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A Holy Week Series

*An 8-Day Holy Week Series
by Brooke Jackson*



BROKEN FOR YOU

*The Cost of Following Jesus
to and Beyond the Cross*



Hosanna Revival



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ABOUT THIS STUDY

Though not as flashy as Christmas celebrations can be, the week of Jesus's passion—Holy Week—is the centerpiece around which our faith revolves. Jesus's death and resurrection are the moment of redemption. And while that is something we mostly rejoice in, the week leading up to the resurrection was not wholly celebratory. Instead, it was full of sorrow, pain, and rejection. It was a week in which Jesus was abandoned by his friends, ridiculed and mocked by the religious and those in power, and ultimately condemned to die. In that week, Jesus was broken. Yet it is only in his brokenness that our salvation is realized.

Broken for You invites followers of Jesus to walk through Holy Week with him, witnessing his brokenness along the way and considering what his example means for us. It extends an invitation for us to take up our cross and follow Jesus into brokenness. Are we willing to give up ease and reputation for the benefit of others? Or is it easier to remain comfortable in our faith, unwilling to walk the path Jesus did? Broken for You beckons readers to participate in God's kingdom, even when it is uncomfortable, and to see the riches of his glory that accompany a life surrendered to his use.

Broken for You: The Cost of Following Jesus to and Beyond the Cross

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Holy Week

INTRODUCTION

Broken for You

And when He had given thanks, He broke [the bread] and said,
“Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you: do this in
remembrance of Me.”

1 Corinthians 11:24 NKJV

At a conference several years ago, I saw a booth where teen girls were selling jewelry—rings, earrings, and pendants—made from shiny, colorful gems, held in place by tightly wrapped silver cords. The girls were part of Bling, a ministry for teens working through anger after experiencing traumas like abuse, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or youth legal systems. The program provided a nontraditional therapeutic outlet, allowing the girls to channel their pain into making jewelry. The “jewels” in their creations were actually pieces of broken glass harvested from the streets of their Chicago neighborhood. The girls collected, chiseled, and polished the glass until they looked like gemstones, turning broken things into something beautiful. The hope was that the ministry would instill this profound truth in the hearts of both the makers and their customers: that God restores, redeems, and redefines what is broken within us and in our lives.

Brokenness is not on most of our wish lists. It is uncomfortable and can leave us feeling isolated. We pray for wholeness—for ourselves and for others. We would rather feel complete than fragmented. The desire to avoid brokenness can be what makes practices like Lent difficult to engage in earnestly. For followers of Jesus, Lent is a season of reflection

and sacrifice—a time to experience what it means to carry the death of Jesus Christ about in our bodies. Those of us who practice Lent typically give up something in the forty days before Easter as a way to deny our flesh and forgo what we would prefer to be doing or consuming. Reflecting on the tension between the desire to fully embrace self-denial and the hesitation we often feel, Henri Nouwen wrote,

I am still so divided. I truly want to follow you, but I also want to follow my own desires and lend an ear to the voices that speak about prestige, success, human respect, pleasure, power, and influence. Help me to become deaf to these voices and more attentive to your voice, which calls me to choose the narrow road to life.¹

Despite our own hesitation toward brokenness, the most significant moment of our faith is rooted in the brokenness of Jesus. Both Jesus's mission and life, as outlined in the Gospels, are marked by sacrifice—a continual outpouring of himself for others. This journey culminates with Good Friday and then Easter—the solemn and celebratory conclusions of the Lenten season. This week, we will walk alongside Jesus in the events of Holy Week, reflecting on how he was broken for us on the cross and considering what it means to follow him in our own brokenness beyond it.

**“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others
and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

Mark 10:45 NLT

¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Show me the Way: Readings for Each Day of Lent* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 13.



Day 1: Palm Sunday

CELEBRATION AND SORROW

Broken for What We Miss

“How I wish today that you of all people
would understand the way to peace.”

Luke 19:42a NLT

READ ZECHARIAH 9:9–11 AND MATTHEW 21:1–11.

Many Jewish people are traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Jesus and his disciples are no different. But Jesus has another purpose in traveling there for this particular Passover celebration. This time, his coming will fulfill the prophecy declared hundreds of years before by the prophet Zechariah.

READ JOHN 12:12–19.

How do the people respond to Jesus's entry?

The coming king was prophesied to bring peace, destroy weapons of war, and set prisoners free! And so, it is no wonder that the people wave palms toward him as he rides in, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (John 12:13b ESV). This scene is loaded with expectations—many of them sociopolitical in nature. There was a hope that Jesus would overthrow the Roman empire

that kept the children of Israel subservient.¹ But the events of the week do not play out the way people imagine they will.

READ LUKE 19:41–44.

How would you describe Jesus's emotions here?

