



**2024 EASTER
PRAYER PROMPTS**

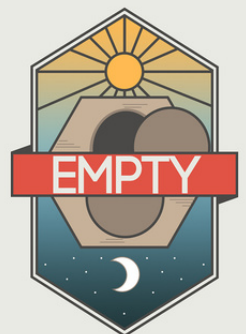
**IN PREPARATION FOR
EASTER, LET US PREPARE OUR
HEARTS WITH AN OFFERING
OF PRAYER TO OUR GOD. WE
HOPE THAT DURING THIS
HOUR, YOU EXPERIENCE GOD
IN A BRAND NEW WAY.**

**THIS GUIDE WILL SHOW HOW
THOSE INVOLVED IN THE
EASTER STORY CHOSE TO FILL
THE EMPTINESS WITHIN, AND
HOW WE CAN LEARN FROM
THEM.**



Segment One:

The Pharisees and Behavior



STOP

Stop everything and prepare your heart and mind to spend time with God.

Once you are settled in and ready, follow these steps:

1. Notice the thoughts running through your head. What's been on your mind?
2. Notice your body. How does it feel? Thirsty, sleepy, sore, comfortable?
3. Notice your feelings. How do you feel? Nervous, distracted, joyful, frustrated?
4. Now, hold them in your hands. Grip them tightly. And when you're ready, open your hands and imagine it all blowing away in a breeze like dust. Right now, it's time to be with God.

For the next hour, we will look at four prayer prompts that will help us focus on a feeling of emptiness. Not just the feeling of physical emptiness, but the feeling of spiritual emptiness. To use a big phrase, we're talking about every person's existential longing. It's the feeling that there must be more to life. It's the sense that something is missing. It's the feeling of being empty.

All too often, we try to satisfy our longing for God with other things; the wrong things. We try to rid that empty feeling with things that create an even greater longing. Let me give you an example...

The religious leaders of Jesus' day tried to fill their emptiness with traditions and rules. So much so, that by the time Jesus came on the scene, they were obsessed with the laws of their religion.



What are the things that you use to try
to satisfy your longing for God, that
aren't HIM?

Pray that God would reveal those
things to you. Once He does, release
those things to Him.

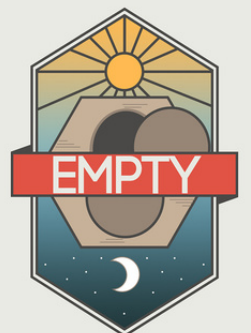


The religious leaders of Jesus' day had fallen for the behavior trap. They tried to satisfy the deficiency of their souls by performing the right actions. They tried to fill their emptiness by following rules. It's the belief that "If I could just do everything right, then everything would go alright." "If I could just practice enough, or study enough, then I would feel like enough." "If I could please my friends or please my parents - my problems would go away." Often, we look to our behavior or our performance to bring us fulfillment. But the reality is, no matter how hard you try, your behavior can't make you feel complete. Only Jesus can do that.

Only Jesus, not our behavior, can make us whole. Because as hard as we try, we'll never be perfect without Him. That's why Jesus died on the cross, to forgive us of all our sins and to make us perfect in Him. The story of the Pharisees should cause us to look at our lives. Is it possible that there are areas where you think you are so right that you can't even recognize your own wrongs? Do you fall for the behavior trap where you're trying to find fulfillment with perfectionism that you can never actually achieve? What might be the human traditions or empty philosophy that you follow? Are these things bringing you fulfillment? Or does all this push you further from God and leave you emptier than before?



Segment Two: Judas and Greed



Have you ever had this experience? It's late at night, hunger strikes, and only one thing can satisfy: Pringles. You go to the kitchen. You open the cabinet. There it is. Your favorite flavor: pizza. You grab the pizza Pringles can. You pop the lid. You can smell the pizza Pringles. Your mouth waters. You reach your hand in... and... it's... empty! Or maybe, instead of Pringles, you go for the ultimate late-night snack: cereal. You pour the box of sugary goodness into a bowl, grab a spoon, open the fridge, reach for the milk, and when you pick it up... it's empty! Who would do such a thing? Who would leave an empty can of Pringles in the cabinet? Or an empty jug of milk in the fridge? Have you ever experienced something like that? It's terrible! Not only are you left with an empty Pringles can or an empty jug of milk, but even worse: you are left empty.

