

AUDIO & DIGITAL VERSION



JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

WELCOME! We are so glad that you've chosen to embark on this journey to the cross. Unfortunately, this isn't a pleasant or dignified journey, but rather one marked by suffering, loss, and humiliation. As we explore and sit with Jesus' humanity over the course of these stations, things might get uncomfortable. That's ok. Allow the uneasiness to push you to deeper empathy and gratitude and open you up to reflect on your own humanity and the limits of your own capacity. Our hope and prayer is that we would come to see that the Holy, the Divine, our Savior is INTIMATELY familiar with the hardest parts of our human experience: betrayal, embarrassment, pain, silence, loneliness, and yes, even death.



Jesus is TEMPTED

READ | *Jesus in the garden at Gethsemane*
MATTHEW 26:36-46

REFLECT | As he was preparing for his earthly ministry, the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness with power, prosperity, and protection. Jesus resisted his temptations through scripture and began his ministry as God ordained. However, now, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is faced with an even greater temptation. The temptation to escape, to avoid pain and suffering, and to follow the “easier” route of our own will.

As you read through Jesus’ time in this olive grove, you can hear the anguish in his voice. He is praying DESPERATE prayers, and he is longing for anyone to just come and be with him in his time of despair. Jesus is much like the olives in this grove...pressed to the point of being crushed. Luke’s gospel even records Jesus “in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.” This is not a physical agony (that will come later) but an “agony of spirit”... desperately torn between suffering and accomplishing God’s will. The ultimate rock and a hard place.

Have you ever prayed desperate prayers like these? Maybe you haven’t sweat blood, but have you prayed as Jesus did: “Abba,

Father, everything his possible for you. Please, take this cup of suffering away from me” (Mark 14:36) If so, take heart because Jesus has experienced this level of torment as well.

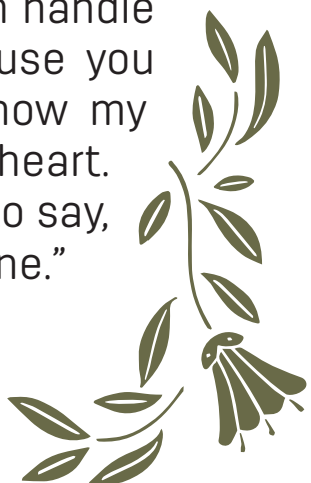
Jesus, in his humanity, experienced spiritual desperation and the contention between desiring comfort and peace, and also desiring God’s kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.

Yet, in the end, Jesus landed here:

“My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.”

RESPOND | *Jesus,*
Like you, I experience the tug-of-war between wanting your will to be done and also desiring what seems like the easy way (my will) that avoids pain, fear, discomfort, and stretching. I empathize with your prayers of desperation. I take comfort in knowing that you can handle my fearful and despondent prayers, in part, because you prayed similar prayers yourself. I lay before you now my fears, my desires, and the desperate prayers of my heart. Strengthen me by your spirit that I might also learn to say, more and more, “I want your will to be done, not mine.”

Amen



Jesus is BETRAYED

READ

Judas sells out Jesus

MATTHEW 26:6-16 & MATTHEW 26:47-56

REFLECT

It sure doesn't take much to sell out a friend.

30 pieces of silver. Most people think this relates to about 4 months wages. However, for Judas, I doubt it was about the money. In fact, a short time later, filled with remorse, Judas tries to return the money.

So why would Judas betray a man he had followed and loved for years?

The simple answer: Jesus wasn't living up to Judas' expectation for who the Messiah was supposed to be.

When the woman broke open an alabaster jar and let the entire contents pour over Jesus, that solidified it for Judas. In Judas' eyes, the messiah was supposed to be a revolutionary, a political powerhouse that would overthrow the Romans and reestablish the Jews as a world power. And here's Jesus, "wasting money" and talking about dying. What?!

While Judas had placed his hope in the right person, his reasons for that hope were disastrously misguided.

It is easy to paint Judas as the villain in this story and to think of ourselves as Peter, the one willing to cut off a man's ear in order to save our Savior. However, if we're honest, we have more in common with Judas than we care to admit.

How do we respond when Jesus doesn't fit nicely within our expectations of him? When circumstances don't turn out how we hoped? When Jesus doesn't show up at the time I

specified? When he cares more about my character and righteousness than my comfort and happiness?

I'm guessing our response looks a lot like 30 pieces of silver.

RESPOND

Jesus,

Like you, I've experienced the sting of betrayal. I've endured someone I love choosing power, popularity, comfort, and selfish desires over me. Betrayal is one of the most painful ordeals I've had to bear. And still...that betrayal didn't culminate in my torture and death. Oh the grace you embody! To allow that man to greet you with a kiss, knowing full-well where that would lead!

