

How to Go Through Gethsemane

Luke 22:39-46

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At this point in our study of Jesus' final week on earth, He takes His disciples from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he has a very specific message for three of His closest disciples: Peter, James, and John. Because they are unable or unwilling to follow His instructions, these three men miss one of the most poignant moments in Jesus' earthly ministry, as He pours out His prayers, His sweat, and even His blood to God His Father. Because Doctor Luke gives us a window into this moment, there are many lessons we can learn from Jesus' night in the garden.

In one of his Old Testament commentaries, Philip Ryken told the true story of a young boy whose little sister needed a blood transfusion. They had both been born with the same disease, and the boy had survived two years earlier.

The doctor explained that her only chance of survival was to receive a blood transfusion from someone who had conquered this disease. Since the two children shared the same rare blood type, this little boy was the ideal donor.

The doctor, along with this boy's parents, eventually sat down with him and asked him if he'd be willing to give his blood to Mary, his little sister. His lower lip trembled at first, but then he took a deep breath and said, "For my sister, I sure will."

Soon they were wheeled into the hospital room—the little girl pale and thin; her brother robust and healthy. Neither one of them spoke, but as the transfusion began, he looked over at her and smiled.

When the ordeal was almost over, the boy broke the silence— his voice somewhat shaky and fearful—by asking the doctor, "So, when am I going to die?"

Only then did the adults realize they hadn't done a very good job explaining this procedure. And then they realized why he'd trembled when he agreed to donate his blood. He thought the doctor was asking for it all.

But here's the remarkable thing: out of love, he had been willing to give it all.

Retold, by Douglas Sean O'Donnell, [Matthew](#) (Crossway, 2013), p. 800

We're about to arrive at a scene where the love of Christ for us is going to be revealed with that kind of resolve, only more eternally significant.

Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus didn't confirm His decision to shed His blood when He arrived at Calvary; He had confirmed His decision in Gethsemane?

While the first Adam, the founder of the human race, failed to do the will of God in a garden, Jesus, called in the New Testament the final Adam—the founder of new race—will succeed in doing the will of God in a garden.

Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, [Be Courageous](#) (Victor Book, 1989), p. 119

Let's watch it happen, as Luke records it in his Gospel account, in **chapter 22**.

Jesus has now left the upper room. He heads outside the walled city of Jerusalem with His eleven disciples; they walk down the valley and across the Kidron Brook, then up the hill to one of His favorite spots.

Now **let's pick up the story at verse 39**:

And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him.

Luke 22:39

Jesus is heading there because he knows Judas will know exactly where to find Him.

David E. Garland, [Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2011), p. 880

But He's also going there because this has been a favorite place of His to rest and pray.

Now inside Jerusalem, within the walls, there were no gardens. The city was crowded and there was this unique ordinance that the city's soil was sacred and should not be polluted with manure.

William Barclay, [The Gospel of Mark](#) (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 343

Which I'm sure people appreciated for other reasons.

But there were wealthy people who possessed private gardens out across the valley on the Mount of Olives.

Ibid.

The word “Gethsemane” means “oil press” and there was more than likely an olive press located among these groves of olive trees.

In fact, the olive press might have been located in a cave nearby, which has since been renovated into a little chapel where visitors, like I did during my travels, can stand and contemplate what happened in that very spot.

Dr. Doug Bookman would say: “In this air space here, everything around us has changed, but we’re still in the same air space, where this scene took place.”

And let me just tell you ahead of time—especially if you’re a new student of God’s Word—this is a mysterious place.

We can’t fully appreciate the struggle that will take place here as we watch Jesus, the man—fully God, yet entirely human—struggle in prayer in this Garden.

Don’t expect to understand everything here. Just be prepared to take off your shoes, so to speak. This is holy ground.

Now verse 40:

And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, ...”

Luke 22:40-41

Mark’s Gospel account adds these details:

And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.

Mark 14:32-33

So, get this picture: they arrive at this particular garden, this grove of trees, and Jesus has them all sit there, but he invites Peter and James and John to enter with him.

