



Praying Through Holy Week

This event can be used during your education hour or adapted as an afternoon or evening event. Praying through Holy Week is meant to help participants hear the story of Holy Week and learn prayer practices that they can connect with each of the days.

As you move through the days of Holy Week there is Scripture, followed by a brief introduction to the day and the prayer connection. Each day has two prayer activity options for you to choose from. One is craft based and the other is more of a science experiment. For Maundy Thursday there are two Scripture and prayer practice options to choose from: one based on the Last Supper and one for the garden of Gethsemane.

If you wish to plan a longer event, share a meal together. Invite people to bring potluck items and talk about how, just like the different foods we bring, we also bring different prayer styles and preferences with us. Explain that some of the practices may not work or feel right for you and that is ok. This time is for learning more about Holy Week and the variety of ways we can pray.

Supplies and Preparation

Provide Bibles for each group. Check individual activities for specific supplies. As you set up for the event, either prepare each table with all the needed items or set up tables designated for each prayer practice.

Gathering

Welcome participants as they arrive and encourage them to be seated in small groups with at least three generations in each group. As you get started, talk about how Holy Week is an important time in the church year when we journey from Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem through Christ's resurrection. Many of the days in Holy Week have specific stories which they will be studying while learning a new prayer practice. Share with them the information about your Holy Week and Easter services and encourage them to attend.

Palm Sunday

Supplies

- Bibles

Introduce that the week begins with Palm Sunday. It was named this because of the palm branches the people waved as Jesus entered Jerusalem.

Ask someone to read Matthew 21:1-9.

Talk about how excited the people in Jerusalem were to see Jesus coming to town. They believed that he was the one who was going to come and free them. This made them want to celebrate! They chose palm branches because in their time these were symbols of triumph and victory. When their excitement got too big to keep inside they popped up with shouts of "Hosanna!" This is a word that is used to let others know how excited and joyful we are about what God is doing.

Prayer Practice Options

Popcorn Prayer Chain

Supplies

- Pre-popped popcorn
- Bowls
- Needle
- Thread
- Beads (optional)

Instructions

1. Place popcorn and beads in small bowls.
2. Cut thread into 3-foot lengths and make a knot at one end.
3. Make a sample chain to show the group. Use the needle to thread each piece of popcorn. If providing beads, add a bead between each piece.

Use this script to guide participants through the activity.

For your prayer experience for Palm Sunday, you'll be making popcorn prayer chains. Just like the people in Jerusalem felt they were bursting with joy, you'll use each piece of popcorn to pray about something that has you ready to shout "Hosanna!" You'll use your thread and needle to make the chain. As you thread on each kernel, talk about something for which you're excited. It could be a vacation, time together as a family, time spent with a friend, or anything that has you ready to shout for joy. Offer a thanks to God for such awesome gifts. You can add beads in between each piece if you'd like to remind yourself to take time between your popping prayers.

Hopping Corn

Supplies

- Glass jars or cups, one per group
- Water
- Food coloring
- Spoons
- Baking soda
- Popcorn kernels
- Vinegar

Instructions

1. Fill a jar or glass with 2.5–3 cups water for each group.
2. Provide food coloring, a spoon, 2 tablespoons of baking soda, popcorn kernels, and 6 tablespoons of white vinegar for each group.
3. Test the activity before leading it. Add food coloring and baking soda to the water. Stir until the baking soda is dissolved. Add a small handful of popcorn kernels. Then add the vinegar. What do you see?

Use this script to guide participants through the activity.

For your Palm Sunday prayer experience you'll be making hopping corn. First add a few drops of food coloring to your jar filled with water. Next, add your baking soda and make sure it's

stirred in until it dissolves. Now add a small handful of popcorn kernels. Then add the vinegar and watch the popcorn start to hop up and down. For each kernel you see, hop up and down, name something that has you ready to jump up and down for joy. Then say a prayer of thanks to God for giving such wonderful gifts for which you can be excited.

