

CONDONATION

COMPASSION

CARE

CONSOLATION

COMPANIONSHIP

COMPLETION

COMMITMENT



The Seven Last Words of Christ

Welcome to a journey... a journey with Jesus reflecting on his final words, spoken from the cross in his final hours. You will find a prayer station created around each phrase. This booklet will be your guide as you read the meditations and reflect on the questions for each phrase. Record your reflections on each page before moving on to the next stations.

Take this journey at your own pace. There is no rush; no need to hurry on; nothing to accomplish beyond experiencing the moment. This is your time to stop and listen to what God might want to say to you as you meditate on Jesus' last seven words.

So to begin...

Find a chair around the sound booth. Get comfortable with both feet flat on the floor, sitting up straight. Clear your mind and spend a moment in silence. Let go of the week and allow yourself time to center. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. On the inward breath say, "Lord, Jesus Christ". On the outward breath say, "Have mercy on me".

After centering yourself in the goodness of God's love move to Station One.

Begin Here

Condonation

Luke 23:34

“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”

At the very moment of his death, Jesus showed his concern for all those around him, all those involved in bringing him to this very point of death, he offered forgiveness.

Condonation is not a word used very often in our world. It means “a pardon by treating the offender as if the offense never been committed.” Yet that is what Jesus did on the cross.

The people then may not have fully understood what they were doing, but we know now what they did. They beat Jesus, spat in his face, humiliated him, forced a crown of thorns upon his head, and made him carry his own cross, and then they executed him.

The condemned typically spewed words of hatred and bitterness from their cross as they were dying. Such words have been spoken at far lesser offenses. But Jesus shouted words of forgiveness, of condonation. “Father, forgive them...”

Much of Jesus’ ministry had centered on forgiving. He had tried to show those around him that God’s love creates the space for others to be. His life demonstrated that everyone is welcome to be a part of God’s community. Jesus consciously sought to eat and talk with those who were excluded from the Jewish community. Jesus welcomed everyone just as they were. This welcome, without a requirement to first change allowed people the freedom to be changed by God’s love.

Luke understood the importance of the freedom that forgiveness brings. Luke knew that his listeners needed to hear this message of forgiveness and freedom so that they would be able to understand what Jesus’ death meant. Jesus died to bring forgiveness of sin and freedom from the bondage that sin brings. Not only did Luke’s listeners then need to know that, all who read Luke’s Gospel today need to hear it as well. Through the death of Jesus we are pardoned for our sin. By speaking a word of “Condonation” God treats all who repent as if the offense against Him never happened. And now He expects us to do the same for all who offend us.

Reflection Question: (If you need more space for reflection, use back side of this sheet)

What is something for which you need to be forgiven? Who is someone you need to forgive?

Prayer Station Activity:

Write a note, regardless of whether you choose to send it or not, to someone who has offended you and tell that person that you forgive him or her for what was done to you. How did it feel to pardon your offender? How do you think Jesus felt pardoning all who sinned against him?

Station One

Compassion

Luke 23:43

"I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

You know the scene. Three crosses are planted on a hillside outside of Jerusalem, The hill is called Golgotha; it means the place of the skull, and that is exactly what it looks like. Why three crosses? It was the most economical way to execute. It saved time and money. Jesus' cross was planted in the middle and on each side hung a thief.

Jesus has always been the central figure, forever speaking words of compassion. "You are healed. Take up your bed and walk." "You were once blind, but now you see." "You were lost, but now you have been found." "You were an adulteress, but now you are clean." "You were a thief, but now you will be with me in paradise."

The word paradise is a Persian word; literally it means a walled garden. When a king wanted to honor one of his servants he would invite him to walk with him in paradise, the beautiful garden.

Whether we want to admit it or not, we are on either side of Jesus. On the one side we are like the thief who ridiculed Jesus for not doing what he wanted him to do. How many times have we ridiculed Jesus before? Have we not cursed him for not saving our loved one from dying? Haven't we been angry at him for not protecting our child from drugs and destruction? Have we not been mad at him because he isn't doing things the way we want them done? But Jesus doesn't get angry with us now just as he didn't get angry at the thief then. He doesn't lash back; he doesn't condemn. Jesus shows compassion even when we are not compassionate to him.

