



Jesus: In The Garden

We continue our journey following Jesus as he walked among us. With this lesson we're going to see Jesus "In The Garden". Naturally, this is the Garden of Gethsemane where he took the disciples after the Passover supper; what we now refer to as "The Last Supper". We'll look at the account as recorded in the book of Mark.

Mk 14:32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, **"Sit here while I pray."**

Mk 14:33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

Mk 14:34 "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

Mk 14:35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.

Mk 14:36 **"Abba, Father,"** he said, **"everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."**

Mk 14:37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. **"Simon,"** he said to Peter, **"are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?"**

Mk 14:38 **Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."**

Mk 14:39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing.

Mk 14:40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Mk 14:41 Returning the third time, he said to them, **"Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.**

Mk 14:42 **Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"**

Jesus in the garden brings us face to face with what I consider to be some difficult issues to contend with, because it brings us face to face with God in anguish, troubled and distressed, overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. That's how Jesus described himself. And what we do is say, "That's the human side of Jesus. It had nothing to do with the God side." I think it's because many of us clearly divide the God side and the human side of Jesus.

The "God side" is the stuff that we're NOT like, or that we're really impressed by, while the human side is the part that just seems... well... normal, or ordinary like us, so healing the sick – God part; sweating – "human part". Walking on water – "God part". This is easy. We don't even have to study to figure this out, right? Eating – human part. We just sort of divide it up in our heads. There's the God side of Jesus and the human side of Jesus.

And yet, in this place where Jesus takes us, in the garden, we face something about Jesus we don't really want to have to deal with. Here is Jesus in a moment of despair, a moment of sorrow, feeling overwhelmed to the point of death. Jesus overwhelmed? I mean, we don't really want God overwhelmed, do we? Let's face it, we don't want God having a bad day! We don't want God needing encouragement! That's what he's there for us!

We want to be the ones that are whining, and struggling, and the ones who are doubting. If we ever have any sense that there's ever a moment when God might feel overwhelmed, that can be very perplexing and troubling can't it. So that's all the human part of Jesus. Can't touch the God part because we want the "God part" to have a level of certainty and stability that leaves us without any responsibility for the relationship, as if God had feelings.

Is it possible that what we're seeing in the Garden is NOT the human part of God? But there's something about the "God part" that God wants us to understand; that God actually has burdens, that God experiences sorrow, that there's the emotion of anguish that God shares with us. You see, God is more human than we think, or better yet, we humans are more like God than we know. The reason you have the capacity to feel deeply is because you were made in the image and likeness of God. Your emotions are NOT the human side of you, they are the "God part" of you!

The reason you are able to love is because you were created by God in his likeness and image. It wasn't that God was saying, "I don't know what love is like, but I think that it would be a great emotion for you guys. And I don't know what it's like to feel pain, but I'm going to give you guys that experience." God gave us these things because they are an intimate and personal part of him. Our emotions are the part of us that is more capable of showing God in us than anything else. God is not an impersonal "IT" but a very personal, and emotional being!

I think a lot of us unknowingly put God in the "IT" category. Have you ever notice that we do the "He", "She", "IT" thing without even realizing it? Without going too far with

this, let's make a quick observation. Have you ever noticed when a woman is pregnant with a child she wants it's a "he" or "she", but when there's an unwanted pregnancy, the child becomes an "IT"? When a man claims fatherhood, and is excited about the coming of the child, he talks about the child as a "he" or "she", but if he's not happy about the child, or doesn't want to have anything to do with the baby, it becomes an "IT"?

I understand the influence in my own mind from the movie Star Wars, because God becomes an "IT"; like "The Force". And, yeah, "The Force" is pretty cool. I mean, who doesn't want to tap into a "Force"? Let's be honest, even the "Dark Side" of "The Force" is pretty attractive. If nothing else, they get better outfits. I mean – Darth Mal – come on! Who wants to be Anakin when you can be Darth Mal?