Lord, while I know the wounds of betrayal well, I also confess that I've been the betrayer. I have deserted my first love, discarded my faith, and vacated my calling at times when circumstances didn't fit my expectations. Jesus, have mercy. Forgive me for my deceptions and duplicity. Thank you that your sacrifices are sufficient, even for defectors and hypocrites like Judas and me.

Amen





READ

*Jesus' "trial"
& sentence*

MATTHEW 26:57-67
& 27:11-26



Jesus is CONDEMNED



REFLECT

Does this arrest, trial, and sentencing seem fair to you? Jesus' charges began with the religious leaders. What were they concerned by? How would witnessing Jesus' experience with the "justice system" make you feel?

Jesus was condemned by an unjust system. I mean, the religious leaders were practically begging people to come forward with false testimony.

Even Pilate, the Roman governor, asked, "what has he done to deserve this?" and gave them a way to make things right by offering Barabbus in place of Jesus.

What **were** Jesus' charges? Was he a cut throat criminal? A danger to society? Or rather, was he pushing up against those who held power? Was he a threat to their influence and message? Did he hold the potential to capsize the status quo?

Jesus experienced the consequences of injustice.

I truly believe in our capacity for kindness and goodness...but the crowds (mob) in this account remind me that hiding in the shadows is our immense capacity for cruelty, oppression, and depravity. As the mob repeatedly

yelled out, "CRUCIFY HIM!!" keep in mind that in a few short hours they could watch him breathe his last, right before their eyes.

In many ways, the religious leaders had real cause for concern. While Jesus wasn't after their political power, he was intent on turning this world right-side-up. The kingdom Jesus was ushering in was one that didn't care one bit about their status. In his kingdom the first shall be last and the meek will inherit the earth. He truly came to earth to give it a radical shake-down. Just not in the way they were expecting.

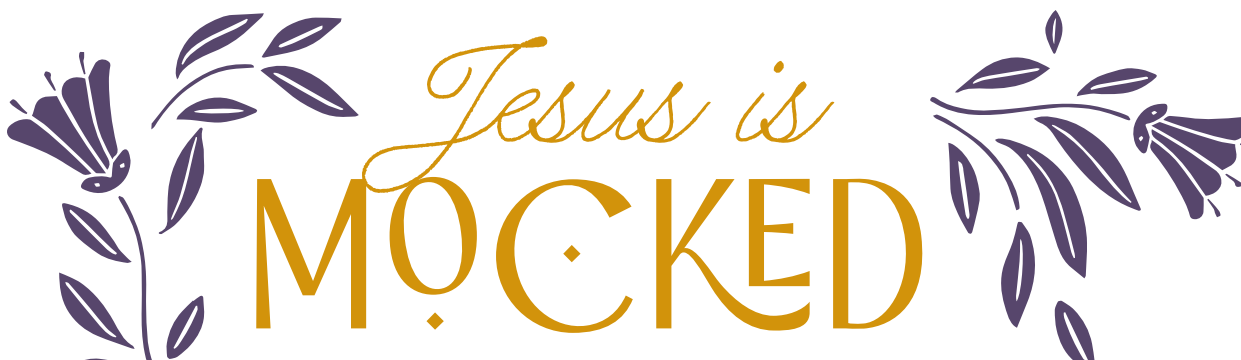
RESPOND

Jesus,

Like you, I have experienced injustice. I've been lied about, accused of things I didn't do, and had my motives and character called into question. I've witnessed oppression and seen first-hand the cruelty in this world. The weak are preyed upon and the kid with the biggest stick (or the most money) usually wins. My heart grieves for this reality. I long for your kingdom to come and turn this world back on its feet. Despite it all, I see glimpses of it now.

In many ways, you **were** guilty of what they accused you of. You **are** a dangerous revolutionary...just not in the violent, political way expected. Lord, I invite your shake-down. Even though I love my comfort, I welcome you to turn things right-side-up in my life. Break me out of my slumber and apathy. Make me a revolutionary too...rebellious against the unjust ways of this world!

Amen



Jesus is MOCKED

REFLECT

More than anything, this scene is the one that really makes me feel the most uncomfortable. Take a moment to picture it.

The King of kings. The Word who was there at the beginning. The One who gave life to everything created. Slapped across the face and SPAT on.

A lead-tipped whip. A thorny crown. A purple robe and a faux scepter. Yes, these instruments were meant to inflict pain. However, more than anything they were meant to humiliate.

