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The Passion of Christ

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WHAT'S IN YOUR TEACHING GUIDE

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:

- to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
- to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
- to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

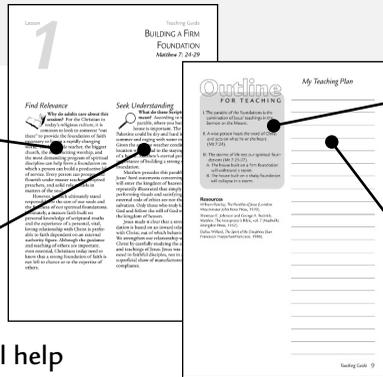
Teacher Helps

Find Relevance

helps you zero in on why each session is important for the adults you teach.

Seek Understanding

presents helpful Bible Background informations and insights that will help you better understand the Scripture.



Teaching Outline

provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Study Guide.

My Teaching Plan is a convenient place for you to make notes for teaching the session.

Teacher Options

Offer Illustrations presents material that will help you paint a picture of the session. This section often presents items from church history, current events, or interesting anecdotes that help introduce the session.

Discussion provides teaching activities that will help learners discuss the Scripture text.

Questions presents multiple collections of questions for various kinds of adults.

Involve Learners helps learners become actively involved with the Scripture text for a particular session.

Closure gives you a means for wrapping up the session.

You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.

PRACTICING OUR FAITH

Matthew 23:1-3, 29-39

Find Relevance



Why do/should adults care about this session? A national survey was conducted recently about the effects of culture and society on today's youth. Among other questions, the poll asked, "Who do you, as parents, believe should be good role models for your children?" The most frequent answers were government leaders, school teachers, and ministers. In this day and time when community, national, and international news can be brought into our homes in a split second through televisions, radios, and computers, it is much easier to scrutinize the behavior and beliefs of ministers, teachers, and government officials than in previous years.

Unfortunately, in recent months, we have seen instances in which the actions of these hoped-for role models seem quite different from their claims, proclamations, professions, and political promises. Consequently, the issues facing our society are great. How do we explain the inconsistencies in the lives of the leaders our children admire and respect? How can we be more intentional about being consistent in our own lives? The example of the Pharisees in today's lesson demonstrates that this task is not an easy one.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? The content of today's passage concludes Jesus' public ministry and his interchange with the scribes and Pharisees. The passage begins with a message to the crowd about the scribes and Pharisees, warning them to avoid following the practices of such leaders who fail to connect word and deed. After these words of warning, Jesus declares seven *woes* concerning the Pharisaic teachers. *Woes* were used for expressing divine displeasure. The formula is commonly found in the prophetic literature, such as the Book of Isaiah.

This particular passage focuses on the seventh woe. "Woe to you...for you build tombs of the prophets..." (23:29-30). Their fathers killed the prophets, and the scribes and Pharisees build and adorn tombs or monuments in honor of those same prophets. In so doing, they piously claim that if they had lived in those days, they would have acted differently from their fathers. In reply, Jesus says that in their own remarks, they admit showing the same negative attitude toward God's messengers. In rejecting Jesus and his disciples, the Pharisees are continuing the practice of their ancestors. It must be noted, however, that Jesus did not deliver his words in verse 37 in a spirit of vindictiveness. His lament over Jerusalem frames the laments of woe in words of love

(Augsburger, 265). The picture is that of a mother hen seeing a storm coming. Frantically, she tries to gather her brood under her wings to save them from it. But they ignore her calls. Jesus saw the storm coming. Rebellion was in the heart of the Jewish nation. Repeatedly he had called to her, but she would not listen (Hobbs, 330). Jesus then declares that they will not see him again until he returns in glory (23:39), and with these final words, Jesus leaves the Temple. Truly, their house was left to them!

My Teaching Plan

Outline Introduction: Matthew 23 contains some of the harshest words ever spoken by one person to another. If these words were spoken by someone given to sudden outbursts of anger, we could easily ignore them. But these words were spoken by Jesus, the One who was ever gentle, kind, and merciful. Therefore, these words require more careful consideration. Specifically, these words were Jesus' condemnation of "the entire system of religion characterized by Pharisaic self-righteousness that evolved into hypocrisy and outward form but which were devoid of any inner spiritual reality" (Hobbs, 314).

- I. Jesus judges the religious leaders (23:1-3)
 - A. Jesus addresses the crowds and his disciples (23:1).
 - B. As legal experts and interpreters of the Law, the scribes and Pharisees succeed Moses (23:2).
 - C. Jesus affirms respect for the Pharisees' role in representing the Law, but says people are to avoid following the practice of the leaders who failed to connect word and deed (23:3).
- II. Jesus' final words in the Temple (23:29-36)
 - A. Jesus directs the seventh woe to the scribes and Pharisees (23:29).
 - B. Jesus claims that the Pharisees build monuments to past prophets in order to distance themselves from the murders perpetuated by their ancestors (23:30).
 - C. Jesus says that their own statements and actions prove they are the descendants of murderers (23:31).
 - D. Jesus implies that the scribes and Pharisees are acting in a manner that "fills up" the pattern of their ancestors (23:32).
 - E. Those responsible for the murder of God's prophets will suffer the consequences (23:33).
 - F. The Pharisees will persecute and murder the prophetic figures of the new covenant even as their ancestors persecuted and murdered the Old Testament prophets (23:34-36).
- III. Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (23:37-39)
 - A. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, for the people were not willing to hear his words (23:37).
 - B. Jesus says that God has forsaken the Temple, abandoning it and the Pharisees to judgment (23:38).
 - C. Jesus leaves the Temple, saying that they will not see him again until he returns in his glory (23:39).

