

GOD'S BIG EASTER STORY

A HOLY WEEK JOURNEY FOR FAMILIES



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DEAR FAMILY

The stories of Jesus' death and resurrection can feel like heavy topics to talk about with your children. Unlike the joyous baby-in-a-manger stories you told at Christmas, the stories that are bookended by a Palm Sunday parade and an Easter Sunday resurrection include betrayal, death, confusion, and deep sadness. But they also show Jesus' character as the loving, humble, servant King who welcomes all to the table, and they help us realize the depth of Christ's sacrifice, preparing our hearts and minds to experience Easter awe.

God's Big Easter Story: A Holy Week Journey for Families is based on the Holy Week section in our popular *God's Big Story* cards boxed set (available from FaithAliveResources.org). It is designed to provide your family with a simple, meaningful way to grow in faith together as you remember the events leading up to Jesus' death and celebrate the hope we have in Jesus' resurrection.

What Is Holy Week?

Beginning on Palm Sunday and ending with the three days that mark Jesus' trial, death, and resurrection, Holy Week is a time to remember Jesus' journey to the cross—and beyond. A lot happens from Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem to his appearance outside his tomb. Reading these stories throughout Holy Week gives us a chance to walk with Jesus in the last moments of his life and to experience the miracle of his resurrection.

Making the Symbols Set for *God's Big Easter Story*

Here's what you need:

- A printed copy of the **pathway** found on page 3 of this document
- A printed copy of the **story symbols** (if you don't have them already, download them from DwellCurriculum.org/Home in black and white or in color).
- *Tip:* You can print the symbols on **sticker paper** if you want to stick them directly on the pathway. Or to make them reusable year after year, stick them on wooden circles instead.

How to Use the Devotions

There's no right or wrong way to use these devotions. For example, you could read one each day during Holy Week, adding a new symbol to the pathway each day to mark the progression toward Easter. Alternatively, you could combine some of the stories and read them over a few days. Or maybe this year you're only able to read a few of the stories together. That's OK.

We've provided NIV Scripture references for each story, but feel free to read the stories from a children's story Bible if that works best for your kids.

We invite you to use the four steps below as a framework for your time together.

BREATHE: Calm your head, heart, and hands as together you slowly breathe in . . . and out. (Adjust the length of this quiet time according to your children's attention spans.)

READ: Spend time in God's story by reading the suggested passage from the Bible or from a children's story Bible. Some days the selections are longer than others. One way to keep kids of all ages engaged is by including them in the telling of the story. You can invite pre-readers to make up an action to do each time they hear a particular word or name. Assign readers a section of the story to read aloud, or have them read the lines of a character as you narrate the story.

WONDER: Use the questions to reflect on the story. We've provided you with "wondering questions" because they work well with all ages, they have no right or wrong answers, and they result in deeper thinking about God and about the lives of the people in the story. Encourage kids to use their imaginations as you wonder together about these stories. You might want to end this time by asking, "What do you wonder about this story?"

