup - all of it.

As they read, pay attention to details - words and phrases.

Try to pick out 1-3 that stand out to you.

Share anything that came to mind when you listened/read.

What does this passage tell us about God? What are some of His attributes?

Have someone else read Genesis 2. Pay attention to details.

Is there anything that stood out to you in your reading? Why?

Finally, have someone else read Genesis 3.

As a whole, what narratives stand out between the three chapters?

What do you think Adam and Eve felt like before the fall? After?

Have you ever stopped to consider the consequences of the fall in great depth?

What did we lose? Why is that important?

REACH

We all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.

If you feel safe, share some of your struggles from the last week or two.

Spend time in prayer for each other.

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

WEEK TWO

BELONG

This week marks the beginning of Holy Week.
What are some of the traditional ways that you have observed this week?

What are your expectations this time of year?
Do you observe Good Friday or tend to skip to Easter?

GROW

As a group, read Matthew 27, pausing for discussion at each “heading.”

Each time you stop, pray that the Lord will abide in you and illuminate scripture to you.

As you stop each time, have each group member discuss:

- What is happening
- Why it's important
- How it makes you feel
- What we can learn from it

After you read all of Matthew 27, take time to sit in the weight of what you've just read.

Why did Jesus need to die? What does that mean for us?

What does Good Friday mean for us?

REACH

Consider attending the Holy Week activities at the church together.

What areas tonight were illuminated that we can be praying for each other?

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

WEEK THREE - EASTER

Consider spending time in fellowship with your group, breaking bread, and practicing gratitude for Jesus' resurrection.





Our journey through the Easter season will follow the path of mankind from the first garden - Eden, to the Garden of Gethsemane, to the grave of Jesus, and finally to the restoration of all things when Jesus returns for His church. The season of Easter is an opportunity for believers to pause, breathe, reflect, and worship. As we progress through the Easter season, we will invite the opportunity to behold Jesus. From gardens into graves and graves into gardens, God beholds us - he maintains and holds us in His gaze. Will you receive His invitation to gaze back at Him intently? To hold space for His love and presence? Join us on this journey of beholding.



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