

BILL GAULTIERE

DAYS OF



HOLY WEEK

DEVOTIONAL

Days of Holy Week Devotional

Receiving Jesus' Empathy



BY BILL GAULTIERE

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Introduction

Holy Week is a time of preparation and reflection leading up to the joy of the resurrection. You know that the last seven days of Christ's life changed the world, but you may not have thought of them as filled with *empathy for your own pain and brokenness*.

The following **meditations on each day in Holy Week** connect us with the divine empathy of Christ that we need in order to be forgiven of our sins and raised to new life in the power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead.

From Palm Sunday and each day after, culminating in the Lamb of God taking away our sin on Good Friday and then rising from the dead on Easter Sunday, you will be drawn into a deeper appreciation of Jesus' work to reconcile us to God and bring heaven to us.

It is my prayer that you will experience Christ's empathy for you in a profound way through each daily devotional and prayer that reveals the human struggles and trials Jesus endured on the road to the cross.



The Empathy of Christ for Your Pain

Empathy is tuning into what someone else feels, validating the bigness of it, and expressing compassion. *People die for lack of empathy.*

When you hurt you often feel alone. Then you may slide into loneliness, depression, or anger. The Apostle Paul shows a better way: when you're suffering, bring your emotions and needs to the Savior Jesus Christ, recall a similar pain or stress from his life in the Gospels, and receive his divine empathy poured out at Calvary's cross.

Paul calls this the companionship of Christ's sufferings ([Phil. 3:10](#)). What heavenly sweetness comes when we share a pain or injustice that we're experiencing with our Lord and we're drawn into a deeper appreciation of a particular way that Christ suffered with love for us! His empathy warms our heart and restores our soul. Then we can overflow with the compassion of Christ to other people who are hurting ([2 Cor. 1:3-7](#)).

The only perfect empathy in the universe is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, offered for all people in Holy Week.

Let's revisit these daily events in a fresh, re-vitalizing way that helps us experience the Passion of the Christ to reconcile us to a love relationship with God.

A close-up photograph of green palm fronds, showing the long, slender leaves and the central rachis, filling the top half of the page.

Palm Sunday

The drama of Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday. Before we can fully appreciate Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross to forgive our sins and his resurrection, we need to appreciate Palm Sunday one week before Easter Sunday.

On Palm Sunday Jesus fulfills the ancient prophecy of the Messiah and rides into Jerusalem on a donkey as crowds of people wave palm branches and sing "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!" ([Zech. 9:9](#); [Matt. 21:1-11](#)).

People are praising Jesus Christ because of all the signs that point to him being the Messiah: good news of God's salvation for the poor and all people, miraculous healings, the best teachings about love, and, most of all, **a life of perfect love** for God and all people.

But here at the height of Jesus' popularity *he was actually totally alone*, emotionally isolated from everyone except his Father in the heavens.

On Palm Sunday no one understood Jesus – no one appreciated that he was the suffering servant of [Isaiah 53](#) who was sacrificing his perfect life to forgive their sins.

Tragically, the reason the crowds praised him was because they wanted him to be their military and political king to lead Israel to overthrow the Roman empire.

When you succeed there are people who will praise you, but the excitement is short-lived. Soon you feel empty and lonely. You long to be known for who you really are and to be loved unconditionally. *Jesus understands*. His empathy for you moves him toward you to minister compassion and deliverance.

Thank you Jesus for knowing us fully and accepting us! You understand how it feels to be misunderstood, overlooked, and alone. Today we bring ourselves to you, resting in your presence, and looking to you as our source of identity and life. We can come to you just as we are to receive your love and grace. Amen.



Monday of Holy Week

Jesus' first order of business on the Monday of Holy Week was to visit the temple. There he sees the corrupt priests and their workers extorting the poor and other people that came to buy a sacrifice and worship God ([Matt. 21:12-17](#)). So he gets out a whip and drives away religious abusers from the people who are seeking God's tender mercy.

Jesus' anger gets all the attention in this scene and sometimes he's even portrayed like he's a madman. But this is a scene of fierce compassion for the poor and needy.

The whip of Jesus made space for outsiders to come to him freely and receive healing. (He offers the same ministry to the insider religious leaders and some became his followers.)

How do you feel about anger? Your anger? Other people's?

When you experience angry judgment or abuse from someone, it's shaming. If your inner critic is active, then shame can come on you like an avalanche. The worst is when condemnation comes in the name of God as was happening in the temple in Jesus' day. *This is religious abuse.*

Jesus feels empathy for you.