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ The Seven Kinds of Pharisees

The Jewish Talmud includes a listing of seven kinds of Pharisees. The “Shoulder Pharisee” meticulously keeps the Law, but wears his good deeds on his shoulder so that others will notice. The “Wait-a-Little Pharisee” accepts the Law, but always finds an excuse for delaying its practice. He *says*, but will not *do*. The “Bruised Pharisee,” believing that a rabbi should not speak to a woman in public, even his own wife, and fearing to look on a woman lest he be guilty of lust, shuts his eyes and is constantly running into buildings or other obstacles. Consequently, he is always bruised. The “Hump-back Pharisee” displays his humility by walking humped over. He drags his feet along the ground, and is constantly tumbling or falling. The “Ever-reckoning Pharisee” is constantly keeping books on his good deeds, thinking that each one puts God a little further in debt to him. The “Fearing Pharisee” lives in constant dread of divine punishment and fear of ceremonial pollution. He is always cleaning the outside of the cup and platter as an evidence of his goodness. Finally, the “God-fearing Pharisee” truly loves God and keeps the Law as a delight rather than a duty (Hobbs, 315).

Since the Talmud depicts six bad types of Pharisees, we can conclude that these religious leaders were struggling with spiritual vitality. In some instances, they had undoubtedly divorced moral conduct from spiritual truth. In this light, we can understand Jesus’ stern words of condemnation.

○ Martin Luther: A Prophet of Reform

Hypocrisy did not end among religious leaders with the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. Throughout the centuries, the organized church in many instances has not practiced what she preached, and many prophetic voices have called the church’s actions into question. One such prophetic voice was Martin Luther. In *Word of God across the Ages*, Bill Leonard tells the story of this prophet of reform (Leonard, 38):

In October 1517, [Luther challenged] the very foundation of the church of his day, a church which sincerely believed that it was the only rightful interpreter of the Word of God. It alone had truth and tolerated no deviancy from it. To dispute prevailing dogmas was to be branded a heretic and face the consequences. The fires burned, the heretics were offered up while the Church preached its dogma and talked the language of the Scriptures.

The Church possessed orthodoxy but its values and behaviors had become so bound to the culture of the age that few could separate the church from the world. This audacious German monk cried out to the pious protectors of orthodoxy: You read the scriptures but you know little of the Word of God. You believe many doctrines but your behavior and worship are worldly and shallow.

Martin Luther was a prophetic voice who challenged the church of his day, and who changed the course of church history.

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

○ Unchurched American

A significant Gallup study on “The Unchurched American” found that the unchurched in America are, more often than not, persons with religious convictions and a personal faith. They just happen not to participate in the life of the church or synagogue (Stokes, 77). The unchurched respondents to the study indicated that they believe in God, read the Bible, pray and reflect on life’s meaning, but are not interested in organized religion. The majority of the respondents claimed that the hypocrisy of churchgoers kept them from attending church. They said that most of the church members and ministers they have known reflect an inconsistency between their words and actions.

Questions

- Reflect on your own church. Are there ways in which your church could be judged as hypocritical?
- Do the members of your church practice what they preach?
- In what ways could your church be a better model of integrity in its mission and ministry?
- In what ways does the church, in the universal sense, send mixed messages to the secular world?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- What is the significance of referring to Abel and Zechariah in verse 35? (Refer to Genesis 4:1-12 and 2 Chronicles 24:20-22.)
- In verse 37, Jesus compares his love and care for the people of Israel to that of a mother hen gathering her chicks. What do you think of such imagery used to

refer to Christ? Can you think of other images that reflect the love of Christ toward us?

Questions for All Adults

- Do you think there are prophets among us today? If so, who are they? How does society respond to these prophets?
- How would you decide whether to believe or reject someone who claimed to be a prophet today?
- What criteria do you use to determine the legitimacy of a prophet?

Questions for Mature Adults

- James (2:17) says that faith without works is dead. What do you think James meant?
- The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were hypocritical. Have you known religious leaders or ministers who have failed to practice what they preach? If so, how did you deal with the disappointment?

Questions for Younger Adults

- What is integrity? Describe someone you know who clearly models integrity.
- What are some examples of previous generations not practicing what they preach? What can we learn from their mistakes?

Questions for Adults with Children

- With your children, does your “yes” mean yes and your “no” mean no?
- Have you ever said to your children “Do as I say, not as I do”? What lesson are they learning from such words?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ Practicing Integrity

James (2:17) writes that faith without works is dead. Clearly, faith and practice are to be integrated in the life of a Christian. In other words, Christians must have integrity. On a marker board or chalkboard, write “integrity.” Ask the group to respond by giving various synonyms for the word. (Synonyms include character, honesty, honor, principle, virtue, purity, self-respect, and morality.) Write their responses on the board. Next, look at each of the synonyms, one by one, and ask the group to respond with ways in which each trait can be put into practice.

Questions

- How easy or difficult was it to think of ways in which to transfer these traits into practical ways of behaving?
- How easy or difficult is it to actually put our faith into practice every day?
- What keeps us from having integrity?

○ Lamenting

In the final verses of today’s text, Jesus is heartbroken and speaks movingly of his pain for those who persist in turning their backs on him despite all his efforts to love them. Jesus laments his rejection by the people of Jerusalem.

Laments are prayers and utterances used to express deep anguish and sorrow about painful situations or experiences. We might lament in any of a number of different situations. Most of us have experienced some form of pain or anguish brought about by the illness or death of a loved one, or the betrayal of a friend. We may also have committed some sin for which we feel deep regret and sorrow. Christ lamented the sin of the people of Jerusalem and their rejection of him.

Provide each class member a pencil and a copy of the Resource Kit page “Lament”

(p. 23). Ask them to write a five-line lament about something that troubles them deeply. Allow 10 minutes for the activity. Provide an opportunity for those who wish to share their laments with the group.

