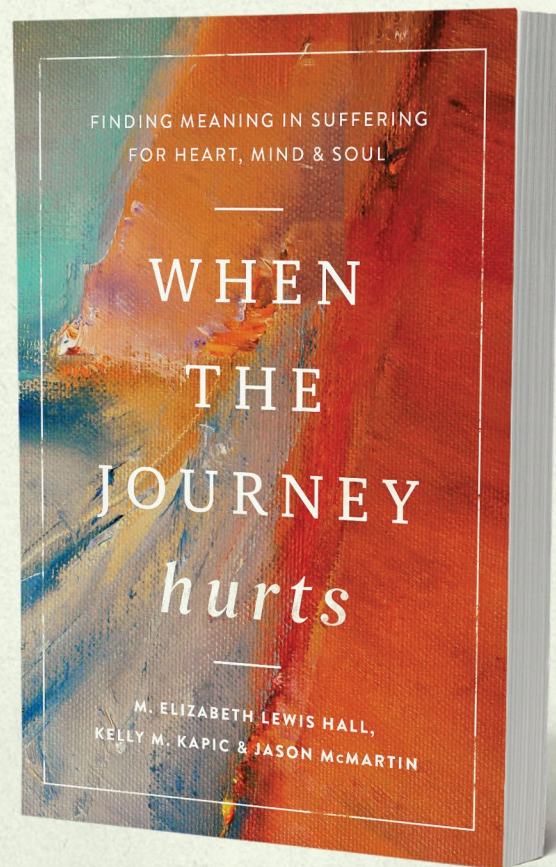


20 DAYS WITH JESUS
IN HIS *suffering*



INTRODUCTION

Thank you for participating with us in these next 20 days of prayerful meditation so that we can deepen our understanding of Jesus' suffering and deepen our own knowing that Jesus understands our suffering, too. Each meditation will encourage you to use your God-given capacity to imagine—to visualize, hear, and feel—the characters and scenes that scripture describes.

God's gift of imagination helps us to understand others' experiences and to enter more deeply into the fullness of the biblical message. God uses our imaginations to help us grasp the richness of the Truth about God and God's world. The Spirit of God has drawn generations of believers to love and follow Jesus more closely through prayerful, imaginative reading of scripture.

Each day, you will be invited to prayerfully read through a passage two times; questions and prompts will help you imagine being in the scene that unfolds. We encourage you to let your imagination roam creatively around what Scripture describes, trusting that God is with you in the process.

If you find it difficult to imagine the people, places and scenes of each passage, that's ok! Some of us are more adept at using our imaginations than others. Further, while some might "see" in technicolor detail, others have rich auditory imaginations, and still others tend to "feel" the scene or characters. We invite you to trust that the Spirit will use the imaginative strengths that God has given you as each day unfolds; you might even find that he strengthens your imaginative skills in these 20 days.

DAY 1 : WITH JESUS AS HE HEARS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST'S DEATH

Take a moment to quiet yourself: close your eyes, take some deep breaths, settle into your chair, collect your thoughts.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

In today's reading, we encounter Jesus as he learns that his cousin, John the Baptist, had been murdered by Herod. Their mothers were close—soon after Mary had been visited by the angel and learned she was pregnant with Jesus, she visited Elizabeth. The cousins may have had a particularly special bond as they grew up, even before John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus' coming.

As you read through the passage this first time, slow down with the last few sentences of the passage, simply noticing the few concrete details we have about this moment.

MATTHEW 14:3-13

Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.

On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother.

John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

Read the passage a second time and imagine that you are present as John's disciples arrive to tell Jesus how John had died. Where are you—in a home, out in the countryside, right next to the sea? Are you with John's disciples, with Jesus' disciples, or watching from a distance? What expressions do you see on Jesus' or the disciples' face as they talk together? What emotions emerge in this moment?

What do you do as Jesus finds a boat and withdraws to a solitary place? Do you watch as he leaves? Do you follow quietly behind? What might that time away in a solitary place with his Father have been like? Become a part of the scene, imagining concrete details—sights, sounds, smells—as if you were there.

