**Matthew 26:36-38**

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-26/matthew-2636-38/>

Jesus led the disciples to a place called Gethsemane and asks them to pray. He takes Peter, James, and John further into the garden and confesses that He is grieved to the point of death. He asks them to remain and stay awake with Him.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 14:32-34, Luke 22:40, and John 18:1.

Matthew continues his narrative of Jesus’s final night before His crucifixion.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane.

Matthew uses the word—then—to denote that they arrived to a place called Gethsemane after Jesus predicted the disciples’ falling away and Peter’s dispute that he would deny Jesus three times (Matthew 26:31-35).

Jesus’s arrival at the Garden of Gethsemane most likely took place on the night of Nisan 15 (late Thursday by Roman reckoning). See “[The Bible Says Timeline of Jesus’s Final Day](https://thebiblesays.com/tough-topics/a-timeline-of-jesuss-final-24-hours/)” to learn more about the timing and sequencing of this event.

The pronoun—them—refers to Jesus’s disciples who came with Him.

After making their way to the Mount of Olives through the city gates of Jerusalem (Matthew 26:30), Jesus and His disciples had arrived at a place called “Gethsemane.” This place was located on the western slope of the Mount of Olives, just across the Kidron ravine from Jerusalem’s eastern wall (John 18:1). This place can still be visited today. [(See Map)](https://thebiblesays.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/1st-century-jerusalem.png)

The house where Jesus and the disciples ate the Passover Meal is traditionally located in the southwest quarter of the ancient city. It is about a mile’s journey from that quarter to Gethsemane (Matthew 26:20-29).

Luke simply identifies the place as the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39). John describes this place as a garden (John 18:1). This is why this place is often referred to as “The Garden of Gethsemane.” Matthew and Mark (Mark 14:32) both identify the place where Jesus went by transliterating two Hebrew words into Greek and smushing them together.

A possible reason Matthew and Mark used the Hebrew name to describe the place Jesus and His disciples came to was because it had special significance which they wanted their readers to notice. The two Hebrew terms are “Gat” and “Shmanim”—“Gat-shmanim.” “Gat” means a “place for pressing oil or wine.” “Shmanim” means “oils.” “Gat-shmanim”/Gethsemane roughly translated means, “olive press” or “the place where olives are pressed into oil.”

Olive presses in Jesus’s day consisted of stone slabs and a collection bin. Crushed olives were placed on a stone slab as another stone was pressed on top of them to press or squeeze the oil out of the olives which would be collected in a bin below. Olive presses may have been a stone weight or in some cases a wheel that was pushed or pulled around in a circle by a donkey or slaves as it rolled over and crushed the olives beneath it.

[See picture of an ancient olive press.](https://thebiblesays.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/olive-press.jpg)

The term Gethsemane vividly depicts how Jesus’s soul began to be crushed beneath the weight of our iniquities (Isaiah 53:5) the night before He would be crucified. It is here that He confesses to Peter, James, and John, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death.” He was grieved and distressed in this place. Luke records that as Jesus prayed in agony, “His sweat became like drops of blood falling down on the ground” (Luke 22:44). The great drops of sweat reflect the picture of olive oil being squeezed out of the olives in the Gethsemane. But instead of a stone weight, Jesus was being crushed by the weight of being betrayed and abandoned by His disciples, being rejected by His countrymen, and forsaken by God. In addition to these heavy weights, He would be crushed bearing the weight of the sins of the world.

Though He had felt the heaviness before (John 12:27), the weight of the world’s sins and the burden of His Messianic task to redeem the world through His sacrificial death (Isaiah 53:11, Matthew 20:28, John 3:17, Romans 5:6) began to press terribly upon Him at Gethsemane, and Jesus was crushed as an olive is crushed at a press.

Luke tells us that it was Jesus’s custom to go to this place (Luke 22:39). This makes sense as Gethsemane is located between the city of Jerusalem and the town of Bethany where Jesus was staying during the Passover festival (Matthew 21:17, 26:6, Mark 11:1, 11:11, 14:3, Luke 19:28-29, John 12:1). Apparently, Jesus came to this place, either alone or with His disciples, multiple times while He was visiting Jerusalem. It is possible that Gethsemane was the place where Jesus explained to His disciples about the end times and His return (Mark 13:3).

