

Do I Have The Strength?
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Matthew 26:36-46

“Everything seems worse at night.” Just a week ago Susan and I were speaking with a young woman whose family is dealing with a sudden health crisis. She said, *“I do pretty well in the daytime, but nights are hard.”* We assured her that everyone has experienced that.

Why are times of suffering worse at night?

It was the night of Jesus’ arrest. He led the eleven remaining disciples to a familiar place, a garden on the western slope of the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem; a favorite place where he would go to escape the crowds and pray.

Matthew 26:36–46 (ESV)

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” ³⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” ⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴² Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” ⁴³ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. ⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

“Gethsemane” (the name means “oil press”) -- like “Calvary,” that one word, “Gethsemane” immediately brings certain images to mind: A dark garden with massive olive trees casting deep shadows; a group of eight depressed men huddled by the entrance; the image of three other sleepy disciples struggling to watch and pray; the painful, lonely figure of our Lord crying out to His father in such distress that his sweat was bloody. We see darkness, despair, struggle, and spiritual suffering that was enough to kill Jesus even before soldiers tortured him. That’s a lot of meaning for one word!

- Why did God the Father choose to have the gospel writers document this scene? What can we learn and apply to our lives? Let’s dig in and see.
- First, let’s look at poor Peter, John, and James. Here’s another episode where we don’t know whether to laugh or to cry.
- We can sympathize with Jesus when He said to Peter: *“Can’t you even stay awake for an hour to give me some kind of moral support!”*
- On the other hand, these poor men were emotionally spent and physically tired. Have you ever dozed off in prayer? I have! Everyone has!
- In verse 41, Jesus admonished them: *“⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*
- Though we’ve all been there, **what is the lesson for us from Jesus chastising his inner circle about being asleep on the job?**
- The Life Application Study Bible tells us: *Jesus used Peter’s drowsiness to warn him about the kinds of temptation he would soon face. The way to overcome temptation is to keep alert and pray. Keeping alert means being aware of the possibilities of temptation, sensitive to the subtleties, and spiritually equipped to fight it. Because temptation strikes where we are most vulnerable, we can’t resist it alone. Prayer is essential because God’s strength can shore up our defenses and defeat Satan’s power.¹*

- In addition to being with Him for moral support, **why do you think Jesus allowed them to observe how He was dealing with this situation?**
- *“Jesus prepared them for leadership by letting them see Him engage in this powerful period of prayer. In the years to come, they would need to understand how to seek the face of God during desperate days.”²*
- **What can you and I do to avoid spiritual exhaustion and failure?**
- The spirit is willing (we mean well!) but the flesh is weak (our human nature makes us prone to spiritual “sleepiness.”) That statement puts us on notice to set ourselves up for success by growing in the discipline of time in prayer and time in God’s word.
- Now let’s turn to what Jesus teaches us by His own actions.
- Jesus said: *“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.”* His emotional and spiritual battle with Satan was taking a physical toll. Luke tells us *“And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground”* (Luke 22:44.)
- Hematidrosis is a rare, but very real, medical condition where one’s sweat will contain blood. The sweat glands are surrounded by tiny blood vessels. These vessels can constrict and then dilate to the point of rupture where the blood will then effuse into the sweat glands. Its cause - *extreme* anguish.³ Sweating blood was not a figure of speech.
- Let’s be clear, Jesus wasn’t afraid of physical torture and death.
- He was fully God and could have stopped all of that at any time. **If it wasn’t the physical pain, what was it that caused our perfect Lord such distress?**
- Two words: SIN and SEPARATION. Our sinless Savior knew He must take on the sin of ALL MANKIND. (Population of 300 million people then; 7 billion now; and all those before and after. Imagine my sin times all that!)
- Separation from His Father. Jesus knew the Father would literally look away from Him on the cross. It had to be! A perfect God could not look at such sin! *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”⁴*
- Wiersbe: *“Jesus was not wrestling with God’s will or resisting God’s will. He was yielding Himself to God’s will. As perfect*

Man, He felt the awful burden of sin, and His holy soul was repelled by it. Yet as the Son of God, He knew that this was His mission in the world. The mystery of His humanity and deity is seen vividly in this scene.”⁵