Why does this work? When the baking soda and the vinegar combine, they react to form carbon dioxide gas. This gas forms little bubbles around the kernels and lifts them to the top. When they reach the top, the bubbles pop and the kernel sinks.

Maundy Thursday and the Last Supper

Supplies

- Bibles

Introduce the next day as Maundy Thursday. Explain that "Maundy" comes from the Latin word *mandatum* which means "commandment." This is because Jesus gives the disciples a new commandment.

Ask someone to read Matthew 26:17-29.

Talk about how Jesus and his disciples were gathering to celebrate a special Jewish festival called Passover. This is a meal that celebrates how God saved them from slavery in Egypt. Each food used in the meal has a special meaning to help them remember the many parts of the story. Jesus used the liturgy of the Passover to explain that God was going use him to save them from slavery again. He took the bread and wine and told them to use these foods to remember his sacrifice for them.

Egg Carton Last Supper Prayers

Supplies

- 12 pack egg cartons
- Teddy grahams

Instructions

1. Provide an egg carton and 13 teddy grahams for each small group.

Use this script to guide participants through the activity.

For your Last Supper prayer practice we're going to make an egg carton Last Supper that we can use to hold our prayers of thanksgiving for things that have happened in the past. At the Last Supper, Jesus was celebrating Passover, a time when Jewish people remember and thank God for freeing them from slavery in Egypt. While they were eating, Jesus taught the disciples how they can use this meal in the future to remember the gift of grace Jesus was preparing to give to them. As you place a teddy graham in each of the egg pockets, take turns talking about a favorite family memory you have and why you think it's important to remember. When you've placed a teddy graham in each spot, add one more into the container to remember Jesus at this meal with his 12 disciples. As you do, offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the gift of remembering.

Walking Water Prayers

Supplies

- 7 clear plastic cups
- Water
- Red, blue, and yellow food coloring
- 6 half sheets of paper towels (recommended: a select-a-size type)

Instructions

1. Provide each small group with cups, water, food coloring, and paper towels.
2. Test the activity before leading it.
3. Fill four of the cups almost to the top with water.
4. Add a drop of red food coloring to two cups, a drop of blue to one and a drop of yellow to another.
5. Set the cups in a line: red water, empty, yellow water, empty, blue water, empty, red water.
6. Fold the paper towel sheets in half. (Make sure that they are able to go from the bottom of one cup to the other but not with a lot of extra sticking up or it will make the experiment take longer).
7. Place part of the paper towel in the colored water and connect it to the empty cup next to it. You'll see the water start to climb quickly.

Use this script to guide participants through the activity.

Add a drop of food coloring to each of the four cups of water. As you do, talk about a memory that color brings to mind for you. Take a moment to think about why it feels important to hold onto that memory. Place a folded-over paper towel to connect cups with water to empty cups. Watch as the water walks to the empty cups and combines colors for a new color. Jesus used the Passover Seder to help the disciples remember what God had done in the past and prepare them for a new act of salvation. In a similar way, our memories can mix with new experiences to tell how God works in vibrant ways.

Why does this work? This experiment uses capillary action to move the water from one cup to the next. Capillary action is the ability of a liquid to flow upward, against gravity, in narrow spaces. This is the same thing that helps water climb from a plant's roots to the leaves in the tree tops.

Maundy Thursday: Garden of Gethsemane

Supplies

- Bibles

Ask someone to read Mark 14:32-42.

Talk about how after Jesus shared a meal with his friends he was feeling worried about what was coming next. Even though Jesus knew what was going to happen, he may have felt a little lost about what path he should follow. So Jesus took his friends to the garden of Gethsemane and spent time in prayer. Jesus trusted God to help him find his way when he was nervous about what was going to happen next.

Finger Prayer Labyrinth

Supplies

- Finger Labyrinths from page 15

Instructions

1. Print a Finger Labyrinth for each participant.

Use this script to guide participants through the activity.