(This discussion about the end times and Christ’s return is known as “The Olivet Discourse.” Its fullest account of this teaching is found in Matthew 24-25).

As mentioned above, John describes this place as a “garden” (John 18:1). This indicates that Gethsemane was likely an olive grove that had an olive press. There are also profound theological implications to John’s description of Gethsemane as a garden. It is an evocative allusion to the Garden of Eden.

The Garden of Eden was where Adam and Eve were tempted and fell in disobedience (Genesis 3). In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve followed their own desires and placed their will above God’s when they sinned (Genesis 3:6). This decision brought sin and death into the world (Genesis 3:19, Romans 5:12). It separated them from God and His good plan for their lives (Genesis 3:22-24):

“Death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.”  
(Romans 5:14)

Jesus is “the type of Him who was to come.” Jesus is “the second Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45-46). He is the second human without sin, who had the opportunity to choose not to enter into sin. Because Jesus did not choose sin, He became the perfect Lamb of God who could be sacrificed for the sins of the world.

Contrary to Adam, who placed his own will above God’s will in the Garden of Eden and brought sin and death into the world, Jesus, the second Adam, put God’s will above His will (Matthew 26:39). We see His process of struggling to make that choice in the garden of Gethsemane. His choice to trust His Father’s will led to the redemption of the world. Ultimately, this will lead to placing the world back into harmony with its Creator. And because of His sacrifice, God will freely grant eternal life by grace to all who believe in Him (John 3:16):

“For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one [Adam], much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”  
(Romans 5:17)

When Jesus arrived at Gethsemane, He said to His disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”

Matthew 26:39 summarizes what Jesus prayed: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.”

Luke tells us that when Jesus told His disciples to Sit here while I go over there and pray, He asked them to pray also; and Luke tells us what Jesus asked them to pray for: “Pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Luke 22:40).

Jesus knew that His disciples would be greatly tempted to fall away (and that they would fall away) when that rapidly approaching hour came (Matthew 26:31). This was why He told them to “Pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Luke 22:40).

After telling His disciples to “stay here,” Jesus took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him further into the garden of Gethsemane.

Matthew’s expression, the two sons of Zebedee, refers to Jesus’s disciples: James and John. James and John were brothers and were both the sons of a Galilean fisherman named Zebedee (Matthew 4:21-22, 10:2).

Peter, James, and John were Jesus’s closest disciples. Jesus had revealed things to them and done things in their presence—such as the raising of Jairus’s daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37-43) and giving them a glimpse of His divine glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9) that no other disciple witnessed. Now in His hour of distress, He took His three closest human companions with Him.

Perhaps He wanted them near so they could learn from Him. Perhaps Jesus, even though He was God, as a human, felt comfort in their presence during His grief. Perhaps both. If Jesus did seek solace from their proximity during His anguish, He would also be deeply wounded by their abandonment a few hours later (Psalm 12:1, 22:6, 38:11-12, Isaiah 53:3-4). Their falling away would have been painful and personal.

Despite their strong assurances that they would never forsake Jesus (Matthew 26:35), they would all prove to be liars as the Messianic psalm predicted (Psalm 116:11).

Matthew reports as Jesus took Peter and the sons of Zebedee with Him further into Gethsemane, that He began to be grieved and distressed.

Jesus’s disposition had noticeably changed from when He celebrated the Passover earlier in the evening. At that time, He was rejoicing even as He was mindful of what was to follow. Jesus expressed to His disciples at the beginning of the meal how He had “earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15).

Now in Gethsemane, Jesus began to be visibly grieved and distressed in front of Peter, James, and John. To see their Lord in this state troubled them. They knew Jesus was the Messiah. How could He appear to be losing His nerve?

Jesus confided to them: My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death.