So, you can tap into the force, but the great thing about it is that it's inanimate, and not personal at all. It's completely impersonal. It's an energy you tap in to. You don't have to relate to "it". And even followers of Jesus Christ, when they talk about God as spirit, when they speak of the Spirit of God they call the Spirit an "IT" as if God were an energy, an impersonal entity without feelings.

I think what we're going to have to embrace, if we want to understand who God is as Jesus reveals him to us, is that we feel deeply because God feels deeply. We have the capacity to love and care because God **IS** love and care! We have the potential of experiencing betrayal, and knowing pain, and knowing disappointment because we are created in the image of God, because love always risks pain.

So we find Jesus in the Garden in a moment of incredible need. Not as if God needed anything, but because God feels deeply. Have you ever had a moment when you were just hurting so badly inside, that you were torn about not wanting to be around anybody, but wishing somebody was there for you? Isn't that one of the reasons it's so hard to care for each other when we're really hurting? We end up in a conversation something like this:

Hurting person, "**Get out of here!**"

Friend... leaves...

Hurting, "Why'd you leave? You weren't there for me."

Friend, "You told me to leave."

Hurting, "I didn't mean it."

Friend, "But you said to leave."

Hurting, "You should have known better!"

Have you ever had that conversation, on one end or the other? It's because the person hurting is torn. They need someone, but they don't want someone, but they do and they don't. They're too confused to think rationally about it. It's because in our greatest pain we're torn about being alone. We don't want anybody invading our space when we're tormented, and overwhelmed, and filled with sorrow, in our moments of weakness! But at the same time we know we really need someone there with us. In those very moments when we're so afraid to have someone else in our life, we run away from those people who care about us, while wishing at the same time that somehow they could catch up.

Jesus had that moment.

Mk 14:32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “**Sit here while I pray.**”

Mk 14:33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

I have three questions for you now to see if you will pass through this Garden with Christ.

The first question is: **Would God bring you close?**

You see, what I notice here is that not everyone gets to go through this experience with Jesus. He had hundreds of people who were willing to follow him, but chose only twelve in which to invest his life most deeply. But in this moment he tells them, “Stay here and pray”, and he takes only Peter, James and John farther with him. And it says in scripture, especially in Luke, that they were so close to Jesus that they were about a stone’s throw away. So everything Jesus was going to experience they could hear and they could see, and in many ways, they could feel. And Jesus brings them **in** to his moment of greatest anguish, and sorrow. What an incredible invitation! It’s as if God was laying his soul bare and saying, “Step into MY moment.” And he chooses just three men.

Sometimes I struggle wanting God to be equal and fair to everyone. I don’t even want to think about the idea that he might invite you to do something and not invite me. It would really bother me, yet the other nine did NOT get this invitation, which lets me know that God invites us to follow him as a people, but very intimately, and very personally, very uniquely. And there are some things that God will invite you to participate in with him that I will not get an invitation to, and some things I will be invited to that you will not.

So, if you have any interest at all, or if it’s peaked in your mind, you may ask, “How do I get an invitation... to something anyway?”; but maybe you don’t want to “go to the garden” with God. That may be a part of it. But would you be brought close by God? If God was going to choose someone that he was going to open his soul to, or share his most overwhelming emotions with, would you be that person?

Right before this experience we find kind of an unusual counter to this invitation because Jesus said in verse 27, “You will all fall away.” That’s kind of discouraging, isn’t it. Jesus told them, “For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered’. But after I have risen I will go ahead of you into Galilee, and Peter declared, ‘Even if all fall away I will not’.”

That’s why I love Peter. It’s like he’s saying, “Not me, Jesus. Yeah, I can see why the rest would, but not me!”

And I'm convinced Peter was absolutely sincere. I don't think he was faking it or just making a show of himself. I believe he really meant what he said. It was in his soul that even if he stood alone he would not abandon Jesus. But he didn't understand what he was up against, and what was about to happen to Jesus.

