

*A Study Guide*  
RELIVING THE PASSION

Walter Wangerin Jr.

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## I. A Letter from the Author

Dear Student of the Word:

This *Guide* is designed both to increase and to enrich your personal participation in the story of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a companion to *Reliving the Passion*, a book of 41 meditations, one for every day in Lent, all of them based on Mark's account of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.

For each meditation, this *Guide* leads you in a deeper spiritual investigation by means of questions, suggested exercises, and further Scriptural readings.

1. You may wish to do the daily study alone. The *Guide*, then, is your private partner.
2. Or you may want to use it as an instrument to family devotions.
3. Or else you may find a small group of people willing to make a 40-day commitment to gathering, reading, talking, and praying. (It is an excellent spiritual exercise to make such a covenant and commitment.) In that case the *Guide* offers topics and readings for "discussion" among a group.
4. Finally, you might meet once a week (likely on a Sunday) with others who are keeping the daily devotion in private. To prepare for the group's gathering, ask one person per each day in the week to bring a significant personal insight gained on that day. These five separate insights will (astonishingly) weave together to create a seamless single group discussion.

—However you choose to do the study, identify a specific time and place for your daily meeting with the Lord.

—Have a Bible, a new notebook, the *Guide*, and the book *Reliving the Passion* (Zondervan, 1992).

—Devotions begin **on** Ash Wednesday. Before that day you will need to read and respond to the "Preface" of the book.

—There are no meditations for the Sundays, when worship shall become the best meditation--except for Easter. Yes, we must take into account Jesus' resurrection; so there is a final meditation on the Sunday of Christ's rising again.

—I suggest that you read both the Scriptural references and the meditation out loud--even if you are alone. The heard word encourages the heart's participation, and the story will grow until it becomes more and more real in your day.

I am grateful to you for the commitment you are making. Truly! Because by means of this *Guide*, I myself am invited into your prayer life.

God bless you.

Walt Wangerin, Jr.

## **II. The Preface and your Preparation for a Lenten Study/Devotional**

### **NOTE:**

**This first act will take longer than any of the following. But, as in all the following *Guide* suggestions, I will number the sequence of your activities. Please be aware that I will sometimes change the regular sequence when it is best for you to prepare yourself for a particular meditation by some previous reading.**

**The category "Consider/Discuss" is so named because if you are alone, you will privately consider the ideas and the insights which the category leads you to; but if you are with others, here is the opportunity for group discussion, so that discovery is accomplished together.**

**1.** Speak a private prayer to the living Lord, inviting his presence and the Spirit's direction in your study to come.

**2.** Read the preface through, aloud.

### **3. Consider/Discuss:**

—What is it that draws and holds a child's attention in stories? In the stories of Jesus? That is: what do the children focus on, and how **do** they maintain focus, and what therefore preserves the experience for them in memory thereafter?

—What held **your** attention in the story of Jesus when you were a child, and what do you now recall as being starkly real in the story? How did you react?

—Now, having thoughtfully reconsidered the elements of storied experience—

**4.** Read Mark's entire account of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, chapters 14, 15, 16. **Read it for the story**, by the details and the actions **experiencing** the event as if you were actually there.

**5.** Write **privately**, as though it were a prayer, your own detailed and personal response to the acts of Jesus. Write **to** someone in order to make your style both intimate and deeply honest rather than formal and frowning. This is **your** preface,

then, to the study about to begin, the personal walk you are about to take with our Lord through death to life again.

**6.** Close with a brief thanksgiving to Jesus.

*This study guide has been provided courtesy of the author, Walter Wangerin, Jr., and the Valparaiso University Office of Church Relations.*

### **III. FOUR REASONS FOR RELIVING THE PASSION**

#### **The First Day: Ashes to Ashes**

**NOTE:**

**It will be best to keep a regular appointment with the Lord, ever the same place, ever the same time, a small sanctuary the rest of the family will honor (if you study alone, it's yours; if the family will read together, it ought to accommodate all easily).**

**Very soon you ought to identify a reasonable amount of time and stick with it, expanding a briefer devotion with personal prayer, but holding a longer devotion to the pre-agreed period of time, lest you or someone else should lose trust in the process.**

1. Speak a private invitation to the Lord.

2. **Read** in their sequence the Scripture passage, the devotion, and the prayer.

**3. Consider/Discuss:**

—Moments in the past when the consciousness of death bore down upon you.

—What sort of "death" were you encountering then? What was its definition? Quickly, what other sorts of death are there?

—What was your reaction to death at that time? How did you feel, what did you do?

—Can such an experience, FOLLOWED BY GOD'S PROMISES OF LIFE, affect the way you live today—both your faith and your behavior?

4. **Read:** Romans 5

(And write privately or else discuss with your family the ways in which the Apostle answers the previous questions and direct our thinking.)

**5. End with thanksgiving to God.**

**The Second Day: A Mirror for Sinners**

1. Ask Jesus to come and participate in this day's devotion.

2. **Read** Isaiah, the meditation, and the concluding prayer.

**3. Consider/Discuss:**

—Can you, out of this meditation, formulate a brief but inclusive definition of sin?

—Martin Luther spoke of the fallen nature of humanity as *incur vitas in se*, the circle that turns in upon itself, in action and desire and spiritual purpose: it sees no goal in its existence but itself and everything else is good only to satisfy the personal purpose. What (except death) can break that circle and so open it up to new loves?

**4. Read prayerfully** the following sequence of questions and answers (taken, with some changes, from The Lutheran Hymnal) by which one can break the circle through personal confession and a genuine, loving, divine forgiveness:

Answer before God who searcheth the heart:

—Do you sincerely confess that you have sinned against God and deserved His wrath and punishment?

Verily, you should confess; for Holy Scripture declares: If we say we have no sins, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

—Do you heartily repent of all your sins committed in thought, word, and deed?

Verily, you should repent, as did the penitent sinners King David, who prayed for a contrite heart; Peter, who wept bitterly; the sinful woman, the prodigal son, and others.

—Do you sincerely believe that God, by grace, for Jesus' sake, will forgive you all your sins?

Verily, you should so believe, for the Holy Scripture declares: God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

—Do you promise that with the aid of the Holy Spirit you will henceforth amend your sinful life?

Verily, you should so promise, for Christ the Lord says: Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.

—Then upon this, your genuine confession, the sincere searching of your heart and faith, hear the truth:

Jesus' death is your resurrection! With him went your sins into oblivion. He has shown you, in the most extreme way possible, that he loves you and has wiped away your sins. You are free of them. Free. At liberty in the Lord.

## **5. End with a spoken thanksgiving to Jesus.**

### **The Third Day: The Roadmap for Disciples**

1. Invite the Master to come teach you today.
2. **Read** Scripture, meditation, and the final prayer.

**3. Read**, in preparation for your personal thoughts on the "Way of Discipleship,"

—Luke 14:25-33

—And **then**, (in this order) Luke 12:22-34.

**4. Consider/Discuss:**

—What difficulties can you realistically expect, thinking of your own circumstances, down the road of discipleship? (Remember the map of Jesus' life.)

—What support is promised unto you from the resurrected Christ? (Be detailed, focusing upon your own particular situation.)

—Briefly write unto the Master a covenantal promise, the sort of disciple you intend to be.

**5.** And gather that promise in a spoken, concluding prayer.

## **The Fourth Day: Life out of Death, Joy out of Sorrow**

**1.** Beg the Holy Spirit to keep you from denying the depth of the death of the Lord—or the height of his resurrection will be lowered too.