Emptiness.

We just looked at the Pharisees and how they tried to find fulfillment in the law. They became obsessed with behavior and perfectionism. Jesus, we saw, rejected this. He called them hypocrites and whitewashed tombs. Because of this, the Pharisees decided Jesus was their enemy. So, they began looking for a way to get rid of Him. This led them to Judas. Judas, as we'll see, also felt this emptiness. But instead of trying to find fulfillment in behavior, he turned to money.



John 12.1-6 ESV

“ Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

We don't get to read Judas' inner thoughts. We don't know his motivations. But based on this incident, it seems that Judas was greedy. Judas wanted to gain wealth for himself.

Maybe he decided to follow Jesus with good intentions, but then greed got the best of him. Or maybe this was Judas' plan all along. Maybe when he saw Jesus performing miracles, he saw a way to get rich quick. Maybe he saw Jesus' power and followed Him hoping to gain his own power.

We can only make guesses, but it seems probable that Judas - like all of us - felt empty; and he tried to fill that emptiness with money.



It might be hard to admit, but many of us have the same outlook. No one wants to say: "I'm just like Judas!" But the reality is that we often fall for the same lie. It's the lie that money or material things can fill us, and that our troubles would go away and our problems would be solved if we could just have more stuff.

But the Bible teaches us a different truth.

Ecclesiastes 5.10 ESV

"He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity."

The Bible warns that chasing wealth will only make us thirsty for more wealth. The story of Judas should leave us asking the question: "Where do I go to find fulfillment?" Our temptation might be to run to money or material things. But these won't bring true satisfaction.

Stop and ask God to reveal the answer to the question: "Where do I go to find fulfillment?"



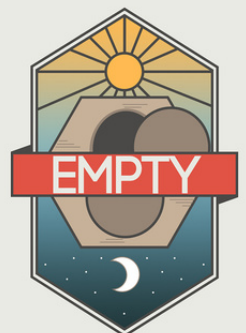
It is only through Jesus and a relationship with Him that we can find true fulfillment. Because only Jesus can fix the hole in our souls. Because only Jesus can forgive our sins and rebellion and mend our hearts. Which is why He died on the cross. After Judas sold him out, Jesus gave up his life as a sacrifice for our sin. His death and resurrection provided the healing our souls need. His death and resurrection allows us to have a relationship with that will bring true fulfillment to your life. Without Him, you'll be left empty.

Spend the next few minutes in prayer. Ask God to fill you, in the way that only HE can.



Segment Three:

Pilate and Crowd Approval

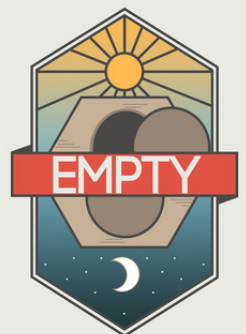


Whether we want to admit it or not, the people around us can have a big impact on our decisions. For many, the approval of a crowd can become a way that we try to fight feeling empty.

We've looked at the craving all humans have for something greater. It's our subconscious desire for more. It's a longing created by our separation from God that began with Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden. This caused us to have a deficiency, a hole in the soul.

The Pharisees tried to satisfy this longing through the Old Testament laws. They became obsessed with behavior and perfectionism. When Jesus didn't share their obsession, they turned against Him. We saw how Judas sought to satisfy this emptiness with money or material things. This greed led him to team up with the Pharisees who offered him money to betray Jesus.

Now, we're going to see how one man tried to fill his emptiness with the approval of a crowd. His name was Pilate.



After Judas sold Jesus out, the Pharisees arrested Jesus and held a corrupt trial. They found Jesus guilty and wanted Him executed. Since the Jewish people were under Roman rule, they weren't allowed to carry out executions. That's where Pilate came in. He was the Roman governor of Jerusalem. To have Jesus executed, the Pharisees needed Pilate to give the order, so that's why they took Jesus to Pilate.