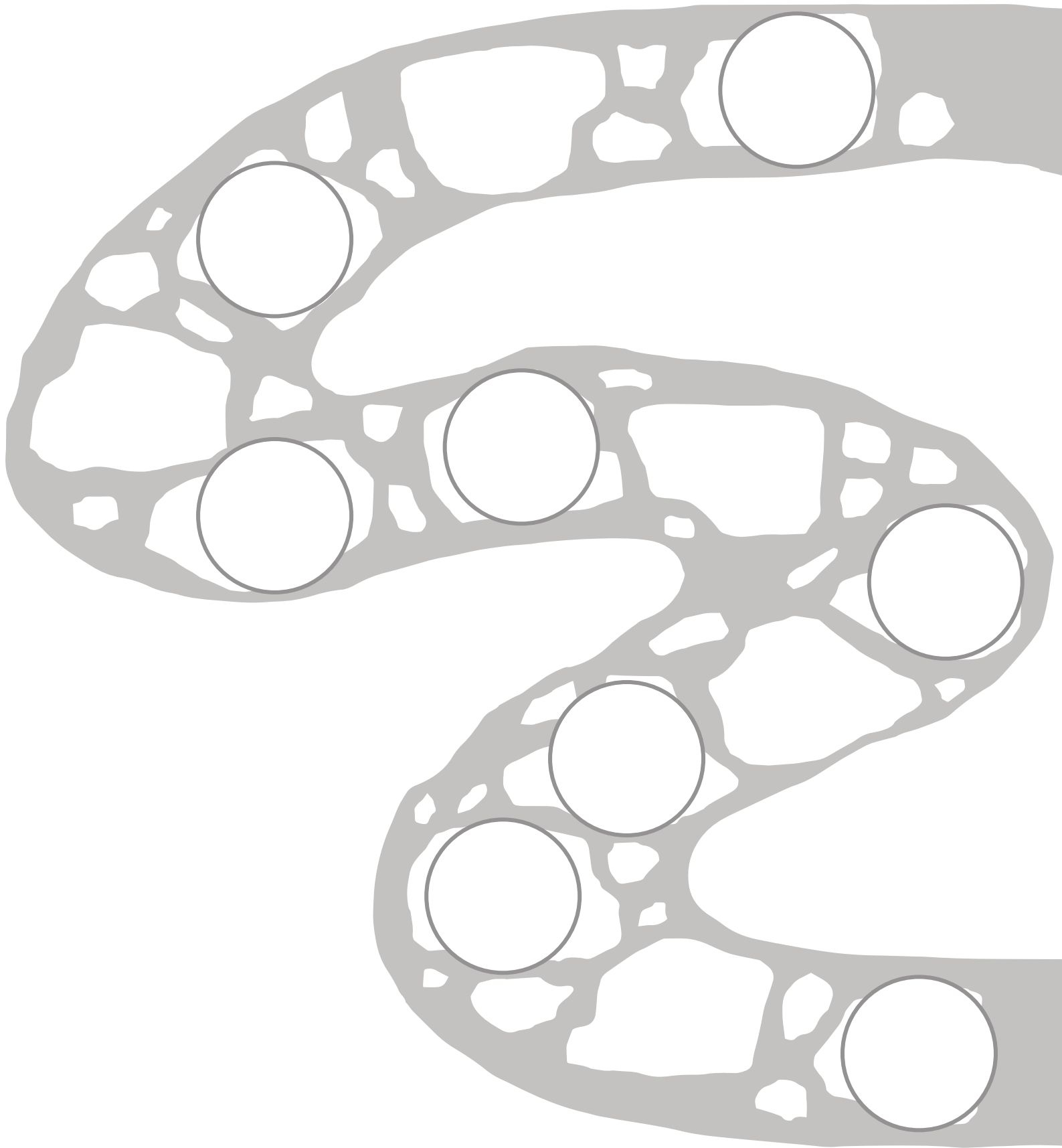
PRAY: Close your time with prayer using the provided suggestions or your own words and ideas.

Easy Extra Ideas

Looking for other ways to engage with the stories during Holy Week? Try one of these ideas:

- Use LEGO™ or other blocks to build something featured in each day's story.
- Create a resurrection garden like [this one](https://tinyurl.com/DwellatHomeGarden) (tinyurl.com/DwellatHomeGarden) from the blog *Confessions of a Homeschooler*.
- Make or purchase hot cross buns to eat on Good Friday.
- Make a colorful sign or banner with the words "Alleluia! Jesus Is Alive!" written on it. Hide it somewhere for your children to discover on Easter Sunday as part of your celebration. Or have your child make the banner and then hide it for *you* to find!
- Celebrate Jesus' resurrection by singing or listening to a favorite Easter song together.

We hope that *God's Big Easter Story* will become a beloved yearly ritual in your home. Let us know how it goes! You can reach us at info@dwellcurriculum.org to share your experiences or ask questions.



GOD'S BIG EASTER STORY

DAILY DEVOTIONS



PALM SUNDAY PARADE

BREATHE: Calm your head, heart, and hands as you slowly breathe in . . . and out.

READ: Matthew 21:1-11

WONDER: What would it be like to be in the crowd that welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem? What would you have said or done if you had been there?

PRAY: Dear Jesus, like the people on Palm Sunday, we praise you. Thank you for coming to be our King and establishing your kingdom. Help us to serve you in it. Amen.



THROWING OUT THE MONEY CHANGERS

BREATHE: Calm your head, heart, and hands as you slowly breathe in . . . and out.

READ: Matthew 21:12-17

WONDER: What does this story show you about Jesus? What words do you think the people Jesus healed would use to describe him? How do you think the children's faces looked as they shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

PRAY: The children ran and shouted "Hosanna!" Use this praise litany as your prayer today, responding with a loud "Hosanna!" after each phrase (run around and shout it if you like):

Jesus, you are the great and awesome King. *Hosanna!*

Jesus, all glory and honor belong to you. *Hosanna!*

Jesus, you are the King—then, now, and forever. *Hosanna!*



THE FOOT WASHING

BREATHE: Calm your head, heart, and hands as you slowly breathe in . . . and out.

READ: John 13:1-17

WONDER: Imagine how the water would feel on your tired feet. What would it be like to have someone so important serve you by washing your smelly, dirty feet? Why do you think Jesus told the disciples to wash one another's feet? How do you serve others?

