

THE
PASSION
of JESUS

GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE

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Published by Wesleyan Publishing House
Indianapolis, Indiana 46250

This guide is to be used in conjunction with *The Passion of Jesus* by Kenneth Schenck (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2013).

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Kenneth Schenck's book, *The Passion of Jesus*, forms the basis of this six-week group study. Written in a conversational style, *The Passion of Jesus* is packed with biblical truth, inspiration, and practical application. You will also find that it raises some questions that will make you think hard about what you may have accepted as fact. As you and your group members read *The Passion of Jesus*, you will undoubtedly enter some uncharted waters and emerge better for the journey. Pray and anticipate six weeks of active learning and significant application!



Week 1

ENTERING JERUSALEM

Mark 11:1–25

Jesus is Lord and King.

TO THE FACILITATOR

Begin this session with a brief sharing time. Ask how the past week went. Did anyone have an unusual experience?

FOCUS ON GOD’S WORD

Mark 11:1–25 opens with a convincing display of Jesus’ authority as Lord and King over all things, and it ends with the priests, scribes, and elders questioning his authority.

As Jesus prepared to enter Jerusalem, he ordered two of his disciples to obtain an untamed colt. If anyone questioned what they were doing, they were supposed to respond simply, “The Lord needs it” (11:3). Everything worked out just as the Lord had predicted. As Lord, Jesus had perfect knowledge of the situation and also the right to claim the colt.

Jesus lordship is seen also in his power to subdue the colt’s natural wildness simply by sitting on it. Riding into Jerusalem on the colt fulfilled the prophecy given in Zechariah 9:9 that Israel’s king would come “riding . . . on a colt.” However, the people anticipated that the king would vanquish their Roman oppressors and restore the kingdom to Israel.

Since it was late, Jesus did not enter the temple. Instead, he and his disciples went to nearby Bethany to spend the night. The next day, he cursed a fig tree because it was barren. Undoubtedly, his action prefigured what would happen to Israel because of its barren spiritual condition. Later, when the disciples expressed amazement that the tree had withered, Jesus advised them that faith in God makes the impossible possible. However, our prayers will not be answered if we hold grudges.

After arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus drove the moneychangers and sellers of animals out of the temple. Jesus described these men as “robbers” (11:17). They were guilty of profaning God’s house of prayer. (See Isa. 56:7.) By cleansing the temple, Jesus demonstrated his authority over the priests, even the high priest.

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Have you noticed that nature always obeyed Jesus, but humans have consistently been rebellious? How do you explain the difference?
2. Do you agree or disagree that the Lord needs something today? If you agree, what do you think he needs?
3. Why do you agree or disagree with the opinion that the Lord doesn't need anything of ours, but we need to submit everything we own to him for his glory and our spiritual good?
4. Why do you think Jesus rode a colt (or donkey) into Jerusalem rather than a white horse? Compare Revelation 19:11.
5. If Jesus inspected churches today, what do you think he would find? More fruit than leaves? More leaves than fruit? Explain your answer.
6. Jesus was angry with what he found at the temple. What might a church do to please Jesus?
7. Kenneth Schenck alleges in *The Passion of Jesus* that "bearing fruit . . . is not about numbers" (p. 20). Why do you agree or disagree with his statement?
8. Why do you agree or disagree that "there are some who have gift of faith that goes beyond the rest of us" (*Passion*, pp. 23–24)?
9. Can we forgive those who hurt us deeply? If so, how?

WRAP-UP

Distribute slips of paper and pencils, and ask each person to write down anonymously how he or she will submit a specific attitude or action to Jesus' authority. Encourage the group to follow through on this commitment this week.



Week 2

JESUS IN DEBATE

Mark 11:27—12:44

Jesus kingdom priority.