Jesus is grieved to the point of weeping. We have seen Jesus weep before (John 11:35). But what drives his grief this time is the failure of the people to recognize his coming. He tells them that they don't "understand the way of peace" (Luke 19:42 NLT). The people imagined that the Messiah would come and break the oppression of the Roman empire and free them from it. They may have dreamed about the Messiah coming into political power and making life easier for them. But, contrary to their expectations, Jesus did not do that. Instead he dies. I am sure that, to the people, this seemed like the exact opposite of what the Messiah would do.

But a review of Jesus's life shows what Jesus meant by the way of peace. Jesus spent years healing people of their ailments, preaching about repentance and the kingdom of heaven, and calling people to see the truth of God beyond their own expectations. He moved toward people in compassion, loving those who society had pushed to the margins and asking his friends to do the same. He corrected the religious leaders when their hypocrisy oppressed others. Perhaps we are meant to understand the way of peace by following what Jesus did: moving toward people, loving those in the margins, and pointing others to his peace.

REFLECT

- 1 How would you describe brokenness?
- 2 In what ways have we misunderstood the way of peace, and how do you think that grieves the heart of God?
- 3 What is something broken that you are hoping God can make beautiful in this season?

¹ *The ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, 2008), 2048, note on John 12:12–19.



Day 2: Holy Monday

ANGER

Broken for What Should Be

Passion for your house has consumed me,
and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

Psalm 69:9 NLT

The Old Testament prophets repeatedly referenced the temple and God's purposes for it. God showed his prophets visions of what he intended for his earthly dwelling and place of worship. For example, Ezekiel 47:1–12 paints a picture of a great river flowing from the temple, extending from multiple sides and growing deeper the further out it flowed, bringing life and fruitfulness everywhere its waters touched. Jesus proclaims in John 7 that he himself is the living water, harkening back to this vision in Ezekiel. The temple was to be not only a place of worship but a place from which life flowed, bringing God's blessing and growth to those who follow him. But in the New Testament, Jesus frequently expresses sorrow and, at times, anger when the place meant for life is used for abuse and oppression. Today's reading will look at one of those times.

READ MARK 11:15–19.

The text does not specifically tell us what about the situation angered Jesus. The common assumption is that the moneychangers were overcharging or otherwise taking advantage of people who came to purchase animals for sacrifices. This is partly because of the specific mention of those who sold pigeons (v. 15), as they were the cheapest animals available for purchase and were often bought by those with fewer resources.

Additionally, a key difference between the Old Testament temple and the New Testament temple points to another injustice. The temple was enormous—measuring twelve soccer fields end to end and divided into various courts and levels.¹ In the Old Testament temple, the only segregation of people that occurred was between priests and nonpriests.² But under the construction of Herod the Great, the temple had been further divided to segregate Jewish men from women, and both from Gentiles, who were permitted only to access the outer court.³ Signs were posted in the outer court warning Gentiles that venturing further into the temple's structure would mean death.⁴

In verse 17, Jesus says, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers” (ESV). The writing Jesus is referring to comes from Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet whose messages frequently centered around justice. To gain more insight, let's look at the Scripture Jesus quotes within its context.

READ ISAIAH 56:1–7

The prophet's words demonstrated God's desire for people to know and follow him and to have hope and a place in his family.

New Testament Scholar and University Professor Amy-Jill Levine writes that the thing that boiled up in Jesus that day was likely an indignation about how outsiders were being treated in the temple. She writes, “Are churches today houses of prayer for all people, or are they just for people who look like us, walk like us, and talk like us? How do we make other people feel welcome?”⁵ Levine continues that when the church isn't welcoming of those God identifies as vulnerable and outcast, it becomes instead what Jesus calls it here: a den of thieves—a cave where “robbers

¹ *The ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, 2008), 48.

² *NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2019), 1727, note on Mark 11:16.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Amy-Jill Levine, *Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week* (Abingdon Press, 2018), 55.

go after they have taken what does not belong to them, and count up their loot,”⁶ a place where those who feel welcome are those who steal and take advantage of others.

This exposition makes me think differently about Jesus’s anger in this Gospel account. Years ago, a ministry I work with had to deal with the disappointment of kids in our neighborhood who would try to attend the local churches that were walking distance from their homes. They’d show up and be admonished that they weren’t dressed appropriately for church. Frustrated, the kids would leave and not go back.

Strict dress codes aren’t the only ways we keep people from feeling welcome in our places of worship. I’m sure you can think of other ways we keep the church from being a house of prayer for all nations. Are we as broken by things like this as Jesus was? Are we moved by our collective failures as a church when it comes to welcoming those who aren’t welcome elsewhere? And if we are, what do we do about it?

After driving out the moneychangers, Jesus didn’t leave or abandon the temple. Matthew’s account tells us that he stayed and healed people (Matthew 21:14). Luke’s account tells us that he continued teaching daily in the temple (Luke 19:45–46). Jesus offered restoration in place of his anger. He corrected the injustice and then stayed to show them the right(eous) way to be.

Righteous anger seeks restitution, not revenge;
it seeks correction, not retribution.