Questions

- How easy or difficult was it for you to write about your experience?
- How easy or difficult was it for you to share your lament with the group?
- How must Jesus have felt in attempting to share his anguish with those around him who would not listen?

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

Lead the group in singing or praying the following words of “Take My Life, and Let It Be” (Frances R. Havergal, 1836-1879) as a benediction of commitment to following Christ with our will as well as our behavior.

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.

Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee;
Take my voice and let me sing
Always only, for my King.

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my will, and make it Thine,
It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own,
It shall be Thy royal throne.

2

SELLING
OUT*Matthew 26:14-25; 27:3-10**Find Relevance***Why do/should adults care about this session?**

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle observed that humans are social animals. Seventeenth-century English poet-minister John Donne noted that no individual is an island. We are connected in some way with family, friends, or coworkers. Our relationships can bring great joy and satisfaction through companionship, shared interests, and mutual support. Yet our relationships also bring the potential for deep pain, pain that can come when a friend or family member betrays our confidence, damages our trust, or abandons the relationship. It has often been said that the people we love the greatest are the persons we hurt the deepest. In today's text, one of Jesus' closest companions, one of his disciples, betrays him. Jesus knew the joy and grief of relationships, and today's betrayal ends in tragedy for all involved. Jesus and Judas both died; one gave his life for others, while the other took his life in an utterly hopeless act. Today's text can help us learn how to deal with betrayal and how to find and offer forgiveness when those whom we love hurt us.

Seek Understanding**What do these Scriptures mean?**

In today's text, we read of Judas's betrayal of Christ.

The passage opens with Judas's negotiations with the chief priests. According to the Gospel of John, Judas was greedy (Jn 12:6) and went to the Jewish leaders with selfish interests. Judas could have acted in this way for a number of reasons, but he probably anticipated the messianic kingdom in terms of Jewish nationalistic expectations. Disappointed when it became clear that Jesus was not an aggressive, forceful revolutionary, Judas took things into his own hands, wanting to goad Jesus into action. Judas probably never intended or expected Jesus to die, and this prospect may account for his willingness to sell his Master for such a paltry sum (26:14). The thirty pieces of silver totaled approximately \$21.60. (Augsburger, 289)

In Matthew 26:17-19, the disciples make the arrangements for the traditional Passover meal. At the appropriate time later in the evening, Jesus sits down at the meal with the Twelve (26:20). During the meal, Jesus makes a shattering announcement: one of his own disciples would betray him (26:21). One after the other, the disciples ask Jesus, "Surely not I, Lord?" (26:22). Then Matthew suggests that Judas waited until last to speak, and then adjusted his question: "Surely not I, Rabbi?" (26:25).

The end of the passage describes the death of Judas. As previously suggested, Judas may never have thought that his betrayal of Jesus would end in the latter's death. Perhaps he only meant to force Jesus to come forth as the King, the Messiah. When Judas realized that Jesus was to die, he felt immense remorse and took the thirty pieces of silver back to the chief priests (27:3). Judas admits that he betrayed an innocent person, and the chief priests refuse to consider his guilt (27:4). Judas then goes away from the Temple and commits suicide (27:5). The thirty pieces of silver were considered "blood money" and could not be put back into the Temple treasury (27:6). So the chief priests took the money and bought land to be used as a cemetery for strangers (27:7).

From the story of Judas, we learn that one can act like a disciple and not be fully dedicated. We also know that the heart can be deceptive, and behavior rationalized. (Augsburger, 306)

My Teaching Plan

Introduction: In the Gospel accounts, Judas plays a substantial role in the Passion narratives. But it is the Gospel of Matthew alone that recounts his tragic death. All the Gospels agree that Judas was one of Jesus' disciples and that his action was one of betrayal. None of them explains why he acted in this way. Regardless of his reasons or motives, Judas helped prepare Christ's way to the cross.

- I. The Betrayal by Judas (26: 14-16)
 - A. Judas goes to the chief priests (26:14).
 - B. Judas negotiates with the chief priests (26:15).
 - C. Judas plots the betrayal (26:16).

- II. Jesus Celebrates the Passover (26:17-25)
 - A. The disciples prepare for the Passover meal (26:17-19).
 - B. Jesus eats with his disciples and makes a startling announcement (26:20-21).
 - C. The disciples pose a question (26:22).
 - D. Jesus identifies his betrayer (26:23-25).

- III. The Death of Judas (27:3-10)
 - A. Judas returns the thirty pieces of silver (27:3-4).
 - B. Judas hangs himself (27:5).
 - C. The blood money is put to use (27:6-10).

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Psalm 55: A Lament of a Friend's Betrayal

It is not enemies who taunt me—I could bear that; it is not adversaries who deal insolently with me—I could hide from them. But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend, with whom I kept pleasant company; we walked in the house of God with the throng (Psalm 55:12-14).

Questions

- Why might such a psalm have been written?
- Do these words give us any comfort for today?
- How have others betrayed you? How have you betrayed others?

○ A Prayer against Indifference

*O Majesty, O Magnificence, O Mystery, come!
Be hammer, and break our indifference.
Be sun, and splinter our shadows.
Be wind, and scatter our despair.
Yea, in the dry country of our souls,
Let thy grace rain;
So that we take root in thee, and grow.
Make of us trees strong in all seasons,
Bearing good fruit,
Giving shade to all weariness
And shelter to them that are lost.
So we pray to the glory of Jesus Christ
Who made the crosstree
Green and flourishing forever.
Amen.*

Arnold Kenseth (Tirabassi and Eddy, 156)

We may never betray Jesus as did Judas, but our behaviors and attitudes can cause Christ pain and suffering in other ways. One means of betrayal is indifference. Perhaps our betrayal comes from our indifference to the story of the Passion, the suffering of Christ. We often skip the difficult parts of the story and head directly for Easter. We may think we know the story so well that it has lost its meaning.

