

Guide to “The Three Great Days”

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” –Galatians 2:20

The purpose of this guide is two-fold. First, the focus is to more closely associate with the suffering of Christ. In order to accomplish this task, the ancient church would participate in the events surrounding the Crucifixion. “The Three Great Days” begin on the Thursday night before Easter and conclude on Saturday night. Robert Webber writes that “The Three Great Days” “calls us to an identification with Christ and his suffering (pg. 125).”

The secondary purpose of this guide is to change our hearts so that we can model Christlikeness to the world. We will do this by shifting our focus to the current famine crisis occurring in East Africa. Our desire is that the world will experience the living water of God provided by Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37–39). However, this desire needs to be accompanied by a desire to care for the physical sustenance of humanity. Therefore, we should be concerned with both physical and spiritual needs of people, by doing all we can to bring physical and spiritual life to a dying world.

If we are honest, our hearts are often far from this desire. Most of us have not experienced deep hunger or thirst. However, despite our met physical needs we are hungry and thirsty for more of God. It is with this attitude of humility that we enter into the suffering of Christ, uncovering avenues to participate through fasting, prayer, and remembrance during these three days that commemorate our Savior’s suffering.

Before these days begin decide how you will join. Will you commit to fasting? If so, how long? How will you set aside time in your schedule for the purpose of centering your schedule around the timeline of Christ’s suffering? The answers to these questions are not straightforward as we all come from different contexts. The following is to be seen as a guide and can be adjusted to fit the circumstance which God has placed you. If you have children, I would encourage you to find ways to make these events come alive to them.

Maundy Thursday

Earlier in the day begin by reading **Matthew 26:17–19**. What preparations do you need to make so that you can more fully participate in “The Three Great Days”?

Before dinner read **John 13:1–20**. God came down to earth and became a servant. He calls us to serve. How is God calling you to serve in your life? How are you called to serve those you have been given authority over? Other passages to consider: **Matthew 20:20–28** and **Philippians 2:1–11**. You could conduct a foot washing experience with your family and discuss this story.

Around dinnertime read **Matthew 26:20–29**. In the passage, we discover that Jesus was betrayed by His friend. Have you ever considered the grief that Christ experienced from this betrayal? How have you betrayed God? Webber writes, “we are to bring our own Judas to the table of the Lord. The cup that we drink is the cup of Jesus’ blood poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. It is a covenant drink and food. We have offended our holy God by our sins, and his wrath demands a punishment for that offense... On that night we come face-to-face in a fresh way with the message that we cannot find peace with God through our own works or moral goodness. We can only trust in Jesus who died for us to set us free (page 129).” Traditionally, some Christians participate in this evening by having a meal prepared with common foods from Jesus’ culture (ideas: bread, cheese, dried fruit, olives, nuts).

Before you sleep read **Luke 22:39–46**. Deep agony surrounded the prayer of Jesus in the garden, so much so that his “sweat became like great drops of blood”. If you wake at night recall the night that Jesus did not rest. He did this so that you can find rest in Him.

Songs of Recommendation: “Lamb of God,” “Humble,” and “Jesus’ Blood Never Failed Me” by Audrey Assad; “God with Us” by All Sons & Daughters; “Since Your Love” by United Pursuit; “Broken Bread” by Rend Collective Experiment

Good Friday

The timeline of Scripture below will attempt to follow a pattern that has been the traditional understanding for the timing of the events. To participate think of ways that will help you realize the physical reality of these events. This may involve going on a walk outside and visualizing the stations of the cross. If you are an artist, you may want to connect through the means of art. If you are a musician, find an opportunity to worship through music. Another meaningful way to participate is by attending a Good Friday service. Webber writes, “Our celebration of that day in worship captures the tension of both the sorrow we bring to the day through our identification with Jesus and the joy we experience knowing that his death was the death of death, the ruination of the powers of evil (pg. 130).”

When you wake up in the morning read **Luke 22:47–23:25**.

In the later morning hours, contemplate Christ’s walk to the cross. Read **Mark 15:16–21**.

12–3PM is considered the time of darkness. This is the time we contemplate Christ’s death on the cross. Read **Matthew 27:45–56**. Meditate on the words of Christ on the cross found in **Matt. 27:46; Luke 23:34,43,46; and John 19:25–27,28,30**. As we contemplate Christ’s physical suffering on the cross, also meditate on the agony that Christ faced as he suffered spiritually and relationally for the weight of our sins. The wrath of God was poured out on the innocent lamb, Jesus Christ.

