



Parkway Fellowship

I Wish I was There • At the Betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane • Matthew 26:36-46 •

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Main Point

Jesus glorified God by submitting to God's will at great cost to Himself and calls us to do the same.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the most difficult decision you have ever had to make? What priorities or factors did you consider most heavily as you made it?

How did you have to mentally, emotionally, or spiritually struggle throughout the process? Who did you rely on for encouragement, guidance, or support throughout that time?

Looking back, would you have walked through the decision any differently or focused on any other truths or ultimate goals more heavily? How can you apply that understanding to future decisions?

Typically, the decisions with the most enduring outcomes and far-reaching effects require the greatest amounts of effort and time. We weigh alternatives and options, carefully examining the implications of the choices we make. For followers of Jesus, the underlying question of every decision is in determining the will of God. But even if we know the will of God in a given situation, we will almost certainly be tempted to choose a more comfortable, self-serving alternative. Thankfully, in contrast, Jesus never strayed from God's will, despite the great temptation to do so. Above all, He was committed to carrying out the will of God—to the point of His own death—acting on His love for us and His unwavering obedience to the Father.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer Read Matthew 26:36-40.

Moving from the Lord's supper to the start of His passion and death on earth, Jesus brought His disciples with Him to Gethsemane—a garden area located just east of Jerusalem. Here, at this moment of great sorrow and anxiety, He asked them to pray along with Him. He opened up to them emotionally and confessed He was sorrowful to the point of death (v. 38). Jesus, perhaps more than at any other point in His life, experienced unthinkable inner turmoil. He prayed to the Father, but also asked His friends to remain and pray with Him.

What “cup” was Jesus referring to in verse 39? (See Jeremiah 25.) What insight does this shed on the Lord's Supper, which Jesus and His disciples had just left?

How does this garden scene compare with the first garden scene in the Bible—the Garden of Eden? What temptations were presented in both?

How did both gardens lead to death? How did the implications of each death differ?

Given the similarity of this setting to that of Adam and Eve at the very start of God's story, it is crucial to note the parallel between the two. The Garden of Eden represented God's perfect will—His creation living in oneness with Him, free from evil and sin. Adam and Eve faced the temptation there to act on their own desires, rather than submit to God's will as Jesus did in Gethsemane. But while Adam and Eve succumbed to this temptation, bringing death upon themselves and all of humanity, Jesus acted in obedience to God's will above His own, enabling eternal life and salvation for all of us.

Do you think it was the physical pain Jesus dreaded most, or something else? How did His death compare with even the most gruesome stories we hear of torture and suffering today?

Given that Gethsemane was located on the Mount of Olives, nearly 200 feet above Jerusalem, how does this physical climb compare with the emotional climb Jesus underwent in getting there?

Here in Gethsemane, the will of God and the weight of the call to reclaim the dream of Eden rested heavily on Jesus as He was called to drink the cup of God's wrath, becoming an object of horror and scorn out of His very love for us. In doing so, Jesus became sin for us, putting it to death once and for all on the cross. Despite never knowing the sting of guilt or regret, Jesus was called to bear the sin of humanity and ultimate separation from the Father, who He has been one with since the beginning of time (see John 1:1).

Why do you think Matthew included the detail that Jesus fell facedown to pray? What does that indicate about the nature of prayer and the inward sentiment of Jesus that night?

Why do you think Jesus asked the disciples to go with Him? What might Jesus have wanted them to see and learn as a result? What did it reveal about the power of His presence?

Jesus had a particularly close relationship with Peter, James, and John. This isn't the only time in the Gospels that these three were singled out—Jesus also invited them up to the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matt.

17:1-13). Here, at this moment of great sorrow and anxiety, Jesus asked his friends to pray along with Him. Yet, three times Jesus returned to find His friends sleeping. Jesus knew they wanted to stay awake. They loved Jesus dearly, but their flesh was weak. While Jesus prayed fervently and followed obediently the will of God, the disciples succumbed to the temptation for something as common as sleep.

Why was it so hard for the disciples to stay awake? If they had understood the magnitude of what was about to happen, might they have acted differently?

How does understanding that the cross is the will of God impact the way we view the crucifixion? How does it impact the way we view Jesus' prayer in the garden?

Jesus asked His friends to come with Him and do something very specific—to sit, stay awake, and be with Him. This was more than a pragmatic move on the part of Jesus. Inviting His disciples to climb up to and pray in Gethsemane with Him stemmed from a value system existing in Jesus before the beginning of time—the way of community and togetherness, woven into the relational fabric of the Trinity itself. Jesus invited His disciples to walk with Him and to pray, just as He calls each of us to do today as followers of Him.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What did Jesus' instructions to His disciples in the garden (not to speak, but to remain alert with Him and to pray) reveal about the way we should walk with people in suffering today?

What role did prayer play for all people in this story? How often are we asleep in prayer when there is great spiritual activity afoot?

How can we rely on His strength and power to work in and overcome our weaknesses so that we do not miss out on all He is doing and working around us?

Given Jesus' openness with Peter, James, and John about the severity of His sorrow, what do we learn about the need for transparency with Jesus and other believers—here at our church and beyond?

Pray

Ask your group to break into partners as you close in prayer. Take a minute to share with each other the areas of your life in which you need the most direction, provision or understanding. Then, close by praying for one another, just as Jesus called His disciples to do alongside Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. As you do, pray also that we might all remain alert to His working and will at all times.

Commentary

26:36. “Gethsemane” meant “oil press” in Hebrew. It apparently was a private garden just outside the city limits of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. It was illegal to have gardens within the city because the manure needed for the plants made the city ceremonially unclean. Apparently Jesus came to this garden quite often. It is even possible that during Passion Week He bivouacked here with His disciples. Judas knew the place well.

