

Matthew 26:36-38

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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](#)" 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](#))

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.](#)

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 perfecter 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.

- **Dismiss:** 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](#)) 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.”