Questions

- How does this indifference or apathy seem like betrayal?
- How might we connect with characters like Judas in order to experience the story of Christ's suffering again?
- How might connecting anew with Christ's Passion give new meaning to Easter?
- How might your church's observance of Holy Week aid in your renewal?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Persons can feel betrayed in numerous ways. Ask your group to name some reasons people might feel betrayed. List their responses on the board. The following are some common reasons for feeling betrayed that can be added to your list, if not already included.

Unfaithfulness in marriage

Telling of secrets

Disillusionment with a person, place, or opportunity

Misrepresentation or lies

Not following through with responsibilities

False pretenses

When your list is complete, ask the group to respond to the following questions.

Questions

- What are some common responses to betrayal?
- What are “appropriate ways” to deal with feelings of betrayal?
- How can we offer support to persons who have been betrayed?
- When do feelings of betrayal serve only our self-centeredness?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- In verse 25, Judas questions Jesus about who the betrayer will be, saying, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” Jesus makes an odd reply: “You have said so.” What do you think the other disciples did or thought?
- Do you think Jesus gave Judas a way out or an opportunity to change his mind?
- In chapter 27, the chief priests refuse to put the money in the Temple treasury because it is “blood money.” What do

you think about this decision? In what ways do we offer tainted goods back to our church or even to God?

Questions for All Adults

- What do you think might have been Judas’s reasons for betraying Jesus? How are we affected by his actions?
- How are we tempted by the same desires that may have consumed Judas?
- Why does Judas kiss Jesus to identify him? Why does the kiss Judas gives Jesus strike us so deeply?

Questions for Mature Adults

- How has the way you have heard this story interpreted changed over the years?
- What is your best understanding of Judas’s *motives*? What *reasons* do you think Judas might have given for his actions?
- How have you felt betrayed?
- What advice would you offer others about the potential for pain in relationships?

Questions for Younger Adults

- In what ways do you think your generation has become distrustful? Why?
- Trust is necessary in any significant relationship. How do you work to develop and maintain trust in your relationships?
- Consider this statement: “We hurt the ones we love the most.” Is it true? If so, how? If not, why not?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How can you help your children when they feel betrayed by friends or family? In what ways does betrayal occur?
- What would you emphasize as you tell the story of Judas and Jesus to your child?
- Teenagers sometimes feel betrayed by their parents, even though the parents have their child’s best interest in mind. How do you help your teen deal with these feelings?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ A Betrayer's Motives

Play a selection from a recording of the music from *Jesus Christ Superstar* such as "Everything's All Right." This song is about the woman in Bethany who anoints Jesus with costly perfume, and it includes Judas's response to her actions. Lead the group to discuss how Judas has been portrayed to modern readers.

Questions

- Is skepticism the same as betrayal?
- Was Judas always on the outside, or did he perceive himself in this way?
- Do you think Judas was free to choose his course of action?

This same story of betrayal in John 12:1-11 suggests that Judas was in charge of finances and was probably dipping into the money bag all along. What do you think might have motivated him toward such greed? Immediately after this story in Matthew, Judas met with the chief priests. Matthew 26:16 notes that "from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him." Do you think that the events in Bethany might have sparked Judas to behave in this way?

○ What Does It Mean to You?

Ask the class to organize several small groups and have them read through today's passage together. Ask them to respond to the following questions:

1. What is the most troubling part of this story for you?
2. What seemed new to you about this story as we studied it today?
3. Do you think Christ forgave Judas for the latter's betrayal? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever betrayed a friend? Have you ever betrayed Christ? After several minutes, ask each group to share their responses.

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

End your class session by asking the group to stand in a circle holding hands. Ask for persons to pray together by naming a word prayer (one word or a short phrase of concern). These prayers should be spontaneous, not relying on a system of taking turns around the circle. Class members may offer prayers more than once if so led. You might consider sharing this prayer with eyes open, as a way of being committed to each other.

Complete your session by reading the following meditation, while the class bows their heads prayerfully.

This is a day to remember.
We remember the Passover Jesus
shared with his disciples.
We remember the new covenant
of broken bread and cup.
We remember the night alone in the
garden.
We remember his arrest, his trial,
and his suffering.
And today, we remember the betrayal
of his friend.
Go, in the name of the Christ
who does not betray us.
Go, and remember. Amen.

(Based on a litany from Duck and Tirabassi, 59-60)

FAITH AND TEMPTATION

Matthew 26:36-46

Find Relevance



Why do/should adults care about this session? Christian educator Lewis Sherrill once said, “At every stage throughout life, man is confronted in some manner by the living God in the crises of life. In each confrontation, the human soul is challenged to growth and further maturity. At every stage or crisis, he can go forward in faith or shrink back in fear” (Cox 200).

Each day we encounter situations that affect our daily activities and alter our schedules. Somehow we adapt and move on. Sometimes, however, we encounter situations or crises that test our relationships, challenge our beliefs, and shake the very ground of our existence. These situations can range from our making a life-changing decision to our dealing with the unexpected death of a loved one. It is precisely at these crisis times when our faith can come into question, and we are catapulted into the dark night of the soul. How we respond at such times will make all the difference in our search for a more mature faith. We, like Christ in the garden, can respond with the conviction that God is ever present, or like the disciples who could not persevere and stay awake, we can shrink away from the crisis.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? Jesus led his disciples to a garden called Gethsemane, where he wrestled in prayer over the crisis before him, his impending arrest and death. Leaving eight disciples behind to wait (26:36), Jesus took Peter, James, and John—a small inner circle—to be close to him during this period of anguish (26:37). Jesus shared his deep sorrow with them, an anguish so intense and exhausting that the disciples fell asleep (26:39-40). This account is a moving story of Jesus’ separation from his disciples at the fiercest point of his crisis (Augsburger, 298).