On the other side of the cross we see that we are really no better than the other thief. We have thought evil thoughts deserving to be separated from God. We committed sins against our neighbors. In actuality we are no better off than the condemned thief hanging beside Jesus. And we know in our hearts that without the saving power of Jesus Christ, we have no hope of salvation. We know that it is only the grace of God that can pull us through. We know that if we don't humble ourselves and confess our sin, we will die in our sin. And to all who do confess their sin there is always a word of compassion that comes from the lips of Jesus.

The invitation is always there. "Come and walk with me in the garden. Experience my compassion for I invite you to my garden party not someday, but today, right now. Don't wait until you die, join with me now as my kingdom comes to earth."

Reflection Question: (If you need more space for reflection, use back side of this sheet)

How does it feel to be invited to God's party?

Prayer Station Activity:

On the table, there are invitations... invitations from Jesus for you to come and join with him in God's kingdom coming to earth. Take an invitation from the table and write in your name. Take the invitation with you as a reminder that you have been invited as an honored guest of the King. Before you leave make sure you sign your name on the RSVP list letting God know that you are excited about His invitation.

Station Two

Care

John 19:26-27

When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, "Dear woman, here is your son." And he said to this disciple, "Here is your mothering." And from then on this disciple took her into his home.

Now the scene gets very personal as we observe Mary, the mother of Jesus and John, his closest disciple, at the foot of the cross. What is Mary thinking at this moment? What must Jesus have thought? Jesus, in the midst of excruciating pain, is thinking of someone else. "Woman, behold your son. John, behold your mother." What is happening here? Jesus addresses his mother as "woman". It seems out of place today but during Jesus' time, "woman" was used to address a woman of great distinction. It is a form of address that shows great honor. Jesus is giving the responsibility of caring for his mother, this woman of great honor and distinction, to John, his disciple. And he is giving Mary a new son. Why John? Jesus' siblings probably weren't there. And John was one of his most trusted disciples. As the eldest son, Jesus would have a special responsibility for his mother, and he would not leave that unresolved.

It was nothing new for Jesus to speak words of care. He was the voice of care for the homeless. He was the voice of care for the poor. He was the voice of care and responsibility for the oppressed. He was a voice of care for the lost and confused. And he continued to speak words of care in the midst of his most agonizing pain. There is never a time that Jesus does not care for us. Christ's love is always flowing over us.

But just as Jesus loves and cares for us, so too are we to love and care for others, especially as families. Because Jesus' family wasn't there, Jesus created a new family. What should have been the responsibility of Jesus' siblings was given to someone else. In that act is not Jesus teaching us that family means more than just our nuclear family? Jesus saw all people as being part of God's family. And it is the responsibility of families to care for each other. And while speaking a word of care for his mother and while directing John to be her caretaker, Jesus is instructing us to care for one another as if we are truly brothers and sisters.

By caring for each other with brotherly and sisterly love we are assured that God's love is with us always. You see, Jesus' word of care is not just for us to receive for ourselves. It is also a word of instruction as to how God cares for all His creation. Just as Jesus asked John to care for his mother, he is also asking you to care for others.

Reflection Question: (If you need more space for reflection, use back side of this sheet)

Who offers you the kind of care that reveals God's love to you? To whom are you offering the kind of care that reveals God's love?

Prayer Station Activity:

Take a Band-Aid. Have you ever thought about what a Band-Aid does? According to the Band-Aid website, Band-Aids help injuries heal more efficiently, decrease the chance of scarring and provide protection during healing. That is what we are called to do for each other. It's our role to care for each other and provide for the healing of each other. Put the Band-Aid on one of your fingers as a reminder that just as Jesus cared for his mother through John so God cares for others through you.

Station Three

Consolation

Mark 15:33-34

The scene was quite frightening now. It was noon and darkness had fallen across the whole land. It was as if it were midnight with no stars or moon. The clapping of thunder that was heard in the distance was now on top of the hill and from it shrieked bolts of lightning. It was all too close for comfort. People were running for safety. It was as if all the powers of evil had gathered on top of Golgotha and were attacking the man on the center cross. And they were. At three o'clock the pain, the sorrow, the dejection, the separation were all too great and so Jesus with a loud voice cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" Which means, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

This is the moment that the apostle Paul describes by saying, "He (Jesus) became a curse for us... He who knew no sin took on our sin."