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John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus. When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

As you consider your own challenges, what in Jesus' experience here resonates with yours? Although the details may differ, how might your circumstances help you connect more easily with what Jesus may have been experiencing?

As you conclude this first day of imaginative prayer, share with Jesus anything that might be staying with you.

DAY 2: WITH JESUS AS HE WEEPS OVER JERUSALEM

Take a moment to quiet yourself: close your eyes, and take some deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

In today's reading, we walk with Jesus as he responds to the rejection of God's coming kingdom among his own people, a people he loves, identified as "Jerusalem." Luke describes two moments of Jesus' mourning, the first in the midst of his three-year ministry as he tries to get the religious leaders to understand who he is, and the second as he approaches Jerusalem the week of his death.

As you read the passages this first time, try to get a sense of what Jesus is concerned with. Why is he upset? What are the people doing or neglecting to do? What is Jesus' response?

LUKE 13:31, 33-35

At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." And he said to them, [...] "I must press on today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem." O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

LUKE 19:41-44

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

As you read these passages again, imagine that you are with Jesus. Become a part of each scene, imagining concrete details—sights, sounds, smells—as if you were there. Who is also there, hearing Jesus speak, or is he alone? What is his voice like—is he whispering, pleading, shouting, resigned? What expressions do you see on his face? Do his voice or expressions change between scenes?

LUKE 13:31, 33-35

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Do you find that your own circumstances or experiences resonate with what Jesus may have been experiencing as he weeps over Jerusalem, people he loves who seem unable to see truth, and if so, how?

What is it like for you to watch Jesus express his grief in each of these moments? As you stay with Jesus in these scenes, how do you find yourself wanting to respond to him?

As you close this time of imaginative prayer, talk with Jesus about what this time of prayer brought up for you.

DAY 3: WITH JESUS AT LAZARUS' TOMB

Take a moment to quiet yourself: close your eyes, and take some deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

In today's meditation, Jesus has heard that his dear friend Lazarus is ill. His disciples resist traveling to Bethany because they know that Jewish leaders in Jerusalem are seeking his death. After delaying a few days, Jesus insists on going. Read the passage slowly, using your imagination to experience what Jesus saw, heard, smelled, and felt.

JOHN 11:17-20

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. [...]

JOHN 11:31-38

When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

Read the passage a second time. What images do you see, hear, and smell as you read the passage? What do you feel?

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Stay for a moment with Jesus as he weeps outside of Lazarus' tomb. What does he feel? In what ways are Jesus' emotions similar to what you have experienced in your own difficult life events? When have you wept or been deeply moved? How do these help you connect more deeply with Jesus?

What image or images from this passage does God press upon your heart?

As you close this time of imaginative prayer, talk with Jesus about what this time of prayer brought up for you.

DAY 4: WITH JESUS AS HE CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE

Take a moment to quiet yourself: close your eyes, and take some deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

After Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphally on the Sunday before his death, he went to the temple. The outer court of the temple was intended to be a place for Gentile worshippers to pray, since they were not allowed within the inner court. Instead, it had become a place for moneychangers and salesmen. Not only were these people preventing proper worship at the temple, they were extorting and cheating those who were already poor.

Read the passage, imagining yourself as one of the onlookers. Perhaps you are a poor Jewish worshipper who is trying to buy a dove for sacrifice. Or maybe you are a Gentile convert who hoped to pray in the outer court, or a religious authority, or one of the merchants. What do you hear? What do you see? What emotions do you experience?

MARK 11:15-18

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

Prayerfully read through the passage a second time. What image or images from this scene does God press upon your heart? What was Jesus' mood in driving out the sellers? Do you see him as angry? Do you experience his action as sorrowful?

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Jesus will not tolerate actions that prevent people from worshipping God. In your difficulty, are there ways you have been prevented from connecting with God by systems or by people? How might your experiences help you enter into Jesus' actions and experiences in the temple courts?

As you close this time of prayer, talk with Jesus about what this passage has brought up for you.

