

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 19 April 2026

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 98:1-3

Opening Hymn: 248 All Creatures of Our God and King

Confession of Sin

Almighty God, Who are rich in mercy to all those who call upon You; Hear us as we humbly come to You confessing our sins; And imploring Your mercy and forgiveness. We have broken Your holy laws by our deeds and by our words; And by the sinful affections of our hearts. We confess before You our disobedience and ingratitude, our pride and willfulness; And all our failures and shortcomings toward You and toward fellow men. Have mercy upon us, Most merciful Father; And of Your great goodness grant that we may hereafter serve and please You in newness of life; Through the merit and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Deuteronomy 4:29-31

Hymn of Preparation: 281 Rejoice, the Lord Is King

Old Covenant Reading: Exodus 7:8-13

New Covenant Reading: 2 Timothy 3:1-9

Sermon Title: *Staffs, Snakes, and the Supremacy of Yahweh*

Psalm of Response: 33 With Joy Let Us Sing to the LORD

Confession of Faith: Ten Commandments

Gloria Patri (Hymn 572)

Closing Hymn: 215 Give to Our God Immortal Praise

PM Worship

405 I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord

502 All for Jesus!

409 Blest Be the Tie That Binds

Old Covenant Reading: Isaiah 49:8-16

New Covenant Reading: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Sermon Title: *Open Your Hearts*

Adult Sunday School – Fellowship Lunch – No Sunday School

Suggested Preparations

Monday (4/12) Read and discuss Read and discuss Exodus 7:8–13

Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Prove yourselves by working a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.’” So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. For each man cast down his

staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (ESV)

It is helpful to know how widespread magic was in Egypt.

Kenneth Cherney writes:

A saying attributed to Clement of Alexandria refers to Egypt as “the mother of magicians,” and magic and Egypt are linked from the earliest times. Sociologists of religion have long argued over whether magic differs from religion and, if so, what exactly the difference is. In James Frazer's classic definition, a religion acknowledges that certain higher powers are in control of the world and guide the events of one's life; it teaches that these powers are to be worshiped and, when necessary, appeased. Magic, on the other hand, is a belief that by using certain techniques, practitioners can compel these powers to do their bidding; thus, for Frazer, magic has more in common with science than it does with religion. The distinction is useful, but it is not certain that the ancient Egyptians would have distinguished magic from religion in this way. For instance, it appears that in Egypt priests were magicians and vice versa.

Clement also mentions “forty-two books of Hermes full of Egypt's occult wisdom, and a very large number of Egyptian magic texts have been recovered. Many of the spells they preserve in writing were meant to be spoken aloud. Magical wands and staffs are attested, although it is not clear how they were used, and Egyptian iconography features many representations of staffs carved to look like snakes and snakes being held by priests or gods. One charm from the mid-third millennium BC apparently was intended to enable a knife to swallow a snake. In the Tale of Pharaoh Cheops' Court (ca. 1600 BC), a “chief lector-priest” ... makes a wax crocodile come alive and then turns it back into wax.

Read or sing Hymn 248 All Creatures of Our God and King

Tuesday (4/13) Read and discuss Psalm 48

Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised
in the city of our God!
His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation,
is the joy of all the earth,
Mount Zion, in the far north,
the city of the great King.
Within her citadels God
has made himself known as a fortress.

For behold, the kings assembled;
they came on together.
As soon as they saw it, they were astounded;
they were in panic; they took to flight.
Trembling took hold of them there,
anguish as of a woman in labor.
By the east wind you shattered
the ships of Tarshish.
As we have heard, so have we seen
in the city of the LORD of hosts,
in the city of our God,
which God will establish forever. Selah

We have thought on your steadfast love, O God,
in the midst of your temple.
As your name, O God,
so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth.
Your right hand is filled with righteousness.
Let Mount Zion be glad!
Let the daughters of Judah rejoice
because of your judgments!

Walk about Zion, go around her,
number her towers,
consider well her ramparts,
go through her citadels,
that you may tell the next generation
that this is God,
our God forever and ever.
He will guide us forever. (ESV)

Timothy Saleska writes:

All of God's people look forward to a moment – which the psalmist himself experienced – when the saving *words* that we have heard from God become a *physical experience* that we can see and touch. If we define salvation as final and total communion with God, the author of Psalm 48 seems to have gotten a small taste of that experience. On Mount Zion, he was in a place where God's salvation was not only hoped for but also seen and felt. God's faithfulness was (for a moment at least) visibly evident, as was His "righteousness." And on Zion, Yahweh Himself was graciously present with His people.