**2. Read** verses, meditation, and prayer.

**3. Consider/Discuss:**

Can you find in your own past experience the sequence of the disciples, **through** sorrow or grief (**on account of** a seemingly endless, overwhelming sorrow) to joy? What was the sorrow? What, in the end, was the joy? Can you detail and define that peculiar experience of joy? Have you noticed that the most serene and persuasive **comforters** for those who grieve have themselves come through grief?

**4. Read**, in order to recognize the true and divine source of strength **within** our sorrow, the same pattern as it affected Jesus on our own behalf:

—Hebrews 2:9-18, and then Hebrews 4:14 through 5:10.

—And write privately the words of these passages, which both explain and also offer the power of Jesus to us in and through our suffering.

**5. Briefly, thank him.**

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## **IV. Bethany and Jerusalem**

### **The Fifth Day: Once Upon A Particular Time**

#### **NOTE:**

**Because this meditation initiates our dramatic companionship of the Lord, our own experience of his story, you might devote a part of your journal each day to those details that most affect you, causing you more powerfully to imagine (and thereby yourself to join) the Saving Event. Even so will you be preserving an account of the Gospel which is peculiar to you, to your soul and your perspective?**

1. Ask the Lord Jesus now to begin telling you his story all over again, as a dear friend tells a dear friend the truth so intensely, both re-live it.
2. **Read** passage, meditation, and prayer. Do not forget this time as always to read it aloud.
3. **Consider/Discuss—list**—the various roles which Jesus performed in society, in his religious community, on earth. Rabbi, healer, etc. I can think of at least six. It is surely good and even (perhaps) necessary that the Christ should fulfill these helpful offices. But how many of them have since become the central focus of various people's faith? And what sad consequences follow such misconceived worship and expectations?
4. In order to re-fix your own focus upon the central and most holy purpose of Christ's coming among us,

**Read:** Mark 10:32-52.

Listen: **you** are represented here both by James and John and by blind Bartimaeus. Just twice in Mark's Gospel does Jesus heal one blind, each time at a significant transition in the story: First in Mark 8:22- 26, just before he goes off alone with his disciples to teach them his deepest identity and mission; second, here he inaugurates the actual fulfillment of that mission. Thus, Mark suggests that first to hear and second to see the Christ faithfully is, in fact, to gain sight after being blind.

Now, then, Bartimaeus, what **do** you see?—for what right and reason do we worship Jesus and place our faith in him?

5. Thank him precisely for **that**.

## **The Sixth Day: My Glory Lost His**

1. **Name**, in your invocation of the Lord now at the beginning of your meditation, as many of the marvelous names of Jesus as you can recall. To each say, "Amen."

2. **Read** passage and meditation and prayer.

3. **Consider/Discuss**: What are the roles **you** fulfill in society?

—The Greek word for "glory" is **doxa**. One of its ancient connotations is "repute," "reputation"--the opinion of the people, in other words, translates into "praise" and even "authority" or "honor" for the one **glorified**. See? Glory, in this case, depends upon the community's view of you. Praise equals power.

—Again, then: what roles do you fulfill in your community? What authority, what power is yours, what praise for what talents or positions?

—When Jesus appears to receive the **true** "power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing," to receive it from the very people upon whom your reputation and your glory is based, how do you react to his coming? Can you easily relinquish glory? Can you with joy diminish? This is a mark **Of** your own love of Jesus. As you do genuinely love him, so you will even desire your glory to be swallowed up in his glory.

4. **Read** with infinite care and patience John 4:22-36.

You are John. Let his relationship to Jesus (**and** his explanation thereof) define your own. Now, then, what is it?

5. Find words for that joyful humility, and let those words become gratitude in a closing prayer.

## **The Seventh Day: You, Nameless, Anonymous, Lovely In Deed**

1. Rather than invite Jesus, this time by your prayer do you yourself enter into **his** place and presence. Knock. Ask. Go unto him.

2. **Read** the story in Mark's passage, the meditation in the form of a personal effusion, the prayer.

3. **Consider/Discuss:** How do you love Jesus?

—What gestures do you make in singular, unabashed, perfect, and absurd love for him? Can you list a few? Was there one in the past?—yea, though it were unplanned and accidental? (Or can you think of such a gesture accomplished by someone else?)

—What long-term duties and steadfast commitments?

—What **words** of love convey it (as carriages convey lovely goods from place to place)? Hymns?

—What motions of your heart which, though hidden, do truly come of an impulse of love and likewise go forth to the Spirit of Christ with love?

Here are familiar words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, written to a human, to be sure; but given the topic, its sweet and thoughtful searching here, and the passion of its expression, her sonnet might also direct our consideration of love for one both human and divine in fact:

**How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
for the ends of Being and Ideal Grace.  
I love thee to the level of every day's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise;  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old grief's, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose**

**With my lost saints—I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears of all my life!—and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.**

Please go slowly through that poem, constantly allowing it to define your love for Jesus. It is a remarkable, nearly limitless declaration of what love is.

**4. Read**, for parallels between Barrett Browning's human-to-human love and St. Paul's human-to-heaven love,

Romans 8:26-39

**5.** Can you, in a closing prayer, now speak your love for the Lord directly unto him? Do.

### **The Eighth Day: Justify the Sin? No! Justify the Sinner**

**1.** Here at the Beginning of this day's devotion, please recall in sincerity and honesty one recent sin. Small or large, it doesn't matter. Make it recent—or else one heretofore unrepented. But don't ornament your memory. In language plain and perfectly accurate, name the sin.

Now, ask Jesus in mercy to forgive the sin.

It is finished.

By this prayer we begin:

**2. Read** verse and meditation and final prayer.

**3. Consider/Discuss:** the ways in which you might compulsively "explain" and so excuse the sin you confessed at the beginning of this devotion, which the Lord has voided for you. It's okay: it **has** receded into your past; it can (like an insect on a pin) be anatomized and scrutinized. It's dead. That sin won't wake to bite you again.

—So, what methods do you commonly use to reduce your responsibility for sins generally? And thereby your guilt?

—Surely you recognize that getting rid of the **feeling** of guilt does not get rid of the adjudicated and legal **sentence** of guilt; in fact, when the feeling's gone, when the symptoms have all disappeared, a sick person ceases to know her sickness and to seek real cure. Get it? The pain has passed, but the dying continues. LIFE is passing too.

**4. Read**, then, the familiar parable: Luke 18:9-17.

Those who do not know their need do not want his mercy.

**5.** Let your closing prayer speak as a child unashamed of dependence, unashamed of openly giving thanks.

### **The Ninth Day: Here, In My Hearth**

**1.** Pray a "Come" prayer—whichever prayer is common to you, perhaps to your childhood—by which to beg Christ's coming now into your day, into your present meditation.

Here is an old "come" prayer, 1500 years old, which in Latin was: Excita, Domine, quaesumus, potentiam tuam et veni. "Et veni" means: and come!

But in English we pray the same prayer this way: Stir up, we beseech thee, thy power, O Lord, and come.

**2. Read** Mark's passage, our meditation on the householder, and the "come" prayer at the end.

**3. Consider/Discuss** the ways Christ is invited into people's lives. A mezuzah? A cross in the house? A Bible on the table? Regular devotions such as this? A sense of God's spiritual presence?

**4. Read** 1 Kings 3:5-15

—The phrase translated (in RSV) "Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind" says that King Solomon asked in his heart of hearts to be clearly aware of, and completely obedient to, the will of God. This is what wisdom is. From this he could judge God's people wisely and well.

—It is in precisely such a prayer—and then through its continued and manifest fulfillment in one's life—that Jesus enters human hearts and dwells there. See: love must issue forth in deed; and obedience to Jesus is both **your** love and **his** life—here, in your heart.