Why Peter, James and John?

Well, it wasn’t for protection. We all know by now that Peter isn’t very good with a sword.

It wasn’t for companionship; it wasn’t because these three disciples like to stay up all night. No, they’re all going to fall asleep.

One of the reasons why Peter would be invited in is because of what Jesus says here to him in verse 40: ***“Pray that you may not enter into temptation.”***

Jesus doesn't mean that prayer keeps you from temptation, He means that prayer keeps you from entering temptation unprepared.

Prayerlessness produces powerlessness. The lack of spiritual communion sets the stage for spiritual collapse.

Even after the Lord invites Peter and James and John to pray because temptation is coming, three different times, the other Gospel accounts inform us, they fell asleep.

Jesus says to Peter three times, “Peter, you need to pray.” And three times, Peter effectively says, “Me? I don't need to pray, what I need is some sleep!”

Peter isn't going to collapse in the courtyard of the High Priest, Peter already collapsed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

You see, Peter is under the delusion that Jesus might need to pray, but not him. He's ready for anything.

We have the same temporary delusion in life, until God brings us to a point where we realize we have nothing but prayer.

If you're not praying, it isn't because you don't know how to, it's because you think you don't need to.

Until something happens that reminds you, you'd better start praying.

Reminds me of the story told by Vernon Janzen who was a guest preacher one Sunday morning when a little boy was acting up during the service. He could see the parents attempting everything they could to keep him quiet. Finally, after the boy just refused to stay quiet, the father picked the little fellow up and walked sternly down the middle aisle on his way out. This kid was in trouble, and he knew it. Just as they reached the doorway to the foyer, the little boy hollered out to the congregation, “Pray for me!”

Too late for prayer.

Corrie ten Boom used to ask this convicting question, “Is prayer your spare tire, or your steering wheel?”

Jesus didn't invite these three men closer into the Garden for protection, or companionship, but for instruction.

He's going to indirectly teach them how to go through their own Gethsemanes one day.

Maybe you're going through one of your own visits to that personal garden today.

Struggling with the will of God, with God's design for your life, with what God has allowed to happen in your life, with what God has refused to give you in life: some desire, some dream, even some apparent need.

How do you go through Gethsemane?

Well, let's watch and learn how the Lord went through it. Let me make several observations that effectively answer that question.

First, I want you to notice:

The Lord's intimacy with His Father.

Notice the first word of the Lord's prayer in verse 42:

... saying, "Father, ..."

Luke 22:42a

Mark records it this way:

"Abba, Father, ..."

Mark 14:36

Don't miss that term of endearment. In other words, even in His lonely distress, Jesus never lost the truth of His utter dependence and personal communion with God the Father.

Abba is an Aramaic term of possessive endearment.

Now some have tried to translate it, or pray: "Daddy, Father" which I find falls far short of its meaning.

"Daddy" is an American expression, and it isn't necessarily endearing. Your children call you Daddy whether they're playing with you, or you just sent them to timeout.

And typically, when they get older, they might call you Dad, not because you're any less close or they love you any less, but because Daddy just doesn't seem to fit anymore.

Now I've noticed that girls tend to keep calling their fathers Daddy. I think that's because they want your money.

It works for me.

This Aramaic expression denotes intimacy because it is possessive; literally translated "My Father."

This is significant to observe because Gethsemane does not drive Jesus to ask, “Are You really my Father?” “Do You really care about me, and if You do, why am I going through this?”

Our Gethsemane experiences tend to bring us to the wrong conclusion: that God the Father has left us alone. We think sorrow and suffering must mean that God is absent.

Jesus is showing us that in this time of great agony, God the Father was not absent, He was active, and we, like Christ, can cling to the truth of “My Father, I know You are mine, I know You have not left me alone.”

So, in this opening word, we see the Lord’s intimacy with His Father.

Secondly, we can observe here in Gethsemane:

The Lord’s honesty in His struggle.

Verse 42 again:

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.”

Luke 22:42

You notice how Jesus refers to everything related to the crucifixion as his “**cup**.”

