

Gethsemane: Under Pressure

MARK 14:32-42

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An old Peanuts cartoon shows Charlie Brown awake in bed, worried about some crisis that seems to be coming the next day, and as he lies there, he makes the comment that when something bad is going to happen, there shouldn't be a night before. Many of us have been in that situation, dreading some terrible thing or some challenging situation that is about to happen. We know it's coming, we cannot stop it, but it hasn't happened yet, and the stress starts to build.

- Maybe it's rent, or a mortgage payment, or taxes, or some other big bill - we know it's coming due, but maybe we don't have all of the funds to cover it, and so we worry.
- Maybe it's some kind of surgery or medical procedure - we know we need to do it, but we are terrified of what might happen.
- Maybe it's a work situation - there's a decision coming that will affect people's lives - perhaps we know what needs to be done, but it's tough, and maybe we just dread making it happen.
- Maybe it's a relationship scenario - we know what we need to do, and it needs to happen soon - but we are torn up over it, and maybe we dread having that conversation.

And like Charlie Brown, perhaps we wish that when something bad is about to happen, that there didn't need to be a night before, because the night before is when we stress and worry over some of these things. This morning, I'd like for us to think about a request that came in from one of our members just last week, and it came in the form of two questions: 1.) How did God handle stressful situations or stress in his life, and 2.) How can I apply what he did to handle stress in my life today? Those are two very good questions! All of us face stressful situations, and as Christians, most of us know that the Bible must have some encouragement for us concerning how to handle those situations. As I started thinking about how to best answer this request, I started asking: What is the most stressful scenario God ever faced? And I kept coming back to one night. I would invite you to turn with me to Mark 14:32-42 (p. 1587). In Mark 14, we join Jesus on the night he was betrayed.

Jesus' life has not been easy up to this point, but after 3-½ years of preaching and teaching, he has now come to the end. Within just a few hours, the Lord will be betrayed, sentenced to death, and nailed to a cross as he takes on the weight and the punishment for every sin ever committed. Jesus, then, is facing what is certainly the most stressful event in all of world history and what is certainly the most difficult night of his life. And on

this last night, Jesus meets with the apostles in the upper room, he washes their feet, they eat the Passover meal together, he institutes the Lord's Supper, they sing a song together, and then they head out into the night to the Mount of Olives.

We will look at the passage in just a moment, but as we get there, I want us to really understand what Jesus is going through here. Look ahead briefly to verse 33, where we find that he is **"distressed and troubled."** And then, in verse 34, when Jesus says that he is **"deeply grieved,"** he uses a word that literally refers to being "surrounded by grief." The first part of the word is found in our English word "perimeter" or "periphery." It's the idea of "around." So he's saying that he is surrounded by grief. He is swimming in grief. One commentary suggests that it's the idea of being so upset that it literally makes us sick or nauseated - so stressed out that we throw up. But it's not just this, because he says that he is **"deeply grieved to the point of death."** The Message says that Jesus, **"...plunged into a sinkhole of dreadful agony,"** and then he says to his disciples, **"I feel bad enough right now to die."** The Phillips translation describes Jesus as being, **"...horror-stricken and desperately depressed,"** and then he says to his disciples, **"My heart is nearly breaking."** And so, when one of our members asks for a lesson on how God handles stress, it seems that Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane is the perfect example of how Jesus as the Son of God handles a stressful situation. If you will, then, let us look together at Mark 14:32-42,

³² They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed." ³³ And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. ³⁴ And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." ³⁵ And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. ³⁶ And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will." ³⁷ And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? ³⁸ Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." ³⁹ Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. ⁴¹ And He came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

As we carefully look at this passage for a few moments, I'd like for us to notice four ways Jesus handles this pressure he's under. But before we get there, I want to share with you something of the struggle I had this week in choosing an image for the background up here. When I went looking for images of Jesus in Gethsemane, most of the artwork looked something like this. We've discussed this primarily in our Wednesday class a time or two through the years, but there is a danger in always portraying Jesus as a 6' tall white guy with blue eyes and long, flowing, wavy hair and a beam of light or a glow or a halo behind his head! We tend to picture Jesus as being like us. A few years ago, we used an image of Jesus with dreadlocks, and somebody kindly pulled me aside afterwards and said, "You know, Jesus probably didn't have dreadlocks." And I totally agree. But I'm also pretty sure that Jesus didn't look like this, either. I'm pretty sure he didn't have 4' long arms and skin that is whiter than mine! So, instead of sticking with one image, I'll be using several images from different cultures this morning, starting with this one - this one comes from a Chinese artist living in the Minneapolis area, I believe. I discovered him several years ago, and he has some interesting work, including the image on the wall up here.

