

Willing

Jesus willingly submitted to the Father's redemptive plan.

Life has its challenges, no matter who you are. Sometimes we face difficult situations that happen unexpectedly and uninvited. Think of automobile accidents, illnesses, job losses, or being victimized by someone else's criminal actions. At other times, we intentionally choose to engage difficult circumstances in an effort to make a difference or solve a problem. Examples might include pursuing a potentially dangerous career—law enforcement, emergency management, or the military—or devoting oneself to serve as a missionary or aid worker in challenging regions of the world. No one enjoys suffering, but sometimes we must choose to engage challenges to help others.

What's the most difficult thing you've ever willingly chosen to do in your life? Depending on your age and life experiences, the answer to that question probably ranges from things that are mildly uncomfortable to excruciatingly painful. If we were to ask that question of Jesus, He would no doubt point to His decision to submit to the will of His Father in accomplishing our salvation through His death on the cross. No one has ever been so innocent and yet suffered so deeply. Those who viewed the arrest, beatings, and crucifixion thought that Jesus was experiencing suffering that was forced on Him. We know from God's Word that Jesus' death on the cross was a choice that He made.

In this session, we will observe Jesus' love and submission to the Father's plan and marvel at His love for us. As we reflect on what Jesus willingly did for us, we will be motivated to submit ourselves to His will even if that means enduring suffering for the purpose of making a difference in others' lives.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 22:39-53

In Luke 22:39-46, Jesus led His disciples to the Mount of Olives following the Lord's Supper. He went there to pray and prepare Himself for what He

was about to endure. Jesus also encouraged the disciples to pray for strength against temptation. He then went a short distance away from them and prayed to the Father about His impending death on the cross. Jesus struggled with the severity of taking on the sins of the world but submitted Himself to the Father's plan of redemption. The Father sent an angel from heaven to strengthen Him.

In Luke 22:47-53, a crowd came to where Jesus and His disciples were praying to arrest Him. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus with a kiss, and the mob proceeded to arrest Jesus. One of the disciples cut off the ear of a servant to the high priest. Jesus stopped the disciple's attempted resistance and healed the servant's ear. He then rebuked the cowardice of the religious leaders for arresting Him in private and at night. The mob took Jesus away for trial.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

IN PRAYER (Luke 22:41-46)

Having led His disciples to the Mount of Olives, Jesus withdrew from them to pray. He asked God if there was another way of providing salvation. After an angel appeared to Him, Jesus prayed again with great fervency. Finding His disciples asleep, He awoke them and warned them to pray so that they would not fall into temptation.

VERSE 41

Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and began to pray,

After urging His disciples to pray so that they could avoid falling into temptation, Jesus **withdrew from them about a stone's throw** for private prayer. The phrase *a stone's throw* refers to a short distance. The typical posture for prayer among first-century Jews was standing; however, in Scripture, kneeling in prayer was associated with fervency (see 1 Kings 8:54; Ezra 9:5; Dan. 6:10; Acts 7:60; 9:40).

When Jesus faced His greatest challenge, He chose prayer as His number one priority. Jesus urged His disciples to pray at this time as well, because He knew that they needed prayer to be victorious in the face of unprecedented suffering. Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. The divine characteristics of Jesus such as His omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence cannot be shared by His followers. The human nature of Jesus

presents many essential qualities that His followers can and should imitate. Prayer was an essential practice in Jesus' life and must also be a priority for those who are believers.

Prayer is fundamental for many reasons in the Christian life, and here the importance of providing spiritual strength in the face of temptation is emphasized. We are often urged by health professionals to practice good habits of health and diet to prevent disease. In a similar way, prayer prepares us to resist temptations that could lead us into sin or trials that could weaken our faith. Because we never know when severe temptations will come, we should pursue daily prayer with passion and consistency. Only when we are men and women of fervent prayer will we be prepared for the unexpected challenges that Satan, the world, or our sinful flesh will introduce. If Jesus needed a regular and zealous prayer life, how much more do we need to make prayer a daily priority in our lives?

VERSE 42

**“Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me—
nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”**

The content of Jesus' prayer is stated succinctly and powerfully in this verse. Luke used the Greek term for **Father** that is the basis of the English word *paternal*. (Mark's Gospel adds the familiar Aramaic term *Abba* in the parallel verse, Mark 14:36.) Addressing God in this familiar way was not typical of Jewish prayers in Jesus' day. The vocabulary in approaching the Father that He used and taught His disciples to use revealed an intimate access to the Father that Jesus came to establish for believers.

The phrase **if you are willing** was typical of Jewish prayers and expressed belief in the sovereignty of God as the One who evaluates and determines the answer to every request. The purpose of prayer is not to compel God to do our will but to submit our requests to a wise God who answers according to His best purposes. We know what we desire, but our desires do not always coincide with God's purposes or timing.