Jesus, in his humanity, experienced being dehumanized.

Scriptures say that the entire regiment participated in degrading Jesus until they were “finally tired of mocking him.” How long does it take to grow tired of dehumanizing a person? ugh.

What do you think compelled these men to treat another human with such cruelty? They weren’t even Jewish. Jesus’ claims of being the Son of God carried no personal offense to them. Yet, still they mocked.

The psychological community would say that mockery is used to cover-up a deeper insecurity and sense of inferiority. In the upside-down logic of depraved humanity, putting people down somehow elevates me.

Only, it doesn’t.

READ

the soldiers mock Jesus

MATTHEW 27:27-31 & ISAIAH 62:4

To a (hopefully) lesser degree, we’ve experienced dehumanization. We’ve been both the mocked and the mocker. We’ve been told (and believed) lies about ourself and our worth. AND we’ve released our anger and shame in situations that are embarrassingly inappropriate.

Dehumanization is a vicious and heart-breaking cycle.

RESPOND

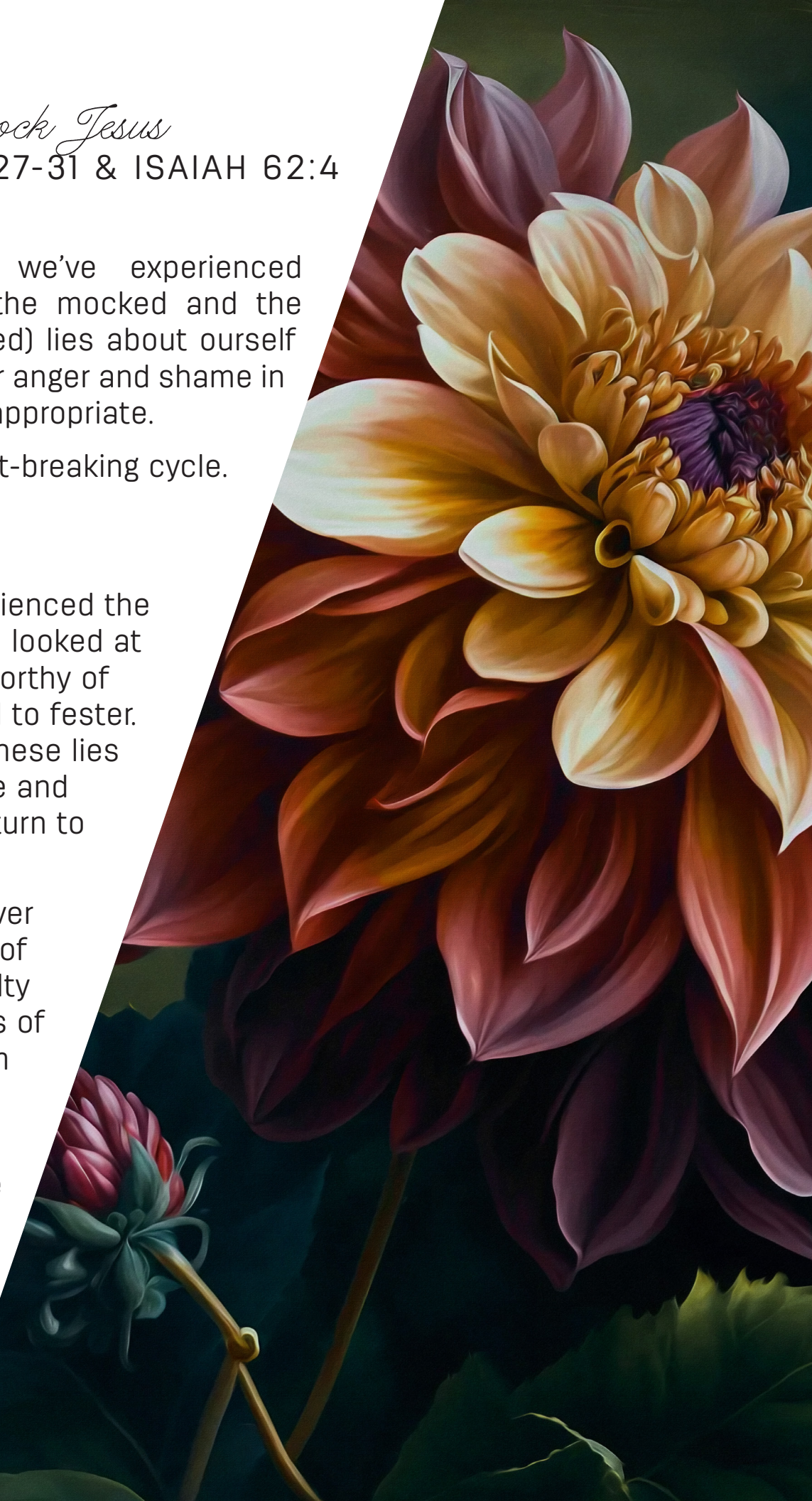
Jesus,


Like you, I’ve experienced the disgrace of dehumanization. I’ve been looked at as “less-than”, “not-enough”, and unworthy of decency. These are wounds that tend to fester. As much as I aspire to the contrary, these lies have implanted themselves within me and I’ve allowed these false identities to turn to shame, anger, and self-contempt.

Further, in a desperate attempt to cover my own shame, I’ve allowed this well of insecurity to produce actions of cruelty and mockery. I’ve looked into the eyes of a fellow image-bearer and made them also feel “less than”.

Lord, have mercy. Help us to follow your example to break this cycle. Give us a fresh and clear vision to see ourselves and our fellow humans as you see us...worthy of love, kindness, respect, and dignity.

Amen





Jesus is
GIVEN HIS CROSS.

READ | *Jesus' accepts what he is given* MATTHEW 16:21-26 & PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11

REFLECT | Here is where the rubber meets the road. When Jesus wrestled through his desperate prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, it was for this precise moment. Among the olive trees, he resolved himself to accept his cup of suffering and follow His Father's will...so now, in this moment, he can walk in obedience, despite what he's already endured and what he inevitably knows is coming very soon.

Before Jesus began his journey to the cross, he foretold his suffering and death and told his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me." What does Jesus mean? We, as Christians, use this phrase often, but what does it actually mean to take up your cross? Daily even?

To be honest, "taking up my cross" is a mystery I've yet to solve. I'm sure I'll spend the rest of my days unpacking it's rich and complicated meaning.

But, I can tell you what it DOESN'T mean. It doesn't mean when, inconveniences come our way we declare, "Well, that's just my cross to bear!" It doesn't mean writing off consequences of our own sin and shortcomings as "our cross

