

The Mom Challenge



7 mini challenges to
help kids appreciate
the **TRUE MEANING** of

Easter



Easter is the most important holiday of the Christian calendar, and the week leading up to it is full of the historic adventures of Jesus. But isn't Christmas of equal or greater importance, some well-intending people might ask? Isn't a birth just as important as a death?

Why Jesus' Death is So Important

Not in the case of Christ. Since the great prophets of all religions have a birthdate and committed good deeds, Jesus' birth and his teachings would only earn him the status of a great prophet.

However, he is much more than that. He is God's only Son, the Messiah, Lord of Lords. Their followers of Mohammed and Buddha attest that their great leaders died and did not come back. Jesus came back. He ascended into heaven and plans to return to earth someday. The Ascension has witnesses; Christ's resurrection has more than 500 witnesses. The differences between Jesus and the other great prophets concern his death and resurrection. No other prophet ever claimed to be a sacrifice for the wrong-doings of mankind. No other religion claims that their prophet arose from the dead as a sign that we, too, shall rise.

Challenges with teaching kids about Easter

For these reasons, it is important to teach kids about Christ's death and resurrection at an early age. But there are challenges. First off, Christ's death was quite violent. How much do we tell children? Second, we're competing with the Easter Bunny. Will a story about a death be eclipsed by a bunny bearing candy? Finally, Jesus died, arose and ascended over 2,000 years ago. How do we teach that Easter is just as relevant today as it was for the first generation of Christians?

Why short readings during Easter Week is a great idea

They become visible if we make Easter Week a time when we have something to mention to our children every day. A ten-minute lesson daily is often how the most committed Christians relay important material to their children. If you commit to this for Easter Week, you may find you want to continue it as part of your daily lives.

Famous missionary Corrie Ten Boom listened to her father read one chapter of the gospel every morning of her life until his arrest for harboring Jews in Holland during World War II. The Dugger Family, featured in TLC's 19 Kids and Counting, manage to get all 19 of their young ones together for Bible time every night. Surely if they were inconvenienced by it or were gaining nothing, the parents would decide they had enough on their plates and stop.

The Mini-Challenges:

a 10-Minute reading per day during Easter Week

Beginning Monday, the day after Palm Sunday, find a time each day until Easter when your family is relaxed and close to being all together. For some it is breakfast. For others it is after dinner, when the food is settling or when kids are enjoying dessert. For even more, it is the bedtime hour, when homework is finished and bodies are starting to wind down.

At that point, complete that day's mini-challenge, which includes reading a scripture, reading a short application relating it to today's world, and finally, having children answer a couple questions about how that part of Easter Week applies particularly to them. Read lively—as if this scripture is the most important story in the universe. Because it is! Close in a short prayer.

You will find that, not only has your family created a cherished memory of regular time spent together, but that Easter is a little more clear and a little more real in your children's hearts!



Monday Mini-Challenge: The Triumphal Entry

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.” ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey,

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted.

Application

Palm Sunday is also known as Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. People were spreading their cloaks and palm branches on the ground to welcome Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah and future King.

Indeed, he would be their king, but like many things that happen on earth, people didn’t “get” what God was actually up to. They thought Jesus would ascend the throne and rule Israel! They didn’t get it that he would be brutally murdered, rise again, and establish the Kingdom of Heaven. The disciples thought they would be considered the King’s Court and get to help rule others. They didn’t get it that they would sit on 12 thrones and judge Israel for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Oftentimes, we can be devastated when something we really want doesn’t work out, especially if it’s something we’ve been working toward most of our lives. Palm Sunday is a reminder

that God’s ways are infinitely better. If we trust and rely on him, we will come into our rewards, which are greater than our own dreams could ever produce.

Discussion

- Have you ever been horribly disappointed when you wanted something and it didn’t work out?
- What might God have in mind for you that is actually beyond your dreams?



Tuesday Mini-Challenge: The Last Supper

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

¹⁴ When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

Application

The concept of eating a symbol of Christ's flesh and drinking a symbol of his blood is often perplexing to new Christians—and even some mature ones! Why do we need God to come down in the flesh and pay a price for all our wrong doings and wrong thinking? Why do we need spilled blood and a destroyed body? It sounds kind of gross and disgusting, doesn't it?