5. Pray the prayer that carries the Spirit of God now with you into your active life.

### **The Tenth Day: Beware, Be Aware — Be Self Aware!**

1. Pray Martin Luther's Morning Prayer:

**"I thank you, dear Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your Son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that you would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all I do and all I am might please you. For I place myself, body and soul, into your hands, O Lord. Let your holy angel be with me that the wicked foe may have now power over me. Amen."**

2. **Read** Mark's verse, our meditation on warnings and wakefulness, and its concluding prayer.

3. **Read** in sequence, the following passages, examples of God's parental mercy (for isn't it the parent who sees farther than the children, seeing not only an act or an attitude, but also their consequences?) and with each passage. . .

4. **Consider/Discuss:** . . . how the God, through people familiar and intimate to you (or else through mere acquaintances, or perhaps even strangers, public figures, heroes or homeless) communicated the same warning for **your** sake. In other words, name the angels Heaven has sent to you to withhold your hand, and identify the context or the act against which they were warning you.

- Genesis 2:15-17
- Genesis 19:12-23
- Genesis 39:1-12
- 1 Kings 16:30-33; 17:1; and 18:1, 17-18
- Matthew 14:1-12
- Acts 9:1-6 and (for the reversed situation)
- Acts 21:27-36

and (if you have time) you might complete the whole story through Acts 23:10, paying special attention to that last verse/event/consequence of Paul's hard and "angelic" presence.

5. And close with Martin Luther's Evening Prayer:

**"I thank you, dear heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your Son, that you have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that you would forgive me all my sins, those I know and those I do not know, and graciously keep me also this night. For I place myself body and soul into your hands, O Lord. Let your holy angel be with me that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen."**

## **The 11th Day: Loving Kindness, Tender Mercies**

1. It is sometimes possible to pray a moaning, two-worded prayer over and over: "Love me, love me, love me, love me . . ." The bidder is aware (so says the repetition) that though she greatly **needs** the holy sustenance of love, she does not deserve it. But God's love comes uncaused, of its own accord--because God **is** love. Thereafter the prayer is transfigured into another two-worded, breathless repetition: "Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you . . ."
2. **Read** Mark's account of Jesus' feast, the Lord's first sharing of his body and blood with those intimate to him. Then, by means of our meditation, consider the stark paradox of the context in which the Holy Meal began. Then humble yourself by means of Job's sentiments in the concluding prayer.
3. **Consider/Discuss** the peculiar quality of the Lord's love for us—the utter divinity of it, the transcendence and the holiness of it—by reading . . .
4. **Read** . . . Hosea 11:1-9.

We are Israel of old. Remember the account of the Exodus, the gift of the promised land (God's love, love, love unto us) and the covenantal request that we in return remain faithful unto him? We are Israel yet today. Remember how God set us free from our personal prisons then raised us to a high and bright land, a place of identity and fulfillment and strength and promise (God's love, love, love unto us) with the simple command that we abide in his word? and what then? We broke covenant. We elevated our word over his.

What **should** (in this context) the mighty God have done next?

That he did not is love peculiar and divine: mercy, tender mercies, the love (says the Hebrew word for "mercy" and "love") of a woman for the child in her womb—that speechless, thoughtless, helpless infant who is unable to repay or even to understand the love devoted unto it, who is just **there**, in the womb. In the love. In the amnion, sustained by the blood of its mother—by her body and her blood.

As in Holy Communion.

**5.** Thank you, thank you, thank you. All day long we go forth murmuring thank you, thank you, thank you—

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## V. GETHSEMANE

### The Twelfth Day: Proud of My Pieties

1. Pray:

**Jesus loves me, this I know,  
For the Bible tells me so.  
Little ones to him belong,  
They are weak, but he is strong.  
Yes. Jesus loves me.**

**2. Read:** Of Peter's ignorance and Jesus' prediction in Mark's account; the dialogue that reveals the Petrine, stone-headedness in us, in our very religiosity; the begging prayer.

**3. Consider/Discuss:** how two fundamentally different acts of piety may look exactly the same.

—One act seeks to draw God closer to us, to prove our goodness, to increase both our own righteousness and God's approval thereof.

—The other act is, simply, thanks. It comes as a spontaneous response to the love that God has first shown unto us.

—They are both genuine. But one is a genuine effort to **become** (by our own reason and strength) good. The other is a genuine expression of the goodness God has already kissed into us. We are extremely aware of the first, constantly checking it in a mirror, checking it against other people's acts, extolling it to God. Of the second act of piety we are blithely unconscious, being conscious rather of God and of the need of the people of God.

—Lo, how Christians (the most righteous among us, the strongest, smartest, most loyal) can slip backward to dwell under an old covenant of law.

—What talents, then, can be dangerous? What skills might incline us to our own undertakings? What learning, what offices, what authority in the Church and in the world can snare us in self-righteousness?

**4. Read** the beatitudes, Matthew 5:1-12.

—Note the **cause** of every blessed act and attitude. Personal strength and righteousness? Or weakness and worldly disdain?

**5. Pray:**

**I am Jesus' little lamb,  
Ever glad at heart I am,  
For my Shepherd gently guides me,  
Knows my need and well supplies me,  
Loves me every day the same,  
Even calls me by my name. Amen.**

## **The Thirteenth Day: Passionate Praying - I**

**1.** It is a wonder and an honor (seeing that **his** devotions were so terribly solitary) that you may now invite Jesus to join this devout moment with you. Do.

**2. Read** in Mark and in our meditations, Jesus' lonely prayer.

**3. Consider/Discuss** how in the past you personally have imagined the "agony in the garden," and how that prayer might have been prayed—with what gestures and expressions, tone and emotions.

—Did your imagining spring from images the church has created? Was the Lord a part **of** the earth and all its sorrows, or apart **from** it, somehow separated and serene?

**4. Read** of the emotional extravagance of the chief ancestor of Jesus, and find therein something of his own (most human) ability to express intense feeling:

2 Samuel 6:12-22

2 Samuel 18:31 through 19:4

5. Unto him who knows strong emotion you may offer your own, whether of sorrow or of great joy, and be assured that he understands it. Do.

## **The 14th Day: Passionate Praying - II**

1. Words and deeds together make up our prayerful expression of faith and trust, of need and confidence. Head and heart and hands all bid the Lord together, parts of the single unit: You.

Perhaps your invocation of God today might represent this singularity by your physical act: stand up and lift high your open hands to heaven. Or kneel, bow your head, fold your hands, and speak the prayer out loud.

2. **Read** thoughtfully Mark's verse and our instruction, by the love of Jesus, in deepest of praying. **Wait**, then: wait to pray our Lord's prayer until this whole devotion comes to conclusion.

3. In preparation of word-and-deed praying yourself, take a moment to translate each petition of the Lord's prayer from the word you will say to the action you will do.

—For example, **how** will you today "hallow thy name," make God's name holy in your life and among the people?

—How bring his kingdom here?

—How allow his will visible manifestation on earth as it receives in heaven?

—How reveal that daily bread is **his** gift, his loving act first, our reception second?

—How allow the forgiveness which first freed us to free others around us?

—How show that all trials are met in the strength of God; how, therefore, our approach to such events reveal God's presence in us before them?

—How find the name and the authority and the love of God as an interruption between the temptation and the sin?

4. Now, **Pray** the Lord's prayer in whatever form is familiar to you. If at the beginning of this devotion you stood, perhaps you might kneel now. If you knelt, perhaps you might stand.

### **The 15th Day: The Serpent Strikes**

1. In external terms, the suffering of our Lord starts with a particular, personal, intimate human act. Here it is, in stunning simplicity. Prepare your minds for this day's devotion, then,

**First please read:** Genesis 3:1-6 and John 8:12-47

2. Now, then, to prepare your hearts,

**Pray** for a measure of the "truth" given to those who continue in the word of the Lord, and the freedom which follows there from.