I. **But as we get back to the text, and as we notice how Jesus deals with the stress he's under, we start in verse 32 as we find that Jesus GETS AWAY TO A PRIVATE PLACE.**

He removes himself from the crowds, and he escapes (at least for a few hours) to a private and quiet garden. Here in Madison, most of us who live in the city live within walking distance of some kind of park. We have Manchester Park and Sandstone Park down near us on the southwest side of Madison. Some of you literally live across the street from a park. But even outside the city, we have county parks and state parks. We have all kinds of places where we can get away. As far as we know, though, they didn't have parks like this in ancient Israel, but they did have gardens. Often, wealthy landowners would set aside places in their orchards or vineyards where they could go to rest or to get away from the heat or the stress of everyday living. One of these places was about half a mile outside the city and was known as the Garden of Gethsemane. The word Gethsemane literally refers to an "olive press." Gethsemane, then, was basically a grove of olive trees, and there was apparently an olive press somewhere on that property. As olives were harvested, they were put in something like this stone press on the wall up here, a wooden beam was put in the hub of that wheel, and someone would walk around and around, the olives would be crushed in that trough, and the oil would run out of a drain to be collected in various containers. Some have suggested something of a picture here of what Jesus was going through as he was crushed by the weight of this grief and stress. I don't know how much we can read into that, but it is an interesting picture. Nevertheless, Gethsemane literally refers to the place of the "olive press." And as I mentioned a moment ago, it is located just outside the city, maybe a 5-10 minute walk. The picture on the wall up here is taken from just above Gethsemane, looking back toward the city. Of course, the meaning of the word and what this place looks like are not nearly as important as what happens here. But the point for us here is: As he prepares for what is coming, Jesus gets away from the crowds, and he takes some time to be alone. He gets himself some privacy. He goes away by himself. As busy as Jesus is, and as much as he came to this earth to heal and help others, he takes this time to collect his thoughts privately. As one of my friends pointed out in an article on this passage, on this night, "The Great Physician's office is closed." He steps away from the crowds, and he wrestles alone with this challenge he is facing.

What does this mean for us? It means that when we face some challenging situation, whether it's grief at the loss of a loved one, whether it's a huge decision we're facing, whether it's some other personal or family or work-related challenge, there is a huge value in doing the best we can to try to step out of the chaos and to regroup for a few moments. And I know that's hard to do. And we know it must have been hard for Jesus to do. There were so many people who needed his attention, but he stepped away from it and went to this garden. This, by the way, is something Jesus was known to do from time to time. In Mark 6:31-32, for example, Jesus said to his disciples early on in his ministry, ***"Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while."*** (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) ***They [then] went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.*** Jesus got away in a boat. Some of you also get away in a boat. Maybe a tree stand. Maybe a tent. It is okay (and even good) to get away from time to time, especially when we face this intense pressure in our lives. By the way, we actually know that Jesus and his disciples often went to this place in particular. Over in John's account (in John 18:1-2), we find that when Jesus had left the upper room that night and was on his way to Gethsemane, ***"...He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples. Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples."*** So, we see that Gethsemane was a place where Jesus ***"often"*** met with his disciples. Today, then, we also need a place like this we can go, a place to get away for a bit. Of course, today it is not so much a place as it is time. We take time to get away.

II. **As we get back to the text, there's something else we learn from how Jesus handled this pressure, and that is: JESUS LEANS ON HIS CLOSE FRIENDS FOR SUPPORT.**

By the way, the image on the wall up here comes from a street artist in France! What in the world is going on here? It took me a while, but it seems that Peter, James, and John are represented by this three-headed creature down at the bottom. Jesus is actually in the middle, but there are two sets of eyes, so I'm thinking this is God the Father and God the Son together in this pyramid, and then we have the cup of God's wrath up in the upper left-hand corner, and the wrath is being held back, but some of it seems to be leaking out, and that's this stress that Jesus is feeling in the garden. The triangles on the right seem to represent his death and resurrection - we see a cross and an open tomb over there. Beyond that, I have no idea. But this is one artist's rendition of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

But the point for us here is: Jesus leans on his friends for support. He takes the eleven apostles to the garden, and then he takes three of his closest friends a bit farther with him into the garden. These men have been with Jesus pretty much 24/7 for 3-½ years now, and they have seen some amazing things - they've seen Jesus give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, the ability to speak to those who could not. They've seen Jesus feed thousands on at least two occasions, and they were the ones who picked up the leftovers. They've seen his baptism and transfiguration, they've seen his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and now, these are the three men Jesus wants with him on the most difficult night in his life.