John 18.29-31 ESV

"So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."

John 18.38b-40 ESV

"After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

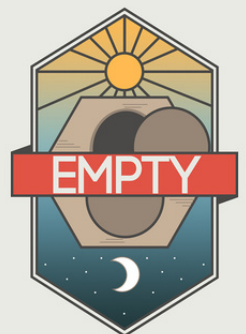
Pilate admitted that he thought Jesus was not guilty. So, he tried to appease them by offering up Barabbas as a trade. Surely, they wouldn't want a criminal like Barabbas to go free. He thought this would get himself out of trying to make an unpopular decision. Instead, the crowd demanded that Pilate release Barabbas.



Maybe you can relate to Pilate's predicament. Maybe you have been in a position where doing the right thing was the unpopular thing. Even though you knew something was wrong, you went with it, because that's what everyone was doing.

One of the most common ways we seek to satisfy emptiness in our lives is through the approval of others. There's an idea that if we can get people to like us or admire us, we will feel full. We can neglect that the real relationship we need is with God. Instead of running after His love, we run after people's admiration.

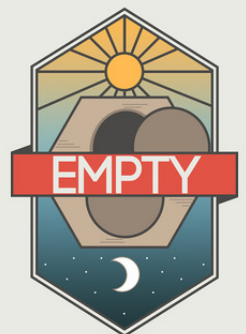
Like perfectionism and like money, the crowd's approval won't fill you. But it can be destructive. Trying to impress other people can lead you to do reckless things. Trying to win the approval of your crush might push you to do things with them or for them that you regret. Trying to win the approval of those you consider more popular might cause you to compromise your own standards. Pilate's attempt at winning the people's approval forced him to turn his back on Jesus. Is it possible that you would do the same?



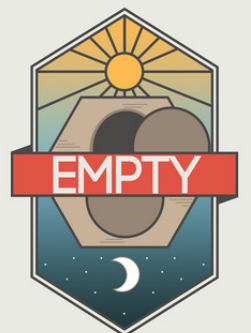
Take the next few minutes and ask God to reveal the desires in your heart. How often do you feel the need to impress others? Is the approval of others something that you've tried to fill your emptiness with?

Once again, we must take a hard look at how we try to satisfy our emptiness. How do you try to fulfill your feelings of unsatisfaction? What do you do to quiet the longings of your soul?

Know that if you are looking to the crowd to find approval, you're looking in the wrong place. Because only Jesus and a relationship with Him can truly bring fulfillment to your life.



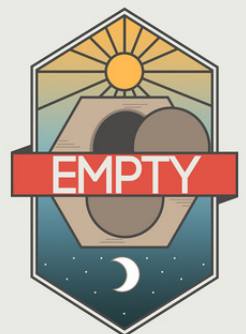
Segment Four: Mary and the Tomb



The Pharisees looked to their philosophy of behavior and perfectionism. But this left them empty. Judas looked to money and greed. But he found out that this was empty deceit. Pilate looked to the approval of the crowd. But approval from the world didn't bring him fulfillment.

The great irony is that these people who were seeking to fill an emptiness in their lives were brought face to face with the one person who could fill it: Jesus. Yet they were too preoccupied with their traditions, greed, or popularity to see Him for who He was. Instead of seeing Jesus as an answer, they saw Him as a problem.

The Pharisees decided to get rid of Jesus. They paid Judas to betray Jesus and lead them to Him. Then, they delivered Jesus to Pilate who ordered His execution on a cross. Jesus was brutally beaten and then nailed to a cross where He hung and died. His body was buried in a borrowed tomb, a large stone was rolled in front of it and soldiers were posted outside as guards. For three days, Jesus' body lay dead in a tomb. His followers were left in the darkness feeling empty. It was in this darkness that we read of a woman who made her way to Jesus' tomb to properly prepare His body for burial.



John 20.1-2 ESV

“Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.””

