

Small Group Worship Leader's Guide – Palm Sunday

Provided by the faculty of the School of Church Music and Worship

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Getting Started

1. A.W. Tozer once said, “The most important fact about any human being is what they believe about God.” That’s why corporate worship centered on the Word of God is so important! While all of creation is a powerful reflection of God’s general revelation, his Word is his specific revelation to us. That’s why the Word is so important as the centerpiece of Christian worship.
2. In his book on worship (*Look and See*), singer/songwriter Matt Papa says, “The triune God is the only thing large enough and interesting enough to bear the weight of glory, and ultimately worship. Anything else will break your heart. Money isn’t secure enough.... Entertainment isn’t impressive enough. Music isn’t interesting enough. Food isn’t satisfying enough. People aren’t reliable enough. The world isn’t good enough. Creation isn’t permanent enough.... Only God, the highest and greatest good, the infinite holy One, is finally enough.” Nothing can bear the weight of your worship other than Jesus Christ!
3. As we consider the Triumphal Entry of Jesus on Palm Sunday through the biblical passages in Matthew 21 and Psalm 118, we get a glimpse into the heart and character of our triune God. Savor the scenes painted by the Psalmist and Matthew. Imagine the sounds of the people lining the road of the procession as they waved their palm branches. Just days later, some of them would weep as they witnessed the cruelty toward Jesus, and yet others would change their shouts of “Hosanna” to cries of “Crucify him!” May we be steadfast in our praise of the One who died for us.

Opening Call to Worship – Psalm 118:1-4

Possible opening statement to facilitate the opening of worship: On this Sunday, we remember and celebrate the Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The people shouted their praise to the Lord as he rode on the donkey that day. But the people of God have always been encouraged through the Word to give the Lord praise and thanks for who he is—our Creator and our Redeemer.

As the psalmist writes in Psalm 118:1:

Leader: Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;

People: His faithful love endures forever.

Leader: Let Israel say,

People: His faithful love endures forever.

Leader: Let the house of Aaron say,

People: His faithful love endures forever.

Leader: Let those who fear the LORD say,

All: His faithful love endures forever.



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Possible transition statement to hymn: "In this opening hymn, we are reminded to rejoice because the Lord is King! And as we sing the second verse, don't miss the words and how they connect to Psalm 118 that guides our worship, "Jesus the Savior reigns, the God of truth and love..." We can trust that Jesus is reigning now, even in this difficult time, and that he will continue to reign, and that his love will endure forever!"

Hymn: "Rejoice the Lord is King"

Scripture and Prayer Time

Possible transition from Hymn (choose 2 people to read the Scripture below): On the day of his triumphal entry, many people who lined the road in praise had heard of the incredible miracles and mighty works Jesus had performed. Some of them may have been the direct recipient of his healing touch. They were looking for a deliverer and the promised Messiah, one who would answer them in their distress. In Psalm 118, the writer is clear in expressing his trust in the Lord. Listen to these words:

Reader 1: I called to the LORD in distress; the LORD answered me and put me in a spacious place.

Reader 2: The LORD is for me; I will not be afraid. What can a mere mortal do to me?

Reader 1: It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humanity.

Reader 2: It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in nobles.

All: The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. (Psalm 118:5-6; 8-9; 14)

Possible prayer prompts for group prayer based on the passage just read from Psalm 118:

Confession:

- Perhaps through the distress of this difficult time, we have not called on the Lord.
- In the stress, it might be that our responses to others have been less than kind and gracious.
- Maybe we have not thanked him enough for protecting us and placing us in a "spacious place."
- We confess our fear of things we cannot control and admit that we have lost control of the things we can ... the responses to others, our response to circumstances, and our own emotions.

Thanksgiving:

- We thank God for his Son, Jesus Christ, in whom we have our salvation, our strength, our witness, and our song.
- We thank God for hearing our prayers.
- We thank the Lord for knowing the details of every aspect of our lives.
- We thank God for answers to prayer we've already seen through the difficulties.

Petition:

- We pray for those who have lost their jobs because of the economic impact of COVID-19, that they would seek and find refuge and help in the Lord.
- We pray for those who have lost loved ones and friends and that they would find their strength and hope and peace in the Lord.
- We pray that many would come to know Christ through this difficult time through the witness of faithful Christians who model "trusting in the Lord and finding refuge in Him."

- We pray for wisdom for government officials.
- We pray for strength, stamina, and protection for health care workers, doctors, and nurses.
- We pray for our church pastors and leaders to guide and shepherd their flocks well.

Possible transition from prayer to song/hymn: “Our God not only hears our prayers, but he knows our circumstances in much greater detail than we do. He is indeed great, and he is faithful. Let’s sing…”

Hymn: “Great is Thy Faithfulness” or “O Great God”

Possible transition from hymn/song to Scripture: “We’ve been reminded of God’s faithful love for us throughout our time of worship this morning. As we read the Palm Sunday passage, let’s not miss the faithful love that compelled Jesus to ride into Jerusalem, knowing that each step took him closer to the Cross.”

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-10:

When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus then sent two disciples, 2 telling them, “Go into the village ahead of you. At once you will find a donkey tied there with her colt. 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 at once.” 4 This took place so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled:

**Tell Daughter Zion,
“See, your King is coming to you,
gentle, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt,
the foal of a donkey.”**

The disciples went and did just as Jesus directed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt; then they laid their clothes on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their clothes on the road; others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them on the road. 9 Then the crowds who went ahead of him and those who followed shouted:

**Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is he who comes in the name
of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!**

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in an uproar, saying, “Who is this?”

Just beneath the crowd’s celebration and their waving of Palm branches hailing him as the “blessed one,” was the reality of his soon-coming agony – the weight of the sin of the world and the wrath of God placed on him. As we read this account in Matthew, the passage closes in verse 10 with these words: “When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in an uproar, saying, “Who is this?” As followers of Jesus Christ, we have the joy and privilege of knowing who Jesus truly is and what he did – for us. May it be that we would indeed draw closer to Jesus and be more and more aware each day of who he is and what he has done on our behalf.”

Hymn: “I Am Thine, O Lord” or “All I Have is Christ”

Scripture and Closing Prayer

Possible transition from song to closing Scripture and prayer: "As we close with some of the final verses of Psalm 118, listen how closely they resemble the passage we read in Matthew:

Lord, save us! Lord, please grant us success! He who comes in the name of the Lord is blessed...
You are my God, and I will give you thanks. You are my God; I will exalt you. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his faithful love endures forever. (Psalm 118:25-26; 28-29)

Possible closing prayer:

"O God our Father, through Christ Jesus you are our God and we give you thanks. As we walk through this coming week, we trust in you and you alone because we know that your faithful love endures forever. Help our belief in that truth impact our behavior. May you be glorified as your Spirit empowers us to live our lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Christ's perfect and holy name we pray, Amen.