to bear". That attitude quickly moves from self-denial to self-loathing and self-inflicted martyrdom. If our "religion" demands daily self-contempt, is it really Good News? Jesus *ALSO* said he came to give us ABUNDANT life.

I think, taking up my cross means identifying with Christ's suffering...so that I may also identify with his resurrection. Yes, it means self-denial...but not simply for the sake of discomfort. It is a self-denial that acknowledges MY way as the inferior way and MY self as a cheap imitation of who God created me to be.

Taking up my cross means releasing my false-self in order to embrace something greater...for the sake of God and others.

RESPOND | *Jesus,*

Like you, I have experienced being given things that feel beyond my control...things that I absolutely didn't ask for and don't want. Some of that is simply the nature of this broken, pre-redeemed world. However, I am aware that there are certain burdens I've been called upon to bear, for the sake of your glory and for the benefit of others. May I carry them with dignity and without self-pity.

Lord, I submit to your will once more. Even though my will seems easier, I know it is but a shadow of what you created me for. I release my false sense of self to you now. Help me to embrace the life you have for me.

Amen

Jesus is ASSISTED

REFLECT

It often makes us uncomfortable to think of Jesus within the limitations of his humanity. We like the version of Jesus

coming on the clouds, commanding the weather, and riding triumphantly on a white stallion. However, the gospels make a point of displaying Christ's humanity (especially John). In the gospels we see Jesus hug people, cry, eat, get tired, and even spit. Jesus' humanity is of VITAL importance to us. Because he was 100% human and experienced all the beauty and cruelty humanity had to offer, he gives us an example and a hope that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we might also walk righteously with our God.

In this passage, we see Jesus doing something very human. **Jesus experienced receiving help from a fellow human.** Was Jesus struggling? Was he slowing down the soldiers? Scripture isn't implicitly clear.

Jesus was just beaten, humiliated, and is now forced to carry an extraordinarily heavy object. He's exhausted. He has now discovered the limits of his human capacity.

Have you been there? Have you had to come to grips with the reality of your own limitations? Financially? Physically? Emotionally? In those moments are when we come face-to-face with the humbling and beautiful reality that a human life cannot be accomplished on its own.

All of us need each of us.

Imagine the perspective of Simon. Scripture doesn't exactly paint him as a willing servant. He is compelled to carry the

READ

Simon carries Jesus' cross
MATTHEW 27:32-34 & GALATIANS 6:2-3

cross. However, there he finds himself, bearing another's burden and walking alongside him as he heads to the end of his life. I imagine this is the kind of experience that changes a person. To witness and share in the undignified journey to one's death.

