The most celebrated story of all time set to today's biggest music hits.

HOSTED BY TYLER PERRY

THE PASSION

STARRING TRISHA YEARWOOD AS MARY

LIVE! SUNDAY MARCH 20 FOX
Watching *The Passion* is a powerful experience. You may have encountered Jesus’ life, death and resurrection for the first time. You may have found answers you were searching to find. Or it may have uncovered new questions. Both offer a rich opportunity to enter deeper into the story. Who is Jesus? Why was his life and death significant? What does his resurrection mean for us today?

This guide can help facilitate small group discussions around The Passion. Use it to help people interact with questions like these—and more deeply engage the story Jesus’ followers call the “gospel”—that is, the “good news.” Feel free to adapt the discussions for your groups’ specific needs.

Here are a few things to consider before jumping in:

» **Who will you invite?** Ask God to bring specific people to mind you could invite. Who may be interested from your church? Think through your day and where you interact with others—neighbors, coworkers, friends. Who may be seeking a deeper relationship with Jesus? Who could benefit from hearing the gospel story?

» **When will you meet?** Designate three different times to meet, no more than two hours each. Ask people to bring snacks or drinks. Make it fun and festive!

» **How will you facilitate?** Follow the “pray, read, reflect, discuss, respond” format. Invite people in your group to read different sections of the following guide. Leave about half of your time for discussion. Invite people to take turns in responding to each question. Don’t feel pressured to have all the answers! Encourage group members not to interrupt each other but also to be respectful of time. Let people know they don’t have to participate verbally, if they feel uncomfortable doing so; their presence is still valuable.

» **What comes next?** When your three sessions come to an end, encourage people to stay in touch. Invite them to your church—or help them find a church that could be a good fit. Keep praying for them in the days ahead, asking God to continue working in their lives.
LAST SUPPER

**PRAY**

*Dear God, we gather together, just as your disciples gathered with Jesus for the Last Supper. Show us about the faith, hope and love offered through your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**READ**

**MATTHEW 26:14-30 (GNT)**

Then one of the twelve disciples—the one named Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What will you give me if I betray Jesus to you?” They counted out thirty silver coins and gave them to him. From then on Judas was looking for a good chance to hand Jesus over to them.

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked him, “Where do you want us to get the Passover meal ready for you?”

“Go to a certain man in the city,” he said to them, “and tell him: ‘The Teacher says, My hour has come; my disciples and I will celebrate the Passover at your house.’”

The disciples did as Jesus had told them and prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, Jesus and the twelve disciples sat down to eat. During the meal Jesus said, “I tell you, one of you will betray me.”

The disciples were very upset and began to ask him, one after the other, “Surely, Lord, you don't mean me?”

Jesus answered, “One who dips his bread in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man will die as the Scriptures say he will, but how terrible for that man who will betray the Son of Man! It would have been better for that man if he had never been born!”

Judas, the traitor, spoke up. “Surely, Teacher, you don't mean me?” he asked.

Jesus answered, “So you say.”

While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. “Take and eat it,” he said; “this is my body.”

Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and gave it to them. “Drink it, all of you,” he said; “this is my blood, which seals God's covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine with you in my Father's Kingdom.”

Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.
REFLECT
Jesus created quite a stir during his lifetime—and he still does. God’s people waited centuries for a Messiah and Jesus wasn’t who they had in mind. He was not a powerful king, warrior or priest. He didn’t lead big wars or give loud speeches.

Instead, Jesus traveled from town to town healing the sick, casting out demons, and performing life-giving miracles. He focused on caring for the poor. He spoke of God’s Kingdom on earth—and invited everyone into a relationship with his Father (John 16:33).

But people were threatened. The political leaders wondered if he was going to overthrow the government—what was this new Kingdom he spoke of? The religious leaders were threatened because he didn’t follow their laws and he challenged their age-old teachings.

The world wasn’t ready for a Messiah like this. One of his followers, Judas, made arrangements with the chief priests to betray Jesus in exchange for thirty silver coins. The night before he was handed over to death, Jesus gathered his twelve disciples together for a meal. He took bread and wine and gave it to them to eat and drink. He said, “this is my body” and “this is my blood.” Soon, Jesus would die on the cross. His body would be broken and his blood shed. Yet this wouldn’t be the end of the story—in many ways it would only be the beginning. Through the offering of Jesus’ body and blood, God would forgive the world of its sins and invite us each into his great love.

DISCUSS
» Jesus was not the Messiah people expected.
   » What would you expect a Messiah to look like?
   » Would this person have political power?
   » Would this person be a well-known pastor or evangelist?
   » If Jesus showed up today saying he was the Messiah, would he meet your expectations?

» Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins.
   » Is it hard to forgive others?
   » Can you think of a time that forgiveness helped one of your relationships?
   » How do you feel about being forgiven by God?

RESPOND
Have a group member read through the Scripture passage again. Imagine yourself in the scene. You are one of Jesus’ disciples, sitting at the table. You observe Jesus’ interaction with Judas—the man who betrayed Jesus is sitting beside you! You watch Jesus break the bread and fill the cup with wine. You listen to his unexpected words about his body and blood. When they have finished reading, take a few minutes in silence to reflect to yourself: how does it feel to sit among Jesus’ closest friends? What questions would you ask him? Have the group share briefly about their reactions.
CRUCIFIXION

**PRAY**

*Dear God, like the followers who witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion, we come together to kneel before the cross. Show us the faith, hope and love offered through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**READ**

MATTHEW 27:32-50 (GNT)

As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene named Simon, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus’ cross. They came to a place called Golgotha, which means, “The Place of the Skull.” There they offered Jesus wine mixed with a bitter substance; but after tasting it, he would not drink it.