DAY 5: WITH JESUS AND THE UNBELIEVING CROWDS

Take a moment to quiet yourself: close your eyes, and take some deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus healed many: he brought sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, mobility to the lame, and freedom to those oppressed by demons. Today we read about varied responses to Jesus' miracles as he preaches in Jerusalem in the week before he was crucified.

But before you read, first take a moment to imagine that you are in the crowds as Jesus heals person after person of their illness. What miracles do you see Jesus do? What do you hear? How do those who are healed respond? What expressions do you see on their faces and Jesus' face?

Now, as you read the following passage, imagine that you can not only see Jesus perform these many miracles, but that you can also see the faces of those described below. What expressions do you see on their faces? How do they respond? What do you hear? What do you see them do?

JOHN 12:37-43

Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:

*“Lord, who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”*

For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere:

*“He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their hearts,
so they can neither see with their eyes,
nor understand with their hearts,
nor turn—and I would heal them.”*

Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

What might it have been like for Jesus to see and know the unbelief of so many in the crowd, even as he performed miracles? What might it have been like to see and know that some were hiding their belief, distancing themselves from him for fear of their image or repercussions in their religious community?

Do you find that Jesus' experience in this passage might in some way resonate with your own challenges or circumstances? If so, how? Stay for another moment with Jesus as he sees the fear, distancing, and unbelief among crowds, which include many who had witnessed his miracles.

What do you find yourself wanting to express to Jesus? In these final moments of prayer, talk with him about what this passage brought up for you.

DAY 6: WITH JESUS AS THE DISCIPLES ARGUE OVER GREATNESS

Take a moment to quiet yourself: close your eyes, and take some deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

In today's passage, we find Jesus celebrating the annual Passover meal with his disciples. These are his last few hours with his disciples, teaching and preparing them for what will come. The disciples, however, still do not understand.

As you read through the passage, imagine that you are in the Upper Room with Jesus and his disciples. Maybe you're standing along the wall as a servant, or sitting at the table with the group. What do you see, smell, hear? What do you touch and taste?

LUKE 22:14-24

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!"

They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this. A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Luke lays out a jarring contrast in this passage. We overhear Jesus tell the disciples that he is about to suffer, that the Passover celebrated by the Jewish people for 1500 years is about to be fulfilled, that this cup is the last he'll share with them before the kingdom of God comes, that somehow his body is given for them and his blood will provide a new covenant (as if he is the Passover lamb!), and that he is about to be betrayed.

The disciples' response is to argue among themselves about who is the greatest.

As you read the passage this second time, imagine Jesus' voice, tone, posture, and presence as he draws his disciples into the depths of what is about to happen. Then, imagine what it would have been like to watch them bicker over a trivial concern in response. What might Jesus have been feeling or experiencing in this moment?

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They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this. A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Do you find that you resonate with Jesus' experiences in some way? Perhaps your concerns have been minimized, missed or even sidelined as you've expressed something of great value to those you've loved; perhaps you've faced deep and difficult circumstances while others complain about trivial concerns.

What is it like to know that he has experienced these difficulties, too? Draw on your own difficulties to better understand Jesus' experiences as he watches the disciples bicker over greatness.

As you close your time in prayer, share with Jesus what this time has been like for you.

DAY 7: WITH JESUS IN GETHSEMANE (PART 1)

Take a moment to quiet yourself: close your eyes, and take some deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

Today and tomorrow we will spend time with Jesus just before his arrest, as he prays and prepares in the garden of Gethsemane. Today, we will focus on Jesus' interactions with the disciples. Take your time as you read through this passage the first time, simply noticing details in the text: where are Jesus and the disciples situated? What does Jesus tell his disciples about his own experiences, and how does he look and sound as he shares them?

MATTHEW 26:36-46

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Jesus suffers emotionally, mentally, relationally, and even physically in this passage. Luke 22:44 adds a further description of Jesus' sorrow: "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." What might Jesus have been feeling, seeing, or experiencing when he finds the disciples asleep, particularly in contrast to his own intense anguish?

