

Lent Week Six: Praying in the midst of suffering



*“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.
The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

Matthew 26:41

**Welcome to week six of our reflective prayer journey.
This week we move towards Palm Sunday and Holy
Week, with its contrast between the cheering of the
crowds as Jesus enters Jerusalem and the jeering of the
crowds as he is tried and crucified. Our focus will be on
Jesus’ struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane.**

The idea of worshipping in the midst of suffering and pain can be an incredibly difficult one. And yet, we are called to worship and pray in all circumstances (e.g. 1 Thes 5:16-18). This does not mean, however, that we try and sideline our pains and struggles during worship. In fact, the Bible encourages us to bring our pain and our questions and express our emotions before God, in all their raw agony and confusion. The Psalms are evidence of that.

This lament is an important and legitimate part of worship. God cares enough about our pain that He became human and walked an even greater road of suffering than we do. God doesn’t just sympathise at a distance. He empathises as one who was despised, abandoned, brutalised, and rejected.

Jesus wept when he learned that His friend Lazarus had died, even though he then immediately went to raise him from the dead! God doesn’t just say to us ‘you’ll get through this’; he says ‘I know how it feels’, and weeps alongside us.

Holy Week is a time to remember Christ’s pain and suffering in the garden of Gethsemane, but it’s also a time for us to bring our own pain and loss to God, asking God to ‘take this cup from us’, while also ultimately encouraging each other to say with Jesus, ‘yet not my will but your will be done’.

Lent Week Six: Three prayers - 5,15, 55 minutes

5 minute prayer

“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” (Matthew 26:38)

*Bring to mind someone who is overwhelmed,
whether by sorrow or by something else?
Is there something you could do to help them
know that they are not alone?*

Lord Jesus, you walked the road of pain. You know us in our sadness, our anger and our frustration. Thank you for becoming like us and sacrificing everything to bring us back to God. Thank you that you don't offer us easy answers, but give us yourself, your humanity, your body and blood, and your risen presence. We pray for people in deep anguish and pain. We ask that you will meet with them in the depths of their experience and give them a peace that is beyond all understanding. Amen.

Music for worship:

Taize: [Stay with me](#)

Stuart Townend: [May the peoples praise you](#)

Stuart Townend: [Oh Church arise](#)

Stuart Townend: [How deep the Father's love](#)

Stuart Townend: [There is a hope](#)

Keith & Kristyn Getty: [Gethsemane](#)

Matt Redman song: [Blessed be your name](#)

15 minute prayer

Read Matthew 26:36-46 (see page 4 for a couple of versions)

This episode in Jesus' life is unusually intense. Even though Jesus knows what is coming and believes in resurrection, he still experiences overwhelming emotion as he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. Let's consider some of his words:

“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” (Matthew 26:38)

To what extent can you relate to this experience of sorrow and longing for people to accompany you through it?

“... he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.” (Matthew 26:39)

In his humanity, Jesus recoils from the prospect of suffering and death and he is honest with God about it, even though he knows what's coming. How do you feel about being honest with God about your fears and emotions?

“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.” (Matthew 26:42)

Was the Father silent? Or did God say “no”? Whatever the case, Jesus practises what he preached as he prays, “Your will be done”. Is there a situation in which you need to follow his example?

What is your prayer today ?

55 minute prayer:

Imaginative Prayer Reading: Matthew 26:36-46

Use the passage provided or find a translation you prefer

Context:

- Matthew chapter 26 recounts some of the events in the last couple of days before Jesus' death, as the Jewish leaders plot to have him killed. With Judas' help, Jesus is arrested and tried by the Jewish leaders. In the midst of this, he shares the Passover meal with his disciples, before he prays earnestly in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- As the chapter progresses, Jesus finds himself increasingly alone. Judas leaves first, his disciples fall asleep in the garden and they soon run away when Jesus is arrested. Finally Peter denies three times that he even knows Jesus.
- Yet it's clear that Jesus knows what is coming (verse 1, 18, 21, 31-32, 50) and believes he is fulfilling the Messianic prophecies in the Jewish scriptures (verse 54 & 56), which include resurrection (verse 29 and 32)
- Gethsemane actually means "olive press", where olives are crushed to produce olive oil. Perhaps an allusion to Jesus' experience as he faced his own death.

1. Take a few moments to become still and quiet.

You may find it helpful to centre yourself by breathing slowly in and out. Notice any discomfort in your muscles and gently stretch and let go of tension.

Invite God to work through your imagination as you pray with the passage. Ask God for what you want - if you are not sure: "To know you more clearly, love you more dearly, follow you more nearly".

2. **Read the whole chapter**, and read through the bullet points opposite, so you understand the context.
3. **Now read the specific passage slowly through a couple of times** until you are thoroughly familiar with it. Notice the events and flow of the passage, and any repeated phrases or themes.
4. Now **let the scene gradually build up** in your mind's eye. Imagine your eyes' adjusting to the night, seeing the garden by the light of the moon, notice sounds and smells, feel the cool air.
5. **Where are you in the scene?** Take your place in the unfolding scene. You may start as someone watching from a distance, or as one of the disciples, or maybe even Jesus himself? Alternatively, simply enter into the scene as yourself.
6. **As you watch or listen to the action**, what do you see/hear as Jesus speaks to his disciples? Notice his tone of voice? His posture? How does this change as he goes to pray? Is there a moment in the story or a word or phrase that stands out to you? What does this make you think or feel?
7. **Let yourself be drawn naturally into conversation** with one of the characters.
8. **Stay in the scene** for as long as you have chosen then draw the prayer to a close.
9. **Note down your reflections:** it may be just one word, an observation, a memory, or an image. Maybe you have noticed something new, learned something or maybe something has spoken directly to you. Be careful and remember to use discernment to judge if you are hearing God.
10. **Talk to God.** What impact does this passage have on you? Does it change anything?

Matthew 26:36 - 46 (New International Version)

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!”

Matthew 26:36 - 46 (The Message translation)

³⁶⁻³⁸ Then Jesus went with them to a garden called Gethsemane and told his disciples, “Stay here while I go over there and pray.” Taking along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he plunged into an agonizing sorrow. Then he said, “This sorrow is crushing my life out. Stay here and keep vigil with me.”

³⁹ Going a little ahead, he fell on his face, praying, “My Father, if there is any way, get me out of this. But please, not what I want. You, what do *you* want?”

⁴⁰⁻⁴¹ When he came back to his disciples, he found them sound asleep. He said to Peter, “Can’t you stick it out with me a single hour? Stay alert; be in prayer so you don’t wander into temptation without even knowing you’re in danger. There is a part of you that is eager, ready for anything in God. But there’s another part that’s as lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire.”

⁴² He then left them a second time. Again he prayed, “My Father, if there is no other way than this, drinking this cup to the dregs, I’m ready. Do it your way.”

⁴³⁻⁴⁴ When he came back, he again found them sound asleep. They simply couldn’t keep their eyes open. This time he let them sleep on, and went back a third time to pray, going over the same ground one last time.

⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶ When he came back the next time, he said, “Are you going to sleep on and make a night of it? My time is up, the Son of Man is about to be handed over to the hands of sinners. Get up! Let’s get going! My betrayer is here.”

Images for Lent week six: Suffering



Norman Adams, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*



Mark Cazalet, *Fool of God*