When Jesus needed God to direct his ways he went to him in prayer. Sometimes we feel lost or unsure what to do next. A finger labyrinth is a way that we can pray to God to ask for help in being ready for whatever comes next. Jesus prayed that God's will be done, not his. We can have an idea of what we want to happen but there are times God knows there is something better for us. Trace the path of the labyrinth with your finger. When you get to the center, ask God to help you with something that you're struggling with. Share with God your worries and then trace your way back out of the labyrinth. Don't worry, you can't get lost because there is only one way to follow the path. When you get done tracing the path out, close your prayer by saying "Your will, not mine be done, God."

A Compass Prayer

Supplies

- Steel needle
- Magnet
- Slice of cork
- Bowl
- water

Instructions

1. Provide each group with a bowl of water, steel needle, magnet, and slice of cork.
2. Test the activity before leading it.
3. Stroke the needle with the magnet in the same direction about 20 times. Make sure to lift the magnet off the needle after each stroke.
4. Place the cork slice in the water and make sure it floats.
5. Place the magnetized needle on top of the cork. It should turn until the needle is pointing in a north/south direction.

Use this script to guide participants through the activity.

It can help us to know that even Jesus, the Son of God, sometimes needed help knowing what comes next. When Jesus was nervous about what would come after he shared the Last Supper with his disciples, he went to a garden and prayed, asking God to guide him. Sometimes we need God to give us directions about what we should do next, especially when we feel unsure.

Use the magnet to stroke the needle about 20 times in the same direction. Make sure you lift up the needle after each stroke. Place the cork slice on the water so that it floats. Place the magnetized needle on top of the cork and make sure the magnet gets placed far away from the bowl. The cork and needle will turn until it faces north/south. As the cork and needle turn,

tell God about what has you nervous or feeling lost. Ask God to give you direction and that it be God's will and not yours that is done.

Why does this work? The needle is made from steel which contains iron. Iron particles can be magnetized when stroked with a magnet. Once the needle is magnetized it interacts with the earth's magnetic field and lines up with the magnetic north and south.

Good Friday: The Crucifixion

Supplies

- Bibles

Introduce the next day as Good Friday. Explain that even though the things that happen on Good Friday are sad and maybe even a little scary, we call the day "good" because it is tied to the resurrection of Easter Sunday. We rejoice because through his sacrifice on Friday, we are able to have forgiveness and salvation through Jesus' resurrection.

Ask someone to read John 19:16-27.

Talk about how the people who were angry with and scared of Jesus had him put to death. This was a scary and sad time for the people who loved and followed Jesus. They didn't understand why this was happening. Jesus was supposed to be the one who freed them and so they didn't know why Jesus hadn't used his power to escape from being put to death. When Jesus was on the cross, he saw some of the people who loved him. They were very sad about what was happening. Jesus told his mother and the disciple he loved that they needed to care for each other like they were family now. After being told that, the disciple took Jesus' mother Mary to live with him so that they could be there for each other like a mother and son. When we're sad it can help us to have someone there to help care for us or listen to us.

Prayer Jars

Supplies

- Glass jar, small coffee tin, or other container for each participant
- Colored paper
- Tape
- Craft sticks
- Thin black marker
- Markers

Instructions

1. Provide containers, colored paper, tape, craft sticks, and markers to each group.
2. Make a sample before the event to show the finished product.
3. Decorate the colored paper with markers and tape it around the jar or coffee tin.
4. Write the names of special people on one end of each stick. Color the other side of the stick.
5. Put the sticks into the jar so that the colorful end is up.

Use this script to guide participants through the activity.

Good Friday was a day when many people were sad about Jesus' death. Being sad is a very normal emotion and it is healthy to let yourself feel it. God brings people into our lives who can help by listening, offering advice, or just being a friend. Those special people can't always be with us right in the moment when we feel sad but remembering who they are and thinking about them can help us not feel alone. Decorate your prayer jar and then write the names of people (and pets) on the sticks. Color one end that will stick up from the jar. Then, when you're feeling sad, pull out one of the sticks and think about that person and know you are not alone even though you're sad. As you write each name say a prayer of thanks to God for giving you such special people in your life.