Are there elements of his suffering that you can identify with in some way: perhaps friends who miss or misunderstand what you're going through, perhaps family unable to meet your expressed needs, perhaps anguish over a pain or sorrow you know is coming, or perhaps experiencing emotional or mental suffering so intensely that it physically hurts?

As you read the passage one more time, continue to imagine that you are present with Jesus, drawing on your own suffering to be with Him as the scene unfolds.

MATTHEW 26:36-46

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Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

As you close this time of prayer, consider what you might want to say or express to Jesus, and share that with him.

DAY 8: WITH JESUS IN GETHSEMANE (PART 2)

Take a moment to quiet yourself: close your eyes, and take some deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

Today we will return to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, but this time we will focus on Jesus' prayer to the Father and the Father's response. As you re-read the passage today, imagine that you are within sight of Jesus as he prays. What do you see—where is he, what is his posture, what expressions do you see on his face? What do you hear, feel, and sense? Listen to Jesus' prayer: What does he ask for? How does he sound as he asks this of the Father?

MATTHEW 26:36-46

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When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Yesterday we observed that Jesus suffers tremendously in this passage; Luke 22:44 adds this further description of Jesus' sorrow: "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." Jesus' prayers were desperate.

Read through the passage one more time, imagining once more that you are present as Jesus prays. As you consider your own circumstances, can you identify with the sorrow, pain, and agony that Jesus may have been experiencing as he returns to the Father with his prayer? What is it like to watch Jesus suffer as he prays?

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Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

The Father's answer to Jesus' prayer here is "no." His prayer ends as his betrayer comes to hand him over to the authorities, and he must "drink the cup." Have you also experienced God's "no" (or perhaps "not yet") in your own challenges and struggles? What is it like to sit with Jesus in the realization that he has experienced this, too?

As you close this time of prayer, consider what you might want to say or express to Jesus, and share that with him.

DAY 9: WITH JESUS AT HIS BETRAYAL

Take a moment to quiet yourself: close your eyes, and take some deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

Today's three passages describe Jesus' betrayal by Judas. As you read through them the first time, place yourself in each of the three scenes. In the first, what do you see and hear as you watch Judas negotiate with the chief priests? In the second, where are Jesus and Judas positioned as Jesus predicts Judas' betrayal? What do you taste, smell, and even sense "in the air" as Jesus speaks? And finally, what do you see as Judas leads the armed crowd to Jesus in the Garden? What do you hear, smell, and feel as the scene unfolds?

MATTHEW 26:14-16

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

MATTHEW 26:20-25

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"

Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?"

Jesus answered, "You have said so."

MATTHEW 26:47-50

While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend."

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

As you read the passages a second time, spend a few moments with Jesus' responses to Judas over dinner in the Upper Room and as Judas betrays him in the Garden. What do you hear? What do you see and sense in his presence—his tone, his expression, his posture toward Judas?

MATTHEW 26:14-16

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

MATTHEW 26:20-25

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.”

They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?”

Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi?”

Jesus answered, “You have said so.”

MATTHEW 26:47-50

While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.

Jesus replied, “Do what you came for, friend.”

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

What would it have been like for Jesus to experience these interactions with Judas, who was a member of his Twelve, a friend greeting Jesus with a kiss? What emotions and responses might describe Jesus' suffering?

Are there ways in which your own suffering resonates with Jesus' suffering? Perhaps others have failed you, let you down, or even betrayed you? What is it like to know that Jesus suffered relationally in these ways? Stay for a moment or two with Jesus in this moment of betrayal, drawing on your own challenges to better understand what Jesus may have been experiencing.

As you end your time of prayer, talk with the Lord about what this meditation has brought up for you.

DAY 10: WITH JESUS AS THE DISCIPLES DESERT HIM

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

After Judas leads the religious authorities to Jesus in Gethsemane, they arrest him. As you read through this passage the first time, imagine you are present in the darkness of the garden and in the midst of the confusion described. Where do you place yourself? What do you see, smell, and hear as these events unfold?

MATTHEW 26:50b-56

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled."