3. **Read** Mark and our meditation.

4. **Write out**, as in letter to Jesus, the prayer you are now most moved to pray.

### **The 16th Day: Christian, Who Are You - Really?**

1. Bid the Lord to become the Word in your mouth, that all your words today be true.

2. Briefly **list** three characteristics which you are certain define you. What distinguishes your person? What are several basic truths about you?

Meeting you, someone would surely meet these elements, these qualities, these attributions--because they are who you are.

3. **Read**, now, of "a young man" remembered by Mark and then considered in our meditation.

**4. Return** to your list. Place yourself in the young man's same circumstance. Can you say truly how each of your three core characteristics would be affected by that life-and-death situation? Can you explain how they would act and acquit themselves?

—Can you, thereby, say who **you** are?

—And does this present you need the Lord Jesus to be steadfastness and spine? That's okay! Truly, it is okay--so long as you confess the need and, according to the depth of your sincerest need, confess Christ as your Lord and Savior.

**5. Do.**

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## **VI . THE HIGH PRIEST'S HOUSE**

### **The 17th Day: Night Court, I- Jesus**

#### **NOTE:**

**Days 17, 18, and 19 all focus on this brief legal event and its conclusion in wretched contempt, the spitting upon our Lord.**

**Tomorrow we will gaze upon Jesus as Christ, the next day upon ourselves as sinners in the presence of such glowing holiness.**

**Today consider Jesus. The one fully human. Know him by contrast to Caiaphas. Watch with eyes that can see invisibility (faithful eyes that recognize things spiritual) this nearly invisible contest between the poor, solitary Jesus and the autocratic representative of powers religious and secular.**

**1. Pray for the eyes of faith, the ability (as Jesus describes it in John) to see through visible manifestations to spiritual events and presences.**

Pray: "Let me see your works, O Lord, that I might know you and love you and praise you."

**2. Read** the long passage in Mark. Read out loud the dramatic meditation that follows.

#### **3. Consider/Discuss:**

Often when we consider the temptations of Jesus, we are inclined to recall his divinity and therefore to diminish the true quality of his achievement; for against smooth Satan Jesus used faith and intellect, learning and virtue and deep obedience unto God--all human characteristics, available to us too!

In order to take a clear sighting of his **human** and **faithful** act before Caiaphas—

**4. Read** of the temptations of Jesus, Matthew 4:1-11 (and note Luke's concluding tag to the temptations, that the devil "departed from him until an opportune time." Which time is now!

—List every parallel between these passages, looking especially at Jesus: what is the same about him before the devil and before Caiaphas? And by that list peer deeply into the silent Jesus, for what is more evident in the temptation may be hidden in Caiaphas' courtroom, but it is there! So, who is Jesus in both circumstances?

What about his personal character?

What about his manner?

What about his words?

What about his actions?

What about his obedience?

What about his purpose, both the interior motive that drives him, and the external cause toward which he is working?

—Behold the **man**, the human, the second Adam, the one our God desires us also to be.

**5.** Beg God so to be.

## **The 18th Day: Night Court, II - Christ**

**1. Now** remember the rude condition of Christ's birth, the donkey stall, the feed trough, the clumsy support of mere day-laborers, shepherds who did not own the sheep they watched, poor folk beneath the contempt of grander luminaries.

**Now**, without elevating the poverty and abandonment of that first scene, pray to the Messiah whose only worldly elevation was to be lifted up for execution.

**Now**, in your own utter humility, ask to serve him, the servant of the world.

**2. Read** Mark's passage and the following reflection upon the character of the Christ.

**3. Consider/Discuss:** This, now—THIS is the Only-Begotten Son, the Beloved Son of God, as he must be in the world to save the world. This, this, dear Christian: **this!**

—List the various qualities of failure which now he represents, by listing all he lost or given up or had stripped from him. In conversation, or in your mind's eye, skim over the whole of his life in order to complete your list.

—Note, then, the essential quality of the Christ, the anointed one: it is the extreme of simplicity, not the complexity of wealth, honor, reputation, glory, promotion, size, greatness, higher degrees.

—What, then, **is** that simplicity?

—In writing, define the Christ.

4. To **that** one now bow your humble head and give thanks.

## **The 19th Day: Night Court, III – Myself in the Light of Christ**

1. Jesus is the Light of the World.

—Pray that the Light shine upon you now as you prepare yourself again to study the passion of this same Jesus.

—Your prayer will surely be answered, **by** the material before you, the story you are studying: as if the story itself were a light bulb suddenly switched on, **it** will beam upward on your face and into your eyes; even your heart will be caught in the light, leaving no dark corner there.

2. **Read** both Bible passages, Mark's and John's--then the thought of today's investigation (which must become self- investigation, an accurate self-scrutiny).

3. **Read:**

John 8:3-12. In context (the story of "the scribes and Pharisees" affected by Jesus' action) what does his claim, "Light of the World" mean?

John 9:1-12. In context (the disciples' query and his healing of the blind man) what does "Light" mean here?

John 1:1-13. In honesty, please note the difference between "His own" and "all who received him." In honest, I say, because if ever the light of Jesus revealed secrets in you, secrets deep and embarrassing, secret sins you don't name even in the privacy of your own mind, then **you** have been **his\_own**, the Christian who does not allow the Christ a complete access to her own soul?

#### **4. Consider/Discuss:**

Now that you've seen how "Light" ultimately represents a necessary and good character of our Christ (not just the horrible diagnosis of sin, the announcement of that sin, but also the forgiveness of the sin **and** the healing of any wound it has caused, whether to you or to them you've loved)—now, then, write in perfect simplicity what sin it was you buried.

- The light shines on it.
- The light burns and purges it: gone.
- The light warms and heals the place where it was.
- You are healed.

5. Pray a concluding thanks using the words of the Psalmist, Psalm 146.

### **The 20th Day: Night and Light and Peter and Me**

1. Pray:

**Lord Jesus, think on me and purge away my sin;  
From earth-born passions set me free and make me pure within.  
Lord Jesus, think on me amid the battle's strife;  
In all my pain and misery be thou my health and life.  
Lord Jesus, think on me nor let me go astray;  
Through darkness and perplexity point Thou the heavenly way.**

2. **Read**, as an actual and dramatic example, of the Apostle Paul's explanation of law and sin, flesh and death and life and spirit,

- Mark's account of Peter's fall and his awakening;
- Our meditation upon the same.

**3. Read** Romans 7:4 through 8:4; and then immediately

**4. Consider/Discuss:**

- how this experience of Peter exemplifies Paul's explanation of
  - (a) law and sin within us, and
  - (b) God's act to set us free from the law.

**5. Pray:**

**Lord Jesus, think on me that, when the flood is past,  
I may the eternal brightness see and share thy joy at last.  
Lord Jesus, think on me that I may sing above  
To Father, Spirit, and to Thee the strains of praise and love. Amen**

*This study guide has been provided courtesy of the author, Walter Wangerin, Jr.,  
and the Valparaiso University Office of Church Relations.*

## **VII. THE PRAETORIUM**

### **Our 21st Day: The Dawn of HIS Deathday - Walking**

#### **NOTE:**

**We are now halfway through our Lenten observance. Today, for those of us who are traveling with Via Dolorosa with the Lord, it is a Friday. Likewise, HIS day today is Friday too. We are about to meditate upon the Friday whose afternoon must witness the death of the Christ.**

**Things will grow day by day more personal now.**

**Therefore, I make the suggestion that today you begin an exercise which you should keep daily until we arrive at the Easter remembrance of Jesus' resurrection:**

—Write brief letters to the Lord Jesus. Let them be in response to each day's reading; but make them personal, as you would write to a brother, a lover, a friend, a son—but yet they are peculiarly unto Jesus, who is beloved like none other in your life.