This does not mean prayer is meaningless in a predetermined divine plan that cannot be overruled. Our obtaining certain blessings from God is dependent on our asking (see Luke 11:9). Jesus expressed a desire and left the answer to the Father. The prayer was an act of submission. As believers, we know that God hears our prayers and responds with His will (1 John 5:14-15).

The use of the term **cup** to describe an experience—good or bad—is biblical (see Ps. 16:5; Jer. 49:12). Jesus previously used this imagery to ask if His disciples were prepared to suffer with Him (see Matt. 20:22; Mark 10:38). In this verse, He used the term to refer to His suffering and crucifixion. He asked

the Father to **take ... away** the *cup* from Him—if the Father was *willing* to do so. This prayer has puzzled some Bible students because it appears to show a lack of resolve by Jesus in completing His mission. However, the follow-up words **nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done** demonstrate that Jesus was not expressing doubt or having second thoughts. Why, then, did Jesus express a desire to avoid the cross if possible? The following paragraphs offer a few possible answers.

First, the deep emotion expressed in the request emphasized the intense suffering Jesus anticipated. Physically and emotionally, crucifixion was death by torture, and Jesus knew there would be humiliation and beatings that preceded the crucifixion. The greatest aspect of His suffering, however, was unique to Jesus. It involved His taking the wrath of God for all human sin upon Himself on the cross. This is the greatest suffering imaginable; there is truly nothing comparable in the suffering of any other human being. We can never fully understand the depths of suffering Jesus endured to pay the price for our redemption.

A second possible motive behind Jesus' prayer was to demonstrate His sinlessness. As the writer of Hebrews points out, Jesus was "tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). God created the first human beings as sinless in the garden of Eden. But when He tested Adam and Eve's obedience by putting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil off limits to them, they failed the test. They yielded to Satan's temptation and rebelled against God's express will. The test of faith is always whether we will follow our will or God's will. Jesus demonstrated His complete surrender to the Father's will in the most difficult test of His life.

A third possible reason for this request by Jesus was to demonstrate there was no other way other than God's plan to provide for our salvation. Other world religions base the obtaining of salvation on human beings' good works. Jesus' request and subsequent commitment makes clear there is no other way to be saved apart from what He accomplished through His suffering and death on the cross for our sake. In John 14:6, Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

VERSE 43

Then an angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him.

The Father did not remove Jesus' cup of suffering, but He did send **an angel from heaven** to strengthen Jesus. The coming of an angel to minister to Jesus is reminiscent of the angelic help He received early on following His temptations in the wilderness (see Matt. 4:11; Mark 1:13). Jesus' fervent prayer followed by the angel's **strengthening him** demonstrates that the Father listens and often responds immediately to our prayers for help.

VERSE 44

Being in anguish, he prayed more fervently, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Luke then described Jesus as **being in anguish**. The Greek word rendered *anguish* is the basis of our English noun *agony* and its verbal form *agonize*. Jesus was not merely troubled; He was agonizing over the prospect of suffering on the cross. This verse is part of the convincing evidence that Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine. He experienced deep emotions just as we do in stressful situations. We also see the courage of Jesus on display as He overcame the anxiety created by His anticipation of such bitter and violent suffering.

Nevertheless, with the angel's help to strengthen Him, Jesus was able to pray even **more fervently** ("more earnestly," KJV; ESV; NIV). Of the four New Testament Gospel writers, only Luke reported the dramatic detail that Jesus' **sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground**. Interpretations of this phrase vary. Some Bible scholars contend the description should be interpreted figuratively, not literally. That is, Jesus was so fervent in His praying that sweat dripped from His brow as though He were bleeding. Other scholars propose that the intensity of Jesus' agony prompted an actual physical reaction in which blood actually came through the pores of Jesus' skin. In either interpretation, the description shows the physical agony Jesus literally felt as He prayed about His impending suffering.

VERSE 45

When he got up from prayer and came to the disciples, he found them sleeping, exhausted from their grief.

After Jesus' intense time of prayer, He returned to His disciples and **found them sleeping**. The reason given for their being asleep was that they were **exhausted from their grief**. They did not have, as Jesus had, the full understanding of what was about to take place. Evidently, however, they were aware from Jesus' mood and statements He made that something terrible was soon to happen. Anyone who has experienced the emotions associated with grief can attest that grief saps our energy and drains us emotionally.

VERSE 46

"Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray, so that you won't fall into temptation."