Another important point of this story is the spirit of Christ’s prayers. His words “Abba Father” express the closest relationship with God as he submitted to the divine will. Christ’s will and God’s will were one in relation to the suffering, the “passion” of Christ. Christ accepted the necessity of “drinking the cup” alone and fulfilling salvation history. (Augsburger, 298)

Like most humans, Jesus strongly desired to seek relief from the pain and suffering. The first prayer includes an explicit request (supplication): “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me”; the second and third prayers repeat Jesus’ submission to God, which may also be understood as a request for God to take charge of the situation: “Your will be done”

Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Thought from Robert Fulghum

In, *It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It*, Robert Fulghum states (Fulghum, 8):

I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge—That myth is more potent than history. I believe that dreams are more powerful than facts—That hope always triumphs over experience—That laughter is the only cure for grief. And I believe that love is stronger than death.

Questions

- What do you believe about grief and death?
- How did Jesus face the issues of grief and death?
- What part did prayer have for him in the process?
- How did he look to his disciples to support him in the process?
- What losses do you think Jesus was mourning in the garden?

○ God of Grace and God of Glory

God of Grace and God of Glory,
On Thy people pour Thy power;
Crown Thine ancient church's story;
Bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
For the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.

Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969)

This hymn by Fosdick speaks well to our need for wisdom and courage when facing difficult situations.

Questions

- How do we remain faithful when tempted?
- What should we expect from God during these times?
- What “wisdom” or “courage” do we need during times of crisis?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Today's story has an element of deep sorrow for Christ. Why do we so often focus on the actions of the disciples rather than on the sadness of Christ? We find it difficult to talk about many events in life because they connect us to despair.

Consider the following crises, tragedies, and other circumstances:

- The death of a loved one
- The loss of a pregnancy
- Divorce
- War
- The state of the world today
- Domestic violence
- Sexual abuse
- Difficult decisions or changes

Questions

- What other situations are often occasions of great sadness?
- How can we help persons experiencing despair?
- What do we expect from God during these times?
- Does God mourn these situations with us?
- Does God intervene to change the situation?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- In verse 37, Jesus is described as “grieved and agitated.” We do not usually hear these kinds of descriptions about Jesus. What does it tell us about Jesus? Why do you think he felt this way?
- In this story, the disciples apparently cannot stay awake. Why were they so tired? In what ways do you fall asleep when others are facing difficult situations?
- How does Jesus express his grief?

Questions for All Adults

- What is one of your sorrows or disappointments?
- To what community of disciples have you turned when you have been in your own *Gethsemane*?
- How have you, like the disciples, been tempted by fatigue, boredom, or apathy?

Questions for Mature Adults

- How have you lived through disappointments or crises in your life?
- How would you describe your experience of grief? What people, events, or decisions have brought you the most grief?
- What advice could you offer to someone experiencing temptation? Sorrow?

Questions for Younger Adults

- What places offer you peace or comfort?
- What words, if any, could you offer to someone in pain?
- When, if at any time, has the pain of others seemed unimportant to you? In what ways have you been tempted to “fall asleep,” that is, to ignore others’ suffering? What have you learned from your experience?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How can you help your children deal with grief? Disappointment?
- How can you teach your children to care about the thoughts and feelings of others in difficult situations?
- What kind of response is appropriate to children who feel “tempted”?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ Defining Temptation

Divide the class into small groups and have them read through today's Scripture passages together. Ask them to respond to the following questions:

1. In our politically correct world, language is very important. What comes to our minds when we think of temptation? How do we define "temptation"? Is there a better word to describe our feelings or thoughts about difficult choices?
2. How does our faith affect our choices? Do we really consider making "Christian choices"? Do we pray when making difficult choices? How do we expect God to respond when we pray during difficult times?
3. What are ways we can resist fatigue, boredom, and apathy in our lives? In our church?

After several minutes, ask each group to share their responses.

○ Faithful Options

On a chalkboard, write the headings "Temptation" and "Faith." Ask the group to list common temptations in our society. List as many as possible under the Temptation heading. Then have the group consider each temptation as a faith challenge or area for growth. Propose ways that our faith can help us work through or even avoid each temptation. There may be several "faithful" options for each temptation. Close this activity by discussing the importance of the group process in suggesting options. Ask if they think they would have thought of all the possible options on their own. Remind them that Christians are united and connected in a faith community. We can best resist temptation together as community.

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

Give each person a copy of the Resource Kit page (p. 24) for this session and share the following litany together.

Leader: Who will come this day to stand with Jesus?

Group: Who is willing to face hostile detractors and accusers?

Leader: We are not sure we want to stand with Jesus.

Group: We are not certain what or whom to believe.

Leader: The Christ comes once more to our cities, our churches, and our lives.

Group: The reign of love among all people is needed.

Leader: We doubt that love is a practical force for today.

Group: We are skeptical of humility amid life's powerful ones.

Leader: Before our eyes, Jesus is betrayed and abandoned.

Group: Homeless and friendless, Christ is abandoned even by us.

Leader: We have no confidence in our ability to intervene.

Group: We hesitate to risk our own safety for another.

Ask persons to pray silently for courage to stand for and beside someone who is suffering.

FAILURE AND FORGIVENESS

Matthew 26:57-58, 69-75

Find Relevance



Why do/should adults care about this session? If we are honest, we would have to admit that we are much like the disciple Peter. Barbara Brown Taylor, a popular preacher and writer, provides an excellent characterization of Peter (Brown Taylor, 34).

There is something so appealing about Peter: the brash, passionate disciple who is always rushing into things, saying what the others are only thinking and doing what the others would not dare. Peter is Jesus' first disciples, and clearly one of his favorites.