TO THE FACILITATOR

Do you know each group member by name? When you engage a group member, use his or her name. By doing so, you help that person feel valued.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

The religious leader in Jerusalem huddled together to decide how they would answer Jesus (Mark 11:27–32). They asked Jesus what authority he claimed for cleansing the temple, and Jesus responded with his own question. Was John the Baptist's authority "from heaven or of human origin" (11:29)? When the religious leaders failed to answer Jesus' question directly, they said, "We don't know" (11:33). So Jesus said he wouldn't identify his authority either. But he proceeded to tell them a parable about an owner of a vineyard, some tenant farmers who refused to pay rent, and the owner's son (12:1–12). The wicked tenants beat or killed the servants who the owner sent to collect the rent. Finally, the owner sent his son, but the tenants killed him too. The religious leaders knew Jesus was referring to them as the tenants and himself as the Son. Therefore, they sought to kill Jesus.

Later, the religious leaders sent some Pharisees and Herodians (the political group that supported Herod) to trip Jesus in his words (12:13–17). The subject was taxes, and Jesus knew they were hoping he would say it was wrong to pay taxes. Schenck reasons, "Someone who thinks he is the Messiah, they surely thought, would not accept paying taxes to another king, to a foreign power. But if Jesus admitted that he was the true king, then they could have the Romans arrest him as a seditious revolutionary" (*Passion*, p. 30). Jesus disappointed his adversaries by telling them to "give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (12:17).

Next, the Sadducees, who didn't believe in a resurrection, tried to trap Jesus in a false statement about the resurrection, but he quoted Scripture to prove the resurrection (12:18–27).

Finally, a scribe asked Jesus to identify the greatest commandment (12:28–34). Jesus cited love for God as the greatest commandment and love for one's neighbor as the second greatest commandment. When the scribe agreed with Jesus' answer, Jesus commended him, saying, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (12:34).

Later, in the temple, Jesus decried the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, but commended the sincere love for God shown by a poor widow (12:35–44).

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Schenck claims that often a person's first reaction to getting found out is denial and anger (*Passion*, p. 29). Why do you agree or disagree with this statement?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that some who know who Jesus is reject him because they want to continue in their sinful ways?
3. How is Jesus' kingdom different from a kingdom ruled by humans?
4. How would you respond to the suggestion that Christians should not pay taxes because the government supports some immoral and unethical causes?
5. What aspects of resurrection life are you looking forward to?
6. How can Christians treat their neighbors in ways that reflect their love for God?
7. Why do you agree or disagree that many religious leaders today resemble those in Jerusalem who mistreated Jesus?

WRAP-UP

Before you end the group session in prayer, challenge each person to decide one action he or she will take this week to share God's love with a neighbor.



Week 3

JESUS AND THE TEMPLE

Mark 13:1–37

We serve Jesus daily while we wait for his return.

TO THE FACILITATOR

Does a member of your group dominate the discussion? You can control that habit by ruling that no one may respond to more than two consecutive questions without a break.

FOCUS ON GOD’S WORD

When Jesus and his disciples were leaving the temple, one of the disciples expressed his awe at the temple’s stones and magnificent buildings Jesus replied that the temple would be completely destroyed. Later, on the Mount of Olives, the disciples asked Jesus when this destruction would occur. Jesus responded by predicting a series of calamities (Mark 13:1–4).

Religious deceivers would arise, claiming to be the messiah. International wars would erupt, and believers would experience intense persecution. However, the good news would penetrate “all nations” (13:5–13). In *The Passion of Jesus*, Schenck indicates these events led up to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 (pp. 47–48).

Jesus also predicted the defilement of the temple that would alert the righteous to flee to the mountains for safety (13:14–23). Some Bible teachers relate these predictions to Jewish zealots’ installing a usurper, Phanni, as high priest and the flight of righteous Jews to the mountain town of Pella. Others view the fulfillment in the tribulation period, when a false messiah occupies a newly constructed temple and righteous Jews flee to Petra.

The return of Jesus to earth will be preceded by disturbances in the heavens: a solar eclipse, a lunar eclipse, falling stars, and shaking planets (13:24–37). His coming will be glorious and powerful, and he will gather his people from the four corners of the earth. Although we cannot specify the day or hour of his return, we can—and should—watch and be ready for it. As Schenck rightly observes, “Jesus will return to earth one day. Be ready and leave it at that” (*Passion*, p. 58).