Here's what's actually gross: The way human beings treat each other. Since the fall of mankind, men have considered themselves to be more important than their neighbors. They think that what they want is more valuable than what God wants. They have gone

far from God in their hearts and don't really care. We're all guilty of this to some degree; it's just hard to see because we're in the middle of it, and because our "self love" blinds us to the gross and disgusting things we do and think.

Put it this way: When we approach a hog farm, we would hold our noses and go "pee-yew! That stinks!" But can the hogs smell it? No. They're used to it. We're used to our world, so we don't think it's quite so foul. Guess what? It's pee-yew-y compared to how it started.

The world was not designed to be a hog farm. God designed it as a garden. God designed man to walk in the gardens with him and have a love relationship, where he could bless man and give him love, peace, friendship, and joy. It's amazing that the creator of the far-reaching universe would want such relationships, but that was the point of creating man.

What God has put up with throughout civilization, we could not put up with. He is kind and good, and people are so unlike him, it's like a good man having a wife who speaks ill of him, cheats, raids his wallet, is ungrateful, complains constantly, and only speaks to him when she needs something. The wages for this behavior if it were done to us?? DIVORCE! ETERNAL SEPARATION, and good riddance to that nasty woman! However, the good husband is so loving that he still wants to keep making things right.

During his hours on the cross Jesus became the DIVORCE. Something magical happened with Jesus' death and resurrection that we don't quite understand.

But it means we are not divorced from God. We are still his! Our taking communion is a reminder of his devotion to the relationship between us and him, and it's our way of saying we're sorry for acting like hogs, and even though we're still prone to it, we want to be returned to our natural state when we die. We want to return to God and be a good mate again.

Discussion

Once we are Christians, God always is at work to make us return to our natural state of goodness, and to be more like him.

- What ways do you see that God has made you a better person since last Easter?



Wednesday Mini-Challenge: Jesus' Arrest

Scripture: Matthew 26:36-56

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

⁴⁰ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. ⁴¹ "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

⁴³ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵ Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." ⁴⁹ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

⁵⁰ *Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend."*

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹ With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

⁵² *"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"*

⁵⁵ *In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶ But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.*

Application

Jesus' disciples were totally acting up the night he was arrested. One of them had agreed to turn him over to the bad guys for 30 pieces of silver. James, John and Peter, often considered Jesus' favorites, were being slackers. Jesus had seen clearly the amount of torture men would throw on him the next day, and it was bothering him so badly that he felt like he could die just from the thought. His best friends had gobbled up the Passover meal and couldn't even stay awake to keep him company!

Peter resorted to violence when the officers showed up to arrest him, and then all of them freaked out and ran away.

At the same time, none of them were trying to act up (except Judas, the guy who betrayed Jesus. No one

really gets what he was thinking.) The disciples were just like us normal people in so many ways. We're often getting something wrong.

Jesus said to his three friends: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." This is the problem for Christians. We want to do everything right and be close to God and be good and not bratty toward friends and relatives. But our flesh is weak—our hearts and our bodies don't always work the way they should.

Jesus understands this. So long as we keep working on ourselves and let the Holy Spirit guide us, someday our flesh will be gone. In heaven we'll have new bodies and new hearts that work the right way.

Discussion

- Have you ever slacked on Jesus? Tell of a time when he might have wanted you to do one thing, and you did a different thing.
- What were some of the results?



Thursday Mini-Challenge: The Crucifixion

Scripture: Matthew 27:27-56

²⁷ Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. ³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹ After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

³² As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. ³³ They came to a

place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). ³⁴ There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. ³⁵ When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. ³⁶ And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. ³⁷ Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is jesus, the king of the jews.

³⁸ Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" ⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴² "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now

from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴ In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

The Death of Jesus

⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

⁴⁷ When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹ The

rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

⁵⁰ And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split ⁵² and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

⁵⁴ When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

Application

The death of Jesus is hard to read about. It's even made some kids cry. It's violent and seems so unjust, as Jesus did nothing wrong. In fact, he spent his three-year ministry healing the sick, releasing people possessed by terrible demons, blessing children, and making people in poverty and with low self-esteem feel that God always loves them. Why did men react violently?

It all gets down to power and popularity. If Jesus were to ascend the throne of Israel, it meant all the important religious leaders among the Jews would probably be reduced to being "mere men," and they enjoyed lots of privileges and high status among the people. They didn't want to give up their fame and glory. So, they plotted his murder instead.