And Jesus responded, "I tell you the truth, today – yes tonight - before the rooster crows twice, you will disown me three times."

Talk about getting slammed! That must have caused Peter quite a stir to hear Jesus announce that about him, and right there in front of all the others! I can't imagine what must have gone through Peter's mind when he heard that, and obviously felt the stares from the others. Jesus had just told him to his face, while he was proclaiming his faithfulness, that his allegiance wouldn't even make it through the night! Boy, is that discouraging or what?

But Peter comes back at him, "No I won't (paraphrase mine) – You don't know me, Jesus. I will NOT disown you!" Uh huh... right. "...even if I have to die with you..." Have you ever said something you wish later you hadn't said? But he was so close; so right on target with **KNOWING** what it would require, but so off at **HAVING** what it would require.

After he said that, all the others said the same. I think that was added because in actuality I don't really think they were as sincere as Peter, if they were sincere at all. Perhaps they just didn't want Jesus to think they wouldn't stand with him. Who knows... except themselves and God. But Peter meant it.

Have you ever made a declaration to God that you meant, but you didn't keep? I'll bet you have. I know I have, and more than once. That's why I believe Peter really meant it. He wanted to be truthful about how he felt and how far he'd go for Jesus. And when Jesus told him what would happen, I'm thoroughly convinced Peter thought Jesus was wrong. I believe it because I've been there. I've been in that place where I've messed up so many times. Have **you** ever been there?

I've been there where I've said, "This is the last time, I promise you, God! I won't let this happen again, and I'm going to change... and it starts **NOW!**" And I meant it with all my heart. In my case, there have been so many times when I've been completely fed up with myself, and I just knew God had to feel the same way about me. I've wanted to change so bad; wanted to stop doing the wrong things; wanted to do the right things, and make a life of doing what I knew God wanted me to do. But time and again I've failed and fallen short of my goal, and I haven't even been that creative about it. So many times it's been the same sin, over and over. Time and again I've had to fall on my face before God, often in tears, and tell him I'm sorry... so very, very sorry. But as we can see throughout God's Word, when given the opportunity, God always chooses forgiveness. Praise be to our loving and merciful Lord!

Here is what I think is so extraordinary. Jesus knew they would all fail him. He knew they would all disown him, and he knew that Peter's declaration, his allegiance, was without any real merit or substance at the deepest level of his ability. And yet, Jesus invites them close. It kind of gives me hope, because I begin to realize that maybe it isn't about being perfect. Maybe being invited by God to come close isn't about getting it right all the time and not blowing it, because if it is then who would possibly have a chance? None of us would ever be invited.

Then I start asking myself, "What is the difference between Peter and Judas?" Let's look at that. First of all Judas disowned Jesus once, but Peter did it three times. That's a little odd, isn't it? Second, at least Judas didn't lie about it, Peter declared it then didn't do it. If anyone messed up more it was Peter, and not Judas. It seems Judas's error wasn't when he messed up, or blew it and betrayed Jesus. His problem was that he didn't trust enough in the mercy of God to turn back to God and be received again. He was obviously filled with remorse; he killed himself.

Strangely enough, what seems to gain the invitation to be brought in close by God is that you just keep coming back. You just keep coming back, and no matter how many times you blow it, no matter how many times you mess up, no matter how many times you fall short of even who YOU want to be, you just never give up on God's desire to bring you close.

Would God bring you close? Would he feel like you're the person that, in a moment, when he just wants to share what's on his heart and in his soul, what he's about, what he's going to do in the world, would you be someone he would bring within a stone's throw to bare his soul?

The second question is: **Can God trust you with his heart?**

So, he brings them in close and he tells them something that I really think had to just blow their minds. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch."