**You will find that the meditations themselves will also take on more a personal tone. Therefore, the intimate quality of your letter writing will be a natural reaction, an easy word.**

- 1.** Let your opening prayer be the salutation of your letter, a written beginning, a greeting, an expression of relationship between you and the living Lord.
- 2.** **Read** the first verse of Mark's 15th chapter, and then the meditation on Jesus' progress down the Way of Sorrows.
- 3. Attend to your letter.**

Perhaps you might find that a particular observation in the meditation triggers the personal expression your own feelings. Go back, then, to the personal words with which the speaker there sees Jesus "walking." Consider that this forward motion is a metaphor for the whole passion of Jesus, the entire trip down suffering into death.

**Now** then, write to him about his action, his "going," the whole drama and effect of it.

**Please** do not ignore the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ, dwelling now outside of time as well as inside of it, can hear your sentiment, as it were, from within the moment of his suffering. This is a mystery, that the Son of God steals through the ages as swiftly as a spirit. Therefore, you **are** writing to him in his sorrow, though you are at the same time writing to him in his glory. Therefore, make this exercise not a mere game, but a genuine communication. Be real. It is real, because he is.

**4.** And **conclude** the devotion and your letter together with an expression of sincere thanksgiving and trust, just as you might conclude a letter to someone of superior rank and kindness.

## **The 22nd Day: The Judicial Complexity**

**1. Follow to the judgment hall.**

**View the Lord of life arraigned;**

**Oh, the wormwood and the gall!**

**Oh, the pangs his soul sustained!**

**Shun not suffering, shame, or loss;**

**Learn of Him to bear the cross.**

**2. Read** Mark's superscript and the day's meditation, paying special attention to the adjudication of this affair, the legal machinery of which three figures must be intensely aware:

—Pontius Pilate, as the ruling judge in this case;

—Jesus, as the accused;

—The Chief Priests, as the plaintiff, bringing charges of a grave nature against Jesus, and seeking a death penalty.

**3. Consider/Discuss**, how Jesus, the least manipulative (seeming the least active) of the three, by choosing first a few words and then silence altogether, is in fact not a merely passive character in this cosmic drama. Note how he wills his progress down this road, himself sharply aware of events both immediate and eternal.

**4. Read** Psalm 2.

—How does this Psalm, in **all** its parts, give depth to the event before us? For example, note how the psalm distinguishes between actions of "kings **of the earth,**" rulers taking counsel together, and the True King.

—How does the Psalm both caption and explain the events of this trial? (That is, do you see neat phrases which might actually "title" the various brief parts of this story, the trial?)

—And now, after considering this Psalm, what is your estimate of the silent Christ, the Son of God, standing before Pilate? How do you feel toward him now?

**5. Write** a quick letter to **that** one, expressing your heart.

**6.** And close in the deep awareness that **that** one goes with you now into your day.

## **The 23rd Day: Heroes**

**1.** Prepare yourself today with the sign of the cross upon your person, and the words:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen"

**2.** Before anything else,

**List** the characteristics which you think define a genuine hero. What are the irreducible—and absolutely essential—qualities of a hero, representing one whom you would admire and to whom you would give honor and an unqualified respect?

**3.** Now, then, **read** Mark's passage and our more analytic meditation. Spend particular time to understand the difference between choosing Jesus, Son of Father-God, and Bar Abbas, son of a father.

**NOTE:** That this passage, is more about the choosers, who reveal

4. **Read** Isaiah 53. Its last verse (the 12th) marks the suffering servant as a hero. **The** hero. The source, the model, the authentic exemplar of heroism. The other verses present the essential characteristics of heroism. List these, now, and then compare them to your previous definition.

—Whom did you, truly, choose as hero?

5. Unto Jesus, now, a few lines. A fan letter. Unqualified, unrestrained praise and admiration. Here is a hero who defines the position, who distinguishes it absolutely from any worldly sense of the heroic.

6. Again, close with the sign of heroism upon your person, the cross, forehead, stomach, shoulder and shoulder; mind and nourishment, strength to strength, the self that now goes out into the world, bearing the cross.

## **The 24th Day: The Climax of Human Hatreds**

1. Pray:

**Kyrie Eleison: Lord, have mercy upon us.**

**Christe Eleison: Christ, have mercy upon us.**

**Kyrie Eleison: Lord, have mercy upon us.**

**Christi exaudi nos: O Christ, hear us.**

**Pater de coelis deus, O God, the Father in heaven,**

**Miserere nobis: Have mercy upon us**

**Fili redemptor mundi deus O God, the Son, Redeemer of the world,**

**Miserere nobis: Have mercy upon us.**

**Spiritus sancte deus O God, the Holy Spirit,**

**Miserere nobis: Have mercy upon us.**

2. For this meditation, focus altogether on this singular moment in the history of the world, the rejection by human kind of dear Divinity: the verdict pronounced by creatures upon the Creator, delivered in a paroxysm of passion. As you

—**Read** Mark's passage and our meditation and the thought that concludes the meditation.

—Prepare yourself, mind and heart, to write the Lord your sincerest internal sense of this, our human rejection of God.

3. Write the letter. Bring it, finally, to a specific expression of your love for Jesus.

4. Close with this prayer:

**Remember not, Lord, our offenses, nor the offenses of our ancestors;  
neither take thou vengeance for our sins. Spare us, good Lord. Spare thy  
people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood, and be not  
angry with us forever.**

**From all evil and mischief; from sin; from the crafts and assaults of the  
devil; from thy wrath and from everlasting damnation,**

**Good Lord, deliver us now and always.**

**In the name and for the sake of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.**

## **The 25th Day: Being Seen**

1. Let's take a break from our journey down the road of sorrows. Let's consider Jesus Christ as the King of

Creation—grand, arisen, surrounded by angels and archangels in his glory: the King of kings, the Lord of all lords.

Pray aloud:

**All glory, laud, and honor to thee, Redeemer, King,  
To whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.  
Thou art the King of Israel, Thou David's royal Son,  
Who in the Lord's name comest, the King and Blessed One.**

**All glory, laud, and honor to thee, Redeemer, King,  
To whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.**

**The company of angels are praising Thee on high,  
And mortal men and all things created make reply.**

**All glory, laud, and honor to thee, Redeemer, King,  
To Whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring,  
To Thee before Thy Passion, they sang their hymns of praise  
To Thee, now high exalted, our melody we raise.**

## **2. Consider/Discuss:**

—How does the Lord in Glory seem to you?

—**Read:** Colossians 1:13-20.

—Upon that passage, as well as your personal imagination, describe in detail (it can be metaphoric rather than factual, since this really is beyond our knowing) the mightiness, the power, the infinite grandeur of Christ, the King of Creation.

—Now, have you felt hidden from such supreme glory? Would you disappear in the crowd that spiritually gathers before him, the crowd which shall gather at the end of the world? Do you fear that your own insignificance would make you but a dot on the universal map before the Lord?

—Or, here's the other side of the coin. Answer truly, now: have you also thought you **might** hide, might **try** to hide, do still **succeed** at hiding from this Omnipotent one? When I teach large groups of students; when I ask a difficult question; when students fear they don't know the answer—then they dip their eyes and think they can merge into the larger crowd, hidden from my sight. Do you do so to God?

**3. Read,** now that you are prepared, Mark's passage and our meditation upon Jesus, rulers, and the crowd before him. Read, too, the personal response with which it concludes.

**4. Write** to the Omniscient One. If his seeing you personally among the myriads of myriads of people is a consolation to you, write in specific your gratitude. The King will read it.