And at his weakest moment ever, in the darkest moment in eternal history, Jesus cries out, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

How can this be? How can it be that for the first time in Jesus' life he refers to God not as Father but as some distant, detached god who hides himself in the clouds, as if his own father had turned his back on him and walked away leaving him to be beaten alive by the forces of darkness.

By experiencing this total abandonment Jesus learned what it feels like to be separated from God by sin. Now he knows what it is like to feel as though you are all alone wrestling with the powers of darkness. He knows the feeling of being afraid. He who knew no sin, in his final hour on the cross now knows all about sin.

On the cross Jesus fought the battle with sin so that when we sin in any one of a myriad different ways Jesus knows the isolation that sin brings into our lives. And in his cry of abandonment, he is declaring that he has experienced the deepest despair that accompanies sin. He understands the deep despair that sin brings into our lives and is able therefore to empathize with us and offer us a word of consolation. Perhaps the words to an old spiritual captures the consolation of Jesus best, "There is no pain that Jesus cannot feel. There is no hurt that Jesus cannot heal. There is no sadness that Jesus cannot feel. There is no sorrow that Jesus cannot heal." Why? Because Jesus has been to the depths of pain, hurt, sadness and sorrow. And so now when we go there we can know that he is right there with us offering his word of consolation.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, the apostle Paul writes, "For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ."

Reflection Question: (If you need more space for reflection, use back side of this sheet)

What difference does it make that Jesus experienced abandonment by God? Does Jesus' experience with abandonment console you? If so, how? If not, why?

Prayer Station Activity:

In ancient practice, there was an elaborate ceremony performed every year in the Temple. Two goats were selected for this practice. One was designated as a sin offering. The High Priest would symbolically place the sin of the people on the other goat symbolized by a red cloth tied to the animal. The goat would then be sent away into the wilderness. It created a vivid picture of confession, repentance, and sin being taken away from the people... a picture that would find its fullest expression in Jesus.

Take a red ribbon from the basket and tie it on the cross. As you do so, remember that Jesus, who never sinned, became the offering for our sin so that you can be made right with God through the consoling work of Jesus on the cross.

Station Four

Companionship

John 19:28

Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, "I am thirsty."

Here we see the man whose first miracle was turning water into wine crying, "I thirst." "Help me, I am very thirsty." He is the one who offered the water of life to a Samaritan woman at a well. He quenched the thirst of others, yet could not or would not quench his own. Could he not perform one more miracle and satisfy the most basic of physical human needs? Yes, as the old gospel song says, "He could have called 10,000 angels to come and set him free." Yes, being the Son of God he could have performed one more miracle but he chose not to satisfy this most basic human need. And that he chose not to is very important for us to understand. There is nothing more basic to human life than water. We can live without food for more than a month, but we can only survive without water for about one week. If we lose more than 20% of our normal water content we will die. We need two-and-one-half quarts of water every day. Water is the most basic of all human needs.

Jesus came to earth so that God might know what it is to be human. This is what separates Christianity from all the other religions of the world. The God that we worship is the only god who has come to earth in human flesh. He is the only god who was willing to suffer as we suffer. And in that regard He is the only god who understands us fully and because of that He is the only one who knows what to do when we need help. He is the only one who says, "I love this world so much that I sent my son so that he might know what it means to be human."

When we are drowning in the flood of life, we don't need a philosophy, an ideology, or even a religion. We need a companion who reaches out to take our hand.

The God we serve has walked in our shoes and knows the most basic pains and needs of human experience. He is the one who took on flesh to understand our humanity. The German theologian Jurgen Moltmann wrote, "God weeps with us so that we may someday laugh with him."

Reflection Question: (If you need more space for reflection, use back side of this sheet)

What does it mean to you that Jesus refused to call upon any heavenly powers to satisfy his thirst or save him from the cross? Whom do you love so much that you are willing to die for? How does that realization help you understand how much God loves you?

Prayer Station Activity:

Pour a glass of water and in your own words offer it to Jesus as if you were offering it to him on the cross. After offering it to Jesus, place it on the table as an offering of love.

Station Five

Completion

Mark 15:33-34

John 19:30

“It is finished!”