How many of us, if Jesus Christ looked at you, you've seen him feed thousands of people, make the blind see, the lame walk, raised the dead, walked on water, if he said that he was overwhelmed to the point of death, wouldn't your whole insides just start shaking? Wouldn't we be thinking, "If he's scared, what does he know that I don't know? Maybe I don't really want to be **that** close in the moment when he's overwhelmed with sorrow!"

Mk 14:35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.

Mk 14:36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

And Luke tells us that Jesus was in so much anguish that he was sweating like drops of blood. ^{Mk 14:37} “Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping.” What a slap in the face! Jesus, in his moment of greatest despair, inviting them to come close to him, and they’re not even connected enough to stay awake. It had to be like watching a bad movie; they just lost interest.

^{Mk 14:37 (second half of verse)} “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?”

^{Mk 14:38} Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

^{Mk 14:39} Once more he went away and prayed the same thing.

^{Mk 14:40} When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Now, that’s an understatement! Have you ever tried to stay awake and couldn’t, even when someone really needed you to? You know what the problem is? It’s not your pain; it’s not your problem; it’s not your moment. You’re not connected enough with them to identify with their feelings at that instant. It’s not that you don’t care, or that you don’t care about the person, you do, I’m sure, and you’re so close you can see what’s happening to them, but... it just isn’t **your** pain. And in the final analysis, you just become indifferent to it. I’ve done that. We’ve all done that to someone.

You know what makes the difference in that situation? When the person has your heart. When you can truly identify with that person, and their situation and feelings so that what happens to them seems to be happening to you at the same time, then you won’t fall asleep. Then you won’t lose interest.

For instance, doctors have studied the phenomenon of men having morning sickness when their wives become pregnant. When you love someone deeply their pain becomes your pain, their joy becomes your joy, their suffering becomes your suffering, and their burdens become your burdens.

Those disciples, as close as they were to Jesus, they had not come to that place where the burdens of God were their burdens. They were so close they could hear it and see it, but they still couldn’t quite feel it.

Can God trust you with his heart? Does what God cares about matter to you in any way? Are you shaped by what comes from the soul of God? Does what God cares about affect you? When God is burdened are you burdened?

YES, GOD FEELS! This was **NOT** the humanity of God! This was the divinity of God! God is the essence of love. No one feels more deeply than God, no one cares more deeply than God, no one loves more purely than God, no one feels pain more profoundly than God, and no one knows betrayal greater than God.

Can God trust you with his heart? Does what God cares about affect you at all?

I say this with all the love I can. But I really want you to think about this. If you're reading this lesson, you've probably already read the ones that went before in this series. Has it had any affect on you? Do you think more about how you live your life, and about your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Are you starting to get an idea of how much God **has** done for you, and continues to do for you?

You can tell what a person cares about by what they gravitate toward. You can always tell when a person is really becoming a follower of Jesus Christ because they start getting drawn into the things that God cares about.

There are 6 ½ billion people on this planet, most of whom go to bed at night with a level of emptiness in their souls that they wonder if anyone can fill. There are people desperately searching for their own sense of identity wondering if they exist for any reason at all. The anguish and despair of their souls is so profound, and God feels it in eternity, but we can be unaware of it, and strangely enough, even apathetic to it.

I'm by no means perfect, and I've already admitted how many times I've failed in my relationship with God, but I've always gotten back up and moved closer to him again. But one thing I've noticed over the years. When I take the time to talk to people about God, and try to encourage them to seek a relationship with him, usually to get them to at least start attending church somewhere, and I begin to see changes in their lives, it makes a difference to me. I can only talk about myself, but it makes it easier for me to continue pursuing my walk with Jesus when I see lives being changed.

I believe that God knows he can trust you with his heart when the things that matter to God matter to you, when the things that bring his soul to life bring your soul to life. It really thrills my heart to see people's lives changed, and see them turn around and put their trust entirely into God. It's like looking into eternity, like supernatural stuff! Kingdoms are crashing down, walls are falling and people are surrendering to Jesus and being set free!