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

As you read the passage a second time, consider Jesus' tone and expression as he speaks first to his disciple ("Put your sword back in its place...!") and then to those who came to arrest him ("Am I leading a rebellion...?"). How have each misunderstood him? What might Jesus have been feeling or experiencing as he responds to his disciple and as he addresses the crowd, quelling the violence that is about to erupt?

What would it have been like for Jesus to then watch his disciples flee?

MATTHEW 26:50b-56

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Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Do your own circumstances or challenges resonate in some way with Jesus'? Maybe you have found yourself trying to mediate conflict or calm violence. Maybe you have found yourself trying to explain over and over again your intentions in the face of consistent misunderstanding. Or maybe you have been deserted in some way by those who were close to you. What is it like to know that Jesus experienced these things too?

Stay with Jesus for a bit longer in this moment of his suffering.

As you close your time in prayer, talk with the Lord about what might have come up for you.

DAY 11: WITH JESUS AT THE TRIALS BY RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

After the arrest, Jesus is taken before the former high priest, Annas, and then to the house of the current high priest, Caiaphas, and finally before the full ruling council. These three trials are unjust: they do not follow the correct legal conventions and false witnesses are brought forward. Jesus is innocent, but condemned to death anyway. Jesus' own true testimony that he is king and Messiah, the very Son of God, leads to his condemnation.

Read the passage slowly, using your imagination to place yourself in the scene and consider what Jesus might have seen, heard, smelled, and felt.

MATTHEW 26:57-68

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled . . . The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Finally two came forward and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

"You have said so," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

"He is worthy of death," they answered.

Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?"

How would it have been for Jesus to experience false accusations and be on trial before his spiritual and national leaders? What might it have been like for Jesus to be assaulted, humiliated, and mocked?

What falsehoods, accusations, opposition, or misunderstandings might you have experienced during your current difficulties? Have you been neglected, opposed, or betrayed by spiritual leaders or other people you thought you could trust? Have others assumed or believed things about you that were not true? How might your experiences resonate with what Jesus endured? Stay with Jesus a few moments longer in his suffering.

Prayerfully read through the passage a second time. What image or images does God press upon your heart?

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As you close this time of prayer, talk with Jesus about what this passage has brought up for you.

DAY 12: WITH JESUS AS PETER DENIES HIM

Take a moment to close your eyes and simply take deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

In today's passage, we find Jesus in the midst of the Jewish trials. Our first few verses take us back to Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial. Our second passage describes how Peter's denial came about: after fleeing Gethsemane, Peter circles back to see what the religious authorities would do with his Rabbi, hoping to blend in as he joins those sitting around a fire in the courtyard of the high priest's home.

Read slowly through both passages, noticing the details: What does Jesus say to Peter in the Upper Room? How does he respond to knowing that this disciple who loved him would deny him? What expressions do you see on Jesus' face? How does his voice sound?

LUKE 22:31-34

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

LUKE 22:31-34

Then seizing Jesus, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Jesus' suffering seems multiplied in this passage: after watching the disciples flee from Gethsemane and in the midst of responding to the questioning, abuse, and mockery of the religious authorities, one of his closest friends denies even knowing him.

As you read the passage a second time, imagine you are present somewhere in the high priest's house, perhaps in the courtyard with the crowd or with Jesus as the guards ready him for questioning. What do you see, hear, smell, and feel as the scene unfolds?

What does Peter's voice sound like and face look like as he answers the servant's questions? What might Jesus, in the midst of his own questioning, have seen, heard, or been aware of as Peter repeatedly denies being a follower of Jesus? As the rooster crows and Jesus turns and looks at Peter, what expression do you see on Jesus' face?

LUKE 22:31-34

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Do your own experiences resonate in some way with Jesus'? Perhaps you also have experienced the distancing or even denial of those closest to you, perhaps you know what it is like to experience difficulty piled on difficulty, or perhaps you resonate with the loneliness of a particularly trial-filled season.

How might your own experiences of suffering help you better understand Jesus' suffering? Take another moment to watch Jesus turn and look at Peter, allowing your own suffering to deepen your knowing of Jesus' suffering.

