

1. Jesus is condemned

No proper evidence; no justification for passing the death sentence. The crowd eager for blood. The self-righteous religious leaders puffed up with pride and hypocrisy; misusing their power and authority; keen to be rid of this trouble-maker who is constantly challenging them. Pilate too scared to do the right thing, trying desperately to distance himself yet unable to wash himself clean of his involvement. Barabbas, guilty as sin, walks free. How ironic! The only one free of guilt is the one who has to die, condemned by those he came to save.

We see injustice all around us, but do we challenge and confront it head-on as Jesus did? Lord, help us to think of others; to place their concerns before our own. Open our eyes to look out for the outcast and the stranger, for it is then that we welcome you.

2. Jesus carries the cross

The wooden cross - an almost unbearable weight; difficult to carry; no easy place to grip hold - the wood rough and jagged; tearing into the flesh; somehow made heavier by the guards' jeers and harsh treatment. Betrayed by a kiss; sold for 30 silver coins - the price of friendship comes cheap. Denied three times over by a beloved disciple. Surely too much suffering for one man to bear?

We can be so wrapped up in our own lives that we fail to notice the pain of those around us. Lord, help us to be more aware of the problems that burden our friends, family and all your people, near and far. Give us the desire to journey with them and help carry their load.

3. Jesus falls for the first time

Weak from the beatings; pushed roughly along by the soldiers. Stumbling blindly; sprawled on the ground; bloody knees and grazed hands; searing pain. Laughter and more shoving. Looking foolish; utterly humiliated; all for our sakes. The God of love.

We all know the embarrassment of looking a fool in front of others, especially those we want to impress. Lord, grant us the gift of sensitivity to act with kindness and compassion to all people. Teach us to love unconditionally and to offer support to those who fall.

4. Jesus is face to face with his mother

Watching and waiting. A helpless bystander, just another face in the crowd. Flashbacks to that first encounter with the angel. Words too mysterious to understand. A child? How can this be? Joseph's gentle acceptance: no recriminations; no harsh words. Then the day we almost lost him - an ache tearing my soul in two. Even then he was marked out as special; more God than man: the miracles, signs and wonders. Such love and compassion for the poor and the lonely, the hungry and the outcast. Such love ... and now this: the mob braying for his blood - insults, jeers, humiliation. A sword pierces my heart.

Mary accepted God's plan for her with humility and grace, trusting in his love and guidance. But we are used to making decisions and choices based on our own judgement. Lord, grant us the wisdom to know that you alone can see the bigger picture. Help us to trust you completely, even when the way ahead seems painful and bleak.

5. Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross

Keep my head down; stay out of trouble. It's nothing to do with me. I don't want to get involved. This guy Jesus seems like a good sort. Can't work out what they've got against him. Better not argue though, not when the guards are waving spears around. My, this cross is some weight - no wonder the poor fellow couldn't manage it, especially given the beatings he's had.

How often do we come across unfair situations and say nothing for fear of getting caught up in the crossfire? Lord, take away our uncertainty; make us bolder to act when others need our help, so that, like Simon, we can share their burden as a sign of our solidarity.

6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Moved to pity by Jesus' plight. The crown of thorns digging deep into his forehead: blood and spit mixed together; sweat and tears streaming down. A face so humble and full of compassion. A sudden spontaneous movement; pushing through the crowd; not stopping to think how the soldiers might react; no time to think of her own safety, Veronica gently wipes his face with her veil; eases his suffering with a

loving gesture ;a small act of kindness in a world bound up in hatred and cruelty.

Do we have the confidence to go against the crowd and reach out to someone who is unpopular or unloved? Lord, give us the strength of purpose to stand up for the truth and not worry about the consequences for ourselves.

7. Jesus falls for the second time

Another fall; another humiliation. Not wanting to see this thing through; hoping against hope that there might be another way, an easier way; that God would not require such a difficult sacrifice; that this cup will pass me by. But no: I must suffer shame and embarrassment to become truly human; to share fully in the utter degradation endured by so many. This way, I can look them in the eye and say: 'I understand your pain, I am one with you.'

No one likes to look foolish or a failure in front of other people. Lord, inspire us to show true compassion to those who fall. Teach us not to be judgemental, but to welcome the opportunity to show your love to them.