He experienced religious abuse even as a young person from a poor family visiting the temple and experiencing the unjust system. Throughout his life *he was looked down upon, rejected, and mistreated*. Our Lord's empathy motivates him to rise up to defend and protect you and all who are mistreated or judged.

On Holy Monday Jesus ministers the tender mercy of God to you.

Jesus, thank you for protecting the vulnerable and oppressed. Thank you for welcoming the outsider and making space for us to receive the Father's tender mercy. We bring to you the areas of our lives where we have felt judgment or abuse from others and ask for your healing. You are our ever present strength and help in time of need. We ask for your tender touch on each of the needs in our lives. Amen.



Tuesday of Holy Week

On Holy Tuesday Jesus explains how he was able to do physical gardening in a fig orchard using only his words: "If you believe you will receive what you ask for in prayer" ([Matt. 21:22](#)).

Then, on the Mount of Olives, he confronts the religious leaders' lack of faith in God, saying they're "blind guides" ([Matt. 23:16](#)).

Later a poor widow puts two cents in the temple offering, and Jesus says she's put in more than the rich hypocrites who made a show of their giving. Are these just nice words? No. She really did put in more because she alone gave with confidence in what God would do ([Luke 21:1-4](#)).

Jesus is teaching us Kingdom of God math where $1 + 1 = 11$, not 2. A little faith + God = HUGE!

That's why Jesus could change a garden with only words, and two cents was a large offering. But the religious leaders were blind because they didn't see and trust the God of mercy. Maybe your faith feels small to you as the poor widow felt. Jesus himself was often *wrongly accused by the religious leaders as having bad faith*.

What do you need God to do for you or a loved one? What big project do you need God's help with? **Use Jesus' Kingdom of God math.** Use the faith-trust you have – even if it feels like it's not enough – and *act with Jesus*. Do the loving thing and watch for God's Kingdom of beauty and goodness to manifest.

Jesus, help us to see reality through your Kingdom lens! We long to have the faith of the widow. We long to see and trust your mercy. Help us to use Kingdom of God math today as we face challenges in our lives. Nothing is impossible with you! We want to act with you, Jesus, in everything we do. Give us eyes to see your Kingdom of beauty and goodness today. Amen.



Wednesday of Holy Week

It seems that Wednesday of Holy Week was a quiet day of blessing for Jesus. It was the calm before the storm of the cross. He may have spent his day resting at the home of his dear friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany (just two miles outside of Jerusalem).

It was here that Mary anointed Jesus' feet with very expensive ointment. Imagine the delightful fragrance that came from Jesus' feet and filled the house and the events of Holy Week.

Even as Jesus hung on the cross, he and everyone nearby could smell the sweet aroma coming from his nail pierced and bleeding feet. Surely, this reminded him of Mary's kindness and how his Abba was loving him through her.

Mary's act of devoted love deeply ministered to Jesus, but his disciples thought it was a waste of money and they criticized her. The Lord stood up for her. He publicly thanked her and prophesied that what she did would be told as part of his gospel forever ([Matt. 26:6-13](#)).

As with Mary, when you devote yourself to Jesus with affection and reverence, some people will criticize you as being too emotional or not productive enough. But nothing is more important than cultivating intimacy with Jesus.

The beautiful fragrance of Mary's offering points to Jesus' sacrifice of perfect love on the cross. When we receive our Savior's mercy, the horror of the abuse and pain he endured is transformed into the most glorious event in history.

Thank you Jesus for your unfailing grace to us! You forgive our sins and empower us to do what is good and loving. We want to make intimacy with you our highest priority. Like Mary, we pour out our gratitude and devotion to you, praying that our Abba will make it a sweet aroma for you and many other people. Amen.



Maundy Thursday

On Maundy Thursday Jesus spiritually gives his body and blood to his disciples at the Last Supper. He institutes communion for all people who would follow him ([Matt. 26:17-30](#)). He washes their feet, shares his last words with them, teaches them to abide in his love like a branch in a vine, and prays for them and us too ([John 13-17](#)). Then in the Garden of Gethsemane he travails in prayer to prepare for his cross ([Matt. 26:31-46](#)).