The speaker's experience at Zion was a touchstone for him – an amazing experience. He wants others to experience Zion as he did, so that they could report to future generations: “our God is forever and ever.” Today, however, the speaker's invitation is a problem for us. His Zion is long gone, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city and the sanctuary in 586 BC, and though they were rebuilt, they never reached their former glory and then were razed again in AD 70. Eyewitnesses died out long ago. The voice in Psalm 48 is a voice from a very different past.

However, even though it is a voice from the past, it is not an isolated voice. Others testify to occasions in which what they had previously *only heard about* turned into something they themselves *saw* with their own eyes. As I said above, the author of Psalm 48 alludes to his past and God's visible act of salvation in the exodus. But at the end of his poem, he also holds out hope to future generations that what they hear about God would become tangible truth to them as well.

And indeed, when the apostles talk about Jesus, they sound a lot like the voice in Psalm 48. For example, John describes his own move from hearing to sight this way:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we saw and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life – indeed the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and we testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. ...

From the perspective given us by the risen Jesus, the description of the earthly Jerusalem in Psalm 48 is not only a description of past glory but also of future glory. It is a description of the heavenly city on that Last Day when the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be its temple and believers from all nations will flow to it. In the new age, the hyperbole and imagery in Psalm 48:1-8, applied to the earthly Jerusalem, will become literally true.

Read or sing Hymn 281 Rejoice, the Lord Is King

Wednesday (4/14) 2 Timothy 3:1–9

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than

lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. (ESV)

R. Kent Hughes writes:

The false teachers in Ephesus ... opposed the truth, just as the sorcerers opposed the truth of Moses' message. The magicians' rods looked just like Aaron's. And by analogy, today the same language of the gospel is used by false teachers, but with different meanings. Their commands may sound like God's commands. Their religious paraphernalia may look the same – the same clothing, the same Bible, the same creeds. They may use the same meter in their prayers, just like authentic prayers. But they enslave people. They remain “men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.”

This has all been so dark, but Paul closes his thought in this section with an encouraging word to Timothy: “But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.” The folly of Jannes and Jambres became evident when they could not match the power of Moses and duplicate all his miracles. All then saw that what they taught was false and that they must not be followed. The same will happen to the false teachers who oppose Timothy.

This was an important word to Timothy, who could only see the false teachers' growing success. He was to understand that those men could compete only for so long, and then their folly would become evident to all. So it is today. There are places where lies seem to be winning, where preachers deny Christ's incarnation and resurrection and preach another gospel, where charlatans promise a new age. But they will not last, and their folly will be clear to everyone!

What we must especially watch for in our own lives is the inversion of love – where we become lovers of self “rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power.” Whenever this happens, the Great Commandment has been turned on its head. When we become lovers of self rather than of God, the whole withering paragraph slides through our souls.

These truths are crucial in these “last days” because many evangelicals have imperceptibly become lovers of themselves. James Davison Hunter, in his

landmark book *Evangelicalism, The Coming Generation*, published in the late 1980s wrote: “The fascination with the self and human subjectivity has then become a well-established cultural feature of Evangelicalism generally in the latter part of the twentieth century, not simply and ephemeral fashion among the younger generation.”

This shift of gravity to self must be resisted with all we have. The Great Commandment will never change: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ... Love your neighbor as yourself.” Significantly, ... when the Apostle John penned the book of Revelation, he recorded these words to the same Ephesian church that Timothy had served: “Yet I [the Lord] hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love” (Revelation 2:4).

Love, fresh love for God, must be the true north of our lives.

Read or sing Psalm 33 With Joy Let Us Sing to the LORD

Thursday (4/15) Read and discuss Isaiah 49:8–16

Thus says the LORD:

“In a time of favor I have answered you;
in a day of salvation I have helped you;
I will keep you and give you
as a covenant to the people,
to establish the land,
to apportion the desolate heritages,
saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out,’
to those who are in darkness, ‘Appear.’
They shall feed along the ways;
on all bare heights shall be their pasture;
they shall not hunger or thirst,
neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them,
for he who has pity on them will lead them,
and by springs of water will guide them.
And I will make all my mountains a road,
and my highways shall be raised up.
Behold, these shall come from afar,
and behold, these from the north and from the west,
and these from the land of Syene.”

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!

For the LORD has comforted his people
and will have compassion on his afflicted.

But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me;
my Lord has forgotten me."