This is prophetic fulfillment.

- In **Isaiah 51**, “the cup” represents the cup of God’s wrath against sin (Isaiah 51:17 & 22).
- In **Jeremiah**, the cup holds the wine of God’s wrath (Jeremiah 25:15-28).
- The **prophets** refer to evil nations like Edom and Babylonia drinking the cup due to their sin.

O’Donnell, p. 800

Listen, Jesus isn’t an actor trying to feel the part here; He’s not a robot trying to drum up the emotion of what it must be like to be human.

No, this is real. Jesus has a divine nature and a human nature; He was the God-man—100 percent deity and 100 percent humanity in the mystery of His incarnation.

Mark records Him saying, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.”

This cup He was about to drink:

- Included the pain of betrayal and the abandonment of friends.

- It included the indignity of being sold for 30 pieces of silver, the price in those days for a crippled slave.
- It included the rejection of His own people Israel over whom He'd earlier shed tears.
- It was mixed not only with their rejection but the ultimate insult as they will shout to Pilate, "We have no king but Caesar."
- This cup was mixed with the distress of bearing our sin; He, the perfect, sinless man was about to die covered with our sins.
- This cup was mixed with the physical horrors of the cross, the cruelest way to die.
- This cup is mixed with the coming separation from the Godhead—the loss of fellowship and intimacy He has known from eternity past.
- This cup is mixed with these and a million more sorrows we can never understand or imagine.

He will die *for us*; He will die *instead of us*; He will die *as us*, saturated with our sin; He will become sin for us Who knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The fact that Jesus is honestly struggling here only proves His humanity.

Ralph Davis wrote recently that if you understand something of the contents of this cup, then His desire to avoid it is proof of His perfection. He recoils from sin.

Dale Ralph Davis, [Luke: The Year of the Lord's Favor](#) (Christian Focus, 2021), p. 180

And that's true. That would be like you, in a brand-new white dress, being compelled to wade through a muddy swamp. You would recoil from that.

The hesitation of Jesus is a godly one. There would be something wrong with Him if He did not flinch or draw back from this.

Ibid

So, He agonizes over this now as He stands on the threshold of being covered with the mud and slime of every imaginable sin.

Now you might have seen that famous painting of Jesus praying in the Garden where He's kneeling at a large stone, His hair is perfectly combed, His hands are neatly folded in prayer and there's even a little halo around His head as He looks up to heaven.

Now if you have that picture, don't take it down. The Lord may very well have prayed in that manner at some other time.

But not here.

Mark's Gospel informs us that Jesus ...

And going a little farther [into the garden], he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him."

Mark 14:35

Mark uses the imperfect verb tense to indicate that His falling and praying were continual and constant.

Charles R. Swindoll, *Christ's Agony and Ecstasy* (Insight for Living, 1982), p. 8

In other words, He fell to the ground and prayed. Then He got up, went a little farther and fell down and prayed; He picked Himself back up, staggered a few more steps and fell again and prayed.

Hebrews 5 refers to this same scene and it says that Jesus prayed with loud crying and tears.

Look at your Savior: struggling with the plan of salvation He had designed; see Him now as a man, agonizing over all that it meant:

Falling ... crying ... praying ...staggering ...falling ... praying ... crying.

No wonder Luke adds here in verse 43:

And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.

Luke 22:43

It wasn't time to die. He was humanly pressed to a point no human could survive.

In fact, the pressure was so great, greater than any other human experienced, that Luke, the medical doctor, is the only Gospel writer to add this verse, **verse 44:**

And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Luke 22:44

Luke uses the word **"like"** which suggests that the Lord's sweat was so heavy it fell like clots of blood.

It's quite possible however that Doctor Luke is trying to describe what the medical community today calls hematomatosis, the bursting of capillaries underneath the surface of

the skin and the clotting blood mixes with sweat of the person under such intense distress and it emerges on the skin and drips off.

There's little wonder an angel was dispatched to give Him strength.