This is a painful day for Jesus. He's betrayed by Judas. He predicts that Peter will deny him three times. In the garden his apostles all fall asleep after he's asked for their prayers. He agonizes in prayer as he takes on the weight of the cross and sweats drops of blood. He's assaulted by Satan and nearly killed.

But the Bible says that God answered Jesus' cries in the garden, helping him make it to the cross, and now our risen Lord serves as our high priest to help us in our prayers and in all that we need ([Heb. 5:7, 10](#)).

When you're in pain or exhausted, Jesus has empathy for you.

When a family member or friend rejects you, Jesus is faithful to love you.

When people you're depending on for help disappoint you, Jesus is there to strengthen you.

When the devil lies to you and attacks you, the Lord Jesus is with you to protect you and encourage you.

Jesus, you have gone before us to give us the perfect example of service and obedience. You welcome us to the table to partake in your body and blood shed for us. When others may reject us, you embrace us. Help us to abide in you today. You are our great high priest who understands every need we have and we trust in your protection and provision today. Amen.



Good Friday

On Good Friday the Son of God is betrayed by Judas, falsely accused and condemned by the religious leaders and Pilate, scourged almost to death by the soldiers, abandoned by his disciples, mocked by the crowds, and tortured to death on the cross.

The pure and shining one who never sinned took on the hideousness of humanity's sin. He chose to receive the punishment that we deserve so that we could be healed (fulfilling the prophecy of [Isaiah 53](#)).

The Lord had the power to call down thousands of mighty angels to defend his righteousness and deliver him from his enemies ([Matt. 26:53](#)), but he willingly gave himself to suffer and die for you and me. The cross didn't happen to Jesus – he seized hold of it out of love for us!

As Jesus hung on the cross, the sky went black. The Nazarene cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" ([Matt. 27:46](#)).

Did God stop loving Jesus? Was God angrily punishing Jesus?

Jesus' closest friend who saw it all answered, "God is love!" ([1 John 4:8](#)). God would never stop loving Jesus, you, me, or anyone. (His holiness, anger, and judgment are expressions of his love.) Yet by becoming a sin offering for us, Jesus experienced a separation from his Father. He experienced the awfulness of humanity's sin as if it were his own. He felt abandoned in the night. He was all alone, cold, and naked as he hung on the cross.

Because of sin, shame, and isolation, we know the feeling of God's absence. Like David we cry out, "How long, O Lord, will you hide your face from me?" ([Ps. 13:1](#)).

Jesus has gone before us into this Dark Night of the Soul. He is there on the cross with arms open wide and eyes of mercy fixed on you.

Nothing can ever separate you from God's love when you look to Jesus ([Rom. 8:38-39](#)).

Jesus, we are overwhelmed by your incredible love for us! Thank you for going to the cross to make a way for us to be with you forever! We know that in you, we are unforsaken. Nothing will ever separate us from your love. Thank you for taking on our sin and experiencing that pain and suffering on our behalf. We love you, Jesus, and look forward to eternity in your presence! Amen.



Holy Saturday

On Holy Saturday Jesus is dead. His body is in a tomb: limp, cold, lifeless.

The Messiah didn't deliver Israel. He didn't finish his job of setting the common people free from oppressive Roman tyranny or legalistic Jewish religion.

Nothing makes sense.

There will be no more of Jesus' witty stories, teachable moments with his disciples, playing with children, standing up against oppressors to protect the poor and powerless, or amazing miracles. The Messiah is gone. Hope is gone.

Sometimes we all feel that our hopes have been dashed.

But death cannot hold him! Jesus is the Righteous One and Satan can't hold him or anyone who puts their confidence in Jesus ([Acts 2:24](#)). Jesus holds the keys of death and hell ([Rev. 1:18](#)).

With the precious blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, God paid the ransom to deliver us from sin, death, and hell ([1 Peter 1:18-19](#)).

We may fear dying, even going to hell. But Jesus Christ has empathy for us – we're not alone in death! – because the Lord went into the dark void ahead of us and then resurrected!

His eternal light-life shines for you even in death. He comes riding on the clouds to embrace you and escort you into heaven.

Sin, death, and hell could not hold the righteous Christ (*Messiah* in Hebrew) and so they cannot hold you when you put your trust in the mercy of God through him.

Jesus Christ's promise for us is that "anyone who keeps my word will never see death" ([John 8:51](#)). In other words, as a disciple of Jesus when you die physically you won't experience death –you won't even know that you "died" until later!