His remark reveals Jesus’s humanity. Jesus was fully God and fully man. Paradoxically, His divinity did not swallow up His humanity, and His humanity did not diminish His deity. Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. And Jesus’s comment about how He felt in this perilous moment reveals that just because He was God in human form, did not exempt Him from experiencing human emotions—such as grief, distress, anxiety, and anguish (Isaiah 53:4, 10-11).

Whether from His understanding of the scriptures, through being told by His Father in prayer, or from His omniscience, Jesus already knew what was about to happen to Him. He was about to be crucified. He dreaded it. But He also despised it, meaning He thought little of it in comparison to the joy set before Him, the praise and reward from His Father for doing His bidding (Hebrews 12:2, Philippians 2:9). Jesus confessed His fears and His desires to His Father (Matthew 26:39, Mark 14:35-36, Luke 22:41-44).

He endured this temptation (and others) as a human (Hebrews 2:17-18). Jesus emptied Himself of divine privilege as a man (Philippians 2:6-7). He overcame temptations not in His own personal power (great though His power was), but rather, He overcame temptations by relying completely upon His Heavenly Father for grace to overcome His trials (Matthew 4:4, John 5:19, 30).

In living in complete dependence, Jesus showed us an example of how we are to overcome our own temptations—by relying completely upon Him (John 15:5, 1 Corinthians 10:13, James 4:7). The author of Hebrews calls Jesus “the author and perfector of our faith” because His example shows us how to complete our faith, by relying on God through the greatest difficulties, all the way to the end of our lives (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Jesus’s comment to His three disciples also reveals that emotions are both real and powerful. He said His grief was so deep it was to the point of death. He felt as though His grief might kill Him. If emotions can affect Jesus this powerfully, emotions can also powerfully affect us.

We do not get to choose how we feel. Emotions are good gifts given by God. They are indicators that we need to take actions. Emotions insist that we respond to our circumstances. We should listen to our emotions, but take actions based on values, while depending upon God.

Jesus acknowledged His emotions. However, He did not do what His emotions might have suggested, which would be to despair. Rather, the action He chose to take was to pray. He chose to pray for help from His Father.

Ecclesiastes tells us that there is a time for everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). It is up to us to choose the proper time. Jesus’s example shows that the best way to make good choices is to seek God’s will. Prayer is an important means by which to seek God’s will.

Emotions are reliable to tell us: “Something is wrong, and action is needed.” However, emotions are not reliable to tell us what we should do. If we follow Jesus’s example, we will look not to emotions, but to God to decide actions to take. God is authoritative. Emotions, like circumstances (whether desired or not) are outside our control. We do not choose our feelings. The only things we choose are who we trust, our perspective, and what we do. We can consider emotions like circumstances. They are not something we control.

Whenever we experience powerful emotions, we should listen to them, take them into account, like Jesus did. Jesus understood why His emotions were triggered. He decided to take His grief to His Father in prayer. From this example, there is a sequence we can use when engaging with emotions, that can be remembered by the acronym L.I.D.D.: “Listen-Investigate-Decide-Dismiss.”

* **L**isten: Always acknowledge emotions. Do not suppress them, and do not react to them. Jesus acknowledged His emotions, they were causing Him to be deeply grieved, to the point of death.
* **I**nvestigate: Look inside and discover what problem your emotions are prompting you to address. In Jesus’s case, He recognized the greatest need was to resist temptation (Matthew 26:41). We can infer from vs 41 that Jesus investigated His emotions and discerned that they were attempting to lead Him away from His Father’s will.
* **D**ecide: Decide what actions to take based on God’s will. In Jesus’s example, the action He chose was to pray. He exhorted His companions to do likewise. But they had their own choices to make.
* **D**ismiss: After acknowledging our emotions, and making the proper choice, dismiss our emotions from deciding actions, but release them to go do their proper job of being a sentry, to tell us when action is needed. We will see Jesus choose to endure the cross, despite a great desire to avoid it.

By following this approach, we can take our feelings (like our thoughts) captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). If these emotions are in line with God’s word, they serve as an affirmation of what is true and good. But often our emotions tempt us away from what God commands of us.