They crucified him and then divided his clothes among them by throwing dice. After that they sat there and watched him. Above his head they put the written notice of the accusation against him: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” Then they crucified two bandits with Jesus, one on his right and the other on his left.

People passing by shook their heads and hurled insults at Jesus: “You were going to tear down the Temple and build it back up in three days! Save yourself if you are God’s Son! Come on down from the cross!”

In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and the elders made fun of him: “He saved others, but he cannot save himself! Isn’t he the king of Israel? If he will come down off the cross now, we will believe in him! He trusts in God and claims to be God’s Son. Well, then, let us see if God wants to save him now!”

Even the bandits who had been crucified with him insulted him in the same way.

At noon the whole country was covered with darkness, which lasted for three hours. At about three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why did you abandon me?”

Some of the people standing there heard him and said, “He is calling for Elijah!” One of them ran up at once, took a sponge, soaked it in cheap wine, put it on the end of a stick, and tried to make him drink it.

But the others said, “Wait, let us see if Elijah is coming to save him!”

Jesus again gave a loud cry and breathed his last.
REFLECT
If people weren’t ready for a Messiah like Jesus, they certainly didn’t know how to respond to his death. Why didn’t Jesus save himself? Why didn’t he rise up against his abusers? He was betrayed by those closest to him, mocked and insulted. He was cruelly murdered, crucified next to criminals. His last words are full of immense suffering: “My God, my God, why did you abandon me?” Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God, but now he is made powerless.

But Jesus’ death serves a powerful purpose. It accomplished the work he was sent to do on earth. In Jesus, God became human, and once and for all paid the price we could not pay. It forgives us for the sin that has separated us from God since the beginning of our story—all the way back to Adam and Eve. It wipes our slate clean.

This offers us unfathomable freedom. We still live in a world with sin, but we aren’t crushed under it. We aren’t separated from God with no way of returning. God’s grace is always available. We can receive God’s love—even now—which restores all of our brokenness.

DISCUSS
» Think back over Jesus’ words at the Last Supper about forgiveness of our sins. Read John 3:16: “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.”
   » What purpose did Jesus’ death serve?

» Jesus’ death paid a price we could never pay on our own. We can never earn God’s love—it is freely, graciously given.
   » Is this a difficult concept for you to understand?
   » Do you sometimes feel like you have to earn God’s love, or get all the “rules” right?

RESPOND
In the excruciating hours of Jesus’ crucifixion, even as he was being mocked, he cried out to God. He expressed his suffering honestly. Take a moment to pray as a group. You could start by each saying one sentence or thought, or sitting together in silence. Encourage one another to speak honestly to God. Have you felt abandoned by God? Are you or others suffering? Do you want to know more about God’s love, grace or freedom? Follow Jesus’ example, and speak whatever is on your heart.
RESURRECTION

PRAY

Dear God, we approach the tomb after Jesus’ death in sorrow—and encounter the joy of resurrection. Just as the disciples met the risen Christ in different ways, so do we. Show us the faith, hope and love offered through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

READ

MATTHEW 28:1-10 (GNT)

After the Sabbath, as Sunday morning was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid that they trembled and became like dead men.

The angel spoke to the women. “You must not be afraid,” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised, just as he said. Come here and see the place where he was lying. Go quickly now, and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from death, and now he is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him!’ Remember what I have told you.”

So they left the tomb in a hurry, afraid and yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Peace be with you.” They came up to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. “Do not be afraid,” Jesus said to them. “Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

REFLECT

Imagine the two women’s surprise when, the morning after Jesus’ violent crucifixion, they went to Jesus’ tomb and he wasn’t there. Instead, an angel of the Lord tells them Jesus was raised from the dead. And they would see him again! Jesus was already ahead of them, going toward Galilee.

The women were filled with fear and joy. We may experience similar feelings at hearing the angel’s news. We have never seen anything like this before. It is beyond our understanding. A man died and was then raised back to life? We may also feel the desire to believe. Can God overcome even the grave? Can God’s love enter into our own places of darkness and despair?

The women hurried to tell the others. But suddenly they were interrupted. Jesus stood before them, alive! They fell at his feet and worshipped.
Like the women, we share this story with others because it is too wonderful to keep to ourselves. Jesus—the Son of God, the Messiah—suffered on our behalf, entered into death and overcame death with life. No matter how dark our situations, God’s love is more powerful. Jesus is victorious. We hear his voice telling us not to be afraid, calling us into joy. We too can hear the good news and worship the risen Lord.

**DISCUSS**

» The women felt fear and joy at the angel’s news.
  » Why were they afraid?
  » Why were they joyful?
  » Can you identify with their feelings in your own journey these past couple of weeks?

» Imagine the women coming to your small group discussion and telling you the good news of Jesus’ resurrection.
  » How would you respond?
  » What questions would you ask?
  » What action would it prompt you to take?

**RESPOND**

Now that you’ve heard this good news, keep getting to know Jesus. As a group, discuss ways you can take steps to continue this journey. What does Jesus’ life, death and resurrection mean for your life? Your community? Do you want to keep meeting and studying the Bible together? Does anyone want to commit to following Jesus as the Messiah? If anyone in the group is not currently involved in a church, this might be a good time to invite them. Take a moment to pray together, giving people an opportunity to receive God’s love, grace and freedom through Jesus’ sacrifice. Ask God to lead each of you forward, helping you know and recognize the risen Christ.