Unfortunately, many of us live our lives as though the invitation God extends to us is just an ordinary thing. When God is doing something, or wants to do something in our lives, we treat it as though it's just another ordinary event, and it really isn't that important. There's nothing God entrusts to you and me that is more profound and more significant than a love for people. There's nothing deeper that God gives to us that is more urgent and meaningful than his love for those who are without him.

When God invites us to where he bares his soul, to share his heart, he invites us to the garden where Jesus said, "If there's any other way to save humanity, I'd like to know what it is, I'm open to it. But if there's no other way to save humanity, then I will bear whatever burden, and pay whatever price it takes for them."

Can God trust you with his heart?

Last question: **Will you come through when God calls on you?**

Jesus comes back three times. The first two times he's saying, "PRAY! This is not complicated! Watch and pray! Just do what I'm doing. Connect to what I'm doing in this moment. Watch and pray!" Then he says to Peter, "Peter, pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

We may think he's saying pray that you will not fall into temptation, but that's not it. He was not saying to pray, "Lord, please keep me from falling into temptation." He wanted him to pray and connect with Jesus, and what he was doing, so he would do what Jesus would do and **not** do what Jesus would **never** do. The only way to ensure that you will not fall is to follow.

He keeps coming back and telling them to watch and pray, but finally, the last time, he comes back and tells them, "You couldn't do it could you? Not even for one stinking hour!" So he says, "Get up and let's go." New command; new direction.

Here's something that maybe we're uncomfortable with. When God invites you into something, it's not open ended. Most of God's invitations are time dated. The disciples with him had one hour to join Jesus in this battle of prayer, and they blew it. They would never, never, never get that opportunity again. It was gone! How many of those golden opportunities have you missed? As for me, I don't even want to count.

I know there have been invitations from God to which I've said, "Maybe later, God." I don't have the nerve to tell God I don't want to do it, so I've told him I'd get to it later. You know, I'll answer your call on my heart later. I'll follow you in baptism later, or fix my relationship later, or get committed later, I'll make the character change later. Later is how we tell God we're not interested in the invitation at that moment.

But once they put it off too long, it was over, and the next command was, "Rise, and let's go. My betrayer has come." The story moves on without us if we ignore the invitation.

Will you come through when the moment comes? The moment you get it, the moment you understand what you're supposed to do, will you act, or will you just put it off and say, "Well, I need to think about it." Or "I'll pray about it."

Jesus is looking for women and men who will treasure his invitation and follow him without question. What is it God is saying to you right now? Is it "watch and pray" or "get up, and let's go"? Whatever it may be, what is the unique invitation God is giving you into right now?

Some of you may be new to this idea of following Jesus, but many of us have been at it a while. For those of us who've been there for some time, God is saying, "You've been

listening to me for a long time. It's time you yield your life to me. Let me invade your soul and follow me, and quit putting me off."

In Isaiah 55: 6 it says, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near."

It means that God draws near to you so you can find him, but just because he feels near, don't assume he will always be there. He can and will move on if you don't seek him or answer him soon, and you could get left behind because his invitation is time dated and you must treasure it when he invites you to follow him or you may lose that particular invitation.

There are some who grasp every invitation and get right in there with Jesus, but so many always say, "Later." We've gotten so used to pushing life back that we tend to also push God back. What is it he's inviting you into right now? Whatever it is he's putting on your heart, NOW is the moment to act on it, not later. Because what Jesus wants to know is if you would like to move into a more intimate place with him.

Would God bring you close?

Can he trust you with his heart?

Will you come through when he calls on you?

As you can answer these questions, "YES", you know you'll blow it; you'll mess up. But I guarantee that if you'll keep getting up, and say to Jesus, "Every time you call on me, I'm going to move closer to you", you'll discover that you will live in the most intimate communion with God you could ever imagine.