As you close this time of prayer, share with Jesus about what this passage has brought up for you.

DAY 13: WITH JESUS BEFORE HEROD

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

After trying Jesus, the Jewish leaders turned him over to the Romans, who were allowed to carry out executions. Jesus experienced the opposition and disbelief of the Jews throughout his ministry, even though his own people should have been his greatest supporters. As an oppressed subject of a foreign power, Jesus would not have expected any support from Rome, even though non-Jewish people often responded more positively to him throughout his ministry. Pilate sends Jesus to Herod, the same Herod who had killed Jesus' beloved cousin John, hoping that Herod will deal with the problem.

Prayerfully read through today's passage, imagining you are standing in Herod's court: what do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel?

LUKE 23:6-12

Pilate asked if [Jesus] was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

Herod wants to be entertained, not find justice. What would this moment have been like for Jesus? What might it have felt like for Jesus to be pressured and questioned before the power of Herod, a king who wants to be amused, and the hatred of the religious leaders? How would it have felt for him to be a spectacle for entertainment and derision?

Have you experienced similar things? How might your experiences help you connect more deeply with Jesus?

Prayerfully read through the passage a second time. What image or images from this passage does God press upon your heart?

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As you close this time of prayer, talk with Jesus about what this passage has brought up for you.

DAY 14: WITH JESUS BEFORE PILATE

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

Herod got bored with Jesus and found no reason to convict him so he sent Jesus back to Pilate. Pilate also believed that Jesus was innocent. He tried multiple strategies to appease the angry religious leaders and also let Jesus go. In the end, he caved in to their pressure. As you read today's passage, imagine you are there, watching Pilate's interaction with the crowd as Jesus stands nearby. What do you see, hear and feel? What might Jesus have been experiencing as he heard the crowds and the Jewish leaders shout for his death?

JOHN 18:38b-40

With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"

They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

After talking to Jesus again:

JOHN 19:12-16

Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."

When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.

"Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews.

But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked.

"We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.

Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

How must Jesus have felt when the death sentence finally came? How bitter would it have been to see a guilty man freed while he was condemned? Beaten and weary, receiving the wrath of the religious leaders and the indifference of the political rulers, Jesus came to the end of hours of interrogation.

Can you identify with the mental, emotional and spiritual exhaustion Jesus may have felt? Or perhaps you also have experienced hostility or condemnation in your difficulties, as Jesus did? How might your experiences deepen your appreciation of Jesus' suffering?

Prayerfully read through the passage a second time. What image or images from this scene does God press upon your heart?

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"We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.

Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

As you close this time of prayer, talk with Jesus about what this passage has brought up for you.

DAY 15: WITH JESUS AS HE IS BEATEN AND MOCKED

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

In today's passage, Jesus is handed over to the soldiers in the fortress in Jerusalem. At least 120, and perhaps as many as 600 soldiers surround him. As they usually did, the Roman soldiers played an elaborate game with the convicted prisoner, which mocked and shamed him while also including physical torture.

Read the passage slowly, using your imagination to place yourself in the scene, imagining the sights, the noises, and smells of this moment of Jesus' suffering.

MATTHEW 27:27-31

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

What might it have been like for Jesus to have hundreds of mocking, antagonistic soldiers surrounding him? What would it be like for Jesus to not just be beaten but mocked and humiliated? To have his clothes taken and to be dressed up for the amusement of others?

Has your own suffering involved physical pain or humiliation of some kind? Have you also been mistreated by others?

How might your experiences be like those of Jesus? How might your own experiences help you understand Jesus' suffering more deeply?

Prayerfully read through the passage a second time. What image or images from this scene does God press upon your heart? Stay with Jesus for a moment as he experiences this suffering.

MATTHEW 27:27-31

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As you close this time of prayer, talk with Jesus about what this passage has brought up for you.

DAY 16: WITH JESUS AS HE FORGIVES

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

Many people follow Jesus through the streets to the place where he will be crucified. Some of these had called for his death. Some are his followers who may have deserted him or are keeping their loyalty a secret. Others are curious bystanders. The Roman soldiers are fulfilling their orders. His opponents continue to mock him. Remarkably, Jesus asks God to forgive those who are crucifying him.