And on this night, Jesus isn't asking much. He doesn't want them to do anything incredibly heroic. All he wants is for these three men to stay awake and to pray. Sometimes we need friends just to watch our back for a little bit. We need friends to protect us. We need good Christian friends to look out for us as we go through difficult times. Sometimes we need friends to join us in the struggle, to join us as we wrestle with something. And this is a reminder for us: As Christians, we have people in this room who want to help! And sometimes we need the reminder: Don't shut them out. But instead, we need to be calling on each other. If we need help or encouragement, let's grab some friends to come to us, just like Jesus does here.

And I would emphasize: Jesus opens up to these three men. He tells them what he is feeling. In verses 33-34, **"...He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death...."** He doesn't hold it in, he doesn't say, "Oh, don't worry about me. I'm fine." But instead, Jesus tells these three friends exactly what he is feeling, "I'm having a hard time here," [paraphrased] is basically what he is saying.

And I would also emphasize: He also calls on these three men, knowing that they were imperfect, knowing that they would probably mess this up! He knows these men. Just a few minutes earlier, in fact, Jesus specifically said to these men (and the rest of the apostles), **"You will all fall away"** (verse 27). Of course, Peter objects, and Jesus presses it even further with Peter and basically says to him, **"Not only will you fall away, but you will deny me three times"** [paraphrased]. And yet, knowing this, Jesus still wants these three men with him in the garden.

And isn't this a picture of us? Aren't we imperfect like the apostles? Don't we also have issues? And yet there is still a value to calling on each other, there is still a value in praying for each other, there is still a value in watching out for each other, there is still a value in being there for each other. Of course, some of us have friends who would sell us out for far less than the 30 pieces of silver like Judas did, but even so, we still need friends!

What happens here? As this night unfolds, we learn, of course, that these three men fall asleep. And it took me a while to figure out what is in this image. We have Jesus at the top, and then the three friends are lying down under him (or in the foreground of the painting). And so they fall asleep - not just once, not twice, but three times! And Jesus gets on them for that, he keeps coming back - checking in with God and then checking on his friends - three times - but I want us focus in on what Jesus says to his friends in verse 38. He says, ***“Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*** I love that! He doesn’t just excuse their behavior, but he acknowledges reality. He knows that they mean well, but he also knows that these men are tired! As we piece this together, what happens here probably happens somewhere between 2-4 in the morning. I was talking to some of you yesterday about how early I’ve been falling asleep at night lately. This time change thing is messing with me. I was wiped out the other day, and could barely keep my eyes open, and I mentioned to Keola, “If this were a Wednesday, I’d be teaching class right now.” And that was my last moment of consciousness, at something like 7:30. Sometimes in our family we refer to this as O.G.S. (Old Guy Syndrome). But we get tired. I think of going to the drive-in movies over in Jefferson - two movies that don’t start until it gets dark. I refer to it as a “\$9 nap.” We’re driving home at 1 in the morning, and my eyeballs are burning. But that seems to be what’s happening here. These men mean well, but they cannot stay awake. The point for us is: Jesus leans on his friends here, and we need to be doing the same. As weak and as imperfect as they were, we need friends to help us get through some things. My suggestion is: When we are having a hard time, let’s tell somebody!

III. As we move on, we notice another big idea here (in verses 35-41) as we find that Jesus also handles the pressure of this night by GOING TO HIS FATHER IN PRAYER.

And this is probably not the kind of prayer we might expect to hear in a worship assembly. But instead, this is more of a desperate prayer. Only in Mark do we have Jesus addressing his Father as ***“Abba.”*** ***“Abba”*** is a very personal word. Some have compared it to “Papa.” It almost sounds like “Papa,” doesn’t it? It’s one of the first words that a little child would learn. So, this is a personal prayer. It’s also very emotional as we have Jesus falling down on his face on the ground. It is so intense, in fact, that in Luke, we have an angel coming and strengthening Jesus. In Luke, we also have the description Luke gives us that Jesus was praying so fervently that his sweat ***“became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.”*** And so again, Jesus seems to be almost completely overwhelmed and overcome with this situation, with this pressure he is facing.