6PM is the traditional time for when Jesus’ body was laid in the tomb. In the evening, meditate on the following passages: **Matthew 27:57–61, Isaiah 52:13–53:12, Psalm 22:1–22, and Hebrews 4:14–16**. This time is traditionally a time of intercession. Webber states, “on this occasion the prayers of intercession are longer than usual and cover the whole range of intercessory prayer. Prayers are lifted up for the entire church, for all nations and peoples of the earth, for peace, for those who suffer, and for those who have not received the gospel. What better time than at the hour of his death for us to acknowledge Christ as the one who hears our prayers, for his death is surely a response to the cry of affliction we feel on account of sin (pg. 133).”

Songs of Recommendation: “For the Songless Hearts” by Jon and Valerie Guerra; “Even unto Death” by Audrey Assad; “Your Love Changes Everything” by United Pursuit; “You Bled” and “Boldly I Approach” by Rend Collective Experiment

Holy Saturday

Webber writes, “Saturday is a day of rest and preparation for the great service of resurrection. It is a day to keep silence, to fast, to pray, to identify with Jesus in the tomb, and to prepare for the great resurrection feast (pg. 134).” On this day, our focus will be on the famine in East Africa. If you are physically able, it is encouraged to partake in this day with the spiritual discipline of fasting. If you are not physically able, you could consider a partial fast. Your hunger through fasting serves a purpose. When you feel the hunger pains, use this as a reminder to pray for the famine. The prayer guide below is based on a World Vision resource (prayer guide can be found in resources).

- Pray for the millions of people struggling from famine and food shortages.

In Nigeria, Yemen, South Sudan, and Somalia alone, tens of thousands of children could starve to death as famine, starvation, and food and water shortages affect 22 million people. World Vision is scaling up humanitarian assistance here to meet the health, nutrition, child protection, livelihoods, shelter, education, and water and sanitation needs of the most vulnerable. Ask God to begin healing these battered areas of the world.

Good Shepherd, we pray for cooperation and support for life-saving assistance to people struggling from food insecurity around the world. Send life-giving rains at just the right time, create good conditions for families to grow food for their survival, and cease conflict so Your children will no longer go to bed hungry and afraid each night.

“The crops failed, and there was no food anywhere in the land.” —Genesis 12:10 (CEV)

- Pray for children affected by acute and chronic malnutrition.

Worldwide, one in four children younger than 5 does not get the nutrition he or she needs. Hunger affects everything from intellectual development to physical growth and ability to fight off illness. Without proper nutrition, a child’s heart literally shrinks. In cases of acute hunger, the liver, kidneys, and intestines begin breaking down. Ask God to intervene.

Great Physician, we don’t have words to express how much this breaks our hearts. Have mercy on these children. Protect their little bodies and give them strength. Put Your healing hand on those with developmental issues, and allow them to grow up strong and healthy despite the hunger that afflicts them.

“... You haven’t eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive.” —Acts 27:33-34 (NIV)

- Pray children can learn.

About 66 million children around the world — 23 million in Africa alone — attend school hungry. This makes concentrating on subjects difficult, and their learning suffers.

- Pray for the organizations who work to feed the hungry. Pray for the churches in the countries affected, that they will have the opportunity to share physical and spiritual food with those suffering. Pray for the people to be hungry for the Gospel.
- Pray for people to discover the Bread of life.

We “do not live by bread alone” (Matthew 4:4, NLT). Many people still live without faith and hope.

Thank You Lord for being our Bread of life — the One who satisfies our soul’s deepest desire with the joy of salvation. Open people’s eyes to recognize You as the only Bread of life for their spiritual hunger.

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’” —John 6:35 (NIV)

Scripture Recommendations: **Isaiah 55; Matthew 19:16–30; John 6:22–59, 7:37–39; James 2**

Songs of Recommendation: “Buried in the Grave,” “All the Poor and Powerless,” and “We Are Waiting” by All Sons & Daughters; “Spirit of the Living God,” “I Shall Not Want,” and “Abide with Me” by Audrey Assad; “Not in a Hurry” and “Hidden” by United Pursuit

Resources

Webber, Robert E. *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004. Provides a helpful description for the celebrations of the Christian year.

For more on fasting, the following link will lead you to a discussion on fasting with Don Whitney, professor of biblical spirituality at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/march-web-only/does-your-fasting-have-point.html>

The following link will take you to World Vision’s page regarding the East Africa hunger crisis. By clicking on the top tab “Newsroom” you can read articles on the crisis. By clicking on the “Donate” tab you can donate. <http://www.wvi.org/emergency/east-africa-hunger-crisis>

This link will bring you to Samaritan’s Purse site for the option of donating and reading more information regarding the crisis. <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/article/samaritans-purse-delivers-food-to-many-in-famine-stricken-south-sudan/>

A prayer guide for the famine can be found at the following link: <https://www.worldvision.org/hunger-news-stories/matthew-25-pray-hunger>