Read today's passage slowly, using all of your senses to engage your imagination.

LUKE 23:32-39

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

In the midst of being mocked, disbelieved, and killed in one of the most physically and emotionally painful ways imaginable, Jesus asks God to “forgive them.”

Prayerfully read the passage a second time. As you join with Jesus in his suffering on the cross, what do you imagine it is like for Jesus to forgive those who are causing his suffering? What might his voice sound like? What expression do you see on his face as he says “forgive them”?

LUKE 23:32-39

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One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

In your own challenges, have you also found that you might need to forgive others who have caused pain? How might the struggle to forgive the wrongs you have experienced during your trials draw you closer to Jesus during his agony?

Or, perhaps you found that you need the forgiveness of others, or that you need to receive Jesus’ forgiveness yourself. As you read, consider placing yourself at the foot of the cross as a soldier, a bystander, or a follower and hear Jesus extend forgiveness to you.

Regardless of your response, stay with Jesus in this moment of his suffering and his forgiveness.

As you close this time of prayer, talk with Jesus about what this passage has brought up for you.

DAY 17: WITH JESUS AS SOLDIERS DIVIDE HIS CLOTHING

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

Read today's passage slowly, using your imagination and emotions to share Jesus' experiences. What did he feel, see, hear, smell, taste, and touch?

MATTHEW 27:35-44

When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

While he is dying, the soldiers divide up his possessions in front of him. He didn't have much, but even what he had was taken from him. Those around Jesus continue to mock him. What would it have been like for Jesus to have these things happen to him while he was at his lowest?

What losses might you have experienced when you were already down? How might your own experiences help you feel what Jesus might have felt?

Prayerfully read through the passage a second time. What image or images from this scene does God press upon your heart?

MATTHEW 27:35-44

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As you close this time of prayer, talk with Jesus about what this passage has brought up for you.

DAY 18: WITH JESUS AND MARY AT THE CROSS

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

When Jesus was about a month old, Mary and Joseph brought him to the temple to present him to the Lord. Simeon, an elderly man who had long prayed for the coming Messiah, saw them there, and he recognized Jesus immediately. He said to Mary, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:34-35).

We might wonder how much Mary saw, knew, and understood as she watched her little boy grow, mature, and begin his earthly ministry. We might also wonder at what moments in Jesus’ life and ministry Simeon’s words may have echoed: and a sword will pierce your own soul, too. And, we can imagine that Jesus knew that his own mother would suffer as she watched him suffer.

As you read today’s passage, consider what Jesus might have seen and experienced as he hung on the cross, looking on the faces of those he loved—his mother, the women who had followed him, and his disciple John. Where do you find yourself in this scene? What do you see on their faces? What do you hear? How do you imagine they responded as Jesus spoke to them?

JOHN 19:25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

As you read the passage a second time, prayerfully consider: What might it have been like for Jesus to see his mother there? What might it have been like for Jesus to see his mother's soul-piercing anguish as Mary sees him on the cross, powerless to save her son?

JOHN 19:25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

How might Jesus' experience of seeing his mother suffer resonate with your experiences? Stay for a moment in this scene with Jesus, simply offering your presence as you watch and wait with Mary and the disciples.

As you close this time of prayer, talk with Jesus about what this passage has brought up for you.

DAY 19: WITH JESUS AT HIS DEATH

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

During Jesus' last hours of life, he recited two psalms of lament (Ps. 22:1; Ps. 31:5) Read today's passage slowly, engaging your heart and your senses: what do you see? What do you hear? What details do you notice as you watch Jesus in these moments before his death?

MATTHEW 27:45-49

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

LUKE 23:46

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

What must Jesus have felt as knew he was taking his last few ragged breaths? After walking so closely with the Father, what would it have been like to feel abandoned by God, especially in his darkest moment? In the midst of your difficulties, have you had to face your own death or that of someone you love? Have you felt abandoned by God? How do your experiences draw you closer to Jesus in his agony?

