

Stations of The Cross-FOR GOOD FRIDAY

1. *Luke 22:39-44* He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.

Have you ever thrown yourself on the ground in prayer, asked your closest and dearest friends to pray and intercede with God for you? Have you ever prayed late into the night, desperately hoping to change God's mind for you? Have you ever resigned yourself to God's plan for your life, a plan that was not your own, a plan which would bring pain?

Imagine how Jesus must have felt as he knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane. Then kneel down (if you are able), and pray the prayer Jesus prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."

2. *Luke 22:47-51* While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him.

Judas, one of Jesus' closest friends betrayed him with a kiss, a sign of intimacy. Think about how he must have felt walking up to his teacher and his friend for the last three years, embracing him, knowing as soon as he did – things would be set in motion which he couldn't undo.

Pick up a chapstick or a lipstick and use it on your own lips. Think about the times in your own life when you have betrayed Jesus by the things you've done and left undone.

3. *Matthew 26:57-66* Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. . . The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death."

The trial at Caiaphas', the High Priest, home was to establish one thing. Who was Jesus exactly? Was he a revolutionary who would cause a war with the Romans? A prophet from God? The long-awaited Messiah? We all have questions about who Jesus is – what we decide makes all the difference.

Write one of your questions about who Jesus is.

4. *Luke 22:63-65* Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?" They kept heaping many other insults on him.

Jesus was not just physically beaten, but mocked and insulted. The men sought not just to break his body but to break his spirit. Many of us have found ourselves beaten up by people's words. Jesus heals us by reminding us that we are worthy of God's love, no matter how we are belittled by the world.

On a piece of paper, write insults that have broken your spirit. Reflect on how Jesus has healed your spirit from the beating it has taken. Reflect on how Jesus has proclaimed you are worthy and loved. Erase the insults on that paper.

5. *Matthew 27:1-24* *When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor... Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed... when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."*

Pilate could do nothing. He tried. He failed. Then all that was left was to get out of the mob's way. We often think we can do nothing against the violence in the world. When have you found yourself trying to free yourself from the guilt of being a bystander of injustice?

Wash your hands and reflect on the times you've avoided helping someone or standing up for someone.

6. *Mark 15:6-11* *Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead.*

Barabbas was exchanged for Jesus. Jesus freed the guilty prisoner. We all carry guilt. Just as Barabbas did, we find that Jesus frees us from the prisons we find ourselves in, even the ones we honestly deserve. Jesus us takes our place, and sets us free.

Unlock a lock in your house, and reflect on what guilt has imprisoned you. How has Jesus set you free?

7. *John 19:13-16* *When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.*

Pilate was a government employee loyal to Caesar. Yet, here he is calling out to the crowd, "Here is your king!" Those whose loyalty should have been to God called out, "We have no king but Caesar." How often we find ourselves putting our government officials and our nation's interests above our loyalty to God. When have you chose nation over God? Where does your loyalty lie?

Pray for God to reveal how you can put God first. Pray for our government.

8. *Mark 15:20-21* After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

Simon was going about his own business, doing his best to stay out of the way of the Roman execution squad. Until he was picked at random from the crowd and forced to carry the cross beam for this criminal. Sometimes circumstances draw us into God's work in unexpected and uncomfortable ways. Are you willing to carry the cross of Jesus, even if it means being singled out, having your plans interrupted, and identified with him?

Pick up a piece of wood. Reflect on how rough the cross must have been on Jesus' wounded skin. Carry it with you as you move through the rest of the day.

9. *Luke 23:27-31* A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Jesus has been beaten and bloodied to the point he can no longer carry his own cross. Yet, when he sees the women mourning for him, he is moved with compassion, because he knows the pain the future will bring them. He knows life is full of hurts and sorrows and grief.

Pick up a band aid and reflect on the pain you have suffered. Then stick it on your hand and remember it is by the blood of Jesus, all hurts are healed.

10. *Mark 15:22-32* Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

Can you imagine standing in public, surrounded by those who hate you, naked. It is what makes up our nightmares. Yet here was Jesus, shamed for the world to see. All so that we may be clothed his righteousness. All so that our shame may become honor.

Roll a pair of dice, and hold a piece of cloth. Reflect on how Jesus has taken your shame, and replaced it with honor and righteousness.

11. *Matthew 27:45-50* From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

The Water of Life was thirsty. Immanuel (God with us) felt the abandonment of God. The Light of the World overcome by darkness. The Giver of Eternal Life – dead on the cross. There are times in our lives where we feel God has abandoned us, that all hope is gone, and we can't go on living life this way. In his last moments, Jesus tasted the bitterness of our broken world for himself – and knew our pain.

Blow out a candle as you reflect on the death of the Light of the World.

12. *John 19:38-42* After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, following the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Jesus is dead. His body taken on the cross by secret followers, prepared for burial. Laid in a cold, rock tomb, with the stone firmly sealed behind them when they left. All their hopes had died when Jesus died. When in your life has hope died? What carried you through the despair?

Bury a seed in the soil. Reflect on how like a seed buried in the ground, Jesus story didn't end here.