Or if his seeing you causes a certain personal distress, then write the reason in confession; for he already knows it; the point here is your willing acknowledgement so that hereafter his seeing you **can** be comfort.

5. For a final, comforting step, **read** Revelation 21:1-7. As you read, realize: this is a one-on-one act, where the Lord God and you shall, in a mystery, meet in a private and personal manner.

## **The 26th Day: Teaching and the Deed**

1. Open by reading Psalm 1.

2. **Consider/Discuss:** Our meditation for the 14th day recognized that this Rabbi, Jesus, taught prayer not only by word but also by the actual deed: He **did** the prayer—**lived** the prayer—which he hoped his followers would likewise pray in word and deed.

—On this day we discover with profound admiration that the laws which this master requires of us he himself fulfilled.

—Please **read:** Matthew 3:13-17, paying special attention to Jesus' words to John in the 15th verse. Discuss the breadth of that fulfillment. What is "all righteousness?"

### **NOTE:**

**If he modeled the things he thereafter asks of us, then he himself becomes for us the source of our strength likewise to perform them, whether ceremonial (Baptism) or legal (the Sermon on the Mount).**

3. Having been thus prepared.

**Read** Mark's description of the brutality Jesus suffered, inter-mixed with Jesus' own words from the Sermon on the Mount. Read how teaching and deed appear together in our Lord, the alpha and omega: he is at the beginning **and** the end of his commandments, both commanding and **keeping** them himself.

4. Close by writing your Lord a letter, asking that he travel this day with you, ever the director, ever the source of your holy behavior on earth: Even so does he enter this life again.

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## VIII. GOLGOTHA

### The 27th Day: Outside the City Walls - Walking

#### NOTE:

**We will again let your letter frame this devotion, just as we did at the dawn of Jesus' deathday, when he walked to the Praetorium. He is walking again, grimmer, wearier, closer to dying. Walking: for us the deep symbol of Lent and the Passion. Walking, walking, down the Road of Mourning to Death.**

1. Let the salutation of your personal letter be the opening prayer, naming **in reality** the relationship you experience with Jesus now because of his holy suffering then: Name it, name him, name yourself and your particular office on account of Jesus (as Paul did in the salutations of his letters).
2. **Read:** Mark's brief, objective description of the Lord's passage from the city. Then read our meditation, also a most personal response to the event that saves us.
3. **Consider/Discuss:** how personal is the Passion for every Christian, one by one. Perhaps I might help your thought on this subject by reference to my own private experience. . .

While writing this series of devotions, I became aware that the "I" of many of them (the first person speaker, the one who "sees" Jesus as he progresses through the events of Holy Week, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday)--that this "I" was becoming a particular person, someone who would actually have been in Jerusalem, watching what they did to Jesus, someone who had a history with him, loving him. But I had very little idea who this might be. I didn't press the issue; I simply wrote each meditation as fully and carefully as I could.

—Then came this, the 27th day, and my "I" actually acted. For just an instant I wondered with it might **be** Simon of Cyrene. But, of course, it couldn't be, since he was just a passer-by, little involved. And then the soldier's sneering reply came

as a marvelous insight: "You're a woman." Ha! She is a **woman** through whose eyes I was seeing the Passion this time. News! I had not known. All is sharpened now, and the story itself is more intimate, knowing that she is not merely a "camera," a "no one," or merely a "stand-in" for me who could not have been there.

—The point of my little revelation: This story is intimate and personal only insofar as there is a true and genuine **someone** to see it! It cannot be a cold, objective tale told **apart from** a real, flesh-and-blood, feeling, loving, fearing, believing audience.

4. Now, you, dear companion with me through this series of meditations and this story of Jesus' suffering and death—**you** be that someone.

—Write to Jesus your own personal feeling, your true, interior response to him at this point in the journey. Detail it. And close the letter and the devotion together.

## **The 28th Day: That Pain Might Be Transfigured, Forever**

1. Pray:

**On my heart imprint Thine image, Blessed Jesus, King of Grace,  
That life's riches, cares, and pleasures Have no power Thee to efface.  
This the superscription be: Jesus, crucified for me,  
Is my Life, my hope's Foundation, And my Glory and Salvation.**

2. **Read:** of the **choice** and the **depth** of Jesus' suffering, in Mark's verses and in our meditation.

3. **Consider/Discuss:** How many ways our present society seeks to alleviate pain and suffering, to the point that people believe it is their **right** not to hurt, that it is itself **wrong** to hurt at all. It has a near-religious intensity among us. Commercials; our serious expectation of Governmental action as well as politician's promises; feel-good books, institutions, cults.

—But suffering cannot be abolished.

—Note how our faith, far from making the false promise that God will in this life banish hurt, looks **at** suffering with a clear eye, and then **through** suffering (even **by means of suffering**) to maturity in wisdom, faith, godliness. Christ has made of suffering the extraordinary development of the created human toward the Creator, since **this** God took upon himself the suffering his creatures caused.

—Can the world, which fears and despises suffering, comfort them that hurt? Only by relieving the hurt.

—So, then, where are our comforters?

—Here. Among us.

—Amen.

4. **Write**, briefly, an episode of your own suffering; write it to the Lord, with the request that Jesus transfigure **that** particular experience of yours into something blessed for those around you.

5. And conclude that letter with a prayer that opens to the day.

## **The 29th Day: To Die**

1. **Calvary's mournful mountain climb; there, adoring at his feet, Mark that miracle of time, God's own sacrifice complete. "It is finished!" hear Him cry; Learn of Jesus Christ to die.**

2. **Read:** of the central event of human history, Mark's four words and our meditation upon the death of Jesus.

3. **Consider/Discuss** the effect of death upon **all** of life, and then of **Jesus'** death upon all, by means of these 4 poems:

**A. Ozymandias** [the Greek name of Ramses II]

I met a traveler from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,

Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away  
—Percy Bysshe Shelley

**B.**

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so;  
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleep, which but thy picture be,  
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.  
Thou 'art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy' or charms can make us sleep as well  
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally  
And death shall be no more; Death, though shalt die.  
—John Donne

**C.**

Steadfast cross, among all other  
Thou art a tree mikel\* of prise\* much/worth  
In branch and flower such another  
I know of none in wood or rys.\* thicket  
Sweet be the nails,  
And sweet be the tree,  
And sweeter be the burden that hangs on thee!  
—Anonymous, A.D. 1300

**D.**

Jesus' wounds so wide  
Be wells of life to the good,  
Namely the stream from his side  
That ran full strong on the road.\* cross

If thee list to drink,  
To flee from the friends of hell,  
Bow thou down to the brink  
And meekly taste of the well.  
—Anonymous, A.D. 1400

4. I encourage you at this point to write, if not a poem, at least in a poetic mode—describing by sharp language and imagery what death **generally** has become for you because of Christ's particular death **for** you, in your place. Let it be your letter to him this day.
5. Amen.

### **The 30th Day: The Dying, His and Ours**

1. Call the Lord close to yourself.
2. **Read** Mark's verses and our meditation, personalizing these intense moments of Jesus' dying.
3. **Strive**, in your private letter to the Lord, to make personal and intimate your own response—your own reflection upon, your own relationship to—Jesus' physical dying on the cross. Remember that he is above time and will hold in himself **both** the moment of that historical dying **and** this present moment of your immersion in the memory of the event. He brings the two together. By him, then, return to the time of his dying and of your salvation. Hush! Hush. Write in the deepest quiet of your heart. Take time. Find the word. Love your Lord by means of this communication.
4. Amen.