PRAY: Think of all the people who serve you—family members, coaches, teachers, and community helpers. Offer a popcorn prayer of thanks for these people, jumping in and naming them whenever you are ready. End your prayer by asking God to help you serve others too.



THE LAST SUPPER

BREATHE: Calm your head, heart, and hands as you slowly breathe in . . . and out.

READ: Luke 22:7-23

WONDER: Do you remember the words Jesus said about the bread and the cup? (If not, reread verses 19 and 20 together.) Wonder how the Lord's Supper celebration at your church is like the special meal Jesus had with his disciples. Why might Jesus have used food and drink to remind us how much he loves us? What do you wonder about the Lord's Supper?

PRAY: Dear Jesus, thank you for giving us a way to remember your sacrifice for us and to remind us how much you love us. We love you too, Lord! Amen.



A SAD NIGHT

BREATHE: Calm your head, heart, and hands as you slowly breathe in . . . and out.

READ: Luke 22:39-62

WONDER: Wonder why the disciples fell asleep. How do you think Jesus felt when all his friends were too tired to support him? Imagine that you're Peter, a follower and friend of Jesus. After Jesus was arrested, what emotions would you be feeling? Why do you think Peter denied Jesus? Why do you think Peter cried?

PRAY: Think about a time when you did something that made Jesus sad. Begin a family prayer with "Jesus, I made you sad when. . ." Then give everyone a moment to silently talk to Jesus. End the prayer with "Thank you, Jesus, for forgiving us. Thank you for always loving us, no matter what. We're so glad you never leave us or get too tired for us! Amen."



JESUS DIES

BREATHE: Calm your head, heart, and hands as you slowly breathe in . . . and out.

READ: John 19:14-30

WONDER: What do you wonder about Jesus dying on the cross? How does this story make you feel?

PRAY: Draw a simple cross. Practice holding up the cross and having everyone say, "Thank you, Jesus." Hold it up after each sentence in this prayer, saying the response together:

Dear Jesus, you are our Lord. *Thank you, Jesus!*

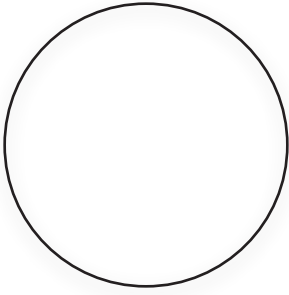
You came to earth for us. *Thank you, Jesus!*

You lived for us. *Thank you, Jesus!*

You suffered for us. *Thank you, Jesus!*

You died for us. *Thank you, Jesus!*

You love us. *Thank you, Jesus! Amen.*



JESUS IS BURIED

BREATHE: Calm your head, heart, and hands as you slowly breathe in . . . and out.

READ: John 19:38-42

WONDER: When Jesus was alive, Joseph of Arimathea was afraid to tell others he was a follower of Jesus. But after Jesus died, Joseph asked Pilate if he could bury Jesus' body. Wonder why Joseph wanted to do this for Jesus. What emotions do you think Joseph and Nicodemus were feeling as they buried Jesus? Where do you think the other disciples were on this day? How do you think they were feeling? How does this part of the story make you feel? Create your own symbol for this day in the blank circle above. (If each person would like to make their own symbol, trace the circle and make extras.)

PRAY: Practice making the signs for "Jesus" (with hands open, touch the tip of the middle finger of one hand to the palm of your other hand; repeat on the opposite hand) and for "Thank you" (touch the fingertips of your dominant hand to your chin; then extend your hand forward with the palm up). Sign "Jesus" and "Thank you" as you read the following prayer:

Dear *Jesus*, you taught us how to be servants to each other. *Thank you!*
Jesus, you suffered in the garden when your friends weren't there for you. *Thank you!*
Jesus, you let your enemies arrest you and hurt you. *Thank you!*
Jesus, your friends ran away and even said they didn't know you. But you didn't complain. *Thank you!*
We are sorry that your friends ran away.
We are sorry that you felt so alone.
We are sorry that your enemies hurt you.
We are sorry that you suffered so much for us.
Jesus, we love you.
Thank you for loving us!
Amen.

—prayer adapted from Kid Connection, Year 2, Quarter 2, p. 151



JESUS IS ALIVE!

BREATHE: Calm your head, heart, and hands as you slowly breathe in . . . and out.

READ: John 20:1-18

WONDER: What do you think Jesus' friends thought when they saw that his tomb was empty? Why do you think Jesus' friend Mary Magdalene didn't realize at first that she was talking to Jesus? What would you have done when you realized Jesus was alive again? Who would you run to tell?

PRAY: Celebrate Jesus' resurrection by echoing this prayer together (repeating each phrase as it's read):

Jesus, you are Lord.

Jesus, you are our hope.

Jesus, you won the victory over death.

Jesus, we jump for joy because you are alive! Amen.