It is Peter who asks Jesus to explain his parables, Peter who answers Jesus' questions first, Peter who understands Jesus' true identity but fails to understand what it will cost him, and Peter whom Jesus calls the foundation rock of the church, one moment before he also calls him Satan, who is not on the side of God but of men. It is Peter who swears he will never deny Jesus and Peter who does; it is Peter whom Jesus asks to pray with him in the garden of Gethsemane and Peter who falls asleep. It is Peter whom Jesus calls to walk with him upon the water and Peter who sinks.

It is hard not to love Peter. He is full of faith one minute and full of doubt the next. What you see is what you get with him: an impetuous, outspoken man who both loves Jesus and lets him

down, who richly deserves Jesus' judgment but who also receives his grace.

It is hard not to like this man Peter, for we can see parts of ourselves in all of his great moments of faith and in all of his weak moments of falling away. Like Peter, our failures need not be final. Today's story of Peter reminds us that we have hope.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? Today's text is Peter's denial of Christ. Jesus has been brought before the Sanhedrin for a trial (26:57). Peter has followed at a distance, gained entrance into the high priest's courtyard, and now sits with the servants to observe the development of events (26:58).

Peter is first approached by a servant girl who identifies him as having been seen with Jesus of Galilee (26:69). Peter denies that her statement has any merit (26:70). Then Peter withdraws from the group to the porch, where a second servant girl identifies him as having been seen with Jesus (26:71). Again he denies it, with an oath this time for emphasis, saying specifically that he did not know Jesus (26:72). This denial was a step further in his negative statements (Augsburger, 303). Later, some bystanders accuse him of being a follower of Christ on the grounds that his Galilean accent gives him away (26:73).

Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Peter and Judas: A Contrast in Betrayal

In last week's lesson, we studied about Judas' betrayal of Christ. This week, we learn about Peter's denial. Both disciples failed Christ, just as we all do. But the two men also offer a contrast. On Thursday night, Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin occasions Peter's denial and then his repentance. Then on Friday morning, the chief priests' decision to condemn Jesus to death prompts Judas' regret and suicide. The Greek word regularly translated "repent" in the Gospel of Matthew is different from the Greek word translated "repent" in 27:3. Although Judas regrets his deed, is he really repentant? Some have suggested that Judas only "feels remorse" (*metameletheis*), whereas Peter truly "repents" (*metanoeo*).

Is feeling remorse simply not enough? Can true repentance be the only way to receive true forgiveness?

Questions

- What, if anything, is the difference between feeling remorseful and repenting?
- How does our society use the two words "remorse" and "repentance"?
- In criminal cases, "remorseful" defendants are viewed much more positively than those "having no remorse." Is it enough in our culture to express remorse?

○ The Shape of God's Forgiveness

In *Practicing Our Faith*, L. Gregory Jones offers a discerning description of God's forgiveness (Jones, 140-141):

In becoming human, Jesus becomes vulnerable to the world of human beings. He becomes vulnerable not only to the human capacity to touch and celebrate, but also to the many ways in which people diminish, betray, oppress, and abandon one another. Even though he is vulnerable to these, he does not allow himself to be defined by them. Instead, he breaks apart the cycles of destruction, not just for himself but also for us, thereby offering us new ways of living together.

As Jesus' ministry progresses, however, he faces even more persistent and threatening attacks, and ultimately he is led to the cross. He is crucified by human beings, yet in spite of our unjust judgment, Jesus absorbs our sin and evil without passing them on. And in the resurrection, God vindicates the ministry of Jesus, showing that God's forgiving and reconciling love, God's desire for communion, overcomes human sin and evil even at its worst. The risen Christ returns with a judgment that does not condemn but that offers forgiveness and new life.

Questions

- How does this illustration describe God's forgiveness?
- What does it say to us as followers of this Christ about our obligation to forgive others?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

When Peter denied Jesus, Peter lied. Lying is usually considered a sin. Yet is there ever a time in which lying is not completely wrong? Consider the following story.

Karl heard the footsteps coming up the walkway to his house. The rhythmic pattern of many feet assured him of who would be across the threshold when he opened the door. The sharp knock came and Karl put on his best poker face and opened the door.

“Do you know the Konsarski family? The man’s name is Aaron.”

“No sir,” replied Karl. “I’ve never heard of that man or his family.”

“Now sir, we have it on good authority that this man was your employee for a time.”

“Sir, your sources are mistaken.”

“Do you realize what would happen to you if we find out that you have been lying?”

“Sir, I do assure you that I have no knowledge of these people.”

“Then good-bye, sir.”

“Good-bye.”

In the attic a family sighs in relief as they hear the rhythmic footsteps of Hitler’s soldiers leave. Aaron looks to his wife Sarah and says, “Let’s hope they believed him.”

Is lying always wrong? Certainly, the circumstances were much different for Karl than they were for Peter. Suppose that Peter thought that by lying he could do more good for Jesus. What if Peter thought that by getting close to the location where Jesus was being held, he might be able to free Jesus? What do you think were Peter’s intentions? Was Peter justified in his lying?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- Peter followed Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest “in order to see how

this would end” (26:58). How do you understand this verse? Did Peter expect the worst or was he simply curious to see how the trial before the high priest would end?

- Though Scripture provides a description of circumstances, it doesn’t explicitly state why Peter denied Christ. Why do you think he denied Christ?
- What do you think you would have done if you had been in Peter’s shoes?

Questions for All Adults

- Is honesty always the best policy regardless of the consequences?
- In many biblical commentaries, scholars describe Peter’s denial as “apostasy.” Apostasy—renunciation of one’s faith—has often been called the “unpardonable sin.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- What sins, if any, are unforgivable?