In this next to final cry from the cross Jesus declares his divinity. We see him screaming for the entire world to hear that what God set out to accomplish with Jesus in the beginning has now come to completion. The one who was born as the savior of the world was now dying as the savior of all humankind. Where once the way to God was through the sacrifice of an unblemished animal to be offered for the forgiveness of sin, we now have the ultimate sacrifice provided for us. This nullifies the need to ever again bring other sacrifices to God. We can't earn salvation with sacrifices of time, talent or money. It is a gift from God. He has finished the work; God has accomplished the most revolutionary act in the cosmic order – Jesus died to save us all.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans gives us great insight to this act. He wrote “For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” – Romans 10:4. In the Greek text the word for “end” is telos. It doesn't mean end as we think of end; it means completion; it means fulfillment. In other words, Jesus with his final breath is saying, “The work is now complete. The law of God's love and grace and forgiveness is now made whole; it is fulfilled. What was once incomplete is now complete. It is finished. Everyone who believes in me shall be saved.”

That was the divine side of Christ, but there was the human side of Christ revealed in those words as well. In those final hours as his life raced in front of him and he thought about all that he had done with his life he could say, “Wow! I completed my life's purpose. I was tempted many times to give up but I didn't.” You can believe that he wanted to give up when all he came to live for was rejected by family, friends and religious leaders. But he didn't.

What a wonderful way to die – knowing that you have fought well the fight of life; that you knew your purpose and never wavered from it.

Our human tendency is to quit before we finish. It is seen in the smallest of things – an unfinished book, a defunct resolution to exercise, a project started around the house months ago. Sometimes our tendency to quit is seen in more painful ways – an unfulfilled promise to a child, spouse or friend, an uncompleted letter of forgiveness to a parent or friend, or the lack of discipline to spend time alone with God every day.

Jesus is our role model as he spoke these three words. He is asking us, “Are you close to quitting on something really important to you? Please don't”; “Are you discouraged with your lot in life? Hang in there.”; “Is your marriage crumbling? Give it one more shot, get some help.” Whatever it is that is defeating you, Jesus is saying, “Don't let it win. Keep your faith in me and I will help to see you through.”

Reflection Question: (If you need more space for reflection, use back side of this sheet)

What are you about to give up on? Can you trust Jesus to help you stay the course? Who do you have that will help you not give up?

Prayer Station Activity:

Complete the follow sentences:

I don't think I am strong enough to _____

Pray for God to help you complete what you don't think you are strong enough to finish.

Station Six

Commitment

Luke 23:46

“Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!” And with those words he breathed his last.

These final words of Jesus are perhaps his most important spoken from the cross. They form the foundation upon which his whole life was built. These words were his compass giving him direction from the time of his birth to the time of his death. These words determined not only his day to day life but now his eternal life as he hung his head to die.

The words originate in the Psalms. Psalm 31:5 reads, “I entrust my spirit into your hand. Rescue me, Lord, for you are a faithful God.” Jewish parents teach this prayer to their children. It is to be recited every night. Jesus is crying out a prayer of trust and commitment.

The Psalmist goes on to write, “I will be glad and rejoice in your unfailing love, for you have seen my troubles, and you care about the anguish of my soul. You have not handed me over to my enemies but have set me in a safe place.” Just as Jesus entrusted his life to God, he entrusts the ending of his life to God.

Whenever we talk about trust and commitment, we are challenged. We would rather be the masters of our own fate. But in reality, that’s exactly what has made such a mess of the world.

But in these final words we see hope... hope that this commitment doesn’t end here. Somehow God is going to redeem all that is lost. He is going to mend all that is broken. He will heal all that suffer. Somehow, here, now, in the face of what seems like God’s biggest failure, Jesus still trusts that God will see this through.

What is your primary commitment in life? Where do you find hope? When our primary commitments are to our jobs and activities or our highest hopes are in our own accomplishments, we will quickly burn out, wear out, and be defeated. We can see in Jesus’ final moments that there is only one place where we can put our trust, one place that offers hope, and one person to whom we can fully commit.

Reflection Question: (If you need more space for reflection, use back side of this sheet)

What is it you need to place in Jesus’ hands?

Prayer Station Activity:

Into Your Hands

Write what you need to give to Jesus, what you need to trust him with, on a note card and nail it to the cross in the place where Jesus’ hands were nailed..

Station Seven