



underthefigtree

GAT-SHEMAN

A Discussion Guide for Individuals and Groups

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As I walk with Jesus, I take great comfort in knowing that He wrestled with suffering as well. He too experienced the death of close friends, witnessed the erosion of disease, was wounded by the cold betrayal of his followers. He spent his life in the thick of the grime and the disorder. And on the eve of his own death, we find the Son of man as alone as he has ever been. Here, at Gethsemane, the gospel writers lay bare the vulnerability of our Savior, the shadow of the cross already hanging dark and heavy, tearing at the heart of this Jewish boy from Nazareth. It is here, alone with his Father, his Father who's back will soon will turn, that the "crushing" weight of our sin begins to fully bare down. As Golgotha was for us, Gethsemane was for us.

Most of us have heard the story of Gethsemane countless times. But in today's lesson, I hope you'll learn to see Jesus' suffering in a new light. It's "at the place called Gethsemane" that we discover Jesus' brutal suffering was God's way of telling us how much he loves and values us. And, if we are willing, he can use the crucible of our own lives to share that message with a wounded world.



The Text

Before you watch this session's video together, read the following passages:

Matthew 26:36–46

Mark 14:32–42

The Teaching

Watch the video, “Gat-Sheman.” If time allows, we recommend that you (or your group) review the vocabulary words and background details below before continuing with the talking points.

Vocabulary

Bet-Guvrin

house of power

yam

large stone bowl in which olives are initially crushed

mammel

millstone used for crushing olives in the yam

gat-sheman

olive press installation, combination of “gat” (press) and “sheman” (oil)





Background Information

Standing at a strategic location along ancient trading routes Bet Guvrin boasted a number olive oil installations, evidence of a booming olive oil industry. With a wide variety of uses, olive oil was a lucrative cash crop. The “liquid gold,” as Homer once described it, was used not only for culinary purposes, but also for fuel in oil lamps, for medicinal purposes, and for skin care. Olive oil also played a special role in Jewish religious rituals at the great Temple in Jerusalem. Similar to the significance of crude oil today, olive oil sustained everyday ancient life and became a driving force in the ancient economy.

Harvested in late autumn, olives were shaken from the tree as soon as the first black, ripened olives would appear. For an initial crushing, olive oil producers poured the olives into a large stone bowl (yam) and rolled a heavy millstone (mammal) on the olives. The mashed olives were placed in hemp bags and brought to the underground olive oil installations (gat sheman) pictured in the video.

At the gat-sheman, multiple pressings would take place, each subsequent pressing producing oil of a lesser quality. The first pressing, which produced the highest and finest quality oil, would be given to God as a firstfruits offering and used for Temple purposes. Subsequent pressings would be for food or medicines, with the final pressings (with the lowest quality) being used for fuel.

Gat-shemans would be used heavily in the fall, but would generally be empty the rest of the year, offering a nice, cool place for visitors to stay. It's easy to imagine a press owner offering his empty “Gethsamene” as a resting place for Jesus and his disciples during the spring Passover. Today only one olive press has been found on the Mt. of Olives and a Catholic church stands at this likely site of Jesus’ Gethsamene experience.

THE TALKING POINTS



- 1 In Jeremiah 11:16, God describes Israel as “a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form.” Paul builds on this metaphor in Romans 11:17 when he describes the Gentiles as wild olive branches being grafted into a cultivated olive tree. When you consider the role of olive trees and olive oil in ancient life, why do you think God chose the olive tree as a metaphor for His people? What do we offer to the world that parallels the purposes olive oil served in ancient times?
- 2 Was it a coincidence that Jesus spent his last week in a Gethsemane? What parallels do you see between the ancient practices of olive pressing and the suffering Jesus experienced at Gethsemane? What do you think motivated him to stay the course rather than fleeing into the night?
- 3 Ancient olive oil gave sustenance. It gave healing. And it gave fuel for life’s everyday activities. But none of this could come without a pressing. Is there a picture here for the role of suffering in our spiritual lives? What was the end product of Jesus’ pressings? What has been the end product of “pressings” in your own life? Have you or someone you know ever experienced a kind of healing via suffering?
- 4 It seems to me that “all suffering” is not the same; there are different kinds of suffering. There is a kind of suffering that grows out of the darkness of the human heart: brokenness because of sinful human choices. And there is a suffering that comes from the marks of sin on the natural world—the cancerous cells eroding a patient’s body or the destructive forces of a hurricane. But the quality of Jesus’ suffering is different: It is a chosen suffering because of deep love for another. Redemptive. Discuss these different kinds of suffering: Can any kind of suffering be redeemed? Are different kinds of suffering redeemed in different ways? Should all kinds of suffering be avoided?
- 5 We serve a Lord who chose to suffer and ultimately die for us. But his choice came after years of learning and ministry. Is there a sense in which we must also “grow or mature into” this kind of sacrificial servant hood? If a willingness to suffer for others is a mark of spiritual maturity, then what kind of living can help us develop that maturity? And how can we recognize, as Jesus did at Gethsemane, when the right opportunity has arisen for us to suffer for another?
- 6 God values you enough to sacrifice his only Son: Do you find it easy or difficult to believe that you are worth so much to God? In what ways have you struggled to value your own life as highly as God values you? What would it look like for you to embrace the value of your own life with equal vigor to what God has done for you?

“SEE WITH YOUR EYES, HEAR WITH YOUR EARS, AND SET YOUR HEARTS ON EVERYTHING I AM GOING TO SHOW YOU, FOR THAT IS WHY YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT HERE. THEN TELL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL EVERYTHING YOU SEE.” EZEKIEL 40:4



The Task

Before you end today’s session, read Isaiah 53 together.

Pay special attention to verse 5: The Hebrew word translated as “crushed” in this passage literally means “apply pressure to an object, which if alive, will hurt, bruise, or kill.” Can you see echoes of Gethsemane in this passage? Can you see the weight of our sins coming down on Jesus as he prayed in the garden that final night of his life? Do you realize that in the economy of God, all the suffering of Isaiah 53 was worth it for you?

As you leave today’s session, thank God for this deep, sacrificial love. And then ask him to open your eyes to those around you. Is there someone God is calling you to value more highly? Someone who needs to know how dearly they are valued by God? Could there even be someone He is calling you to make a sacrifice for?

In the week ahead, revisit Isaiah 53 every day. Let the depth of God’s love for you sink in as you read the words. And then consider how deep that same love runs for those around you. Jesus’ excruciating suffering was worth it to Him—for others too. As you read each day, consider each of the following individuals as a recipient of God’s deep love and sacrifice:

Day One – yourself

Day Two – your closest friend

Day Three – a co-worker, employee or employer, teacher or student

Day Four – your enemy, the one who has hurt you the most

Day Five – an acquaintance who does not yet believe in Christ

Day Six – a stranger you saw today, or a stranger who lives around the world

Day Seven – Consider Jesus’ great pressing and sacrifice—for us all.