Whether we like it or not, throughout a human life, we carry one another.

RESPOND

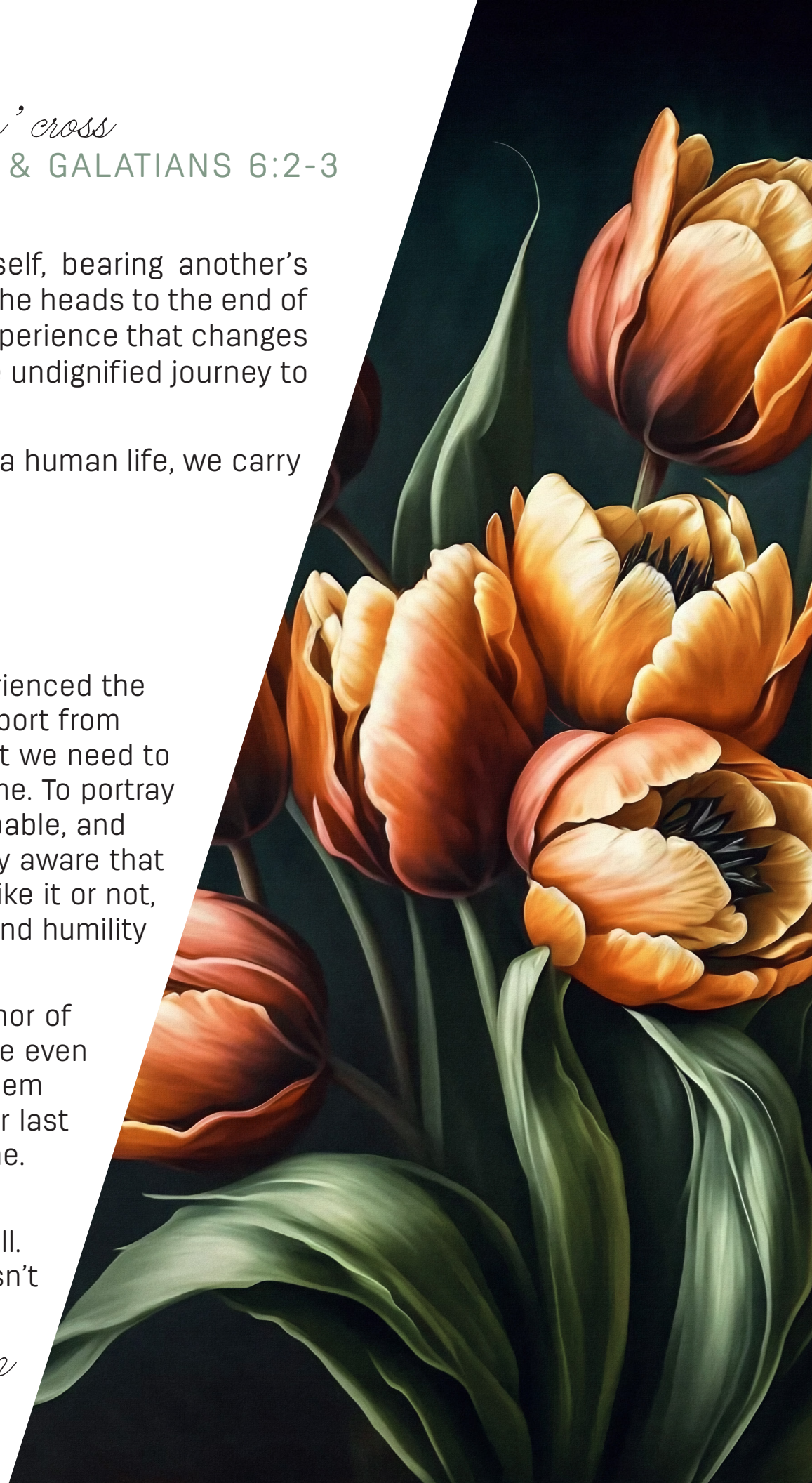
Jesus,

Like you, I've experienced the humbling realization that I require support from another human. The world tells us that we need to be all things to all people all of the time. To portray an image of ourself that is strong, capable, and lacking nothing. However, I am painfully aware that I am none of those things. Whether I like it or not, I need people. Grant me the wisdom and humility to ask for help.

Lord, I have also had the immense honor of shouldering a burden for others. Maybe even holding their hand and walking with them on the undignified journey toward their last breath. These experiences changed me.

Jesus help us to be an example of a community that loves one another well. That bears with one another and doesn't shy away when things get messy.

