

THE WAY OF THE HEART

An Invitation to Be in Communion with Jesus

The Stations of the Cross are a long-standing tradition among Christians who choose to hold a vigil in their hearts during Good Friday—the day Jesus suffered, died and was buried. Images of different memorialized milestones of Good Friday (points of vulnerability, strength, love, compassion, etc.) are typically set up as prayer or meditation stations for people to walk through, remember, pray, and experience Jesus’s marathon of suffering and ultimate death.

This doesn’t sound pleasant, even though it’s called “Good” Friday; however, it provides us with a pathway to a softened and more transparent heart, and an opportunity to let go into God the things within us that are ready and willing die. Controls that keep us far from our Maker, and disallow the progress to wholeheartedness.

The style and form of the stations vary widely and often reflect the artistic sensibility and spirituality of the time, place, and culture of their placement. In other words, people sometimes don’t use all 14 stations, but pull from those to create a sacred place and time of slow, present-minded prayer and contemplation. This is what we have done. From the 14 original stations, we have selected 10 films that we believe embody 10 stations. We hope these will be a blessing to your journey, and open up his *Way of the Heart*.

These devotions and meditations can be done anytime, but they are commonly used as a Lenten practice on Fridays and especially on Good Friday. Participating in the Way of the Heart is an invitation to be in communion with Jesus, to enter into the mystery of his pain and suffering, and ultimately the most extreme display of sacrificial love in obedience to God. To a much lesser degree, this is a day to day choice we face in our lives. Can we surrender our way and can we take up God’s way? Throughout the *Way of the Heart* you will find that it is only through the experience of his death on Good Friday that we come alive with him on Easter Sunday.

Throughout this time, we encourage you to make this a practice. Slow down. Become aware of your breathing, quiet your mind, create a sacred time. It doesn't need to get complicated. Ask God for awareness of what is ready to die. See if you might be willing to let go of whatever that is. Just consider it. If you become willing, seal it in the tomb with Jesus on Good Friday, let it go into the unseen. This may take a lot of breathing and letting God be God.

May God bless you, and keep you. Our hearts and prayers are with you.

The Way of the Heart

1. Jesus is condemned to death.
2. Jesus takes up his cross.
3. Jesus falls.
4. Simon helps Jesus carry the cross.
5. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem.
6. Jesus is stripped of his garments.
7. Jesus is nailed to the cross.
8. Jesus promises his kingdom to the thief on the cross.
9. Jesus dies on the cross.
10. Jesus is buried in the tomb.

Opening Prayer

Together, Lord, we have arrived at another beginning, the onset of pilgrimage—taking the labored walk toward Calvary. Jesus, may walking with you soften and open my heart. I am willing to face what surfaces, and see what aches to be seen. Jesus, stay close—and God help me to remain; to move through. I am dying to live a liberated life.

Jesus Christ crucified, by your passion and death, help me to find the strength to take up my own cross and follow you. Amen.

STATION I.

Jesus is Condemned to Death

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips." (Luke 22:66-71, ESV)

Watch Brian McLaren's "Justice, Power and the Kingdom"
<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/justice-power-and-the-kingdom>

Reflection

Power. How we wield power in any given situation speaks volumes about who we are as a person. Station 1 brings up questions like, What is the right and good use of the small amount of power we are entrusted with? How do I stand for justice? How do I empower the powerless? What does the way I live my life reveal about who/what I believe my ultimate authority is? According to Brian McLaren,

"God is the ultimate authority and power." "Power is exercised in servanthood." "Power is exercised in Love." "God plays favorites with the weak and the poor." "The Kingdom of God is about the power of love."

Spend a few minutes searching yourself to learn how you wield your power. Where do you misuse power? Where do you take power from others? Whose voice do you make room for? Who do you empower? Consider dedicating 5-10 minutes to a focused meditation.

STATION II.