As to what he is actually praying, ****PPT**** we find in all three of the parallel accounts that Jesus is asking his Father to remove this ***“cup”*** that he is about to endure. Ultimately, he wants his Father’s will to be done, but his will at this point is that he is begging his Father to find some other way. Often in scripture, the picture of a cup is used to try to illustrate God’s wrath or God’s judgment, God’s punishment for sin. Of course, Jesus had never sinned, but he was preparing to take on the punishment for our sins on the cross. As Paul would explain later (in 2 Corinthians 5:21), ***“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*** Jesus was preparing for this. This is why he came into this world, to bear the guilt of all sin ever committed. We think about how we feel guilty when we sin. Most of us do, at least. But think of that intense guilt that we’ve violated some law, that we let God down. Jesus was getting ready to take on all of that, for all of us. The guilt of every sin ever committed is about to be placed on him. And as this event gets closer, Jesus sees the horror of it, and he seems to be almost overwhelmed by it. And that’s why he throws himself on the ground. This isn’t the kind of prayer we pray as we’re driving in the car somewhere. This isn’t the somewhat casual prayer we offer before a meal. But this is intense. This is painful and personal - crying out to God, desperate, begging for help, begging for some other way.

And yet, in the end, Jesus is also asking that his Father's will be done. By the way, you might remember that this is how Jesus' ministry started, with the Sermon on the Mount. His disciples wanted to know how to pray, and he told them to say to God, ***"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"*** (Matthew 6:10). So here we are three years later, and Jesus desperately wants this cup taken away, but he also wants his Father's will to be done.

One thing I find interesting here is that we don't have an answer. As far as I can tell, though, we basically have two options. Either, 1.) the Father responded with a firm, but gentle "no," or, 2.) the Father was completely silent. Again, we do not know. But it seems that we are starting to understand, perhaps, why Jesus cries out from the cross, ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*** But whatever happens here, what we learn from this is that when we face pressure, we learn from Jesus that there is still a huge value in going to God in prayer, asking for God's will to be done. And I say this primarily because of what happens next.

IV. As we come to the end of this passage, we find (in verses 41-42) that Jesus ULTIMATELY GETS UP AND HE FACES THIS CHALLENGE WITH COURAGE.

After all of this, he says, ***"It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"*** And with that, ***"immediately,"*** and ***"as he is still speaking,"*** Mark says, Judas shows up with the angry mob, and Jesus willingly goes with them. He doesn't run and hide, but he submits. Peter, of course, whacks off a guy's ear with a sword, but Jesus condemns him for that and reminds him that all of this is taking place ***"to fulfill the Scriptures."*** In other words, once he prays and accepts the answer (or the lack of an answer), indicating that there is no other way but to go to the cross, once he accepts all of this as being ***"according to the Scriptures,"*** Jesus gets up and he faces it with courage. And truly, everything that is about to happen has been foretold for hundreds if not thousands of years - from the betrayal by a friend (Psalm 41:9), to the arrest without a protest (Isaiah 53:7), and even the disciples leaving him (Zechariah 13:7). Everything that happens this night has been prophesied. Jesus, then, faces all of it with courage, knowing that he is doing exactly what his Father has asked him to do.

Conclusion:

So, as we come to the end of our study today, we've learned something from Jesus about how to handle stressful situations. And I know we will never face what he faced here, but he is our perfect example. Whatever we go through, let's at least try to think about what he went through. He got away from the situation a bit, he leaned on his friends for support, he prayed for his Father's will to be done, and once he was clear concerning what that will was, he got up and he faced the situation with courage. And so, whether we are distressed or troubled, or whether we are surrounded by grief, even to the point of death, we know that we do not need to go through that alone. As we sometimes sing, "I must tell Jesus, I must tell Jesus, I cannot bear my burdens alone. Jesus can help me, Jesus alone."

But beyond this idea of dealing with stress, the more important application of this morning's passage is that Jesus did this for us. God the Father did this for us. As a father, I couldn't do what he did. There are a few people in this world I might give my life up for. But to offer the life of one of my children? There's nobody on that list. But God the Father did this for us - not because we are so good, but because he loves us (as Reid read for us earlier). In response, we can ignore what he did, we can go and just live however we want to live. Or, we can love him in return. The Christian life isn't always easy, but we serve a God who loves us. He loves us so much that he ***"gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"*** (John

3:16). When we believe, we obey. We turn away from sin, and we obey his command to join him in his death, burial, and resurrection, in baptism, for the forgiveness of sins. If you would like to talk about this further, we invite you to get in touch. But if you are ready to obey this good news right now, we hope you will let us know right now, as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com