Questions for Mature Adults

- Have you ever betrayed another? How did you seek and find forgiveness?
- When were you not completely honest in your relationship with God? How did you seek and find forgiveness?
- Have you ever benefited from someone else’s lie? Is it our responsibility to expose the truth?

Questions for Younger Adults

- Some people regard all lying as wrong. But others categorize lying into white lies, bold-faced lies, and so on. Are such categories appropriate? Why or why not?
- Many members of the medical profession claim that forgiveness is one form of healing. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- When have you been forgiven after confessing a lie? When has confessing a lie brought an abrupt end to an otherwise amiable relationship?
- When have you regretted telling the truth? Why?

Questions for Adults with Children

- In what ways do you teach your child to be honest?

- In what ways are you teaching your child dishonesty?
- The best way for children to understand God’s unconditional love is through unconditional love shown to them by parents. In what ways do you show unconditional love when your child fails or disappoints you?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ Writing for Forgiveness

Read the following to the class:

Psalm 51 is a prayer for forgiveness. Ask each learner to reflect on some situation or sin for which they need forgiveness. Pass around pencils and the Resource Kit pages “Psalm 51” (p. 25-26) for this session.

Allow time for each learner to paraphrase verses 1-9 of the psalm. Give learners an opportunity to read aloud their paraphrases, and then ask them to share their experience of engaging the psalm in this way. Do the words adequately express your need for forgiveness?

○ Offering Forgiveness

Distribute pencils and paper to the class members. Ask each of them to write a letter to someone he or she is struggling to forgive. (Let them know that no one else will see the letters.) Name the wrongs that have been done: describe the nature of the injury as clearly as possible, the reason it still hurts, and why it is difficult to forgive. Imagine lifting up this difficulty and giving it to God. After a time of reflection, burn the letters and dispose of the ashes.

Closure

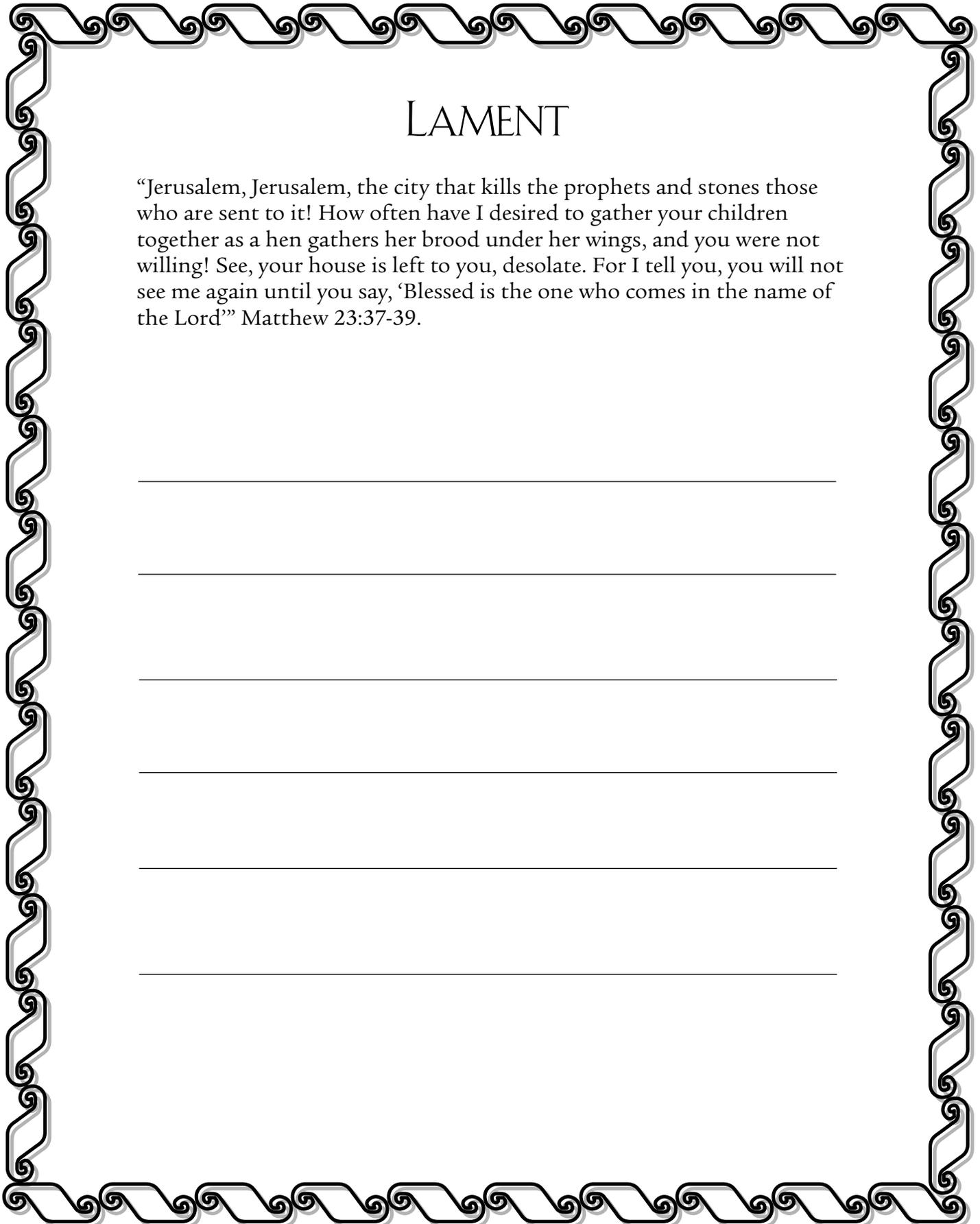
How do I lead learners to respond?