Jesus Takes up His Cross

They sent Jesus out carrying His own instrument of execution, the cross, to a hill known as the Place of the Skull, or Golgotha in Hebrew. (John 19:17, The Voice)

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7, ESV)

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12, ESV)

Watch Glennon Doyle Melton’s “Broken is the Beginning”

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/broken-is-the-beginning>

Reflection

Glennon Doyle Melton says a person becomes “real when the shine of life wear’s off, and [they] come apart.” Grief is something each of us will go through. It’s just as much a part of life as joy, but because it is not comfortable, we may try to avoid it. To go around it rather than through it. Melton believes being with people in their pain and grief “is the place to be. That is how we end up feeling connected.”

That makes Jesus taking up his cross make so much more sense.

He is choosing to be united with us in our suffering. He will not always have control on this journey but this station is his choice. This is an acceptance step; he will walk this road. No longer is he pleading for the cup to be withdrawn, he accepts what is coming.

Take some time to consider the ways you might be avoiding grief and pain. Be okay with the fact that it may take a good amount of time to come to recognize your coping mechanisms. Denial is a strong force; but, acceptance (though hard to come to as well) is equally strong. Have you ever taken a next right step in the face of imminent doom or hell fire breaking loose? Do you remember a time empathizing with someone who had experienced great loss? Let's think about acceptance. Consider accepting tragedy. Consider accepting grace. What does this reveal in you?

Consider dedicating 5-10 minutes to a focused meditation. Consider one of the following statements to focus on, or create one of your own by way of a *visio divina* practice using the film or by *lectio divina* using the text provided for Station 2.

Meditation Focus Statements

“I choose to follow you,” or “I accept,” or “Help me stay with you as you suffer,” or “Spirit, teach me acceptance.”

Silence

Blessing

Jesus Christ crucified,
in the face of indignity,
you surrendered. You allowed
chaos to rule against you,
and received your cross—
 you didn't fight for your honor, but ours
 you didn't need to prove yourself...
 but you did.

Worthy is the one who is slain
 who lays down their life for others.

Help us, God, with the courage to accept our crosses,

place in our hearts the strength to walk through our pain.
Lord, have mercy.

STATION III.

Jesus Falls Under the Weight of the Cross

Though He was in the form of God,
He chose not to cling to equality with God;
But He poured Himself out to fill a vessel brand new;
a servant in form
and a man indeed.
The very likeness of humanity,
He humbled Himself,
obedient to death—
a merciless death on the cross!
So God raised Him up to the highest place
and gave Him the name above all.
So when His name is called,
every knee will bow,
in heaven, on earth, and below.
And every tongue will confess
“Jesus, the Anointed One, is Lord,”
to the glory of God our Father! (Philippians 2:6-11, The Voice)

Watch Richard Rohr’s “The Human One”

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/the-human-one>

Reflection

Richard Rohr points out that we don’t get to choose what type of suffering we will endure. He says, “Chosen crosses are hardly ever crosses,” and explains that “true crosses are uninvited, tragic, unjust, and undesired.” It’s these characteristics about the crosses we bear that make them extremely hard to get over. We wonder why, and we can’t make sense of it. Hurt hurts. Experiencing hurt teaches us how to empathize with others in their suffering.

STATION IV.

Simon Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. (Luke 23:26)

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24)

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me...for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:29-30)

Watch Jean Vanier’s “Become Weaker”

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/become-weaker>

Reflection

Jean Vanier says “Life comes from the recognition that I cannot do it on my own. That I need help.” Even Jesus needs help. I tell myself that I should be able to make it on my own. Jesus, however, not only leads us to powerlessness, but shows us the way through it. Vanier puts it this way: “It is when we touch our powerlessness that we realize ‘I need help.’” In twelve-step recovery programs this is the first step (We admitted we were powerless...). Admitting powerlessness brings a gift: others. Admitting we need help, invites friendship and relationship—community with God and one another.

“Weakness [is] not a horror, but a moment of communion, of peace.” — Vanier

Have you ever reached the end of yourself? Did you ask for help? How hard was it for you to ask for help? Do you find you are often first to help but last to ask for help? Why do you think so?

Consider dedicating 5-10 minutes to a focused meditation. Perhaps choose one of the following statements to focus on, or create one of your own by way of a *visio divina* practice using the film or by *lectio divina* using the text provided for Station 4.