Amy-Jill Levine

REFLECT

- 1 As a follower of Jesus, where do you look to understand what things grieve the heart of God?
- 2 What things grieve your own heart in a righteous way right now?
- 3 Consider the thing you identified above. How can you be involved in bringing restoration or healing to it?

⁶ Ibid., 56.



Day 3: Holy Tuesday

EXPECTATION AND DISAPPOINTMENT

Broken for What Is Lacking

Whenever Jesus says, “Look at the fig tree,” he is challenging our notions of attentiveness and expectations.

Margaret Feinberg

For our fourth anniversary, my husband and I bought each other apple tree saplings: his a Granny Smith, mine a Honeycrisp. We planted them in our yard and waited for the harvest. The Granny Smith grew some crab apples during its second year and produced a few edible apples in year three! By year five, his tree was producing more than one hundred edible apples. And mine? It had not even produced a single flower (the apple’s precursor) in that same time. I was disappointed. Had bugs or a fungus gotten to the roots and stripped it, preventing it from flourishing? Around the spring of 2020, the trees’ six-year mark, I decided the Honeycrisp was going to have one more season to show some sign of life or we’d tear it out and start over. Then, one April afternoon, I almost cried when I saw three small pink and white blooms nestled close to its trunk. The tree was alive! This past summer, in its tenth year, it produced actual, edible apples, just like the Granny Smith.

The mistreatment of the temple was not the only thing that frustrated Jesus during Holy Week. In the time between the cleansing of the temple and Jesus’s arrest and crucifixion, we see Jesus rebuking religious hypocrisy. Jesus makes a lot of folks angry with the things he says. Curiously, he also curses a fig tree and it withers.

READ MATTHEW 21:18–22.

Jesus goes to the fig tree in hunger, expecting there to be fruit; yet there is none. So he curses it, rendering the tree unable to do what it was meant to. I've always wondered why Jesus cursed the tree this way. Mark's Gospel says that the tree was out of season, meaning that it was not time for fruit. It feels wasteful, almost cruel, to expect the tree to have fruit when it's not the usual time. But throughout the Bible, figs represent more than just food to eat. Figs are mentioned multiple times in the Old Testament, with their first appearance in Genesis 3:7. Thereafter, they symbolize security and peace for those who follow God (1 Kings 4:25)¹ or the lack of security for those who do not (Jeremiah 8:13). Take a look at Jeremiah 24:1–10 and see the way God used a vision of figs to communicate a message to the prophet. Likewise, Jesus uses the fig more than once to teach his followers. Margaret Feinberg writes:

[W]hen the prophets paint an image of a satisfying life with God, a close relationship with him, they describe people living under their own fig tree. The contentment and delight symbolized by such a scene are multi-layered. The fig tree alludes to God's ongoing provision by way of its slow ripening and multiple crops. The fig leaves speak of God's tender care as some of the coolest shade to be found in Israel. The fruit speaks of God's sweetness through its delicious, nourishing sustenance.²

Fig trees are unique among fruit trees. From afar, their giant leaves make it difficult to see whether there is fruit on their branches. They produce their fruit in waves, resulting in multiple harvests over their fruiting season. Fig trees that are well cultivated can produce tens of thousands of figs a year—a staggering figure.

Harvesting figs is difficult because the window between ripeness and spoilage is short, passing in mere days.³ As a result, fig farmers must live in a state of expectancy and attention, ready to work and gather immediately when the fruit is ripe. The first harvest, known as the breva

1 NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible (Zondervan, 2019), 1727, note on 1 Kings 4:25.

2 Margaret Feinberg, *Taste and See: Discovering God among Butchers, Bakers, and Fresh Food Makers* (Zondervan, 2019), 63.

3 Ibid., 56–57.

crop,⁴ is favored because it indicates the end of winter—warmer days are coming!

Jesus tells his disciples this as well in Mark 13:28: “Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches bud and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near” (NLT). The nearness of summer means those who gather must be ready for what’s next. This significance of readiness is emphasized when we consider what Jesus says following the withering.

After the tree withers, Jesus tells a series of parables to those who are with him at the Mount of Olives, including one about two sons whose father asks them to go to the vineyard (Matthew 21:28–32); the wicked tenants who killed those who were sent to collect the harvest (Matthew 21:33–45); and the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1–14). Each of these stories is full of meaning. While highlighting the hypocrisy of the religious leadership and the expansive nature of God’s kingdom, each of them also gives a glimpse of God’s expectation for our readiness. Jesus then returns to the lesson the fig tree can teach us.

READ MARK 13:28–37.

It is easy to fall into the pit of apathy, busyness, or idleness, trading the hope of eternal life for the temporary comforts of this life. But Jesus instructs us to remain watchful. Are we cultivating the fruit of the kingdom? Are we paying attention to the right things? Will we be ready for what’s coming next?