We have seen people seeking fulfillment but finding emptiness. Now, we have Mary who sought a full tomb but found it empty. And it seems that Mary might know a thing or two about emptiness because Mary had once been full of demons. The Bible tells us that Jesus had cast out seven demons from Mary. We aren't given the details of how or why she came to be possessed. Maybe she too was seeking fulfillment in the wrong ways or places and ended up under demonic power. Maybe it was out of her control, not a result of her choices at all. But Mary must have known what it felt like to be empty.

When they finally made it to the tomb, they found it empty! So, they ran back to tell the disciples. Then, Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves. And of the three women, at least Mary, went back too. The disciples went into the tomb, they saw that it was empty, and then went away dumfounded. But Mary stayed.

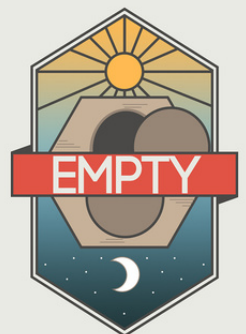
Why did she stay? Did she know there was more going on? Was she still hoping? Or was it because she was hurting? Maybe she found herself once again searching for the fulfillment she had only found in Jesus? All we know is that she stayed.



John 20.11-16a ESV

“But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him. Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!”

Can you imagine this roller-coaster of emotions? Sadness on the way to the tomb. Confusion at the empty tomb. Frustration trying to get the disciples to believe her. Sad all over again at the tomb. Straight terror upon seeing angels. And then unimaginable joy when she was suddenly face to face with the living Jesus, after He beat death!



It's interesting that at first, Mary didn't recognize Jesus. Maybe it was because He was the last person she expected to see. Maybe He was unrecognizable in His resurrected body, especially compared to the mutilation His body had experienced just days before. But when Jesus said Mary's name, she recognized Him instantly! It was the same man who said her name after releasing her from demonic power. He was the one who had fixed her soul and filled her emptiness. It was Jesus and he had beaten death.

It's also worth pointing out that, at first, Mary mistook Jesus for a gardener. John included this important detail because it changes our perspective on the setting. It's no longer a graveyard, it's a garden! At the mention of a garden, John's original readers would probably have been reminded of the Garden of Eden: the paradise where Adam and Eve, the first humans, once dwelled with God. They had a unique and perfect relationship with their Creator. They were complete. They were whole. But then, they disobeyed God. As a punishment, death entered the human picture and they had to leave the Garden of Eden. A rift had been created between humanity and God. Adam and Eve turned a garden into a graveyard.

The Garden of Eden is where our problem of emptiness began. Sin creates a hole in our soul. It's the reason we have that longing feeling for more; the desire for our Creator. But because of our sin and rebellion, there's a rift between us and God. Sin puts us in a graveyard, but we're looking for a garden.



John communicated all of this by pointing out how Mary mistook Jesus for a gardener. She was surrounded by death and hopelessness, but then Jesus appeared. He was the one who defeated death, the one who died for our sin. Jesus' death provided a bridge across the rift between humanity and God. His death and resurrection mends the hole in our soul.

Jesus' death and resurrection repairs us and now the Holy Spirit fills us. We no longer have to experience emptiness because the presence of God is in us. We are made full!

If you struggle with emptiness, know that God offers a solution. If life feels lonely, know that God wants a relationship with you. If you struggle with that gnawing sensation that there must be more, know that Jesus has provided more! We can only be fixed, we can only be made full, by a relationship with Him. This comes by giving your sins and your life over to Jesus and allowing God's Spirit to fill you.

God has gone to great lengths to be with you and to fix your emptiness. He provided a solution for all of the sins that leave you feeling empty through the sacrifice of His son Jesus on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. He provides you with a full life now and an eternal life after death! Why? Because God loves you! He wants to take your grave and make it empty! Will you let Him?



Stop. As you come to a close of your time in prayer, ask God one final time to reveal the nature of your heart. What are you choosing to fill your emptiness with?

Pray that God will fill you. That He would fill your heart with His Spirit.