Meditation Focus Statements

“Your burden is Light,” or “I will carry my portion,” “I am powerless,” or “How can I help?” or “I am loved by God.” “I need help” or “I am a light-bearer”

Silence

Blessing

Jesus Christ crucified,
 who else could walk this path?
You lead me to my own powerlessness,
my need for the shoulders of others
 to lighten life’s burdens—
the hand of a friend cures the heart.

For this mercy, I am thankful.

Give me the strength to ask for help when I need it.
Gift me the blessing of being a help when there is need.

STATION V. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

“And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” (Luke 23:27-28, ESV)

“Your face, Lord, do I seek. Hide not your face from me” (Psalm 27:8-9).

“...but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.” (John 19:25, ESV)

Watch Jurgen Moltmann's “God the Mother”

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/god-the-mother>

Reflection

“God our Mother” may be an idea that you need to make time for, perhaps this is a meditation focus on its own.

Along the way, Jesus encounters several women. In the traditional Catholic Stations of the Cross, stations 4, 6, and 8 are places where Jesus is blessed by the compassionate nature of women. First by his followers who are weeping, next his mother, suffering alongside him every step of the way, and finally when he meets Saint Veronica, a woman who wiped the sweat, blood, spit, and dirt from his face with her veil. These women come bearing a gift: their heart for God. They showed compassion. They loved who God loved. Compassion, then, becomes a character that encounters Jesus along his Way.

Moltmann quotes the Apostle Paul saying, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you

are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) May God continue to balance and restore right power among us.

How does “God the Mother”, or the “Motherhood of the Holy Spirit” make you feel? Do you love who/what God loves? How have you received compassion? Consider praying Jesus’s Our Father prayer instead using “Our Mother.” How did that make you feel?

Consider dedicating 5-10 minutes to a focused meditation. Perhaps choose one of the following statements to focus on, or create one of your own by way of a *visio divina* practice using the film or by *lectio divina* using the text provided for Station 5.

Meditation Focus Statements

“God our Mother, have compassion.” or “Ima, look upon me” or “Ima, hold my injury in your heart” or “Ima, bear with me.” or “Compassion be my teacher.”

Silence

Blessing

Jesus Christ crucified,
your pain enfolds into the heart of Ima,
God, our Mother.
She wipes your face, sees you
it is the strength of her love
that bandages brokenness.

Ima, have mercy.

Give us the blessing of seeing you in our time of need
gift us your compassionate heart.

STATION VI.

Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

“And so they came at last to the execution site, a hill called Golgotha, which means the “Place of a Skull.”

“The soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with myrrh to dull His pain, but He refused it. And so they crucified Him, divided up His clothes, and cast lots (an ancient equivalent of rolling dice) to see who would keep the clothes they had stripped from Him. (Mark 15:22-24)

Watch Erwin McManus’ Naked and Unashamed

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/naked-and-unashamed>

Reflection

“Who told you that you were naked?” “When we see ourselves through the eyes of God we can be naked and unashamed and that is just a beautiful way to live our lives.” — McManus

Jesus is naked. Bared before the authorities, before the crowds. He is now plain for all to see. No more parables. Clarity. Though we are horrified and grieved for the violence of his stripping, we can also offset those criminal acts in today’s time by taking on God’s belief that we were born naked and unashamed. What would it mean to walk away from this station with the heart of God versus the heart of the centurion? How do you cope with your shame? Where have you been healed of shame?

As McManus says, “When we see ourselves through the eyes of God we can be naked and unashamed and that is just a beautiful way to live our lives.”

You are accepted as you are, shamelessly.

Consider dedicating 5-10 minutes to a focused meditation. Perhaps choose one of the following statements to focus on, or create one of your own by way of a *visio divina* practice using the film or by *lectio divina* using the text provided for Station 6.

Meditation Focus Statements

“Because of you, I am naked and unashamed,” or “I come clean,” or “My heart is completely exposed,” or “let me see what you see.”

Silence

Blessing

Jesus Christ crucified,
even stripped and naked
they don't see you for who you really are
nor do they know the strength you stand with:
shamelessness.