In Jesus’s lesson of the fig tree, we see not only an encouragement to bear fruit but an expectation of it. Yet Jesus’s expectation does not come without instruction and support. In John 15 he tells his disciples the secret to bearing fruit: abiding in him (John 15:1–5). It comes with the promise that those of us who do will “bear much fruit” (John 15:5 NIV).

“In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that his return is very near, right at the door.”

Mark 13:29 NLT

⁴ Ibid., 57.

REFLECT

- 1** What does the fig tree's lesson of readiness and Jesus's warning to be watchful mean for you?
- 2** What purpose do you think Jesus has for the role our fruit plays in the kingdom of God?



Day 4: Spy Wednesday

HONOR AND BETRAYAL

Broken for What We Love

Even my close friend, someone I trusted,
one who shared my bread, has turned against me.

Psalms 41:9 NIV

Although it is Matthew's account that places the story we will read today in the middle of Holy Week, we are going to read the narrative from John, in which it occurs before. In each report, Jesus is having a meal with friends and followers in Bethany. Here, Mary—a friend and disciple—does something to prepare for his burial. And it starts with an act of breaking.

READ JOHN 12:1–11.

If we could put ourselves in Mary's shoes at this moment, what might we feel? This Jesus, who has been a long-time friend, who raised her brother from the dead, is headed toward something dark and violent. She might not know all the details, but Scripture tells us that she is a good listener, often sitting at the Savior's feet to learn (Luke 10:38–42). Jesus has shared multiple times that he is going to die (Mark 8:31–33; 9:30–32; 10:32–34). Does she feel the time drawing near? Have his recent mysterious sayings made her realize that his end is soon? Perhaps feeling a sense of urgency, she sets aside any concern for her own reputation and publicly honors Jesus before his death. She breaks an alabaster vial of nard—a

very expensive perfume, the cost of which was about a year's wages.¹ She pours out the perfume for Jesus, weeping as she kisses his feet and wipes them with her hair. Her actions are intimate and lavish, yet in the eyes of Jesus's other disciples, they seem wasteful (Matthew 26:8–9; John 12:5). She risks judgment, jeopardizing her social status and the appearance of piety (for this money could have been given to the poor). Yet Jesus describes her act of breaking as a beautiful thing, done to prepare him for his burial (Matthew 26:10–12). He promises that what she has done will be remembered everywhere the gospel is shared (Matthew 26:13).

READ MATTHEW 26:14–16.

In the same week that Mary bears her heart in worship, Judas betrays Jesus for money. Thirty pieces of silver was worth more than 100 days' wages.² The irony—if it can be called that—of one person spending the value of a year's worth of pay to demonstrate devotion and love for the coming sacrifice of Jesus, while another earns one third of that amount to deliver him over to death, is striking. Jesus was simultaneously adored and hated—lauded with cries of “Hosanna” while being secretly plotted against for his death. Worshiped and betrayed—the contrast is dizzying. This polarity is present throughout his ministry, but it is starkly apparent during the events of Holy Week. Yet Jesus is not overcome by it. Look back at one of the times when Jesus foretold what would happen to him.

READ MATTHEW 16:21–28.

I think Peter reflects the initial reaction that many of us have when we hear impossibly bad news. We reject it or do anything we can to avoid its arrival. Peter did the same, even to the point of rebuking Jesus and insisting that this death could not possibly happen. Jesus's rebuke of Peter teaches us the difficult truth of what it means to follow him. There's a danger in believing that the way of Christ is wholly safe or comfortable. Of the difference between those who follow Jesus versus those who merely admire him, Søren Kierkegaard wrote:

It is well known that Christ consistently used the expression “follower.” He never asks for admirers, worshippers or adherents.

¹ *The ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, 2008), 2047, notes on John 6:7 and John 12:5.

² *NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2019), 1684, note on Matthew 26:15.

No, he calls disciples. It is not adherents of a teaching but followers of a life Christ is looking for. Christ understood that being a “disciple” was in innermost and deepest harmony with what he said about himself. Christ claimed to be the way and the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6). For this reason, he could never be satisfied with adherents who accepted his teaching—especially with those who in their lives ignored it or let things take their usual course. His whole life on earth, from beginning to end, was destined solely to have followers and to make admirers impossible.³

Jesus honors Mary for her act of worship in her breaking (Matthew 26:13). And he washes Judas’s feet, despite what Judas has already done (John 13:1–30). This idea of suffering accompanying the life of the follower of Jesus was emphasized by Paul in his letters to the church in Rome. He wrote about the role that suffering would play in the life of a follower of Jesus: “And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering” (Romans 8:17 NLT). Paul did not see suffering as meaningless. Instead, he believed “we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and, character, hope” (Romans 5:3b–4 NIV).

We are not promised ease. To follow in the steps of Jesus is to join him in the suffering of the cross, not to run from it or deny that it is happening. Suffering is required for the faithful, but it is never without purpose.