The question Jesus asked—"Why are you sleeping?"—was a warning to the disciples, not a request for explanation. Jesus urged them **to get up and**

pray, so that they would not **fall into temptation**. Jesus knew that His disciples would need the strength only prayer could provide to withstand the pressures of the next days. Their lack of prayer would prove to be a weakness for the disciples in the face of some upcoming temptations. Physically, the disciples craved sleep, but spiritually they needed prayer. Spiritual needs are believers' highest priority, because our battles are not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces in the heavens (see Eph. 6:12).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Prayer" on pages 1291–1293 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are the main purposes of prayer in the believer's spiritual life? How does the example of Jesus emphasize to you the importance of prayer for believers?

IN BETRAYAL (Luke 22:47-50)

Judas led a mob to the garden and betrayed Jesus with a kiss. One of the disciples pulled a sword and struck the high priest's servant, severing an ear.

VERSE 47

While he was still speaking, suddenly a mob came, and one of the Twelve named Judas was leading them. He came near Jesus to kiss him,

The phrase **while He was still speaking** links this verse with the previous verses and suggests there was no gap between Jesus' awakening His disciples and the appearance of **a mob**. While Jesus prayed, the plot to arrest Him had been put in motion. The group was likely comprised of Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus and temple police (or perhaps hired Roman soldiers). The mob was led by **Judas**, who apparently had left the upper room when Jesus identified him as the one who would betray Him (see John 13:30). Luke's description of Judas as **one of the Twelve** underscores the pain of the betrayal for Jesus. This was one of the men who had walked with Jesus and watched Him minister to so many needy people!

Adding to the shame of the betrayal, Judas **came near to Jesus to kiss him**. In the context of the ancient Near East, a kiss on the cheek (or on both cheeks) signified friendship and welcome (see Luke 7:45; Rom. 16:16). Judas chose a greeting that was intended to show great trust and distorted it into a signal of deep treachery.

VERSE 48

but Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

Jesus’ penetrating question to Judas evidently struck the betrayer’s conscience like a jagged rock. Later, Judas would be overwhelmed by such deep remorse for his actions that it led to taking his own life (see Matt. 27:3-5). Judas was betraying not just his Teacher but **the Son of Man**—the very Messiah whom the heavenly Father had sent to provide salvation!

Many people—believers and non-believers—have speculated throughout the years about Judas’s relationship with God and his possible motivation for betraying Jesus. The view that Judas was somehow collaborating with his Teacher in a plan to guarantee Jesus’ becoming a beloved martyr has been thoroughly discredited. There simply is no biblical evidence (or logic) to support such a view. Indeed, the Scriptures make clear that Judas’ betrayal was an act of someone under Satan’s control (see John 13:2,27; 17:12; Acts 1:25). The motivation of Judas to betray Jesus could be as simple as greed or doubts about Jesus as the Messiah. His story highlights the possibility of being exposed to the deepest spiritual truths but then rejecting them as an act of a sinful and rebellious will. Judas’s example reveals the possibility of being a church member or even a recognized leader without ever having truly believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

VERSE 49

When those around him saw what was going to happen, they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?”

The apostles (**those around him**) then realized that the mob led by Judas had come to arrest Jesus. The words **should we strike with the sword** are expressed in a grammatical construction that implies awaiting a command rather than asking for permission. The Greek word translated *sword* could refer either to a dagger or a full-length blade. Obviously, at least one or more of the disciples was armed. While they might not have had a full understanding of the events that were about to transpire, they appear to have anticipated the possibility of danger. Their first reaction to the mob that included armed soldiers was to resist with force. The disciples showed courage initially; but their actions were misguided, as Jesus’ response to them revealed.

VERSE 50

Then one of them struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear.

Apparently without waiting for Jesus' reply, one of the disciples took action. He **struck the high priest's servant and cut off** the man's **right ear**. John's Gospel specifically names both the aggressive disciple—Simon Peter—and the high priest's servant—Malchus (see John 18:10). The impetuous nature of the attack fits with the description of Peter in the Gospels. Moreover, the detail of Peter's severing the servant's *right ear* underscores how carefully Luke researched and reported these chaotic events.

The severing of the servant's ear likely suggests that Peter was attempting a lethal blow to the neck or head but missed in the dim lighting. In any case, the arrest of Jesus quickly turned into a confusing and violent situation. If He had not intervened, there likely would have been more casualties as the two groups engaged in hand-to-hand combat. In taking control of the situation, Jesus spared the lives of His disciples who would live on to accomplish great things in the power of the Holy Spirit after the Day of Pentecost.

Matthew 26:53 reveals that Jesus was hardly defenseless in the garden of Gethsemane. In constraining His disciples from fighting, He asked, "Do you think that I cannot call on my Father, and he will provide me here and now with more than twelve legions of angels?" Jesus was not taken because He was overpowered but because He chose to surrender to God's will in paying the price for the salvation of sinners. This fact, of course, was not evident to Jesus' enemies who came to arrest Him. Their intentions were evil, but God was overruling their plans to accomplish His will.