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Why do you agree or disagree that the study of biblical prophecy has no relevance for modern-day Christians?
2. How can Christians stay positive in the midst of global calamities and atrocities?
3. Why should it encourage you to know the future is in Jesus' hands?
4. What specific persecution have you experienced for your faith in Jesus?
5. How can a persecuted believer experience peace and joy?
6. Why do you agree or disagree that current international conflict, natural disasters, and religious deception are signs of the times?
7. How does the belief that Jesus will return someday help you live today?
8. If someone asked you how to be ready for Jesus' return, what would you say?

WRAP-UP

If songbooks are available, have your group read or sing “What if It Were Today?” Otherwise, ask each group member complete this sentence: “I hope Jesus returns soon because . . .”



Week 4

THE LAST SUPPER AND ARREST

Mark 14:1–65

Jesus fully submitted to the Father's will.

TO THE FACILITATOR

Never chide a group member for a response that is off the mark. Instead, thank that person for sharing his or her thoughts, and ask whether anyone else has something to contribute to the discussion.

FOCUS ON THE WORD

While the chief priests and scribes were plotting to kill Jesus by trickery, Jesus and his disciples were dining in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper. In striking contrast to the religious leader's hatred of Jesus, a woman, apparently Lazarus' sister Mary (Matt. 26:6–13; John 12:2–8), showed her love for Jesus by anointing his head with expensive perfume. Some of the disciples protested Mary's act of devotion. They saw the anointing as a waste, and believed Mary should have sold the perfume for more than a year's wages and then given the money to the poor. However, Jesus saw the anointing as an expression of love in light of his imminent death, and he said she should be remembered wherever the gospel would be proclaimed (Mark 14:1–9).

Still indignant, Judas conspired with the religious leaders to betray Jesus in return for money. Knowing all things, Jesus dispatched two disciples to Jerusalem with directions to a man who would lead them to an upper room furnished and ready for the Passover (14:10–16).

That evening, “after sundown on Thursday night” (*Passion*, p. 65), Jesus and the Twelve observed the Passover (14:17–21). At this time, Jesus identified his betrayer as the “one who dips bread into the bowl with me” (v. 20). Jesus acknowledged that he must die to fulfill prophecy, but he also emphasized the woeful fate his betrayal would experience.

After supper, Jesus instituted Communion (14:22–26). Next, the group sang a hymn (Pss. 114–118) before departing for the Mount of Olives.

Jesus predicted his disciples' desertion, but also his reunion with them after his resurrection. Peter objected strongly to Jesus' words, but Jesus told him he would deny him three times before sunrise (Mark 14:27–31).

In Gethsemane, Jesus instructed Peter, James, and John to stay and watch. He went a little further, and then struggled in prayer about his approaching death. However, he willed to do the Father's

will. When he returned the third time to his slumbering disciples, he announced His imminent betrayal. That's when an armed multitude arrived with Judas to arrest Jesus (14:32–43).

When Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, a preplanned sign to the armed men, they arrested Jesus. As Jesus predicted, all his disciples deserted him. In the aftermath, Jesus' captors seized a young man, probably Mark, but he escaped naked (14:44–52).

Throughout the night, a kangaroo court put Jesus on trial, using false witnesses against him (14:53–59). Jesus offered no defense on his behalf, but he did relate a quote from Daniel 7 to make it clear to all that he was the Messiah. This quote so enraged the court that they pronounced Jesus worthy of death, and then they abused him (Mark 14:60–65).

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. How might believers show we love Jesus more than money?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that Communion would not become more meaningful if it was held more frequently?
3. Why do you think Judas betrayed Jesus?
4. Is it possible for Christians to betray Jesus? If so, how?
5. Why did Jesus struggle in prayer?
6. When is it hardest for you to pray? Why?
7. What is your response to Schenck's "Explore" paragraph on page 73 of *The Passion of Jesus*?
8. How can we apply Jesus' example of suffering at the hands of his accusers to our lives?