REFLECT

- 1 Why do you think we tend to seek pleasure in an attempt to avoid hardship or confronting our own brokenness?
- 2 What makes following Jesus and engaging in his suffering difficult?
- 3 What is the cost to others if you avoid being an actual follower of Jesus?

³ Søren Kierkegaard, “Followers, not Admirers,” *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard*, compiled and edited by Charles E. Moore (Plough, 1999), 83.



Day 5: Maundy Thursday

GRIEF AND SOLITUDE

Broken in Yielding

And when He had given thanks, He broke [the bread] and said,
“Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you: this do in
remembrance of Me.”

1 Corinthians 11:24 NKJV

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Matthew 26:56b NIV

READ MATTHEW 26:17–57.

Each Gospel tells of the Last Supper Jesus has with his disciples. Today's reading highlights the first night of Passover, which commemorates the exodus of God's people from Egypt. It is here that Jesus leads the disciples in the first Eucharist. In John 6:53, Jesus foreshadows this event when he tells them that to have life in them, they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. And here, while celebrating the historic event of the salvation of God's people from their oppressors, he breaks and distributes bread and wine, telling them to eat and drink his flesh and blood in his memory (Matthew 26:26–28).

Think back to yesterday's consideration of what it means to join Jesus in the suffering of the cross. Jesus reiterates the idea of partaking in his suffering in a way that may have shocked his listeners. Cannibalism was not the message. But eating the flesh of a sacrificed animal was something

that would have resonated with the disciples—such meals were seen as symbolically sharing a meal with God as part of the act of worship.¹ Yet even then, no blood remained in the meat—it was to be fully cooked. Since the time of Noah, blood was not fit for consumption by God’s people.² But here, Jesus tells his disciples to eat his *flesh* and drink his *blood*. We know Jesus isn’t telling them to defy all God’s laws (Matthew 5:17), so why would he tell them to do this?

If we take the Eucharist for granted, if we take Communion as simply a form of dinner, then we miss the shock. Jesus is giving up his life, and he wants that to be remembered. He is allowing his body to be broken, and he wants that to be remembered.³

The invitation to eat and drink is to take into our bodies the sacrifice of Jesus. It is an invitation to participate in his death.

Here is where Jesus also tells his disciples that one of them will betray him. They respond in distress (Matthew 26:22). All of them wonder if they are the one who would do such a thing to their friend. Even Judas asks, “Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi?” I wonder if he asks because he wants to see if Jesus knows it’s him. Or maybe he wants the other disciples to not suspect him. There’s also the possibility that, at the time he asks, Judas does not yet realize how he was going to deliver on his promise to turn Jesus over to the authorities. John’s Gospel says that Satan entered Judas as he takes the bread from Jesus (John 13:27–30). Then he leaves to finish his work.

At the end of the evening, the group sings a hymn, likely from the psalms of the Hallel (Psalm 113–118), which are traditionally sung throughout a Passover meal.⁴ Read *Psalm 118* and take note of what the psalm says about God’s character. Draw your attention to these verses:

When hard pressed, I cried to the LORD;

he brought me into a spacious place.

The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid.

1 Amy-Jill Levine, *Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner’s Guide to Holy Week*, (Abingdon Press, 2018), 120.

2 Ibid., 120.

3 Ibid., 120–122.

4 NRSV *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2019), 1684, note on Matthew 26:30.

What can mere mortals do to me?

The LORD is with me; he is my helper.

I look in triumph on my enemies.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD

Than to trust in humans.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD

Than to trust in princes. (Psalm 118:5–9 niv)

These lyrics and the promises of God's faithful love are still lingering on the tongues of Jesus and his friends as they go to the garden of Gethsemane, the place where Jesus is going to ask the Father if what is coming could possibly pass him by. God's enduring presence is likely fresh in Jesus's mind when he approaches with his prayer.

Immediately before he prays, Jesus tells his friends that they will desert him. Peter firmly denies this. He will do no such thing! In fact, he vows that even if it means death, he will not leave Jesus's side (Matthew 26:35). That's a bold promise—one that Peter ultimately doesn't keep.

With all that professed devotion, it would seem simple then for the disciples to stay awake and pray as Jesus seeks the face of God. But as Jesus prays, his closest friends fail him. In fact, every time he asks them if they could do the small thing of staying awake and being watchful, they sleep, leaving him to deal with his anguish alone. The second time he returns to find them sleeping, Jesus says specifically to Peter, "Couldn't you watch with me even one hour? Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation" (Matthew 26:40b–41a NLT). In the end, each of them, who only hours ago could not fathom that they might be the one who would betray Jesus (Matthew 26:22), were mere hours away from scattering, hiding, and denying him themselves.

Jesus yields to the will of God, despite knowing the coming betrayal. Three times Jesus asks God to allow the cup to pass from him, even while praying, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39c NIV). It was no easy thing for Jesus to walk the road to crucifixion. And yet he did it anyway.