26:37. From Mark 14:33 and John 4:21 we know that the two sons were James and John. This was the inner circle of leadership among the disciples. They were present with Jesus on several special occasions when the other disciples were not. But these were strong terms in Greek (cf. Mark 14:33). We are on very holy ground here in the garden as we see the Son of God in what may have been His most vulnerable human moment. Jesus must have related this account to His disciples after His resurrection. Apparently it was meant to be helpful for those who face temptation and for those who seek to understand the agony and cost of the Calvary experience.

26:38. This was an Old Testament idiom (cf. Ps. 42:5) which expressed the tremendous intensity which was involved in the redemption of sinful mankind. Something of the struggle can be seen in the parallel of Luke 22:43–44, which records that an angel came to minister to Him and He sweat great drops of blood. The victory over the evil one was won here in the garden. The insidiousness of Satan’s temptation in Matt. 4 and of Peter’s supposedly helpful, but extremely destructive, comments in Matt. 16:22, are fully revealed in this passage.

26:39. The beautiful contemporary pictures of Jesus kneeling in the Garden of Gethsemane by a rock are moving, but inaccurate. The Greek text here asserts that He was completely prostrate in agony and distress, even to the point of physical death, during these moments. It has often been asked what terrified Jesus so much. Some have speculated that it was the fear of physical death, or His fear that the disciples could not lead the Church. Jesus, who had known intimacy with the Father moment by moment, was on the verge of having to experience the last great aspect of human lostness—a breach of fellowship with God. It was this breach of fellowship and having to carry the burden of sin for all people of all time that terrified the Son. If we can see this kind of intense anguish on the part of Jesus of Nazareth, the unique Son of God, how awesome and destructive must separation from fellowship with God really be!

There are several important aspects to this phrase. From Mark’s parallel we understand that He used the Aramaic term “Abba” which referred to an intimate, family relationship. It is often translated “Daddy.” In a few brief hours this will change to “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (cf. 27:46). The phrase “if it is possible” is found in Mark 14:36 in the phrase “all things are possible.” The slight variation between verse 35 and 42 and the variation between the Gospels do not minimize the fact that, from verse 44, we realize that Jesus prayed the same prayer three times. The concept of “the cup” in biblical usage reflected an Old Testament symbol for the destiny of a man, usually in the sense of the judgment of God (cf. Ps. 75:8; Isa.

51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15, 16, 27, 28). The cup of judgment that God had prepared for rebellious mankind was consumed to the dregs by the innocent Son of God (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). These verses show us the intent of the Son in His prayer. Though His human nature cries out for deliverance, His heart is set on fulfilling the will of the Father in substitutionary atonement (cf. Mark 10:45).

26:40. Before we are too quick to condemn the disciples, let's note that in Luke 22:45, the phrase "they were asleep from sorrow" describes that they were unable to bear the pain of Jesus' prophecy about His own death and their subsequent scattering. Though Jesus longed to have human fellowship and intercession at this time of ultimate crisis in His life, He had to face this moment alone, and He faced it for all believers!

26:41. These are both present imperatives for constant vigil! Temptation is an ongoing reality (cf. Matt. 4:11; Luke 4:13). There have been several theories as to what "temptation" referred in this context: (1) to the disciples sleeping instead of praying, (2) to the disciples desertion of Jesus in v. 56; (3) to Peter's denial in vv. 69–75; or (4) to governmental or religious trials (cf. Matt. 5:10–12; John 9:22; 16:2).

The term "temptation" (peirasmos) had the connotation of "to tempt or try with the goal of destruction" (cf. Matt. 6:13; Luke 11:4; James 1:13). It is often contrasted with another Greek term for test (dokimazo) which had the connotation of "to try or tempt with a view toward strengthening." However, these connotations are not always present in every context. Theologically it can be said that God does not test or tempt His children to destroy them but He does provide opportunities for spiritual growth through trials (cf. Gen. 22:1; Ex. 16:4; 20:20; Duet. 8:2, 16; Matt. 4; Luke 4; Heb. 5:8). However, He always provides a way through (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13).

"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" was the self-confession of Jesus, who knows fully our humanity and its weaknesses (cf. Heb. 4:15). And, knowing us, He loved us and died for us (cf. Rom. 5:8) and now intercedes for us (cf. Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1).

26:42-43. This implies that Jesus knew it was God's will that He go to the cross, but He knew He could express His concern to the Father. It is good to know that God will not reject us because of our fears and confusion, but will work with us in love and faith as He worked with Jesus. We cannot even pray ourselves out of the will of God.

26:44-46. Jesus prayed three times. This is similar to Paul's three prayers concerning this thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:8). There is something of the Hebrew idiom of emphasis in the three-fold repetition (cf. Isa. 6:3; Jer. 7:4). We can bring to God our concerns any time, as often as we feel the need. Jesus has won the victory and now stands ready to face the night trials, the morning beatings and crucifixion.

26:47. There has been much discussion about the motivation of Judas. It must be said that this remains uncertain. His kiss of Jesus in v. 49 either (1) was a sign to the soldiers that this was the man to arrest (cf. v. 48); or (2) lends support to the modern theory that He was trying to force Jesus' hand to act (cf. 27:4). Other

Gospel passages state that he was a robber and an unbeliever from the beginning (cf. John 12:6). From Luke 22:52 we know the make-up of this crowd. There were Roman soldiers involved because they were the only ones who could legally carry swords. Also, the Temple police were involved because they usually carried clubs. Representatives from the Sanhedrin were also present at the arrest (cf. vv. 47, 51).