Amen





Jesus is
STRIPPED

READ

Jesus' clothes are divided up
MATTHEW 27:35-44

REFLECT

There is nothing dignified or noble about a public execution. Everything up to this point has had the intention of inflicting pain, humility, and shame. However, there is nothing more embarrassing than public exposure...of having everything used to cover up your vulnerability stripped away.

The shame of nakedness is felt deep within us. This emotion was felt from the moment sin entered the world and Adam and Eve recognized their nudity for the first time and felt shame...also for the first time.

However, nakedness doesn't necessarily simply mean being without clothes. It definitely goes deeper than that. It's feeling exposed. It's having everyone... people you love and people you don't trust...see ALL of you. Even, and especially, the sides of you that you'd love to keep hidden or falsified.

Being stripped means losing anything that you use to cover up, protect yourself, and hide your vulnerabilities. Your bank account. Your accomplishments. Your upbeat attitude. Your self-deprecating humor. Dominating others. The image you portray on social media. Ouch.

Have you been there? If not...just you wait. Every human life eventually feels the

shame of being stripped down to our bare selves. Everything in the shadows eventually comes into the Light.

I know that seems scary. However, here is some great news. In the Light we find boundless love and compassion. When we come to the end of our cover-ups and are unable to hide any longer, we are met by our tenderhearted Savior, who shows unfathomable mercy. Even in the Garden of Eden, God in his grace, offered Adam and Eve animal skins to cover their nakedness because what they were using was gravely inadequate.

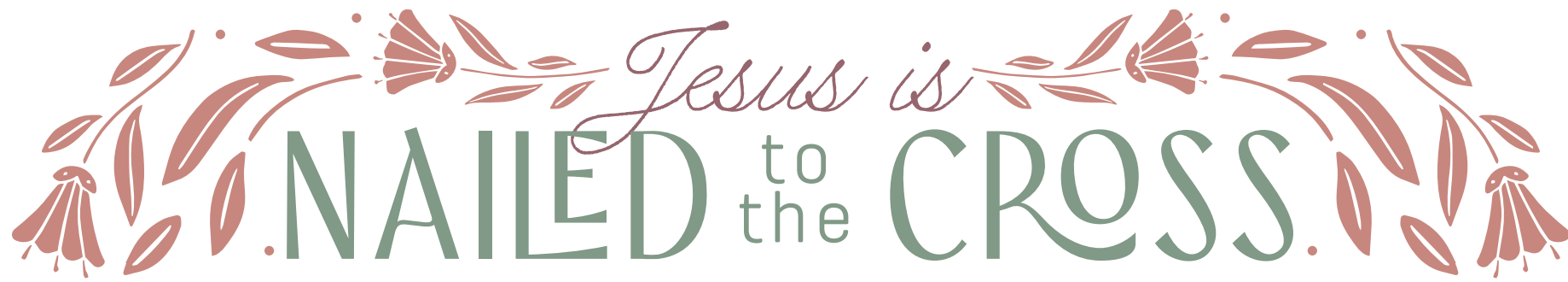
RESPOND

Jesus,

Like you, I have experienced embarrassing and shameful exposure. The things I've worked hard to keep hidden have reared their ugly head and found their way into the light. Lord, I've come to realize that, like the fig leaves in the garden, the things I've used to cover my vulnerabilities are clearly deficient. I need something better, something only you can provide, something that can only come from sacrifice. Something like those animal skins.

Lord, thank you for responding to my bareness with compassion and mercy. Your shed blood covers not only a multitude of sins, but also my shame. Restore me by your grace and help me to unmask my true identity to myself and others.

Amen



Jesus is NAILED to the CROSS.

READ

Jesus is crucified
MATTHEW 27:45-49
& ISAIAH 49:13-16

REFLECT

The long physical pain of crucifixion was excruciating. In fact, the word excruciating is derived from crucifixion. They created a word out of witnessing the pain found in the experience of being nailed to a cross.

Physical pain is unavoidable in life. From skinned knees on the playground, to childbirth, to even intentional pain like receiving a tattoo. Jesus' physical pain bears witness to his humanity and his experience with the whole spectrum of human existence.

Unfortunately, Jesus' physical sacrifice, while EXCRUCIATING, won't actually save us from also experiencing physical pain and death. However, there is a deeper pain that Jesus experienced. It is a pain that, because of his enduring sacrifice, we won't have to bear.

Jesus experienced the pain of being forsaken.

