Small Group Bible Study Questions

A) Can you recall a time when you were struggling with some major issues in your life and you felt completely alone, as though no one could understand or relate? If you are able, share about the circumstances which surrounded that time (past or current) in your small group.

B) Why does God seem so distant in life's worst circumstances? Even Jesus Christ struggled with the presence of His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane... Why are these times of greatest personal darkness so difficult to see God through?

C) What do you say to someone who is going through a sustained time of difficulty? How would you assure them of the presence of God in their lives?

D) Even Jesus Christ struggled (mightily) with God's will for His life. He asked God to take the cup of wrath away, so that Jesus Christ did not have to experience it. Yet, in the midst of His request to God, Jesus was also careful to submit Himself to God's will. Jesus' ability to let go of what He wanted and embrace (aggressively) what God wanted for Him was not a mistake or miracle. There was a process to it, a transformation of Christ's heart to become like the heart of the Father, God. What was that process, and how does the same process translate into our own lives?

E) The Garden of Gethsemane is one of the darkest chapters in the bible. The cost of intimacy with Judas, the betrayal and failures of Jesus' closest friends, the agony of accepting God's will, the choice of Christ to become helpless and weak despite all the power of heaven at His disposal. Yet, the story is filled with extraordinary hope... When a Christian is all alone in the midst of extraordinarily difficult circumstances, God is right there in the midst of the battle. He will send support, He will clarify His will, He will meet our greatest needs -- despite the pain we might have to endure. Do you have one of these kinds of "bigger-than-life" difficulties right now? Share with your group and pray together for the felt presence of God!
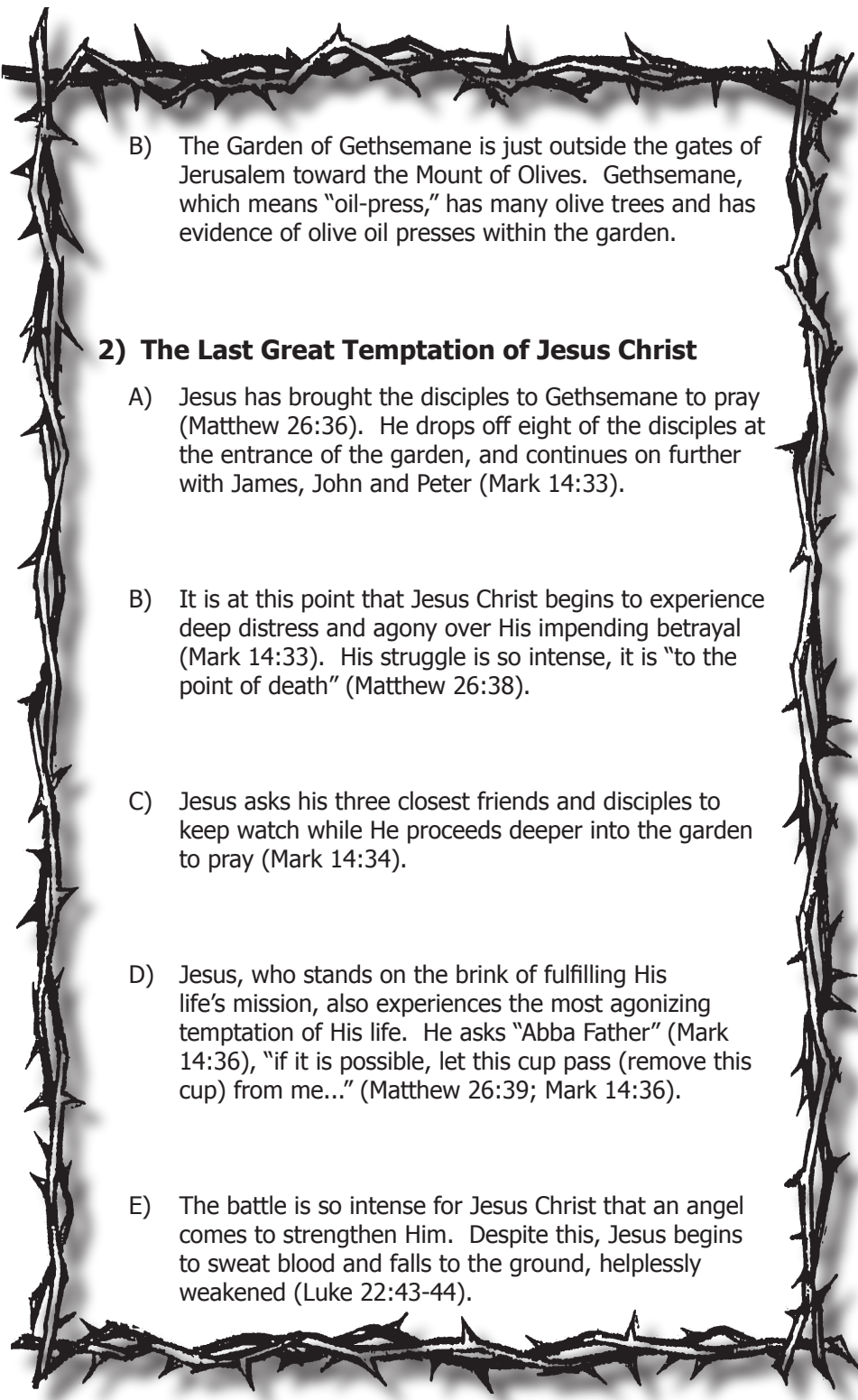
All Alone