Then we have the opportunity to make three excellent choices, the choices exemplified by Jesus. All three are from the category of the three things we each control as humans (who to trust, what perspective to adopt, and what actions to take):

* We can choose who we trust, and choose to trust God rather than trusting whatever our emotions happen to be suggesting.
* We can choose which perspective we will take, and adopt God’s perspective, rather than what we are feeling in the moment.
* And we can choose to follow God’s way rather than whatever way our emotions might suggest.

Despite His intense emotions (Isaiah 53:11), indeed to the contrary of His feelings, Jesus chose to trust God (Matthew 26:39), seek God’s perspective (Hebrews 12:2), and obey God to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2:8). And because Jesus did these things, “God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9) and “will allot Him a portion with the great” (Isaiah 53:12).

Jesus chose to trust that “the joy set before Him” of being elevated and honored to sit “at the right hand of the throne of God” was worth the “shame” heaped upon Him. He therefore “endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2).

Again, Jesus set the example for us to follow when we have intense emotions and engage with any emotion. Whether we face dreadful or seemingly fun circumstances, either can tempt us away from following the will of God. Like Jesus, we are exhorted to adopt the same mindset as Christ (Philippians 2:5). We are empowered to trust God, seek His perspective, and strive to love and serve others in obedience to His command (Matthew 22:39) even in our trials. It is up to us to learn from Jesus’s example, and follow in His ways.

We can always know that the will of God is for us to grow, learn, and be transformed to the person He made us to be (Romans 12:1-2). This is the daily process of being set apart from the world and the flesh, and being placed into the example of Jesus. The scripture sometimes refers to this process as our “sanctification,”

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.”  
(1 Thessalonians 4:3a)

Jesus also asked Peter, James, and John to remain here and keep watch with Me.

Again, perhaps Jesus was trying to draw a measure of comfort from being near them in His distress. Jesus’s command to keep watch with Me, is an expression to watch out and be alert for danger. There were two imminent dangers for which the disciples should keep watch—a physical threat and a spiritual threat.

The physical threat was from the authorities, who at this very moment were preparing to arrest and condemn Jesus and have Him executed by the Roman authorities. They would arrive in force within a couple of hours. Jesus could have meant for the disciples to keep watch for these authorities.

But the context indicates that Jesus’s primary concern was for His disciples to keep watch over their own hearts and minds—so they would be prepared for what was soon to come. Jesus wanted them to overcome temptation. This is indicated by what He said to the disciples as recorded by Luke.

“Pray that you may not enter into temptation.”  
(Luke 22:40)

A while later Jesus would awaken the disciples and say something similar to Peter:

“So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”  
(Matthew 26:40b-41)

This was not a prayer to avoid being tempted. Temptation by itself, is not sin (James 1:14). Entering to temptation and acting on it is sin (James 1:15). Jesus was telling His disciples do not “enter into temptation”— i.e. enter into alignment with its evil perspective and in so doing, sin. This was a prayer to be delivered from evil (Matthew 6:11b). Jesus exhorted the disciples to overcome temptation. This might be a picture of what Jesus had in mind when He exhorted the church at Laodicea to overcome temptation as He overcame temptation (Revelation 3:21).

Jesus wanted them to be strong in their faith and ready for what He was about to undergo:

* Jesus did not want His disciples to be afraid when they came to arrest Him and He submitted to their authority (Matthew 26:52-56).
* Jesus did not want His disciples to lose heart when they saw Him unjustly convicted and abused—and He quietly took their scorn (Isaiah 53:7).
* Jesus wanted His disciples to keep the faith when they saw Him humiliated, and beaten, rejected by the crowds, and executed on a Roman cross—and He accepted His suffering (Isaiah 53:7).
* Jesus did not want His disciples to despair when they laid His body in the tomb after He had given up His Spirit (Luke 23:46, John 19:30).

Jesus knew that not losing heart and staying strong in their faith would be extremely difficult for the disciples as these terrible things happened in the coming hours. And He was telling them to pray and keep watch so that they would have faith in God’s plan during these dark hours.

In the next section ([Matthew 26:39](https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-26/matthew-2639/)) we will look more closely at what Jesus prayed during these moments.

**Biblical Text**

**36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. 38 Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.”**