REFLECT

1 In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow “to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38). As a person who struggles with anxiety, I am familiar with anguish that leads to feelings of defeat. What comfort does it bring to you to see that, even for Jesus, yielding to God’s plans for him was not something he accepted easily?

2 Much like Jesus’s disciples, I think many of us like to believe that, in the face of risk to others, we would be the ones on the right side of history. We would protect the vulnerable and stop the evil from succeeding. What is it that stops us from doing the hard thing of walking with those who are at risk?



Day 6: Good Friday

IN DEATH AND DYING

Broken for Us

When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Philippians 2:7c–8 NLT

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:4–5 NIV

Today we will see how Jesus impacts those with whom he comes into contact on the day of his death. Luke traces Jesus's steps from accusation through the road to Golgotha; and the reactions—from friends and foe alike—are varied.

READ LUKE 23:1–49.

The accusations against Jesus weren't true. He wasn't subverting the nation or telling people not to pay their taxes. And when Pilate asks Jesus whether he's king, Jesus turns the question back to Pilate. I love this exchange between Pilate and Jesus in John's account:

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

“What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.” (John 18:37–38 NIV)

Everyone believes that they are on the side of truth. Powers and factions uphold what they believe to be true, with dangerous consequences. Wars have been fought based on what people believe to be true, no matter how grotesque those beliefs might be. I imagine Pilate’s incredulous expression when he asks Jesus, “*What is truth?*” It’s almost laughable to consider what “truth” is when everyone has their own version. Yet Jesus says truth is the reason he came into the world. For us to know what the truth really is, we must watch and listen to him. And yet, when conversing with Jesus, the truth Pilate finds is that Jesus is not guilty of what he stands accused of. Pilate becomes immensely uncomfortable with being the one to condemn Jesus to death. So he passes Jesus along to Herod when he finds out Jesus is from Herod’s district.

Herod sees this as an opportunity to have him perform (v. 8). But Jesus doesn’t take the bait and, instead, remains silent in the face of Herod’s questions. I imagine that Jesus’s refusal to go along with Herod’s intentions for him was extremely frustrating. In turn, Herod and the soldiers mock Jesus, laughing at him and putting him in “elegant robes” before sending him back to Pilate, still uncondemned (v. 11 NIV).

Pilate wants clean hands (don’t we all?). This is evident as he repeatedly asks others to make the decision for him, even though he has the authority to decide whether or not to crucify Jesus. But he has him crucified anyway. Luke’s Gospel says that Pilate and Herod became friends that day, even though they had previously been enemies (v. 12). They bonded over their respective roles in Jesus’s crucifixion. Though not uncommon, history is replete with the darkness that accompanies powers bonding over injustice.

The next person we meet who engages with Jesus is a man named Simon, from the region of Cyrene, who is made to carry the cross of Jesus as he marches toward Golgotha. Mark’s Gospel tells us that Simon is the

father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). While we know little else of Simon's background, the fact that he and his sons are named likely indicates that the readers of the Gospel know them.¹ As a participant in this specific event, Simon was likely the person who recounted his experience, with either him or his sons giving the account to the Gospel writer. For historians, tracing the oral history from named sources corroborated the truth of the writer's account. But to me, it speaks to the impact that literally carrying Christ's cross had on Simon's life—so much so that he, and eventually his sons, remained connected to the apostles and the folks to whom the Gospels were written, even years later.

Following behind Jesus is a crowd of mourners, including the women who were wailing in grief. Jesus tells them not to cry for him but to cry instead for themselves and for humanity; for if they're doing this to him, what else is on the horizon?

Jesus's final moments, once on the cross, are between two men who have also been accused of crimes and who are going to die alongside the Lord. Even they have two drastically different responses to Jesus's presence. One mocks him and questions his identity, testing Jesus to perform a miracle and save himself and them (v. 39). But the other, in humility and in recognition of the moment they are in, says, "Don't you fear God . . . since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong" (vv. 40–41 NIV). He then addresses Jesus and asks him, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom" (v. 42).

Lastly, of today's witnesses to the cross, we see the centurion who, after seeing the sky darkened and the self-rending of the temple curtain, comes to a realization of who Jesus is. Matthew's Gospel says that the earth shook and the bodies of other holy people who had been entombed were raised to life out of open graves (Matthew 27:51–52). Luke says that the centurion realized Jesus was righteous and innocent in those moments following Jesus's death (Luke 23:47). And Matthew records the centurion exclaiming, "Surely, he was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54 NIV).

The reality is, many people can have varied reactions to Jesus and believe

¹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and The Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 40–52.

wholeheartedly that their perspective is true and right, some even believing things about Jesus that lead them to harm unjustly. And yet, alongside those same persons, are those who see the truth of Jesus for what it is in ways that change the trajectories of their lives. My prayer for us is that we are the latter.

Pilate's question, "What is truth?" is answered in the person of Jesus. Jesus, the only one who has ever been completely whole, was broken for us. Despite our own brokenness—our failures, selfishness, inattentiveness, and apathy—Jesus gave himself to be broken so that we could be whole. In an ultimate expression of love, he endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2), despite having the power to avoid it.