Darkness fell across the whole land and Jesus yelled out, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus felt the deep, agonizing emotions of abandonment, shame, and despair. As Jesus, our sacrificial lamb, took our sin upon himself, he endured a separation so traumatizing that he felt forsaken by the Father.

Forsaken. Some synonyms: deserted. disowned. ignored. left at the altar. abandoned. discarded. On the cross, Jesus encountered a loneliness so deep that we can't even fathom it. And it is because of his suffering that we will never have to face a true separation from God, our Father.

Sure, we've probably all encountered seasons where God felt

distant or like he wasn't hearing our prayers. We've probably endured feelings of abandonment. I don't want to minimize that. The psalms are full of songs of lament, shaking our fists and asking, "Where are you God?!" If you have, clearly you're not alone.

However, the reality is: you are NOT forsaken. Even if your feelings deceive you, you are LOVED and accepted by your heavenly Father, and because of the cross you will be **WITH HIM** forever in eternity.

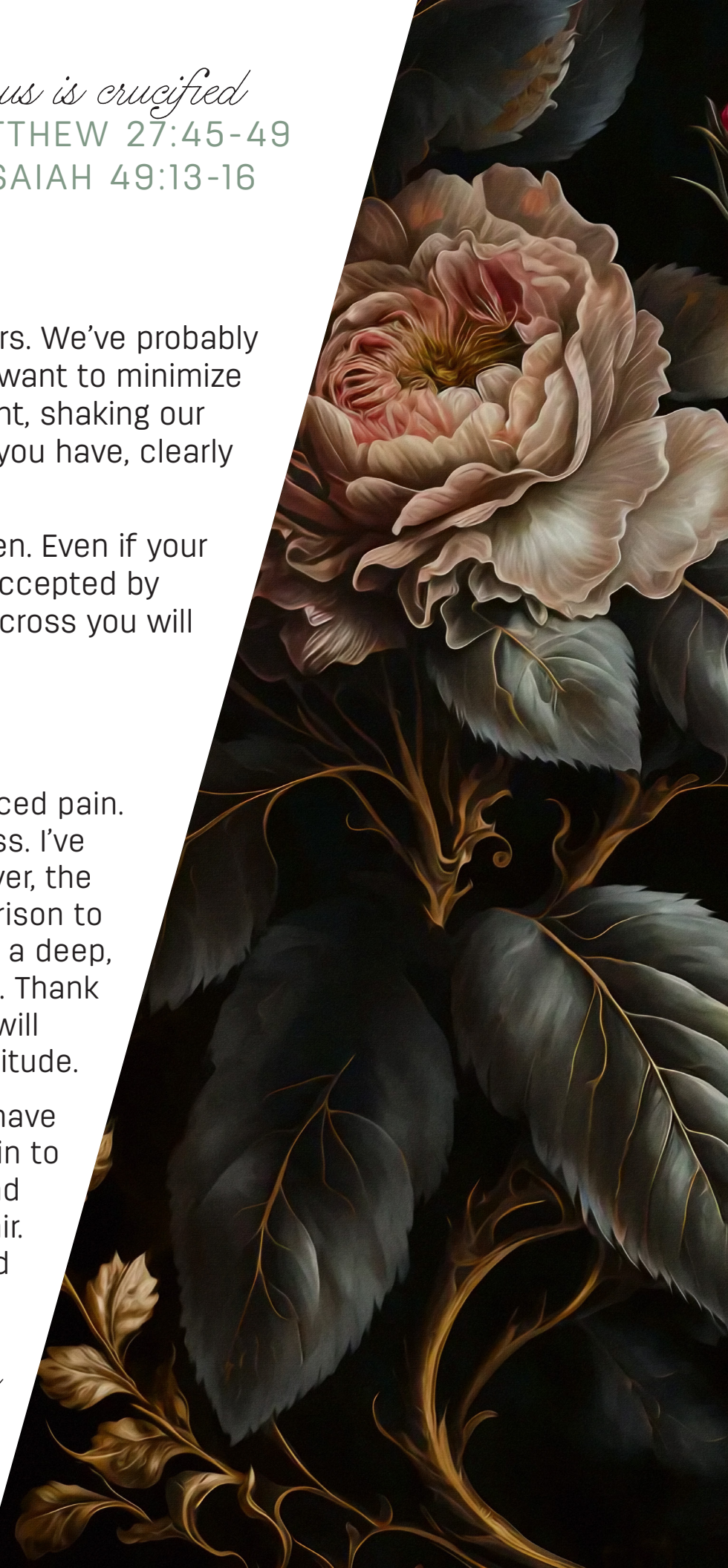
RESPOND

Jesus,

Like you, I've experienced pain. I've endured seasons of profound loneliness. I've felt left out, forgotten, and unheard. However, the isolation I've gone through pales in comparison to the separation you felt on the cross. What a deep, and heavy despair you must have endured. Thank you for suffering that on my behalf. There will never be enough words to express my gratitude.