In *Practicing Our Faith*, L. Gregory Jones (137) writes these words about forgiveness:

The prospect of forgiveness requires that we take the risk of offering words, gestures, and actions that break the pattern of lovelessness for the sake of reconciliation.

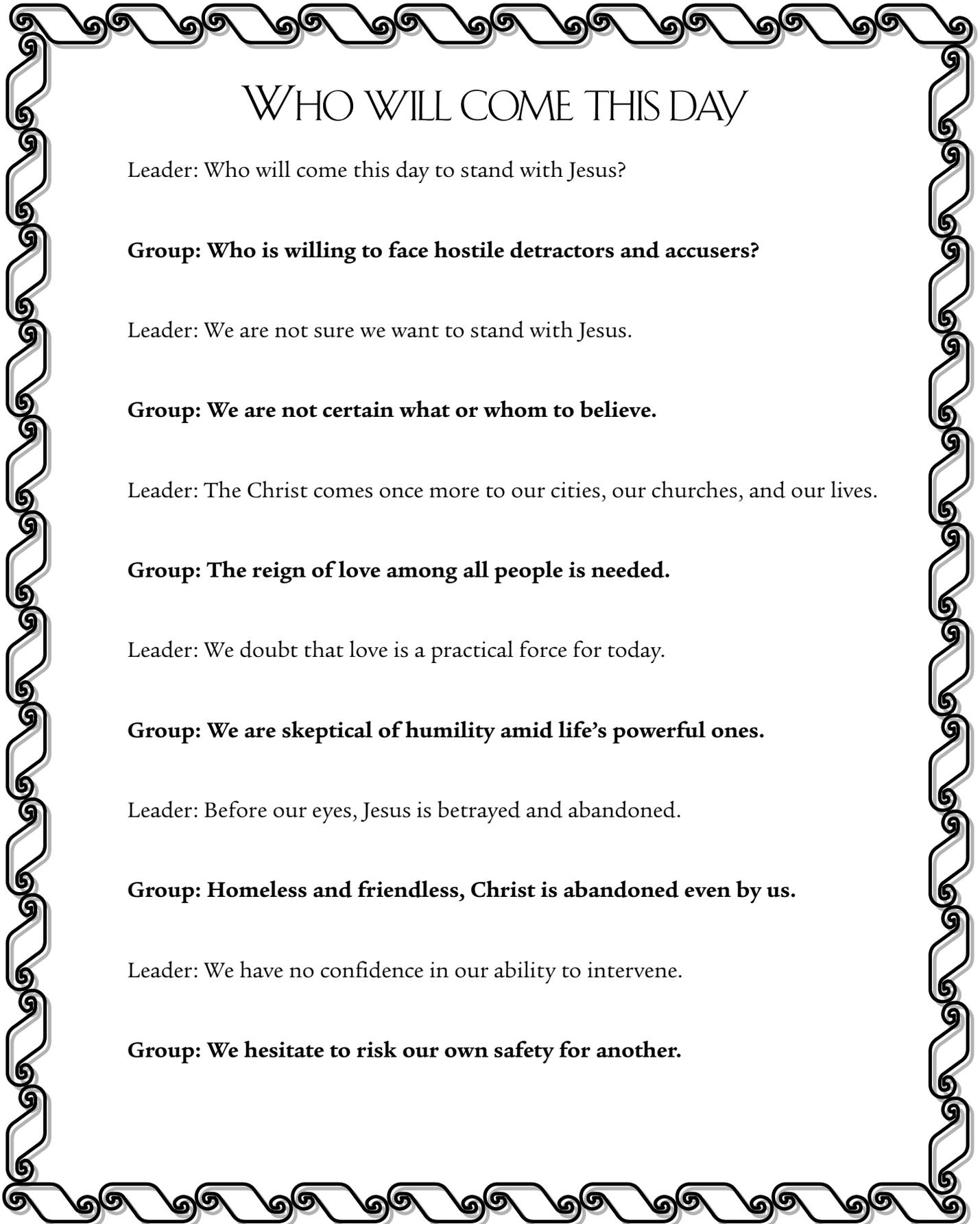
What kinds of words, gestures, and actions? Perhaps words of gratitude such as “Thanks for your kindness in doing this,” or words of explicit forgiveness such as “I forgive you, let’s work this out” and “I’m sorry, please forgive me.” Perhaps a gesture such as a handshake—originally a sign that one is not carrying a weapon in the right hand. Or perhaps the offering and receiving of food as a sign of hospitality; it is not easy to eat your enemy’s food, because so much is at stake. In these acts, the participants on each side offer something of themselves to the other, and the possibility of a new relationship begins to emerge.

Ask the members of the class to close their eyes as you read the above words aloud. Then ask each member to commit to offering one word, gesture, or act of reconciliation in the next week. Close with prayer.



LAMENT

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord’” Matthew 23:37-39.



WHO WILL COME THIS DAY

Leader: Who will come this day to stand with Jesus?

Group: Who is willing to face hostile detractors and accusers?

Leader: We are not sure we want to stand with Jesus.

Group: We are not certain what or whom to believe.

Leader: The Christ comes once more to our cities, our churches, and our lives.

Group: The reign of love among all people is needed.

Leader: We doubt that love is a practical force for today.

Group: We are skeptical of humility amid life's powerful ones.

Leader: Before our eyes, Jesus is betrayed and abandoned.

Group: Homeless and friendless, Christ is abandoned even by us.

Leader: We have no confidence in our ability to intervene.

Group: We hesitate to risk our own safety for another.

PSALM 51

PARAPHRASE

1. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
2. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
3. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
4. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.
5. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.
6. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
7. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
8. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
9. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
10. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

PSALM 51

PARAPHRASE

11. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.
12. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.
13. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
14. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
15. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
16. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
17. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
18. Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
19. then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.