Long Beach Alliance Church ● March 13th, 2005 ● Pastor Chris Lankford

Then He *said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."
~Matthew 26:38-39 (NASB)

1) **Tranquility & Retreat**

   A) The scene shifts from the Upper Room (the location of the Last Supper), to the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36). The disciples often went there (Luke 22:39) for quiet times of prayer and sleep.

B) The Garden of Gethsemane is just outside the gates of Jerusalem toward the Mount of Olives. Gethsemane, which means "oil-press," has many olive trees and has evidence of olive oil presses within the garden.

2) The Last Great Temptation of Jesus Christ

A) Jesus has brought the disciples to Gethsemane to pray (Matthew 26:36). He drops off eight of the disciples at the entrance of the garden, and continues on further with James, John and Peter (Mark 14:33).

B) It is at this point that Jesus Christ begins to experience deep distress and agony over His impending betrayal (Mark 14:33). His struggle is so intense, it is "to the point of death" (Matthew 26:38).

C) Jesus asks his three closest friends and disciples to keep watch while He proceeds deeper into the garden to pray (Mark 14:34).

D) Jesus, who stands on the brink of fulfilling His life's mission, also experiences the most agonizing temptation of His life. He asks "Abba Father" (Mark 14:36), "if it is possible, let this cup pass (remove this cup) from me..." (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36).

E) The battle is so intense for Jesus Christ that an angel comes to strengthen Him. Despite this, Jesus begins to sweat blood and falls to the ground, helplessly weakened (Luke 22:43-44).

F) After an hour, Jesus returns to find his closest disciples asleep (Matthew 26:40). He wakes them asking them to keep watch and pray, encouraging them to not give into temptation (Mark 14:37-38). Despite this, the disciples fall asleep three different times (Mark 14:41).

G) While the disciples sleep though, Jesus is divinely strengthened for the road ahead. His will is perfectly melded with His Father's will (Luke 22:42), and He is prepared for "the hour" (Mark 14:41-42).

3) Betrayal With A Kiss

A) Judas, knowing Jesus and His customs (John 18:2), brings a Roman cohort of soldiers (John 18:3) to seize Jesus. Judas kisses Jesus on the cheek, a pre-arranged sign to reveal Jesus' identity (Matthew 26:48-50).

B) Despite the betrayal, Jesus is now powerfully resolute in revealing who He is ('I AM HE' -- John 18:6). Where there was a desire to see the cup of God's wrath pass by Him before, Jesus now lacks fear (Matthew 26:50).

C) He defends both His disciples and His captors (John 18:8-11), even healing the High Priest's servant's ear (Malchus -- John 18:10; Luke 22:50-51).

D) His time in the garden has transformed Christ from questions and anguish, to determination and resolve (Matthew 26:56). He is completely assured of His Father's presence (Matthew 26:53-54; Mark 14:62).