8. The women of Jerusalem weep for Jesus

Unbearable suffering; hearts bursting with sorrow; desolation that knows no bounds. A river of tears; uncontrollable weeping and wailing. 'O women, weep not for me, weep rather for yourselves and your families.' A suffering not understood in human terms. The ultimate sacrifice; the perfect act of love to redeem a fallen world.

In our broken humanity we find it impossible to fully comprehend the depth of Jesus' love for us – a love so perfect that it knows no bounds. Lord, give us the grace to see through your eyes so that we may respond to the cries of our brothers and sisters with generosity and compassion: to love as you love.

9. Jesus falls for the third time

Yet another fall, this time worse than the two before. Scarcely enough strength to get up again. This agonising pain is too much to bear. Truly a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief; bruised and broken; despised,

demoralised; crushed and pitiful. A lamb led to the slaughter, never even opening his mouth.

Lord, we know that you have promised to always be there for us, no matter what we do. But it's hard to believe that promise when we feel utterly abandoned and alone. Encourage us to put our trust in you and turn to you in good times and bad.

10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes

Naked and exposed. Nowhere to hide; no way to retain even the smallest scrap of respect. Teased and taunted; jeered and mocked as a king. Now worse than the poorest of beggars. Stripped to nothing. All trappings of dignity roughly torn away: the very opposite of worldly power and majesty. Endured so patiently; no word of protest or reproach.

Lord, give us the courage to peel away the layers that we have built around ourselves for our own protection. Help us to embrace our vulnerability as a means of coming closer to our brothers and sisters and to you.

11. Jesus is nailed to the cross

Does man's inhumanity to man know no bounds? Concentration camps; ethnic cleansing; torture; mindless violence; murder; rape; gun crimes on the streets; lack of care for God's wonderful creation. A man nailed to a cross. Left to die a slow, agonising death in the heat of the mid-day sun. What super-human reserves of love are required to truly forgive the tormentors? A heart full to overflowing with love and compassion.

How often do we 'nail' Jesus to the cross with our harsh words; our lack of consideration for others; our self-centredness? Lord, help us to overcome the dark side of our natures and to focus on the light so that we may reflect your love in the world around us.

12. Jesus dies

Such a dreadful way to die: long, drawn out, every breath a new torture. No quick easy bullet or poisoned cup. The mouth on fire with unbearable thirst: lips parched and dry. A drink is offered - vinegar, not water, bitter tasting and sour; smarting against cut lips; re-opening the wounds;

making the blood and pus ooze once again. The bitter vinegar like the bitterness of the mob clamouring for his blood. The end is near. The sky darkens. It is finished.

For a moment it seemed as though God had deserted him, but we know that without Jesus' death there could be no resurrection and no promise of eternal life. Lord, when the problems of life seem to overwhelm us, remind us that tomorrow will bring a new day, full of new possibilities.

13. Jesus is taken down from the cross

My name's Joseph. I come from Arimathea. I've been a follower of Jesus for a while now, but in secret. Okay, I didn't join in with the other members of the Council when they turned against Jesus, but I didn't exactly do much to stop them. I was too afraid for my own safety. Well, maybe I didn't stand up for Jesus while he was still alive, but I can do something for him now. I plucked up courage and asked Pilate for the body. Pilate seemed surprised at the request, but he said 'yes.' I think he was starting to feel guilty: he knew he should never have allowed Jesus to be executed.

Lord, forgive us for the times when we lack boldness. Give us the courage to act, without worrying about how it may impact us. Take away our hearts of stone and give us hearts of fire that burn with love for you.

14. Jesus is placed in the tomb

A hurried burial. A race against time to finish the preparations before the Sabbath begins. Joseph and Nicodemus, both secret disciples, go together to prepare an empty tomb for Jesus' body; wrap it in a clean burial garment; place it in the tomb and roll a large stone over the entrance to prevent anyone disturbing it. The faithful group of followers trudge home, their hearts heavy and sad, unsure of what tomorrow may bring.

Joseph and Nicodemus kept the lowest profile of all the disciples and yet they were the ones who took centre stage in the final scene of Jesus' death. Like them, we may be slow to make a commitment, but God's patience is boundless - he never gives up on us. Lord, be our inspiration on our journey, that we may work faithfully to bring about your kingdom of love and justice and peace.

Justice and Peace

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