Widen our sight! Give us a God's eye view.
Grant me the mercy of seeing you with your eyes.
Gift me the blessing of standing with you, unashamed.

STATION VII.

Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. (Luke 23:32-33 ESV)

Watch Danielle Shriver's "All the Way Down"

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/all-the-way-down>

Reflection

Shriver quotes from *The Crucified God* saying, "The cross is not and cannot be loved." She talks about how she grew up numbed to the pain of the cross because of how it is celebrated. She goes on to encourage our reconciliation with the fact that God was crucified because "until you go to that place, Easter will never make sense. If you don't go all the way down, you can't come all the way up." Coming up means taking on the belief that "If we killed God, and that brought life, there is literally nothing we can fear" because Jesus "went way deeper than despair."

Jesus is nailed to his cross and positioned between two criminals. The crowd mocks him. According to Shriver, he's "doubled down on our despair." Now he hangs, now he waits. How have you struggled with the crucified God? The violence of it all, where have you landed with it? This took a lot of love. A lot. How did Jesus's human heart contain so much love? So much love that he is still inviting. Where can you be more inviting?

Consider dedicating 5-10 minutes to a focused meditation. Perhaps choose one of the following statements to focus on, or create one of your own by way of a *visio divina* practice using the film or by *lectio divina* using the text provided for Station 7.

Meditation Focus Statement

“Be my breath,” or “Still my heart,” or “Lord, remember me,” or “Be not afraid,” or “Fear not,” or “Hold me, God.”

Silence

Blessing

Jesus Christ crucified,
Who were you to suffer such indignity?
You hang, arms open to the world,
holding nails, draining...
I understand this is your way and yet
I still beg of God:
 “Have mercy. Take him down.”

May your inflictions cause an uprising of scars,
 a revolution of the wounded
Let them become first responders
 empathy as a salve,
 dignity and love within the poultice.

STATION VIII.

Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Thief on the Cross

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23: 39-43, ESV)

Watch Maggie Barankitse’s “Criminal Love”
<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/criminal-love>

Reflection

According to Maggie, loving criminals is an important quality of the Christian faith. Loving victims through tragedy is only half of the equation of violence. To break the cycle of violence, according to Maggie, we need to express love to those who have trespassed against us. This could be as simple as praying for your enemies, and wishing them well. Maggie has taken this even further, by visiting criminals, including one who murdered members of her own family. She visits to let them know they “are still loved by God.”

During crucifixion, the person being crucified begins to lose the capability to breathe. It is a tortuous death. But here, we see Jesus exchanging words, using breath to welcome his neighboring crucified criminal into Paradise. He’s still blessing, he’s still making room! With his limited ability to take in and exhale air, he is speaking blessing. Just like Maggie, he’s saying you “are still loved by God.” The criminal likely expressed something similar to what the murderer said to Maggie: “Your forgiveness [gave] me back human dignity. Now I am a human person.”

Are you carrying unforgiveness? Why? For whom? Are you ready to be free?

Consider dedicating 5-10 minutes to a focused meditation. Perhaps choose one of the following statements to focus on, or create one of your own by way of a *visio divina* practice using the film or by *lectio divina* using the text provided for Station 8.

Meditation Focus Statement

“Absolve me of my sin” or “Lord have mercy” or “Expand my vision of love,” or “let my life be a blessing,” or “thank you for my dignity.”

Silence

Blessing

Jesus Christ crucified,

have mercy on us.

Even as you suffer towards death
you are still making room for us, for criminals—
liars, cheaters, con-artists, and worse
receive absolution, and eventual liberation,
their hearts made whole.

Let us love how you love!

With whatever skin we have left in the game, let us give it.

With our last breaths let us bless the world saying: *I forgive.*

STATION IX.

Jesus Dies on the Cross

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:26-30, ESV)

Watch Rowan Williams’ “In the Depth”

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/in-the-depth>

Reflection

“It is finished.” He gave until there was nothing left. He gave his closest people to one another, then he gave his last breath, then he gave his spirit. What are we to make of this? Pausing here to reflect upon the point of Jesus’s final moment and departure is challenging. There are some of his inner circle people around him, ones who never left his side. His mother with arms aching to hold her son, to receive his body.

