

Toward the Cross

The Last Days of Lent

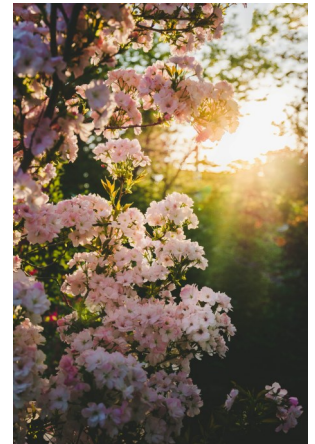
For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses...

Hebrews 4:15a

First, there was a garden. And God walked there in the morning and enjoyed fellowship with His friends—the man and the woman. And it was good. Then there was another garden, and God walked there in the evening, and He wept and begged for things to change, and His friends fell asleep and left Him alone. And it was agonizing.

There was a third garden yet to come, a garden with an empty tomb. And God would walk there in the morning and speak with His friend—a woman. And it would be good. But for now, there is this second garden, the garden of weeping, the garden of grief, the garden of betrayal.

By the time Jesus took His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane, His heart was already heavy. His betrayer had already been identified and had gone off to lead His persecutors back to Him. His disciples were already confused and grief-stricken. Luke's gospel says they were "exhausted with sorrow." Despite having been told repeatedly, the disciples didn't know what was coming; they only knew it wouldn't be good. But Jesus knew. He knew, and it broke His heart.



It is a blessing that we get to see Jesus' prayer in this sorrowful hour. We get to see Him wrestling with what He knew was prophesied to happen. We get to see Him saying that He doesn't want to do what the Father has asked of Him. It's a blessing because it shows us that He can relate to us. He understands how it feels to balk at God's commands. He understands when we are grieved by facing hard—seemingly impossible—tasks. He understands when we are brokenhearted by what we must do, when we struggle to choose between God's will and our own. He understands the desire to avoid suffering. And He understands what it takes to choose to suffer for the sake of others.

When we find ourselves facing trials we never would have chosen, it's a blessing to know that we are not alone. Our Lord faced overwhelming troubles. He faced them and persevered. He chose the Father's will even when it was in conflict with His own. So can we. We can take comfort and find strength because Jesus understands.



Where have you found yourself filled with sorrow in the past weeks?

What can you do to find comfort in the midst of grief?

Exercise:

1. Commit this time to God, asking Him to speak to you throughout this exercise.
2. Read the passage below.

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.

Matthew 26:36-44

3. Now read the passage below, which includes prompts to help you imagine yourself there with Jesus. As you allow your imagination to create the scene, pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings.

Imagine you are with Jesus on this awful night, a silent observer to all that happens.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane

It’s dark and cold in the garden. Feel the chill night air. Hear the crickets chirping, perhaps an owl hoots, or other night birds are calling. Smell the earthy scent of the grass.

and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

What do you see in the disciples’ faces? In Jesus’ face? What does His voice sound like? Walk behind or beside Jesus as He moves away from His friends. Can you move nearer to Him, or do you want to hold back?

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.”

Feel the cold soil under your knees as you drop to the ground near your Lord. You hear the murmur of His voice as He prays aloud. Gradually His words become clearer. What is happening in your heart as you hear His words?

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

Jesus stands and goes to his friends. What do you see as you look at the disciples? What do you see in Jesus’ face? What do you hear in His voice? How do the disciples respond? How do you respond?

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.”

Return with the Lord to the place where He prayed before. What do you hear now? Is His voice heavy? Determined? Weak? Can you approach Him now, or do you feel constrained to stay away?

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

This third time Jesus prays, what do you hear in His voice? Horror? Power? Resignation? What are you feeling in your heart? In this moment, what do you want to say to Jesus? To the Father? Does Jesus speak to you? Do you say anything to Him? Sit with the Lord in this time of sorrow, simply being near Him as long as you need to.

As your time of prayer finishes, bring yourself gently back to the present and review with the Lord how you felt about this experience.

4. When you’ve finished the exercise, journal about the experience, your prayer, your time sitting with Jesus. Note any desires or concerns that have come up as a result of this prayer. Note anything that struck you, especially the unusual or unexpected. Ask yourself:

Why did I feel or think or react the way I did?

Does what stood out to me show me anything about the way I see God, myself, or others? If so, what does it show me?