WRAP-UP

Jesus fully submitted to the Father's will even though he would face betrayal, desertion, arrest, false trial, and beating. Close this session with silent prayer. Encourage each member to pray, "Not what I will, but what you will."



Week 5

BETRAYAL AND CRUCIFIXION

Mark 14:27–31, 14:66—15:47

Jesus suffered and died for us.

TO THE FACILITATOR

Session 4 emphasized the need to pray according to God's will. So approach this session with the prayer that God will accomplish his will in the life of each group member.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

Just before Jesus' arrest, Peter had boasted that he would never deny Jesus. However, Jesus told Peter he would deny him three times before the dawning of morning (Mark 14:27–31). Jesus' prediction simply aroused in Peter a vehement pledge of loyalty. After Jesus' arrest, Peter learned the hard way that Jesus' prediction was true (14:66–72). Schenck comments: “[Peter's] faith was not strong enough to survive these circumstances. He failed his Lord. We won't finish a race if we haven't been training, and Peter's faith was flabby” (*Passion*, p. 80).

The Jewish governing religious and civil body, the Sanhedrin, could not legally issue an execution order, so it turned Jesus over to the governor, Pilate (15:1–5). Pilate questioned Jesus, and the chief priests hurled accusations at Jesus, but he chose not defend himself. As Schenck rightly concludes: “Jesus knew what was happening on a bigger scale than anyone else around him. He was about to die as a ransom for the sins of all humanity. There was no need to talk. It was not God's will to stop what was happening” (*Passion*, p. 82).

When Pilate asked the assembled mob to choose between the criminal Barabbas and Jesus for crucifixion, the mob chose Jesus and allowed Barabbas to go free. In spite of believing Jesus was innocent, Pilate yielded to the mob's cry for Jesus' crucifixion (15:6–15).

Rough, rude soldiers beat Jesus, thrust a crown of thorns on his head, mocked him, and led him away to be crucified. On the way to the site of the crucifixion, the soldiers forced Simon, a Cyrenian, to carry Jesus' cross. When they reached Golgotha, they crucified our Lord (15:16–26).

While Jesus was dying on the cross, the soldiers gambled for his garments, thereby fulfilling Psalm 22:18. Above Jesus' head, they had posted his crime as, “King of the Jews.” Two criminals hung on crosses beside Jesus while onlookers, including the religious leaders, mocked him. A Roman centurion standing near the cross became convinced that Jesus was the Son of God. He had

seen Jesus suffer, and he had heard words and had watched him expire. This man would be the first of many Gentiles who would believe on Jesus (Mark 15:27–39).

When Jesus expired, the veil of the temple tore from top to bottom. God had provided in Jesus a way for everyone to approach him. (See Heb. 4:16.)

Before Pilate consented to release Jesus' body to Joseph of Arimathea, Pilate received confirmation that, unlike the two crucified criminals, Jesus had already died (Mark 15:40–45). If he had not died, the soldiers would have hastened his death by breaking his legs (see John 19:31–33).

Joseph received Jesus' body, treated it with utmost care and respect, laid it a tomb, and rolled a stone against the entrance. As he did these things, Mary Magdalene and Mary, Jesus' mother, observed where Joseph laid the body (Mark 15:46–47).

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Where do you think we are most likely to deny our Lord? Why there?
2. What tips does Schenck offer for maintaining a spiritual fitness regimen? (See *Passion*, pp. 80–81.)
3. How do you account for the Sanhedrin's intense hatred of Jesus? How can religious people be so cruel?
4. How does the release of Barabbas, the guilty, and the condemnation of Jesus illustrate Jesus' substitutionary death for us?
5. Using only a few words, how would you describe Pilate's character? Explain.
6. Read Exodus 12:9 and Psalm 34:20. Why was it significant that the soldiers did not break Jesus' legs when he hung on the cross?
7. Why do you agree or disagree that it is significant that the temple's veil tore from top to bottom and not from bottom to top?
8. What commendable traits do you find in Joseph of Arimathea?
9. What commendable traits do you find in the two Marys?
10. Ephesians 4:9 states that Jesus descended "to the lower, earthly regions." Why do you agree or disagree that this means Jesus descended into hell after dying on the cross?