When you're in school and are looking all around at popular people, try to figure out why they are popular. Is it because of how they dress or because they have fun things like pools and tree houses? Or is it because they are genuinely nice, trustworthy and unselfish? Don't necessarily side up to popular people just because. They may be like the religious leaders of Israel—all show and no heart. As well, don't try to be most popular. Try to be the nicest, most trustworthy and least selfish. Jesus says people who accomplish this will be more popular for all eternity in the kingdom of heaven.

Discussion

Think of some things you can do in school that are nice, trustworthy and unselfish.

- What would they be and for whom? Don't look for rewards right away from kids. Kids might not see it.
- Where should you look for your rewards to come from? What might they be?

Friday Mini-Challenge: The Resurrection

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them.

"Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."



Application

The great news about Easter Week is that no matter what men did to Jesus, he was still Jesus. He never stops being Jesus. They killed him, but he just sprang back up again.

Jesus is all powerful and all knowing. He does not promise us a perfect life on earth. In fact he said in John 14, "In this world, you will have tribulation." The world just is not the most chipper of places in comparison to heaven. There's violence and natural disasters, and depressions down here, ...and none of this would be quite so awful, except for the worst thing in the world: There's always death.

But Jesus went on to say, "Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world." Jesus' resurrection means that we also will resurrect. We will be in heaven with him if we make him our friend.

Friendship means following him. Following his voice. Following his ways. Allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us through the darkness of this world, then take us to the Light.

Are you ready to be a friend of Jesus'? Talk to him. Tell him so. Say something like this:

Lord Jesus, I really want you to be my friend. I want you to come into my life and never, ever leave. I am ready to follow you. I trust you. I am taking your hand now... and I thank you for loving me, even though I'm not always the best, even though you are always the best. Be with me now and forever,Amen.

Discussion

- If you never asked Jesus to be your eternal friend before, how do you feel different now?
- Can you feel him close to you?
- What are some things you can do to show you are a friend of Jesus' until Easter comes around again next year?



Saturday Mini-Challenge: The Ascension

Scripture: Acts 1:1-10

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.⁵ For John baptized with[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with[b] the Holy Spirit."

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Application

Again, the disciples were not quite "getting" it. They were still asking Jesus, "Are you going to ascend the throne at this time?" It was still kind of "all about them." They wanted to know how soon they would get to be his special attendees.

God made their hearts so much bigger, though, as they went out to be those special witnesses. They realized it wasn't about them; it was about an entire planet. It was about making others special by making them Christ's special friends, too.

With all that said, they still didn't quite "get it." They thought Jesus would be back in a few years or within their lifetimes. But again, God's plans are so much better than we can ever imagine. God wanted heaven to be filled with so many people that they would be like the sands of the beach. He didn't want to share his glory with just twelve guys or with just one generation. He wanted to share it with millions, including you, 2,000 years later.

Since the Ascension, mankind has not ceased to ask when Jesus will return. Nobody knows when, only the Father. But he wants us all to remember that it could be any day, and we should live every day like we might get to see him in an hour. That's a big part of what living your life for Christ means.

Discussion

- When you see Jesus, what are some of the things you'd like to ask him?

- What would you like to have done with your life so that you can make him proud of you?



Easter Sunday Mini-Challenge: Today, Tomorrow, and Forever

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Application

Jesus is always with us. Because he sent the Holy Spirit as a counselor, comforter and friend, he is able to hear, through the Spirit, every prayer and every sound on planet earth. Whether you are in school, home,

your neighborhood—even if you were lost in a foreign country—all you have to do is call on Jesus in your heart, and he will be with you and hear whatever you say.

We also get to be like one of his disciples, always watching, waiting and working. We try to bring into Christ's love to anyone who is suffering, lonely, poor, needy, sick, or hurt. It doesn't matter what they've done.

God will show you who those people are if you ask him. Then you can ask them to church or to your house where your mom or dad can tell great stories about who Jesus is. You can also show God's love by loaning your strong and youthful body to the elderly or the crippled, who can't do the things you can. You can help by giving things to the poor.

You too can be a disciple of Jesus while you're waiting for your chance to finally see him! All the disciples in heaven and Old Testament heroes are called in Hebrews your "great cloud of witnesses." They are cheering for you every day, as you listen for Jesus' voice to tell you what he wants you to do!

Discussion

Jesus is more concerned that you follow him than that you make sacrifices for him.

- What are some things you can do so that you can hear and understand him?