REFLECT

- 1 How have your beliefs about Jesus been cultivated over the course of your life?
- 2 How has what you believe about Jesus impacted your daily decision making and your treatment of others?
- 3 What does Jesus's crucifixion mean for you? What does it mean for those whose lives intersect with yours?



Day 7: Holy Saturday

BROKEN SILENCE

Suffering and death belong to the narrow road of Jesus. Jesus does not glorify them, or call them beautiful, good, or something to be desired. Jesus does not call for heroism or suicidal self-sacrifice. No, Jesus invites us to look at the reality in our existence and reveals this harsh reality as the way to new life. The core message of Jesus is that real joy and peace can never be reached while bypassing suffering and death, but only by going right through them.

Henri Nouwen

My family and I have planned and participated in several celebrations of life (funerals) over the last couple years. Some of the deaths were anticipated and slow-going, giving us time to say goodbye, grieve, and make preparations. Some of them were sudden, sharp and unexpected—those left us catching our breath. None of them were easy. Death is hard. And it can often bring out the worst in us. Questions about the person's wishes can lead to arguments and gross comparisons. How we respond to death can be complicated. Mixed feelings of shame, guilt, and even relief can mingle with grief in a disorienting way, and we can behave in ways that we didn't anticipate. The aftermath of Jesus's death contains the same tension.

READ MARK 15:42-47 AND JOHN 19:38-42.

Multiple aspects of this account leave me with lots of questions. Why didn't Jesus's family bury him? Were they not allowed? Were they hiding out of fear? Scholars suggest there are multiple reasons why Jesus was buried by strangers and not his mother or siblings. It could have been because burying him alone was an act of honor for such a great prophet; burying him in an unused plot would ensure that no other remaining bones could be confused for Jesus post-resurrection; or his death on a cross rendered him ineligible to be buried in a family tomb.¹

And then there's the two men who care for Jesus's body after his death. Two silent supporters. Joseph of Arimathea is described as a good and upright man who was awaiting the coming of the kingdom of God (Luke 23:50–51). But he was also a member of the Sanhedrin—the group that had just condemned Jesus to death. Luke's Gospel tells us that Joseph did not agree with what the council had done, and Matthew tells us that he had become a disciple of Jesus (Matthew 27:57). We are told in John 19 that Joseph is joined by Nicodemus—whose initial Gospel appearance comes alongside one of the most quoted verses of the New Testament (John 3:16)—and that the two of them prepare Jesus's body with myrrh, a spice used to help slow the stench of a decomposing body.

I wonder about how hard it was for Joseph—a council member—to watch his colleagues condemn Jesus unjustly and not say anything in his defense. How uncomfortable did he feel hearing the vitriol that surrounded Jesus's accusations? Did he stay silent out of fear of what might happen to him if he spoke up? Or did he try to speak against Jesus's condemnation and was simply shut down from the swath of voices railing against him? And what about Nicodemus? He was a Pharisee who had been curious enough about Jesus earlier in his ministry that he came to ask him about new life; but he only did so under the cover of night (John 3:1–21), perhaps fearing what others would think of him if they saw him with Jesus.

It may be easy to judge these two men for spending Jesus's active years following from a distance or only admiring from afar. But when Jesus was left without the type of service we might plan for our loved ones today, these two men were present with him and cared for his body with dignity. It's a stark contrast to the actions of his closest friends, who had

¹ Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington, III, *The Gospel of Luke*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Printing, 2008), 640; see also, Byron R. McCane, "The Scandal of the Grave," *Christian History* 59, Christianity Today (1998) at www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-59/scandal-of-grave.html (accessed January 22, 2025).

followed him openly throughout his ministry and then fled when the risk to them was highest.

READ MATTHEW 27:62–66 AND MARK 16:1–2.

Joseph and Nicodemus weren't the only ones who were concerned about the body of Jesus after his death. Those responsible for his death wanted to ensure that his followers would not try to move his body and claim a false resurrection, so they stationed additional guards to ensure he could not be removed.

And then there were the grieving women who wanted to honor Jesus. They showed up to prepare his body with additional spices. It is not stated whether they knew additional guards had been stationed at the tomb. But it is clear that, despite Jesus's repeated statements about rising from the dead, they did not expect his body to be gone (Luke 24:1–8). This in-between moment for them, between grief and glory, was likely one in which they were expecting some sort of closure. But that is not what awaited them, is it?

As followers of Jesus, we all have a choice about how we live out our faith. There is almost always a cost to choosing to act in a way that reflects who Jesus was and what he did. If and how we do that is up to us.

REFLECT

- 1 Have there been times when you have worried about what the impact of following Jesus will mean to you or your reputation? If so, how has the concern of what others think impacted your ability to follow Jesus faithfully?
- 2 Have you, like Joseph and Nicodemus, taken steps to overcome those hesitations? If so, what was that like?
- 3 Unlike Joseph, who may have been risking a lot more than reputation by aligning himself with Jesus in the moment he was being condemned to death, the risks we face in most Western faith communities are usually lower. Consider your answers above. What actual risks were you taking by following Jesus faithfully in those times?