### **The 31st Day: Jesus Is Guilt, Jesus Is Guilty!**

#### **NOTE:**

**The message in this particular meditation may be one of the hardest (certainly the most paradoxical) truths for us to accept or even to understand.**

**Jesus never ceases to be obedient to the Father. Jesus never, throughout his entire earthly existence, ceases to be pure and righteous, sinless, holy.**

**NEVERTHELESS, while he hangs at the center of the universe, in the center of all created time and space, on the cross of our sinning, he is ALSO sin, the sin of all humankind.**

**We study this truth now not to scorn our Lord, but to wonder at the sharper anguish of his suffering, since he and he alone could experience this absolute and direct contradiction within his own person.**

1. Pray for a humble understanding, to be free of human narrowness and old prejudices, to be open yet to God's new education.

2. Read Mark's passage—

—and, more slowly than usual (even with pencil in hand to underline the more difficult notions), our meditation upon the sin that Jesus becomes.

3. **Consider/Discuss**, paradox. In Jesus, contradictions can both be true!

—He is fully human, 100%. He is fully divine, 100% Both at once!

—He is fully God, the whole Godhead in him. But he is only one person of the Trinity, which is One God.

—He is on earth the perfect failure. He is the perfect Lord of all the world.

—He is righteousness (right relationship) **itself!** He is our sin. Both at once.

Now, by means of the following verses, consider how we also become paradoxical in Christ—look at our personal contraries:

**When I survey the wondrous cross On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss And pour contempt on all my pride.**

**Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast Save in the death of Christ, my God  
all the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.**

**See, from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled  
down.**

**Did e'er such love and sorrow meet Or thorns compose so rich a crown?**

**Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a tribute far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.**

—Isaac Watts, 1707

4. **Read** the final comment of the meditation, "This, Christ?" and conclude the devotion with thanks written unto our dear and wonderful Lord.

## **The 32nd Day: Descending into Hell**

1. Begin the devotion by reading Psalm 22.

—Though the Psalmist moves toward a reconciliation with God, Jesus' cry receives no answer. It bears the full weight of the psalmist's first grief even into the perfect darkness.

2. **Read:** Mark's account of this grief, and our own meditation upon Jesus' worst—this **is** the worst!—sorrow.

3. **Consider/Discuss** another paradox in Jesus Christ:

—In the 2nd article of the Apostle's Creed we repeat, "And in Jesus Christ . . . who . . . suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose . . ." We've long been taught that that descent was in power to prove victory over Satan in Satan's own kingdom, that it also was a going down in order to lead the faithful Old Testament figures up to heaven. Now, to offer another meaning to the phrase "descended into hell" is **not** to deny these meanings. Both can be true at once.

—And this is the other meaning: that Jesus went to hell **in our place**, in our stead, instead of us—so that we who believe in him shall not descend into hell. He was there, and was fully, fully there, to fulfill the just sentence of guilty upon us and our sin.

4. **Read:** Isaiah 59. This is a stark description (an accurate description) of the sin that separates us from God, which **should** have ended in our perpetual separation, hell.

—"According to their deeds, so will he repay"—but the repayment was put upon Jesus. **He** is the "Redeemer" who brought us back to the "covenant" with the Lord.

5. Amen.

## **The 33rd Day: You**

1. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

2. **Read** Mark's description of the gesture that follows immediately upon Christ's cry of cosmic abandonment.

Read, next, the difference between doing for Jesus and, finally, in faith allowing Jesus to do for you.

3. Can you draw the same distinction in your common life? There are Christians who think **their** service makes the difference in their God-relationship (how they pray, how they keep the ceremonies, how they do good to others, which church they attend, some churches being righter than others) rather than realizing that **Jesus'** service is the difference altogether. Everything that follows is gratitude, mere (but glorious and therefore powerful) thanksgiving.

4. **Almighty God, who hast given us thine only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him: Grant that we, being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same Jesus Christ, thy son, our Lord. Amen.**

## **The 34th Day: For Us the Irony of Death**

1. Open your devotion today by reading Psalm 130.

2. **Read:** of the marvelous irony which a Roman Centurion encounters, making of this execution an experience unlike anything else in his military experience—yea, in his life. Read Mark's account and then our meditation for the 34th day.

3. **Consider/Discuss:** a sweet and trenchant irony.

—Mark does not record that Jesus said, "It is finished." John does (see John 19:28-30). In John it is his final word: **Consummatum est.**, as the Latin has it.

—But Mark's "loud shout" can declare the **tone** with which Jesus declared the completion of all his work on earth, and John's two words may give meaning to the cry:

—**It is done! It is done, done, and very well done!**

—What begins now the ineffable sorrow of them that loved him, for Jesus is the end of sorrow and the beginning of triumph. What an irony! Only the eyes of faith could recognize such a marvel in the teeth of death. But listen: because our salvation has now **already** been accomplished, though we still face the blank and fathomless horror of dying (here, the death of the beloved, hereafter our own death), yet more than mere hope supports us. **Fact** awaits! Victory is, even before we confront our own dying, won.

—Thus the steadfast assurance of those that pray faithfully with the Psalmist: "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word do I hope!" And again: "Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love and with him is plenteous redemption." **Is** redemption, **is now** the love accomplished and in place.

#### **4. Read:** Hebrews 11:1

—In the King James, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for." **Substance**, the independent reality of the thing we hope for. It is real apart from our yearning, our strong longing, our desiring and striving and struggling—real apart from our poor **hope**. And we grasp the reality of the thing still invisible, not by seeing it, not by eyes, but **by faith**. Faith brings to us now the substantial reality of the thing yet to be.

—In the RSV: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for." Again, the thing is there, waiting, waiting—and faith convinces us so. So we can live with the confidence that we know precisely where this travel and travail is taking us: to life!

—Thus the irony, that in defeat is a shout of triumph; in the extreme of failure, success; in absolute departure, coming; and in the very instant of death, life.

5. Write your final prayer in the Lord-Letter. Tell him of your plans, in a very short while to come and live with him. Thank him for purchasing the travel-ticket for you. Amen.

## **The 35th Day: But for Jesus, Death's Irony Intensified**

1. In the simplest of terms, praise the Son of God for his great love for us.

2. Now measure that love:

**Read** Mark's brief remembering of the Centurion's cry, and then our meditation on this final event, for Jesus, in his passion.

3. **Read** Psalm 77.

—Use it, in your personal consideration or else in discussion with others, as a guide to the peculiar state of Jesus in his passion. Read it carefully, allowing its insights to illuminate our Lord's experience—as much, at least, as we are able to understand.

—Here is a Psalm which preserves the irony in Christ's act on our behalf. On the one hand, the first 10 verses are personal and filled with pain. Then, suddenly, the words changes, recalling the greatness of God—but not on this person's own behalf! Most psalms of "Lament" seek the strength of God for the lamenter himself. Here, though one has reason for deep lamentation, he seeks the mighty and ineluctable strength of God for the tribes, and finally: "Thou didst with thy arm redeem thy people." Again, "Thou didst lead thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron."

—A flock. I love this psalm. It touches the same gentle imagery Jesus uses: When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Matt. 9:36

4. Close with a reading of the 23rd Psalm, now recognizing through what anguish this "Shepherd" was able to make us fearless in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

## **The 36th Day: Our Grief**

**1.** Pray the Kaddish, a doxology traditionally recited by Jewish mourners as a memorial for the beloved one who has died:

"Magnified and hallowed be the name of God in the world which he has created according to his will. May his kingdom come speedily, even in your days. Praised be his name forever and ever, and exalted above all expression of praise that can be uttered. May peace and life in the heights come for us and all Israel. May he who maketh peace in his high places bless us and all Israel with peace."

**2. Read** Mark's verses and then again our meditation, this most personal expression of sadness at the death of Jesus, our beloved one.

**3. Write** in your letter to the Lord **your** experience now of the vast and timeless solitude suffered when someone you love so dearly has died.

—What is it like?