Emotion Tubes Prayer

Supplies

- Three paper towel tubes
- Black marker
- Baking soda
- Food coloring
- Vinegar
- Paper towels
- Trays
- Table coverings such as plastic tablecloths or newspapers

Instructions

1. Prepare a set of supplies for each group.
2. Use table coverings to protect from vinegar spills.
3. Make a sample before the event to show the finished product.
4. Draw a sad, angry and scared face on each paper towel roll.
5. Stand each roll upright on the tray.

6. Add 2 tablespoons of baking soda into each tube.
7. Add a drop of food coloring to each using the color you think represents the emotion.
8. Slowly pour vinegar into each tube and watch the face erupt with emotion.

Use this script to guide participants through the activity.

Jesus' death on Good Friday made a lot of people very sad. The emotions they felt bubbled up and sometimes got all mixed together. People could feel sad, angry, and scared all at the same time. But Jesus reminded his friends that they weren't alone and that they could turn to one another for support and care. When we are experiencing a bunch of different emotions, it can be hard to make sense of them. That's why God has given us family and friends to help us when we have big emotions.

On your paper towel tubes draw a face for sad, scared, and angry. As you draw, tell God about something that has you feeling that emotion and ask for God to be with you in that emotion. Stand the tubes up on your tray. Add two tablespoons of baking soda to each roll. Add a drop of food coloring that you think represents that emotion. Pour some vinegar inside each tube and watch each one erupt with emotion.

Why does this work? Baking soda and vinegar cause a chemical reaction creating carbon dioxide gas which causes the mixture to bubble up.

Easter: Resurrection

Supplies

- Bibles

Introduce the final day as Easter Sunday. Remind them that this is the day we celebrate Jesus' victory over the grave and the empty tomb.

Ask someone to read Matthew 28:1-10.

Talk about how on Easter morning the two Marys went to the tomb where Jesus had been buried. They wanted to do the things that would normally be done for someone who had died. As the women went, they were both sad and scared. They didn't know if they would get in trouble or how they would move the stone in front of the entrance. When they got to the tomb there was an earthquake. An angel appeared and told the women that Jesus wasn't there but that he had been raised from the dead. The Marys were afraid but also filled with joy. They started to run back to tell the others but then they met Jesus. It was so wonderful to see Jesus that the women worshiped him. He told them to not be afraid and to tell his disciples to meet him in Galilee.

Clothespin Butterfly Prayer

Supplies

- Clothespins
- Resealable snack bags
- Craft stems cut in 3-inch lengths
- Black markers
- Googly eyes
- Stuffing such as pom poms, confetti, colorful shredded paper

Instructions

1. Prepare a set of supplies for each group.
2. Make a sample before the event to show the finished product.
3. Color the clothespin.
4. Fill the snack bag about halfway with stuffing, close the bag, and trim off the excess above the seal.
5. Pinch the middle of the bag and, starting at the seal, push the clothespin over the middle of the bag.
6. Bend the craft stem into a "V" shape and insert at the top of the clothespin. Attach the googly eyes or draw eyes on your clothespin.
7. Add a smile on your butterfly.

Use this script to guide participants through the activity.

The women were so happy when they learned Jesus was alive they couldn't wait to share the good news with their friends! When we are filled with joy it is hard to keep it to ourselves and we want to share it with others. Good news is fun to share and can spread quickly!

Using a marker, color your clothespin if you want. Then take your snack bag and fill it halfway with stuffing. As you pick stuffing to put into the bag, talk about the different things that have made you happy recently. Share who you wanted to tell about these happy things when they happened. Close the bag and trim off the excess above the seal. Pinch the middle of the bag and, starting at the seal, push the clothespin over the middle of the bag. Bend your craft stem into a "V" shape and insert it at the top of your clothespin. Add googly eyes and a smile to your butterfly. Thank God for the way the good news of Jesus' resurrection spread so that we could know about it today!