Likely little was said. What is there to say? Like Williams’ describes in this film, there is no answer to life’s greatest pains. But, he also says that “when we see people who have lost literally everything, we need to worry. We need to care.” We need to reach out, to touch, to sit, to hold, listen to, cry, and accompany the suffering even though nothing will make such times alright.

Have you ever lost something you can never get back? Have you ever received a gift you could never repay? How did you handle these times?

Reflect on a dark, hard time. Whose faces come to mind? Who accompanied you during your grief?

Consider dedicating 5-10 minutes to a focused meditation. Perhaps choose one of the following statements to focus on, or create one of your own by way of a *visio divina* practice using the film or by *lectio divina* using the text provided for Station 9.

Meditation Focus Statements

“Into your hands” or “Abba, my spirit is yours” or “I give my life” or “I gift my life” or “Love goes to hell and back.”

Silence

Blessing

Jesus Christ crucified,
on your last breath you remind us
that we are given to one another
to hold when horror happens—
when love bleeds out before our eyes
and darkness descends.

The silencing of your life broke hearts wide open,
so grieved the earth it heaved in pain.

No words. No Kingdom utterance.
Who are we to be able to withstand such pain?
Let us not become immune to the suffering of others.

Life without you is a taste of hell.
Lord, have mercy.

STATION X.

Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. (Matthew 27:57-60)

Watch Walter Breuggemann's "Die and be Raised"

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/die-and-be-raised>

Reflection

God blesses the living, and the dead. At the point of nothingness, Joseph of Arimathea comes forward with a gift: an honorable burial. Jesus and God become really quiet for a time. Many churches hold a candlelight vigil honoring this intensely silent, sacred time. Time to anoint the dead, and wait to feel again. Wait to see what life brings next. There is no healthy, helpful way to skip grieving. It is now that we breathe deep, and go through it.

In this Station's film, Breuggemann says "the Bible is a field of imagination where we're constantly watching people rise up to newness." He talks about how the season of Lent calls us "into the abyss." Good Friday becomes a space for us to let a piece of us die. To seal it into a sacred space that only God can reach. Breuggemann also says there are either/or times in life. There are also both/and times. With Jesus tucked into what seemed like his eternal resting place, with Good Friday at hand, what either/or scenarios are you wrestling with? Which both/and ones? What is the scariest thing about "the abyss"? What is something you are ready to let go of, to make room for the unimaginable? Where is your hope?

Consider dedicating 5-10 minutes to a focused meditation. Perhaps choose one of the following statements to focus on, or create one of your own by way of a *visio divina* practice using the film or by *lectio divina* using the text provided for Station 10.

Meditation Focus statements

“Lord, I place _____ in your tomb” or “My heart, too, is sealed” or “God bless the dead” or “Roll away the stone,” or “Lord, have mercy.”

Silence

Blessing

Jesus Christ crucified,
you are held, entombed—
in death’s space.

We have come this far with you,
but we cannot see beyond the stone,
beyond the coldness of separation.
What was it we held? What was it we felt?

Hope.
Energy.
Life.

What was it he used to say? Remember the warmth?
Was that for real?

Roll away stone or let life sprout through the rock!
We remember having what we were searching for all along...
We remember the blessing of Life rising out of the ash!

Have mercy upon us, Lord,
as we search our hearts and thoughts to find you.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, this path has led us to empty ourselves of all but hope. Hope that you are who you say you are, and that you have finished what you say you have finished. We bore the weight of our crosses, wrestled with your humanity and ours. We became willing to seal up shortcomings and distractions; unjust hurt and trauma; our false selves. We accept these are things you can handle and agree to let go.

Christ, have mercy. Take our hearts, now shapable, teachable, open and consecrate them as your own. Embed your energy and love, let it enliven us, stir us to awaken come Easter morning. To rise and stretch and shine, and choose your Way of the Heart: grace.

Yes, Lord, in a world full of injustice, let us be ambassadors of your grace. Amen.