Beloved, this is where we see Him, as a human being, in all of His honest struggle, making up His mind to endure.

The first Adam sinned and was given the curse to work by the sweat of his brow; this second Adam, by the sweat of His brow, has decided to pay the penalty and remove the curse.

Adapted from Wiersbe, p. 120

This is the Lord's intimacy with His Father.

This is the Lord's honesty in His struggle.

Finally, we can observe here:

The Lord's humility in His surrender.

Jesus ends His prayer, ***back in verse 42***, by saying:

"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

Luke 22:42

Have you ever thought about the fact, that your eternal salvation hinges on this moment, and this word, "nevertheless."

"Father, I don't want to drink this cup and experience all its horrors, and all that it means. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done!"

Nevertheless!

And that will now give eternally new meaning to this cup; it isn't just agony, it is victory!

Hallelujah! Jesus said "Nevertheless."

It occurred to me in my study that we use the word "cup" for a number of reasons.

We have the cup as a memorial, representing the Lord's shed blood. And we observe that communion cup with joy and gratitude.

I found it interesting that around the world today, the cup represents victory. In so many sporting events, the winner's trophy is a cup. We have in tennis, the Davis Cup, in horse

racing, the Breeder's Cup, in car racing, the NASCAR Cup Series, in hockey, the Stanley Cup, in cricket , the Cricket World Cup, and in soccer, the FIFA World Cup.

I was at my desk looking these up online and I said out loud, "Whattya know, there's even a Rugby World Cup!"

And Siri, my phone voice assistant, awakened and said, "South Africa defeated New Zealand in the Rugby World Cup with the score of 12 to 11."

I had no idea she was listening to me work on my sermon. She's obviously not saved yet. But I think I'm going to try harder!

Jesus experienced the agony of this cup, but this cup will become His victory over our opponents: death, sin, Satan, and the grave.

- This cup of abandonment makes possible our cup of acceptance.
- This cup of rejection gives us our cup of redemption.
- This cup of pain becomes our cup of praise.

In a sense, this cup becomes the victorious Savior's Cup.

It is certainly the cup of our salvation.

How do you go through Gethsemane today, the one you might be facing? The one where God has perhaps fenced you in these days?

Let me give you some reminders as we model our response to our Savior, here, at His most desperate moment.

First,

Remember that friends can be reassuring, but they should never replace your Heavenly Father.

So often, we tell everyone our troubles, but Him. Frankly, our greatest need is Him.

Secondly,

Remember that praying is designed to align our will to God's will, not shape His will after ours.

Earlier in our study through Luke, we found the Lord teaching us to pray. He didn't teach us to pray that our will would be done in heaven; but that His will would be done on earth.

Third,

Remember that intimacy with God might not eliminate suffering, but it will demand fresh surrender.

For us to say, like our Lord Father, “Father, I don’t want this cup; this isn’t what I was expecting, but if there is no other option, if this is indeed what You want then, nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done.”

When you come to your great hour of need or temptation; when you want to unload your deepest burdens and desires, frustrations and sorrows; when you find the ground giving way beneath your feet, Gethsemane is the place to go.

Adapted from O'Donnell, p. 797

In his book, Philip Yancey tells the story of family friends named the Woodsons. The Woodsons had two children—Peggie and Joey—both born with cystic fibrosis.

Peggie and Joey stayed skinny no matter how much food they ate. They coughed constantly and labored to breathe—twice a day their mother Meg had to pound on their chests to clear out mucus.

They spent several weeks each year in a local hospital, and both of them grew up knowing they would probably die before reaching adulthood.

Joey, a bright, happy, all-American boy, died at the age of twelve. Peggie defied the odds by living much longer. She survived several health crises in high school yet lived on to enter college. She seemed to grow stronger, not weaker, and their hopes rose that she would find healing after all.

The miracle didn’t happen.

The last time Peggie was in the hospital and things were not going well, she said to her mother, “Hey Mom, you remember that quotation?” It was a quotation from William Barclay her pastor had used recently that said, “Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory.”