"Can a woman forget her nursing child,
that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.
Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are continually before me. (ESV)

R. Reed Lessing writes:

The loyal Servant recalls the mission given Him by Yahweh which seemed to meet with no success (verse 4). Yahweh reiterates the Servant's worldwide mission and continues to encourage Him through 49:12. In passages such as Mt 11:20-24 and Mt 17:17, Jesus, who was expending His strength for the salvation of the world, expresses ire at the lack of response. But as the Servant, He entrusts His cause to the Father (e.g., Lk 23:46).

If the sinless Servant could be frustrated by people's apathy and disbelief, all the more is that true of His fallible servants. One example is John the Baptist. At one point, he wondered whether his ministry had been in vain (Mt 11:2-3). He languished in prison before his martyrdom (Mt 14:3-12), yet in the end he was vindicated (Mt 11:11).

In Is 49:9-12, the message of redemption continues with the Servant's release of prisoners. He will lead them back from all directions. While the specific word "shepherd" is not used, the words "feed," "pasture," "lead," and "guide" make it clear that the Servant is depicted as a Shepherd.

And this implies that the Israelites were like stray sheep. Sheep are not intimidating creatures; truth be told, sheep are dumb. They graze on the same hills until those hills turn to desert wastes; they bend down to drink from a pond, get too close and allow the water to absorb into their wool, fall in, and drown! Sheep are also dirty. Their wool is like a magnet. It attracts mud, manure, and maggots and becomes cakes with dirt, decay, and disease. Sheep absorb every particle of filth in the atmosphere. Finally, sheep are defenseless. They sometimes roll over onto their backs, but then are unable to get up. Canines, coyotes, and cougars all that a cast sheep is a sitting duck!

Israel had been just like sheep. The nation was dumb. “The ox knows its owner, the donkey the manger of its master, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand” (1:3). Israel was also dirty. “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy garment.” (64:5. And the nation was defenseless. “From the sole of the foot to the head, there is in it no soundness, [instead] a bruise and a stripe and a wound” (1:6). ...

And so we need an extraordinary Shepherd. Enter the Servant! He leads His flock to find food on barren heights, and in the hottest of weather, He gives His sheep unlimited water. Their path is straight despite the hilly country where sheep usually graze. This Servant even has the ability to tend to a huge number of sheep that are drawn from great distances.

Friday (4/16) Read and discuss 2 Corinthians 6:1–13

Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says,

“In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also. (ESV)

David Garland writes:

[Paul] calls for them to be reconciled to God and to open their hearts to him. For Paul the two are intertwined. This interconnection makes sense if the issue at the bottom of the dispute concerns their associations with idolatry. They cannot be reconciled to God and to Paul if they continue in heathen practices. Some have noted the connection of enlarged hearts to the OT warning against worshipping other gods in Deuteronomy 10:16: “Be careful

that you are not enticed to turn aside and serve, and bow down in worship to other gods.” The [ancient Greek translation called the Septuagint] has “Do not broaden your hearts.” In Deuteronomy the enlarged heart has a negative connotation and is related to pride swelling up in the people because of the bounty of the land, whereas Paul uses the idiom in a positive sense to refer to open and joyous affection. It is ... possible, however, that Paul intends that they enlarge their hearts for him rather than for idols.

Read or sing Hymn 215 Give to Our God Immortal Praise

Saturday (4/17) Read and discuss Exodus 7:8–13

Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Prove yourselves by working a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.’” So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. Still Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (ESV)

Kenneth Cherney writes:

Following Moses and Aaron’s sign. Pharaoh (literally) “did not listen to them,” although it is not mentioned that Moses or Aaron had said anything. The point, naturally, is that the authenticating sign performed by Moses and Aaron made no impression on Pharaoh because his “heart” was “hard.” [A Rabbinic commentary on Exodus 9:7] says that Pharaoh was unimpressed because for Mose and Aaron to perform magic in Egypt was the equivalent of carrying fish broth to Spain (coals to Newcastle, we would say), but the real reason for Pharaoh’s attitude cannot be the fact that he already had plenty of magicians who could turn staffs into snakes too. The victory of Aaron’s staff over the magicians’ staffs demonstrated that a superior power stood behind Moses and Aaron. In addition, if Pharaoh could see a symbolic allusion to an Egyptian myth in which the Apep/Apophis serpent attacks and overcomes the forces of light, order, and the throne, the meaning of the victory of Aaron’s staff would have been very clear.

At this point, no reason at all is given for Pharaoh’s unresponsiveness – although it is said that this is exactly the unresponsiveness that Yahweh had predicted. Just as in the narrative surrounding the birth of Moses, to look for a rational explanation for Pharaoh’s behavior is to miss the point. Pharaoh and those who emulate him do not behave rationally. A symptom of a “hard heart” is a persistent and deadly failure of mental perceptiveness.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow's morning and evening worship services.