Prayerfully read through the passage a second time. What image or images from this moment of Jesus' death does God press upon your heart?

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LUKE 23:46

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As you close this time of prayer, talk with Jesus about what this passage has brought up for you.

DAY 20: TOUCHING JESUS' SCARS

Take a moment to close your eyes and take deep breaths.

Pray this prayer or something similar in your own words: Jesus, help me draw close to you by seeing my suffering in yours and your suffering in mine.

After Jesus' resurrection, he walked with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Meanwhile the apostles were gathered in a home in Jerusalem behind tightly shut doors because they were afraid of the Jews. After being with Jesus, the two disciples returned to Jerusalem and reported to the other disciples that they had seen the risen Lord.

Thomas was not present with the disciples that night and had difficulty believing that Jesus had truly risen. He tells the disciples "Unless I see the nailmarks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hands into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). Jesus then appears a second time, addressing Thomas specifically.

Read the passages slowly, and imagine that you are present with the disciples in that locked home and have just heard their incredible account. What do you see, hear, and feel? Take note of how suddenly Jesus seems to appear among them. What might this have been like? What does Jesus' resurrected body look like? What expression do you see on his face as he appears first to all the disciples, and then appears again for Thomas?

LUKE 24:36-40

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.

JOHN 20:26-28

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus still bore the scars in his body after his resurrection and still does so today. What might it have been like for Jesus to show his disciples these scars? What might it have been like for Jesus to be reminded by the scars of the suffering he endured, alongside the growing joy of his disciples as they realized he was alive?

What scars—emotional or physical—might you bear from your difficulties? What do your scars evoke for you—perhaps pain, gratitude, regret, or a mix of these and more?

Prayerfully read through the passage a second time, remembering once more that Jesus' body still bears the scars of his suffering. How do Jesus' scars help him know you better? How do your scars help you know Jesus better?

LUKE 24:36-40

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

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Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

As you close this time of prayer, talk with Jesus about what this passage has brought up for you.

WHO ARE WE?

Elizabeth Lewis Hall (Ph.D., Clinical Psychology) is Professor at Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University. Liz has been writing on suffering using psychology and Christian theology for 20 years. She has published over 100 academic articles and book chapters. With her husband, Todd Hall, she is the co-author of *Relational Spirituality: A Psychological-Theological Paradigm for Transformation*. Her contributions to the integration of psychology and theology have been recognized in various ways, including the Christian Association for Psychological Studies 2016 Narramore Award for Excellence in the Integration of Theology and Psychology. She teaches regularly for her adult Sunday School class.



Jason McMartin (Ph.D., Religion) is Professor of Theology at Biola University, where he holds a joint appointment at Rosemead School of Psychology and Talbot School of Theology. Jason has co-authored several articles and a book chapter on the role of suffering within the flourishing life. He also writes on virtue, spiritual formation, and theological anthropology, and teaches courses on integrating psychology and theology. He has served as a pastor and urban missionary.



Lisa Igram (Ph.D., Divinity & Religious Studies, MDiv, Spiritual Formation and Soul Care) serves as Assistant Professor at Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University, where she teaches courses in Scripture interpretation, spiritual theology, and the integration of psychology and Christian thought. Her twentyplus years in Christian Higher Education includes a variety of teaching and cocurricular leadership experiences, and she has been involved in leading spiritual formation and student wellbeing initiatives in curricular and co-curricular spaces. Lisa's academic work explores embodied spirituality and Pauline theology, where she draws on theories from the cognitive sciences to understand how Paul sought to shape communities in Christ.



Kelly M. Kopic (PhD, King's College, University of London) holds the Honorary Chair of Theology and Culture at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia. Kopic has also worked on research teams funded by the John Templeton Foundation. He is an author or editor of more than fifteen books, including the award-winning titles *You're Only Human* and *Embodied Hope*, and is an active speaker.




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IN YOUR SUFFERING AND TO ENGAGE WITH IT
IN A HEALTHY, FAITHFUL WAY

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