She said, “Mom, that’s what I want to do.”

Peggie's commitment to Christ was evident, even in the end. Once, the president of her college came to see her and asked if there was anything specific he could pray for. She was too weak to talk, but nodded to Yancey to explain the Barclay quote and ask him to pray that her hard time would be turned into glory.

Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God* (Zondervan, 2015), p. 172

She died a few weeks later, at the age of 23. But she endured, leaving behind a testimony to the glory of God.

This is how you go through *your* Gethsemane.

And along the way, you find:

- A renewed intimacy with the Father.
- A realistic honesty in the struggle.
- And a fresh humility in the surrender to His will.

This is where we learn and relearn to say “Nevertheless.” “Nevertheless, not my will, Lord but Yours be done.”

- Things aren’t going your way... nevertheless.
- Trouble seems to be piling up ... nevertheless.
- Things don’t seem to be working out ... nevertheless.

“Lord, Your will, not mine!”

That’s taking a cup of difficulty and watching over time the Lord turn it into a cup of victory, and your Heavenly Father is given all the glory.

That’s how we go through Gethsemane.

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Study Guide

Summary

In this sermon, we explored the profound and agonizing moments Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane, as recorded in Luke 22:39-46. Through the lens of Jesus' struggle, we examined the depth of His love, His intimate relationship with the Father, and His ultimate surrender to God's will. The sermon highlighted the importance of prayer, the reality of human struggle, and the necessity of aligning our will with God's, even in the face of immense suffering. By reflecting on Jesus' example, we are encouraged to navigate our own "Gethsemane" moments with renewed faith and trust in God's plan.

Key Takeaways

1. Intimacy with the Father.

Jesus' use of the term "Abba, Father" in His prayer signifies a deep, personal relationship with God. Even in His darkest hour, Jesus did not question His Father's presence or love. This teaches us that in our moments of distress, we should cling to the truth of God's unwavering presence and love, maintaining our intimate communion with Him.

2. Honesty in Struggle.

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane reveals His genuine human struggle as He faced the impending crucifixion. He openly expressed His desire for the cup to be removed, yet submitted to God's will. This honesty in prayer encourages us to bring our true feelings and struggles before God, trusting that He understands our pain and is with us through it.

3. The Power of "Nevertheless."

The pivotal moment in Jesus' prayer is His use of the word "nevertheless." Despite His anguish, He chose to submit to God's will over His own. This act of surrender is a powerful example for us, showing that true faith involves trusting God's plan, even when it contradicts our desires or understanding.

4. Prayer as Preparation.

Jesus instructed His disciples to pray so they would not enter into temptation unprepared. This underscores the importance of prayer in fortifying our spiritual resilience. Prayer is not just a ritual; it is a vital practice that aligns our hearts with God's will and equips us to face life's challenges with divine strength.

Discussion Guide

Bible Reading

- Luke 22:39-46

Observation Questions

1. What does Jesus call God in His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, and what does this term signify about their relationship?
2. How does Jesus express His struggle and desires in His prayer, and what does He ultimately submit to?
3. What instruction does Jesus give to His disciples regarding prayer, and what is the purpose of this instruction?

Interpretation Questions

1. How does Jesus' honesty in expressing His desire for the cup to be removed, yet submitting to God's will, model a way for believers to approach their own struggles?
2. What is the significance of the word "nevertheless" in Jesus' prayer, and how does it reflect His faith and surrender?

Application Questions

1. Reflect on a time when you felt distant from God during a difficult situation. How can Jesus' example of intimacy with the Father encourage you to maintain your relationship with God during tough times?
2. Jesus was honest about His struggles in His prayer. Are there struggles or desires you have been hesitant to bring before God? How can you start being more open with Him in your prayers?
3. The word "nevertheless" signifies a powerful act of surrender. Is there an area in your life where you need to say "nevertheless" and submit to God's will? What steps can you take to do this?
4. Jesus instructed His disciples to pray to avoid entering into temptation unprepared. How can you incorporate regular prayer into your life to strengthen your spiritual resilience?