Day 8: Easter Sunday

FEAR AND JOY

A Restored Hope

“We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel.”

Luke 24:21a NLT

The happy ending has never been easy to believe in. After the Crucifixion the defeated little band of disciples had no hope, no expectation of Resurrection. Everything they believed in had died on the cross with Jesus. The world was right, and they had been wrong.

Even when the women told the disciples that Jesus had left the stone-sealed tomb, the disciples found it nearly impossible to believe that it was not all over. The truth was, it was just the beginning.

Madeleine L'Engle

Jesus's first appearance(s) are to his women disciples who had arrived at the tomb to prepare his body with spices (Luke 24:1–23; John 20:1–18). I consider it a precious thing that Jesus appears first to women and that those women are the first to preach the resurrection.¹ But, this Holy Week, I'd like to look instead at the other disciples following the events of Jesus's crucifixion and how Jesus interacted with them.

READ LUKE 24:13–35 AND JOHN 20:19–29.

The sting of loss—especially one that you didn't think would happen—can be paralyzing. The devastation of the looming unknown thereafter

¹ Brooke Jackson, *Just: A Journey Into the Mercy of God* (Hosanna Revival, 2025), 194–198.

can leave us full of sorrow and dread about the future. We can lose hope that we will experience anything worth celebrating again or that we are at risk of the same or similar danger ourselves.

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus show the weight of their sadness in response to Jesus asking what they are discussing (Luke 24:17). We can see how the devastation creates doubt in Jesus's identity as they describe Jesus as a prophet who they had hoped would redeem Israel (Luke 24:20–21). They do not describe him as the Son of God, and they refer to him in the past tense. This is in spite of having heard from the women that Jesus had risen from the dead (Luke 24:23–24). Isn't this always how the absence of hope shakes our faith? Jesus was dead—they had seen that with their eyes. And in the aftermath, they did not know what to do with that defeat. They had hoped he would be the redeemer. They had hoped their circumstances would change. Remember from the first day of this week's reading—their expectations were probably fixed in their present sociopolitical situation. Perhaps they had imagined the fall of Rome under Jesus's leadership, an immediate gratification for years of suffering and oppression. And as this apparent stranger approaches them on the road to Emmaus, the heaviness of their sadness threads through their recounting of the past few days.

Similar to those two disciples, we find others meeting in a home, with the doors locked, in fear (John 20:19). It's understandable. They had seen their friend and teacher—someone who could work miracles and who heard clearly and directly from God suffer a cursed fate, seemingly powerless to do anything to stop it. I would have been afraid too. Because if that had happened to him, what did that mean for me?

And Jesus, despite their fear and sadness, moves toward them and meets them right in the place of their bruised faith.

I think it is sweet that, in Emmaus, the eyes of the disciples are opened with another breaking, this time of bread—a call back to the last time Jesus and his disciples ate together. He breaks the bread and they recognize his body before them (Luke 24:30–31). And to those in the house, he vulnerably reveals the places of his own breaking—the marks in his hands and in his side (John 20:20). In both accounts, Jesus steps into the space of sadness and fear and shows himself to be with them, as he had promised them he would. He opens their eyes and reveals himself

to them as the Messiah. He provides them with exactly the presence they need to recognize him and believe. And when Thomas tells the other disciples that he will only believe if he has the chance to *touch*—not just see—the nail holes and put his fingers in the marks (John 20:24–25), Jesus meets him there as well, full of grace and love for his friend. He allows Thomas to experience what he desired and affirm his faith in the risen Christ.

READ LUKE 24:50–53.

How does verse 52 describe the disciples after their encounter with Jesus and his assurance of his presence with them?

It is possible for joy and disbelief to dwell in our hearts side by side (Luke 24:41). Yet no matter what place we find ourselves in or how far we feel from hope, Jesus can and does meet us there. Whether it is a promise we have begun to lose faith in or an outcome we had not anticipated, Jesus steps in where we are and sits with us, not shying away from our doubt or fear, but giving us the space and opportunity for our hope to be restored through him.

REFLECT

- 1 Go back to the first day of this devotional and notice the thing you identified as being broken. How have you lost hope or faith about whether this thing can be made beautiful? And how has that loss of expectation made you feel?
- 2 Can you imagine Jesus stepping into the space of your own fears and doubts? Take a moment and write a prayer expressing your heart's desire for his presence in that place.
- 3 In the church's liturgical calendar, Easter is followed by Pentecost—when the promised Holy Spirit fills Jesus's followers and a new beginning commences for the body of Christ. You can read about those early days of the Church in Acts, Luke's second book. At the conclusion of this Holy Week, what fresh filling and new beginning are ahead for you?