WRAP-UP

Jesus endured brutal, humiliating treatment at the hands of the soldiers before experiencing immense physical and spiritual anguish on the cross. Close this session with group prayer, in which volunteers thank Jesus for suffering and dying on the cross for them and all humans.



Week 6

RESURRECTION

Mark 16:1–8

Jesus arose!

TO THE FACILITATOR

Thank your group members for participating so well throughout the past sessions. Let them know you have enjoyed getting to know them better and helping them to apply the truths they have found in God's Word.

FOCUS ON GOD'S WORD

Likely, the Jewish religious leaders assumed they were done with Jesus, once and for all. After all, he was dead, and his body lay in a sealed tomb. But they were wrong.

Early Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene and two other women arrived at the tomb with spices. They planned to anoint Jesus' body, but they wondered who would roll away the stone from the tomb's entrance for them. To their great surprise, they saw the stone had already been rolled away. To their further surprise and alarm, when they entered the tomb, they did not see Jesus' body. Instead, they saw a white-robed young man there, who announced that the crucified Jesus had risen (Mark 16:1–6).

The young man invited the women to see where Jesus' body had rested, and then he told the women to notify the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee (16:7).

Matthew 27:62–65 reports that the religious leaders had obtained an agreement from Pilate to post guards at the sealed tomb. Matthew reports further that these guards became petrified when an angel of the Lord appeared, and rolled the stone away from the tomb. This angel was the young man who greeted the women at the empty tomb.

After seeing the angel at the tomb and hearing him say Jesus had risen, the women ran from the tomb in a state of shock (Mark 16:8). However, their shock dissipated and they shared the wonderful news with the disciples that Jesus was alive!

At first, the disciples were slow to believe that Jesus had risen (see Mark 16:9–14; Luke 24:9–11, 13–34; John 20:19–29). But later, they kept their appointment with Jesus in Galilee and received from him what is called the Great Commission, orders to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18–20).

The disciples did not start making disciples of all nations immediately, though. Jesus instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The Spirit would empower

them for their momentous and difficult task. We, too, must depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to continue the mission of making disciples!

FOCUS ON LIFE

Discuss the following with your group.

1. How do you know the women approaching the tomb did not expect Jesus to be alive?
2. If a skeptic asked you why you believe Jesus rose from the dead, how would you answer?
3. How has Jesus' resurrection made a difference in your life?
4. Read Matthew 27:62–64. What flaws do you find in the reasoning behind the chief priests and Pharisees' request that an armed guard be posted at Jesus' tomb?
5. Why do you agree or disagree it is significant that the chief priests and Pharisees' remembered Jesus' promise to rise again?
6. Why, in your opinion, had an angel rolled the stone away from the tomb?
7. What happens to the believer's spirit when he or she dies? (See 2 Cor. 5:8.)
8. Why do you agree or disagree that it doesn't matter whether the body of a departed Christian is buried or cremated?
9. Why do you agree or disagree that departed believers will experience resurrection?
10. Why do you think Jesus entrusted the Great Commission to imperfect men instead of to angels?
11. Are you encouraged by the trust Jesus placed in the disciples? Why or why not?
12. Why do we need to depend on the Holy Spirit for power as we share the good news that Jesus died and rose again?

WRAP-UP

Before dismissal, divide the group into teams of three. Give the teams paper and pencils and have them write a four-line poem about the resurrection. Collect the poems and read them to the group.

If your group benefited from studying *The Passion of Jesus* together, check out *The Parables of Jesus* and *Jesus—The Mission* by Kenneth Schenck, available now!