- The spiritual warfare against Jesus was enormous.
- One commentator described it as “*terrible distress and misery*” another, “*crushed with anguish...*”⁶

Do you remember the first time you saw one of your parents overwhelmed by a difficult situation? This strong figure you always looked to for reassurance that everything will be fine is suddenly shaken to their core. You discover that this “tower of strength and security” was more human than you wanted to believe. It’s alarming for a child. That is why we parents work hard to stay tough. Yet, it shows us that even those “rock of Gibraltar” people in our lives have an end of their “rope.” Everyone reaches a place where there’s nowhere to turn but to God.

It’s also hard to picture our Lord during the last hour or so before His arrest. Gethsemane is not the picture of Jesus we like to imagine. Like His disciples, we want to see Jesus robed in white and riding in on a charger as conqueror.

We will see Him that way one day. But on this night He was conquering in a different way. It shouldn’t be surprising to see Jesus in this situation. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah told us about this.

Isaiah 53:3–5 (ESV)

³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

- **What does Jesus’ example teach us about what we should do in those times when we face an incredible time of suffering?**

- Jesus modeled prayer and obedience. When we're at our "wits end" we should go to the only real source of comfort, our Heavenly Father.
- **What do we learn from Jesus asking for the "cup" to pass but saying "not as I will but as You will?" What does it take for us to be able to say "as You will"?**
- *"Here then appears the classic scriptural example of a prayer that God does not answer in the way desired by the one praying, yet without any fault in the person making the request. Here, too, is a key reminder for us. If Christ could plead as boldly as he did, we should feel free also to unload all our deepest desires before God..."⁷*
- It's perfectly appropriate to cry out to our Heavenly Father asking for relief.
- On the other hand, if He wills that we go through a dark time we can trust Him to strengthen us and be with us every step of the way.
- **How does Gethsemane encourage us regarding times of spiritual depression?**
- "His depression means "that all depression is not sin ... in fact, nothing is more unhelpful than telling people in very sad circumstances not to be depressed."

8

We can take comfort that even Jesus in his humanity - fully God, yet fully man - suffered times of depression and despair.

- Finally, we see Jesus going back repeatedly to plead with the Father.
- God doesn't become weary if we pray for the same thing multiple times. This is not the "vain repetition" Jesus warned about (Mt.6:7.)
- The key is to pray while yielding ourselves to God's will.
- Truth: It's okay to passionately plead for what we think would be better as long as we are willing accept what God KNOWS is best.

So, What's the Takeaway?

In his book "Getting Through the Tough Stuff of Pain," Chuck Swindoll writes:

*"There is no place more alone than one's own Gethsemane. Support groups are great. I believe in them and encourage every one of them in our church. But there are personal Gethsemanes you must walk through completely alone."*⁹

- In His humanity even Jesus dreaded what He had to face. Yet, He surrendered to it so you and I can live forever.
- 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) says, *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*
- We said Gethsemane represents incredible sorrow and suffering. But it also represents hope.
- Jesus modeled for us what it means to watch and pray. He showed us it is part of our humanity to suffer depression and despair.
- He showed us the remedy for such dark times is prayer and obedience.
- He showed us it's okay to passionately plead for what we think would be better as long as we are willing accept what God KNOWS is best.

Quoting Swindoll again:

"You'll always feel a deep loneliness while you're getting through the tough stuff of pain. That's when Christ will be there. Your best friends may fail you. Some will try to understand, but often they can't. A few, frankly, will forget you. Some may turn against you. In the agony of your need for relational support, you'll have all you need with Christ. You will find Him at those times closer than a brother. I know. He has met me in my own Gethsemanes, and He will do so again and again and yet again."

¹ Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 161333-161335). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

² Explore the Bible Leader Guide.- Lifeway 2016.

³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/sweat-blood-Jesus.html>

⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Mt 27:46). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 97). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁶ Blomberg, Craig L.. *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (The New American Commentary) (p. 394). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *Getting Through the Tough Stuff: It's Always Something* by Charles R. Swindoll. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004.