—What is it, after all, this thing, this grieving?

**4. Read aloud:**

—Psalm 42

—Psalm 46

—Psalm 131

Amen.

*This study guide has been provided courtesy of the author, Walter Wangerin, Jr., and the Valparaiso University Office of Church Relations.*

## **IX . THE GARDEN OF TOMBS**

### **The 37th Day: A Veil's Been Torn**

**1. O Lord, as the temple veil which once divided the people from the Holiest Place was torn in two, opening the way of believers to holiness—opening as well the way of holiness into your believers—so fill me too with holiness! By your divine direction and strength, change me, more and more to love you, to follow you, and to be like you. Amen.**

**2. Read** the change in Joseph of Arimathea, Mark's passage and our meditation thereon.

**3.** Once more—with the confidence that this is Christ's description of what the Christian is, as a Christian, in the process of becoming—

**Read:** the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6, and 7.

—But *NOTA BENE*: without Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, this sermon is a severe and impossible demand, failing which we fail holiness and fall short of God. It would then be a terrible thing, strategy for disaster.

—But because Jesus has now become the source of our righteousness and our holiness, this sermon now is a promise of possibility!

**4.** Close by choosing one or two characteristics of the Christian from the Sermon on the Mount and (in your continuing Lord-Letter) asking Jesus specifically to empower these in you. Amen.

### **The 38th Day: Maundy Thursday**

**1.** O Lord God, who hast left unto us in a wonderful Sacrament a memorial of thy Passion:

Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so partake of this Sacrament of thy Body and Blood, that the fruits of thy redemption may continually be manifest in us. Amen.

**2. Read** of this manifestation in us of "the fruits of thy redemption"

- such as the strength of Joseph,
- such as the truth and faith of the gentile Centurion
- such as the marvelous union between

Jew and Gentile  
Ruler and ruled  
military man and mental man  
stranger to stranger  
people and people,  
UNION! COMMUNION - by reading Mark's verse and our meditation.

**3. Prepare** yourself again for participation in this meal of the Lord:

—In John's account of the crucifixion, he notes (John 19:14) that Jesus went forth to be crucified "about the sixth hour" on "the day of Preparation of the Passover." John sees a remarkable parallel here, for this hour on that day was the designated time for the priests to begin slaughter the lambs to be used for the Passover. What does the timing between these two slaughters imply? Well, think: what did John the Baptist call Jesus **twice** when he first met him? In the Gospel of John: "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Get it? Who **is** Jesus? What is he doing in the passion?

—Add one more detail from John. When Jesus' legs are not broken (though the other two who were crucified that day had their legs broken to speed their expiration) John notes (19:36), "For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'Not a bone of him shall be broken.'" Where is that prophecy found? In Exodus 12:46. Who does it refer to there? Why, the Passover Lamb!

—Now, then: think through the wonderful story of the Exodus. Remember the terrible last plague, the death of children in the houses whose doors were not smeared with the blood of the lamb. Add every other detail you want. Then see that the story of Israel's salvation prefigures the story of our salvation. Jesus is the lamb whose blood saves us from death.

—And what was the meal he was celebrating with his disciples when he instituted **our** meal of Holy Communion? Yes. The Passover.

—Thus: Our Lord's Supper memorializes for us two events collapsed into one.

(A) The saving of Israel (by which we can more clearly interpret clearly **our** salvation)

(B) The Passion of Jesus, the **true** lamb of God, whose death indeed saved the world from death and bound it to the Lord God for good.

--Do you see now why "Body and Blood" become so endlessly significant in this sacrament? They bear much meaning from the **first** Israel (whom the Lord called "my son") through the **true** Israel (Jesus, the Son of God), to the **new** Israel (children of God by faith in Jesus).

4. Pray:

**Jesus, over and over I smear your blood upon the doorposts of my heart. Every time I receive the elements of your bloody sacrifice, I am reassured: death shall pass over me. I shall cross the killing sea safely in you. In you I am free. In you, forgiven of my sins. And by your dying I shall live forever.**

**Amen.**

## **The 39th Day: Good Friday**

**NOTE:**

**Let this be for you a day of quiet contemplation. Your devotion might keep a fine and private silence, the whole event passed in prayer. As prayers spontaneously occur to you, pray them. Write them in your Letter to the Lord. Let that activity—the persistence in prayer—be sum and substance of devout activity now.**

1. Pray the thought most upon your heart (whatever it is!) as now you sit and begin.

2. In prayerful watchfulness (translating everything you see here into expressions, whispers, comments, murmurings unto your Lord)

—**Read** of the burial of Jesus in our meditation.

**3. Read**, likewise, the personal tag that follow it on p. 150. You are there.

—Pray the new prayers that have entered your heart since beginning this devotion.

—Do you sense a development in these prayers today? Yes. Yes, all these prayers together are forming one prayer, and if you attend worship this evening, you will find an amazing relationship between your meditations now and your attentions then. Of course: the Lord is with you. And during these last 39 days of devout activity, that intimacy has grown.

**4. Conclude** this devotion (but not your praying, which can now continue all Good Friday through) with a brief thanksgiving.

—As you go forth through the day, doing your work, serving your people, note how the low hum and a reaching prayer can continue within your heart. The soul is complex. Yes, it **can** attend to the business of the day, even while it holds, as it were, the hand of Jesus—just as children hold their parent's hand and forget about it but don't let go, even while going about other interests. God is with you. Jesus is beside you. Let the vagrant melody of prayerful tune just keep running through your head.

## **The 40th Day: Holy Saturday**

**1. Pray:**

**O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, who takest away the sin of the world,  
—Have mercy upon us.**

**O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, who takest away the sin of the world,  
—Have mercy upon us,**

**O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, who takest away the sin of the world,  
—Grant us thy peace.**

**Amen.**

**2. Read** aloud Mark's last verse of his 15th chapter; our meditation of personal annihilation; **AND** the dramatic response of the Lord on p. 152

**3. Consider/Discuss:**

—Recall that for Mary, Saturday was the Sabbath, as full of ceremony as our Sundays are (or ought to be). Activity lay before her, after all. Something that she could **do**, even in her sense of absolute annihilation. So now she becomes merely the **form** of something, no substance, no self. Just an outside casing. A mold.

—What does that suggest for us, who also experience the bleak nihilism between loss and restoration, the utter and absolute nothingness of this existence when someone who meant everything to us passes out of our lives; or who simply become aware of "the horror, the horror" when we are forced genuinely to contemplate our own deaths. What does Jesus (and the Church, the ancient institution, that Body of Christ!) hold out to us in this cold, existential fright?

—What, in other words, **is** for us this Saturday, this hollow gap between death and life?—this period of perfect **not knowing**, this complete darkness, this utter silence, this annihilation of the self? What does it represent?

**4. Read:** Romans 6:1-11.

There are many answers to the questions above. But here is one crucial answer, which acknowledges the dramatic **experience** of our coming to and growth within our Lord.

—It is good, right now near the end of our long consideration of Jesus' suffering and death, to consider our own participation in the event, new each time a person becomes a new Christian, a member of the Body that died to rise again. Thus, Jesus' story defines and gives infinite weight to each of ours.

**5.** Close the devotion (but do not end your long Lord's-Letter, since its ending must ever be life's beginnings) with a final word of quiet thanks and a flourish,

—because, here comes Sunday!

## **The Day of the Resurrection of Our Lord**

- 1. Read** the 16th chapter of Mark.
- 2. Read** of Mary Magdalene's nearly unspeakable joy, the words of our final meditation.
- 3. Go, now.** Express your own joy in worship and, with all the members of the Body, in loud celebration of Resurrection.

The hard deed is done.  
Life is begun.  
You and your Christ are one,  
Now and forever. Amen

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