Jesus, on Holy Saturday we can wait in the dark with hope because we know your resurrection is coming! Even in the darkest times, the light of your hope rises. Help us to see you in areas of our lives where we may feel like hope is gone because your promises are sure and true. We know that in you we have nothing to fear because you have conquered death! Amen



Resurrection Sunday

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter is the culmination of Holy Week and the climax of the Christian faith. It is the dominant, joyful theme of the Bible.

Early in the morning on the first Easter a group of women, including Mary Magdalene, went to the tomb of Jesus and found it empty.

An angel proclaimed, "Don't be afraid... Jesus has risen! He is not here... Go tell his disciples... He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you" ([Mark 16:6-7](#)).

Whatever you need to do, you don't need to do it by yourself. Put your trust in the angel's words that Jesus is risen from the dead, and he's walking with you into whatever situations are ahead for you.

Fix your eyes not on the circumstances that are seen and temporary, but on the glory of Christ's presence that is unseen and eternal ([2 Cor. 4:18](#)).

It's true. It's real. **The Spirit of the risen Jesus is with you.** Hold his hand. Put all your confidence in him. He will comfort you and strengthen you.

"My peace I give you," Jesus promises. "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" ([John 14:27](#)).

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Jesus, you go before us so we are never alone! We praise you as the Risen Lord! Hallelujah! We hold to your promise of peace. Help us to fix our eyes on you in all circumstances and live for your glory, only and always. We love you Lord!! Amen.

