



One of the moments in Christ's earthly life that I reflect on the most is when He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Aside from the Crucifixion, it's one of the most emotionally stirring accounts of Christ for me. I think it's because in a small way, I can relate to Christ in that moment, because, I too, have been brought to my knees by the weight of sin.

If you've followed me for any amount of time, you know that my teenage years were tumultuous. At age 15, I was wrapped up in the downward spiral of an abusive relationship, only to move into an even more abusive relationship after the first one combusted in a fiery flame of pride, selfishness, and jealousy. Outwardly, I kept it together, but inside I felt very used, lonely, and tormented.

On the worst night of my life, in the fall of my junior year of high school, I found myself broken and unsure of what to do. You can read about that here. It was late in the night and sleep was not going to come. I'd already decided not to tell my parents because I didn't want my dad to avenge me and wind up in jail. I got in my car and found myself at

my high school track field. I think I went there because it was a place that at one time I had been confident in myself. Before a terrible injury, running track made me feel strong. I guess, on that night, I needed to be in a place that comforted me. I wonder if that is why Christ went to the Garden of Gethsemane. Did He feel some solace there?

I remember walking out to the 50-yard line and all the weight of the abuse I'd endured buckled my knees and I fell to the ground. The sins of others became too much for me and I felt crushed and abandoned. In that empty, silent night, I cried out to God and asked Him why He had abandoned me.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

That's what Christ cried out on the cross. **The weight of all our sins must have felt daunting.** He must have felt so much pain and suffering that, in his humanity, He felt completely alone. Sin does that. Whether it's our own sin or the sins of others inflicted upon us, we struggle to feel God. The agony Christ felt in the garden dropped Him to His knees. He physically felt the massive affliction of every sin. Every single sin. He knew all the ways we had and would hurt each other. He could see and feel all the abuses up and down the centuries. He had to deal with the torment of people turning their backs on God while giving way to sin. He was our scapegoat. He bore it all.

In the Old Testament, on the Day of Atonement, the people would find a perfect male lamb or goat. They would symbolically cast their sins onto the goat and then they would sacrifice it. It was a scapegoat, an innocent creature bearing the sins of the guilty. Then it was sacrificed and given as a victim to God. Blood had to be shed to atone. Christ was our scapegoat. The innocent bore our sins, but He didn't do it symbolically. No, He really bore them. He felt all the darkness and impurity of them. He felt the immensity of the misery our sins cause. It was so horrifically intense that He sweat blood.

That night on the football field, I didn't trust that God could heal the hurt. In fact, out there in the moonlight, I committed a sin so awful it still pains me to this day. I cursed God. With four words, I added to the torture Christ felt in his heart in the garden. Forgive me, but I cannot type out those words. They are completely awful. I have often imagined that each of my four words was a drop of blood that fell from His forehead.

I have dreamed that I could wipe that blood away. Christ was administered to by an angel in the garden, but I have imagined myself meeting Him there in the twilight and wiping away the blood I caused to seep out of Him. I've wished that I could meet Him there and embrace Him. I've wished I could look Him straight in the eyes and say, "I'm so sorry I caused You this pain. With all my heart, I'm sorry."

I can't physically be in the garden with Christ, but I have made my peace with Him. Many years ago, with tears spilling out of my eyes, I confessed this sin from that dark night in my life and when I heard the words of absolution, my heart surged with joy. It was like a window of my soul had been opened and light, wind, and love came pouring back in bringing life. Grace was restored and, man, it felt tremendous. Forgiveness and mercy are such precious gifts by God if only we ask.

Holy week is greatly significant to me. Christ knows all our pain and suffering. He walks right with us through it all. There isn't an aspect of suffering that He doesn't understand. What gets me most, though, is that His love is more powerful than all the sin the world can muster up. On the cross, Love won out. The only things I can think to do to express my gratitude are to love God with my whole being and live my life proving that what He did made a difference. It did make a difference. It made all the difference. How could it not? God loves me—loves us all—enough that He was willing to take our sins, bear them, and die to free us. That is powerful, powerful love and when we embrace it, our lives change dramatically.

Christ was there with me on that night out on the football field. He was there on His knees with me saying, "I have felt the weight of the sins these boys committed. I know how much it hurts. Know that I have not abandoned you."

In my pain, I couldn't hear Him. For awhile, I allowed their sins and my sins to drag me down into a pit. Eventually, though, when that became too much to bear, I asked Christ to heal me. He did and He can do the same for you.

Have a blessed Holy Week, friends. I pray you feel the love of Christ displayed in His

sacrifice for us. There is no greater love and it's poured out for every single one of us. The miracle of Easter follows and, as Christians, we get to be a part of the greatest love story every told. I hope that stirs your soul as much as it does mine.

Pax cum spiritu tuo. Peace be with your spirit.