

**Matthew 26:36-46**

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 He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. 38 Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." 39 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." 40 Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? 41 Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42 Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." 43 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. 45 Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand" (NRSV).

We know the scene very well. Jesus took his disciples with him to the Garden of Gethsemane where he spent a considerable amount of time in prayer. Meanwhile, the disciples could not stay awake. Three times Jesus appealed to them to stay awake and they could not. This is an important point because it reveals a contrast in the level of understanding between Jesus and his disciples. We remember forever the most significant events in life such as the terrorist attack on America, the Kennedy assassinations, and now the coronavirus pandemic. You will always remember the most significant events in your life. These events generate emotions, excitement, and anxiety. Jesus goes to pray with a heavy heart because he knows what is going on around him. Meanwhile, the disciples are sleeping. This indicates that they are either complacent, because they don't care, or they don't fully understand how significant this event really is. Matthew clearly points out in his gospel how the disciples have a difficult time grasping what Jesus said would happen during passion week.

Today's Scripture shows the repetition that took place. Jesus asked them to stay awake as he went to pray. When Jesus needed their emotional support they fell asleep. Jesus wakes them up and asks them again to stay awake while he goes to pray. They fell asleep again. This happens three times! This is happening at the most crucial time; when Jesus is being betrayed. The worst time ever for Jesus; when a mob comes to capture him. It is the most critical, stressful, anxious, and emotional time of all. It is when Jesus needs his disciples the most that they let him down. Jesus is on the road to the cross. This is a very intense moment but for some reason the disciples appear to be clueless. There is no comparison in our lives. Nothing ever, for any of us, compares to anything like this. We know critical moments. All of us have experienced times full of stress and anxiety. We face a critical moment in our lives right now. But nothing we face compares to what Jesus went through.

We are all familiar with the Plan A paradigm. Plan A is your main strategy and the focus of your plan while plan B is your backup plan that you plan to do if plan A fails. If plan A does not work then go to plan B. Well, God has one plan. God only needs one plan. God does not have or need a backup plan. With God there is no plan B. God is the almighty creator. There is no chance of failure. There is no plan B. There is no other route to salvation. There is no other

sacrifice that is sufficient. There is no substitute. There is nothing else. Only one plan. There is only one way to get lost people back into covenant with God. The answer is Jesus. When Jesus is doing his walking ministry he teaches all about the love of God and he demonstrates, through his action and demeanor, the love of God. Jesus knows the Old Testament prophecy. Jesus knows he is the fulfillment of that Old Testament prophecy. Of all the drama and all of the events that unfold, he is the one that has to go to the cross. There is no alternative. There is no way to take the cross from Jesus. He has to set aside human will for God's will to be done. So, with this heavy burden upon him, he engages in quality prayer and meditation.

I can never emphasize enough the importance of prayer. Jesus faced the biggest problem ever: betrayal, an unjust conviction, savage beating, and brutal crucifixion. Jesus carried the world on his shoulders. As Jesus spends this time in prayer we get to see the human side of Jesus. When overwhelming sadness floods his heart he desires the companionship of his closest friends. He, like all of us, needs comforting care during a time of extreme distress. At his most discerning moment is when he needs his closest friend the most. When Jesus tells his disciples to stay awake, be alert, and watch with him, he is asking for their emotional support.

From this lesson we learn about facing difficult situations. We all face them. Sometimes it may seem like there is no answer and no way out. Sometimes difficult situations may even challenge your faith and leave you to question; Why does God allow it to happen to me? When you do, you forget about all of the setbacks of the Bible heroes. Most of the heroes that we read about in the Bible endured significant setbacks. Look at Joseph for example. He was sold into slavery. Then he was cast into prison on false charges because he refused to be seduced by the wife of Potiphar the captain of the guard. He was kept in a dungeon for years. He was there for two years after the chief cupbearer was released. I don't think we should pray to God for favors and luxuries when Joseph who was highly favored by God and still spent over two years in a dungeon. We know Joseph was highly favored by God because the Bible tells us that he had the skill of interpreting dreams because he was highly favored by God. If Bible heroes who are favored by God have to face difficult situations then it stands to reason that we are not exempt from difficulties. So, in the Scripture we learn from Jesus how to handle difficult situations. The more challenging the situation the more necessary it is to spend time in prayer.

Jesus also prays a very human prayer. Each time he stated his commitment to God's will. When he returns from prayer he faces a huge disappointment. The disciples let him down. When he needed them the most is when they let him down the most. These are the same people that just a little bit earlier boldly proclaimed loyalty to the end. Notice the character of Jesus. He does not get angry when most of us would have blown a fuse. In the midst of his own agony Jesus shows amazing concern for others. In spite of our shortcomings Jesus understands.

When Jesus' hour had come, his focus was on prayer. His concern was that it is God's will that is to be done. Where do you stand in your faith? Maybe we are like the disciples. We boldly confess our faith and end up inactive when the Lord needs us the most. You have an appointment with God on the calendar of life. You don't know when it is and you can't cancel it. You can't reschedule it if you are not ready. You have to be ready. We can find comfort in knowing that even the Bible heroes are no strangers to suffering. When we face difficulties in life we can appeal to the suffering Savior.