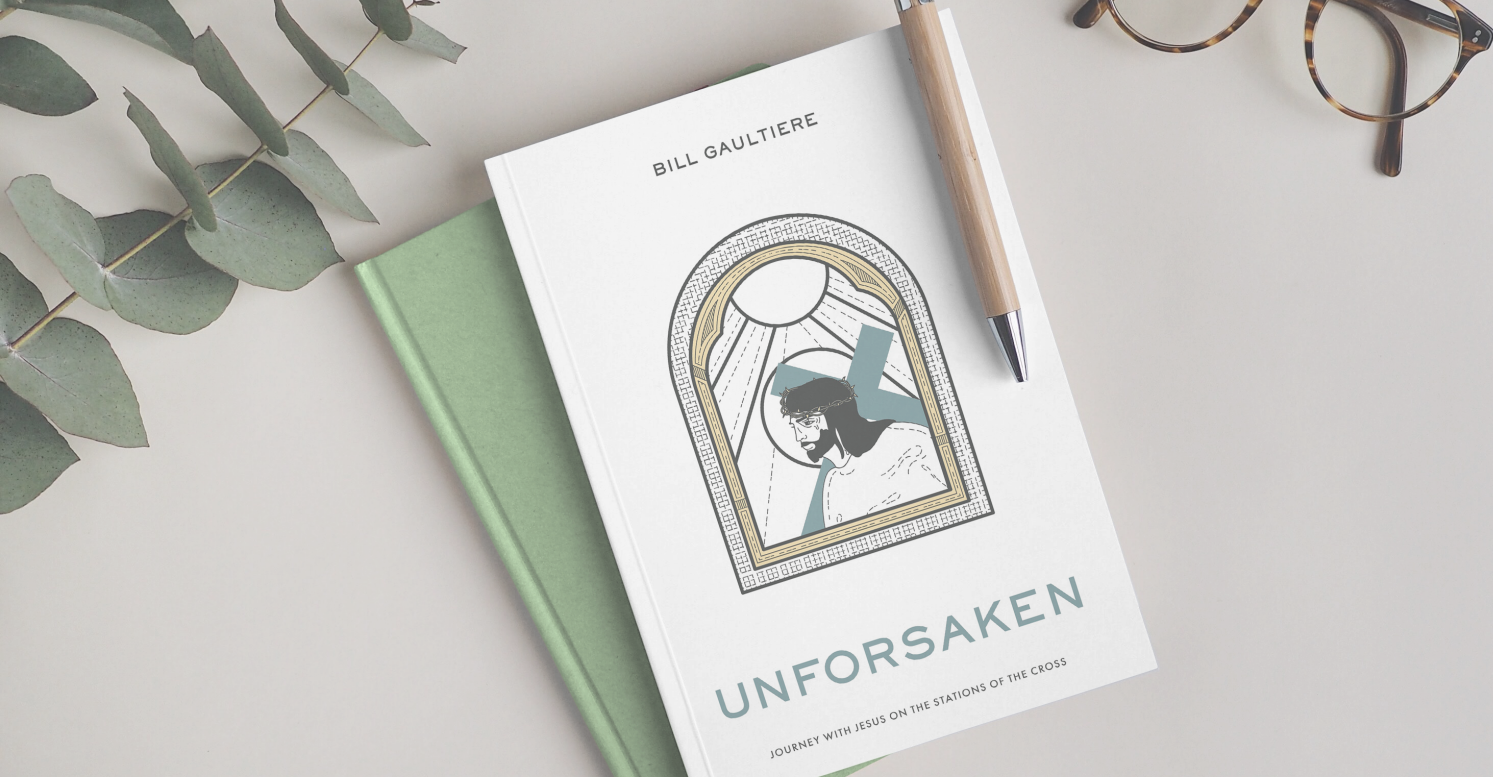


Kingdom Life

On the cross, Jesus shows you that God is your Friend who will never leave you or forsake you ([Hebrews 13:5](#)). Through Christ Jesus, we have empathy, forgiveness, unconditional love, true knowledge, power, and the best life forever!

I pray that this Holy Week Devotional has invited you to receive the love and empathy of your Savior more deeply this Easter. Jesus' love and grace are available to you in every moment of your day, empowering you to live in the Kingdom reality of the joy of his resurrection wherever you go.

May you experience more of the joy of the cross and the presence of the risen Christ in your life today!



Journey Deeper Through the Stations of the Cross

If you would like additional resources for Lent and Holy Week, I invite you to join me on the life-changing journey of: [*Unforsaken: With Jesus on the Stations of the Cross*](#).

Each station includes original artwork, Scripture for meditation, an invitation to experience Christ in deeper intimacy, and reflection questions.

Appendices discuss options for Scriptural stations, examine Jesus' empathy for us at each station, and offer a Guide for Lent, which outlines experiencing two stations per week with Scriptures for personal devotions, small group reflection, or sermon series.

You can order a print copy today through our store, or download our digital e-book for immediate use.

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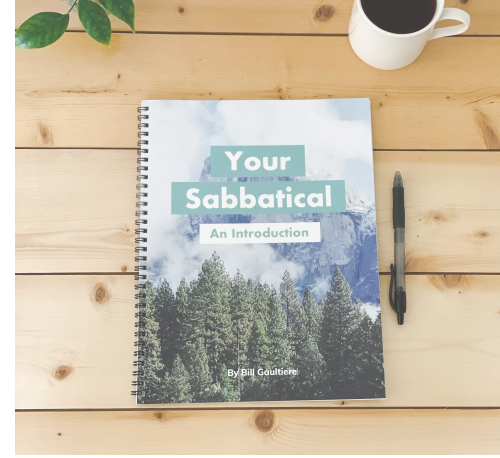
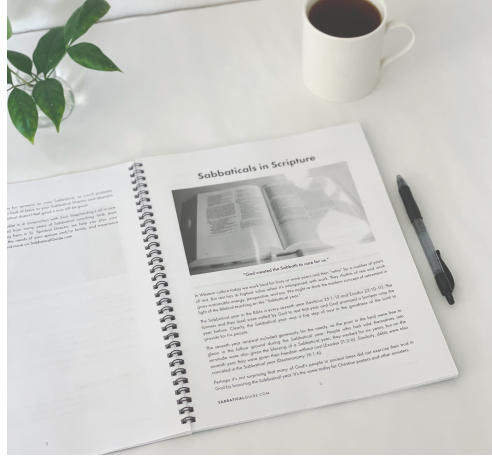
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About the Author



Bill Gaultiere

Bill and his wife Kristi are the founders of Soul Shepherding. As doctors of Psychology, they lead a ministry staff of Soul Shepherds who provide spiritual direction and coaching for pastors and leaders. They lead the [Soul Shepherding Institute](#), which provides retreat-based training in Christ-centered spiritual formation and soul care and a [certificate in the ministry of Spiritual Direction](#). They are also authors of a number of soul care books and resources, including [Journey of the Soul](#), which was #1 on Amazon in Christian Counseling. Their next book is [Healthy Feelings, Thriving Faith: Growing Emotionally & Spiritually Through the Enneagram](#), published by Revell and releasing later in 2023. Bill and Kristi enjoy speaking to church groups and others. Each week thousands of people listen to their [Soul Talks podcast](#) and read their [Soul Shepherding blog](#).