Lord, your faithfulness in those moments have taught me that it is not a weakness or a sin to feel distant from you. I realize that faith and hope can exist alongside doubt and despair. You're big enough to handle my doubts and laments. Thank you for holding them with grace.

Amen





READ

the death of Jesus

MATTHEW 26:27-29 & 27:50-56 &
1 PETER 1:18-20

REFLECT

Death is unsettling. Even though it is an experience we will all eventually share, it somehow seems so unnatural. One minute a person's essence is there, and the next, it's just an empty shell. It's haunting even. Perhaps the reason death disturbs us so much is because we were created for eternity. Death ISN'T actually natural. It wasn't included in how God intended our lives to be.

But then sin had to come along and ruin everything. And someOne needed to pay those hefty wages.

The night before Jesus' death, He and his disciples were remembering a different kind of deliverance from death. They were celebrating Passover. Commemorating a time, long ago, when God delivered His people from the certainty of death through the sacrificial blood of a spotless lamb. Then, Jesus threw them all a curve ball. He declared that it was through HIS shed blood and broken body that death would be vanquished and sins forgiven.

When Jesus breathed his last he shouted, "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" (Luke 23:46). John records him also saying, "It is finished." (John 19:28-30) What is finished? It. This *whole* business of sin separating his beloveds from the God who created them for eternity with Him. It is finished. Done with.



Scripture uses the word "released" to describe the action of Jesus' spirit leaving his body, reinforcing the point that his is a willing sacrifice (unlike that Passover lamb). He knew it was coming as he celebrated the Passover with his friends. He wrestled through it's implications in the Garden. He obediently accepted it when he took upon the cross. And now, it is finished.

Immediately, strange occurrences began to develop. The earth shook. Tombs split open. The veil...the THICK, impermeable curtain that *literally* separated the people from the presence of God in the Temple, was torn...ripped in two, from top to bottom. Never needing to be repaired because it no longer served a purpose. God would not be separated from his children anymore.

RESPOND

Jesus,

Like you, I will one day experience death. It has already touched my life in profound and devastating ways. I grieve the losses I've endured, recognizing that death was never what you intended us to experience. However, because of your sacrifice on the cross, your willing and brutal sacrifice, death no longer has the same sting. Death is not the end. Sin does not have the final say!

Thank you that you love me so much that the idea of being separated from me caused you to endure such physical and spiritual agony. I am *literally* eternally grateful!

Amen



READ

Jesus' body is placed in the tomb
MATTHEW 27:57-65
& COLOSSIANS 2:12-15

REFLECT

Burial delivers such an overwhelming finality to death. It truly feels like the period at the end of a life. When we bury a loved one, we've usually already celebrated their life at a service. We've gone through pictures and tearfully recounted blessed memories. Burial feels like the definitive turning of a page...no matter how desperately we want the chapter to continue.

This is how Mary Magdalene and Jesus' mother must have felt as they helplessly watched the stone being rolled in front of the tomb. All of their work, their tears, their sacrifices, their hopes, wrapped tightly in a sheet of linen and coming to a devastatingly unsatisfying halt.

It's all over. What do we possibly do now?

Have you ever put everything you have into something only to see it fizzle out or come to an explosive end? A business? A relationship? A dream? A version of yourself you always thought you'd become?

What in your life, right now, feels dead? Not just dead. Dead and buried. Three days in a tomb, starting to rot, stinky dead. Perhaps God gave you a promise...a calling on your life or a vision for your future that felt so clear. And now...radio silence. Sometimes, even worse than death is the waiting that comes with the burial.

Death is heartbreaking and burial is like salt in the wound. However, keep in mind...without death and burial, there is no resurrection. Because, we know how this journey ends...and it's NOT in the mugginess of a borrowed tomb.

If you have things in your life that seem dead and buried, take heart.

Because.

Early on Sunday morning, a new day was dawning...

RESPOND

Jesus,

Like you, I've experienced what feels like the finality of burial. I've laid in a "tomb" and waited and waited for resurrection. There are situations and promises in my life right now that feel dead. I humbly ask, by the power of your Spirit, if it's your will, that you would resurrect them.

However, if not, would you powerfully bring NEW life from that death. Help me to see the new things you are doing in my life. I long to witness a new bloom in my life, sprouting out of the buried seed you planted long ago.

Amen