We as believers should never forget this important truth as we see God allowing persecution of the church in our day. The suffering of faithful believers in the gospel mission always has a larger divine purpose. We can be confident that God is in control and will never leave or forsake His people.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled "Humility" on page 777 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are some important areas in today's culture that could benefit from Christians practicing humility? How can we as Christians imitate Jesus' humility in our interactions?

IN ACTION (Luke 22:51-53)

Jesus took control of the chaotic scene and restored the servant's severed ear. Jesus would first address His disciples and then turn His attention to the mob that came to arrest Him. Jesus displayed great courage and love for sinners as He surrendered to the arresting mob.

VERSE 51

But Jesus responded, “No more of this!” And touching his ear, he healed him.

Jesus quickly put an end to the disciples’ efforts to confront the mob with force. The words **no more of this** (“suffer ye thus far,” KJV) were addressed to His disciples who were resisting. In reacting this way, Jesus put into practice His own teachings in the Sermon on the Mount about loving one’s enemies and refusing to retaliate (see Matt. 5:38-45).

Among the writers of the four Gospels, only Luke recorded that Jesus restored the servant’s **ear** and **healed him**. Jesus continued His ministry of healing even in the last moments before His arrest. Perhaps the healing also calmed the mob and prevented more violence. Some Bible students have wondered why the mob continued with their unjust quest of arresting Jesus even after seeing Him demonstrate mercy and healing power. Maybe some of the crowd did not see the healing in the dim light. Others perhaps refused to be persuaded by what they saw and simply decided to follow orders.

In similar situations, anyone other than Jesus would no doubt be deemed a helpless victim of violence by a superior force. However, because we know who Jesus was and what He was capable of doing, we know that He intentionally chose to surrender to the mob. Motivating His surrender was His love for the Father in fulfilling His mission and His love for sinners in providing for our salvation.

Jesus’ response is an example for His followers then and now. Believers do not always have to demand their rights or retaliate when they are attacked. The fleshly temptation is to retaliate in kind with angry words of condemnation or violent actions. Jesus taught His followers to love their enemies and show them a different response based on their faith in God. Jesus trusted the Father’s plan, and He wants His followers to do the same during difficult times in their lives.

VERSE 52

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a criminal?”

Jesus then addressed the mob that came to arrest Him. He mentioned three groups of participants, all of which were associated with the Jewish council, or Sanhedrin. The **chief priests** controlled and administered the Jerusalem temple’s sacrificial system. They probably were Sadducees. The **temple police** likely were Levites (descendants of the tribe of Levi) who were responsible

for guarding the temple treasury and maintaining order in the temple courtyards. The **elders** may have included those who were the chief teachers of the Mosaic law. Luke indicated in 22:4 that Judas had conspired with the *chief priests* and *temple police* in his plan to betray Jesus to Jewish authorities.

Jesus questioned why the mob thought they needed to **come out with swords and clubs** to arrest Him. The words **as if I were a criminal** were intentionally ironic. The Greek word translated *criminal* could refer to either a common thief or a political revolutionary. The irony of treating Jesus as a criminal is stunning. Those who plotted to seize, arrest, and execute Him were the true criminals; Jesus was without sin, and the religious leaders knew it.

We are reminded that the opinions of people can often be the opposite of reality. Only the judgment of God is accurate and final in the end. Jesus was not worried about His reputation with people. He was only concerned about obedience to the Father. May we as believers follow His example!

VERSE 53

Every day while I was with you in the temple, you never laid a hand on me. But this is your hour—and the dominion of darkness.”

Jesus continued to point out the hypocrisy and cowardice of the religious leaders. He referred to His daily practice of teaching in the temple complex. Unlike a revolutionary who operates in the dark and secretly, Jesus operated in the light—that is, in public. Of course, the reason the religious leaders did not arrest Jesus in the temple courtyards was because they feared the reaction of the people who listened to Him.

The last phrases in this verse have an ominous tone and reference. When Jesus said the words **this is your hour**, He was referring to the appointed time of their actions that originated with Satan in **the dominion of darkness**. It was literally dark when the mob arrested Jesus in the garden, but the *dominion of darkness* was the ungodly spiritual realm of sin and wickedness. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ would make it possible for sinners to escape the kingdom of darkness and find the light of forgiveness and eternal life.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the article titled “Darkness” on page 390 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Why is the rule of Satan referred to as a “kingdom of darkness”? How does the kingdom of darkness contrast with the kingdom of light?