Paper Towel Seed Prayer

Supplies

- Uncooked lima beans (lima recommended) soaked overnight
- Resealable sandwich bags
- Water

Instructions

1. Soak beans overnight to help them sprout faster.
2. Prepare a set of supplies for each group.
3. Make a sample a few days before the event to show the sprouted seeds.
4. Fold the paper towel in half a few times until it will fit in the baggie.
5. Soak the paper towel in water and then slide into the bag. Make sure that it is flat inside the bag.
6. Place a few beans about 2–3 cm from the bottom of the bag on one side of the paper towel so they are not sitting in water at the bottom of the bag.
7. Close the bag, leaving just a small opening for air.
8. Tape the bag to a window at home with the bean side facing in. Within 24-72 hours you should start to see the beans start to germinate.

Use this script to guide participants through the activity.

The women were very scared and sad when they started to Jesus' tomb because their friend had died. They didn't know what to expect and that made them nervous. Once they arrived the Marys learned that Jesus wasn't dead but alive! This made them so happy and they ran back to tell all their friends the good news!

Fold your paper towel a couple times so it will fit inside the bag. Soak the paper towel in water and slide it into the bag. Smooth it out so it's nice and flat. Place a few beans not quite at the bottom of the bag on one side of the paper towel. Seal the bag leaving a small opening at the top so air can get in. Tape the bag in a window at home with the bean facing in. Watch as the bean grows over the next few days. As you watch it grow, remember that sometimes we can think that something is over or not going to work but it might just take some time for us to find the joy in it, just like the women started sad but ended happy! The bean doesn't look like much at first but as it is given time it goes from a little bean into the beginning of a plant. As you watch it grow each day, pray for something that you're having trouble waiting for and ask God to help you be patient and watch for the joy to come.

Why does this work? Beans need special signals to "wake up" the sleeping (dormant) plant inside. These signals include light, air, and water. When a plant first sprouts it gets nutrients from the seed casing.

Closing

Thank the attendees for praying through Holy Week with you. Encourage them to report back on the progress of their Easter seeds if you chose that project. Remind them again of your Holy Week worship schedule.

Close in prayer.

Loving God, you gave us the gift of prayer so that we can connect with you in all times of our lives. Let us remember to come to you when we are happy, scared, excited, sad or a little of each. Bless the work of our hands and our time of fellowship that we might go into this week ready to remember and celebrate your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Additional Activity

If you are planning a longer time for intergenerational connections, use this Prayer Walk.

Holy Week Church Prayer Walk

Invite the participants to join you in a church prayer walk. As you walk through your building, you will stop and pray for worshippers, leaders, visitors, and others as you recall the journey Jesus took through this Holy Week.

Gather at the entrance to your church.

Pray: God of beginnings, we ask for you to bless those who will enter into this building with joy and excitement at the work of your hands. May they receive the gift of your Gospel and feel the movement of your Spirit that they leave energized to proclaim "Hosanna!" through the week. Amen.

Move to the altar where you receive communion.

Pray: God of remembering, you invite us to your table of grace and abundance to taste the promise of your mercy. This week embolden us to reach out to others to invite them to this feast without end so that your word of love may be shared with all. Amen.

Proceed to either a place of prayer or to a hallway.

Pray: Beautiful and holy Guide, you are the compass of those who feel lost. You are the shepherd who leaves the 99 for the 1. Fill the hearts of those who come to this space this week with the confidence of your presence. May they find the way made straight and your word be near to their hearts. Amen.

Move to a space near a cross.

Pray: God of our tears, even in our grief and mourning you promise to be with us. We give into your hands all those who will feel sorrow during this week. May your Spirit be a balm and comfort to their hearts. Amen.

Walk to a sacristy or pastor's office or musical instrument.

Pray: We thank you, Lord of all, for the faithful leaders you have raised up (*name pastors, deacons, musicians, if appropriate*). Strengthen and sustain them through this holy but busy week as they guide our congregation in worship, praise, and thanksgiving. Amen.

Move to the typical worshipper exit.

Pray: God of resurrection, inspire your people with your promise of life overcoming death. As we are sent from each service give us the courage and confidence of faith that we might go into all the world proclaiming your Good News of Christ who lived and died and was raised to new life. Amen.

Prayer Labyrinth

