

Session 4 · My Soul Is Very Sorrowful

Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; Hebrews 4:15-16; 5:7-9

PART 1: LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers Christ's own anguish in Gethsemane, hears the Psalm 42 refrain from Session 3 return in his mouth, and opens the sealed envelopes. The answer to "Is anxiety a sin?" comes from the garden: the sinless One experienced crushing distress, so the felt experience of anxiety is not itself sin; and what can be done *with* fear, Jesus shows: bring it to the Father, honestly, with an "Abba" and a "yet."

Catholic Touchstone. Christ is true God and true man, with a true human soul, true human emotions, and a true human will that freely aligned with the Father's ("not what I will, but what you will"). His agony is doctrine before it is comfort, and comfort because it is doctrine.

What You Need to Know

This is the study's summit, and its most delicate night. Some people will hear the sealed answer as permission they have needed for years; a few may resist it, having been taught firmly that worry is always sin. Prepare to be unhurried, precise, and gentle.

The text first. Mark's Gethsemane is stark: Jesus "began to be greatly distressed and troubled" (14:33), and says "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (14:34). The Greek behind "very sorrowful" is *perilypos*, deeply grieved, exceedingly sorrowful; the form of the word suggests sorrow all around, and that is a fair mnemonic though not a dictionary definition. Mark's "greatly distressed" (*ekthambeisthai*) conveys intense distress or alarm. This is among the strongest emotional language the Gospels apply to Jesus. He does not hide it from his friends ("remain here, and watch"), he falls to the ground, and he prays the most honest prayer in Scripture: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will" (14:36). Every clause matters tonight: the intimacy (*Abba*), the honesty (remove this), and the anchored will (yet).

The session's central discovery: in the Greek Old Testament that the early Church read, the refrain of Psalm 42-43, "Why are you cast down, O my soul," uses this same word, *perilypos*: "Why are you *perilypos*, O my soul?" Mark records Jesus, in his darkest hour, speaking the vocabulary of that lament. Be exact about the claim: this is a strong verbal echo of the Greek psalter, not a quotation Mark identifies as one, and the Gospels nowhere record Jesus reciting Psalm 42-43. What can be said, and it is plenty, is that the language of the cast-down soul is on his lips in the garden. When the group finds this, last week's session detonates into this one: the prayer book of the anxious is the prayer book of Christ.

Luke adds two details, and one honest note. The details: an angel from heaven strengthening him (22:43), and agony so deep that "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (22:44). Keep Luke's simile intact when you speak: the verse says his sweat *became like* great drops of blood, and the tradition has long understood it as bloody sweat, but the sentence itself is a comparison and should not be flattened into a bare physical claim. The note: some ancient manuscripts lack verses 43-44 (your RSV2CE footnotes this); the Church's Bibles and liturgy include them, and it is honest to know the footnote exists. Do not lead with the textual point; have it ready if a sharp reader asks. The angel matters theologically. Luke does not say the angel is the Father's answer to the cup prayer, nor how the strengthening came, so read it as interpretation and offer it as such: the sequence can be read as strength given inside the trial rather than exemption from it, which is the Elijah pattern from Session 3 in a deeper register.

Hebrews gives the apostolic commentary: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (5:7), "he learned obedience through what he suffered" (5:8), and therefore "we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (4:15). Hold those last three words: *yet without sinning*. Within one sustained treatment of

Christ's priesthood, Hebrews records both his loud cries and tears (5:7) and his sinlessness (4:15). That juxtaposition is the sealed answer, waiting in the text.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Gethsemane gathers the study's Old Testament threads. The vocabulary of the Psalm 42 refrain returns on Christ's lips (the Live Discovery). The cup he asks to pass is the prophets' cup of wrath and judgment (Is 51:17; Jer 25:15), which he freely takes so that we receive a different cup (this study will not chase that thread tonight; it belongs to the Eucharist and there is not room, but know it for questions). And an angel with strength for the body recalls Elijah's angel with bread: God's pattern of help inside the trial rather than exemption from it, now traced to its source.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas asks directly whether there was true sorrow and true fear in Christ, and answers yes to both. Christ assumed a complete human nature, so he truly experienced the passions of the soul, sorrow and fear included, though in him they were perfectly ordered and never overthrew reason or will. These movements of the soul belong to real humanity; they are not themselves sins.

Summa Theologiae III, q. 15, a. 6 (sorrow in Christ) and a. 7 (fear in Christ). Tier 2: summary in our words, not his.

The step from there to tonight's question is ours, and it belongs in the sealed answer, not in the Summa's mouth: if the sinless One truly felt them, then feeling them cannot of itself be sin.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. John Henry Newman

Newman preaches, in substance, that Christ's interior anguish was not lessened by his divinity but borne with total awareness. He took up mental suffering deliberately, refusing every anesthetic of distraction or denial, and let the full weight of it come, above all the weight of the world's sin, which he apprehended as no one else could.

From his discourse on the mental sufferings of our Lord in his Passion, in Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations (Tier 2: summary; discourse numbering varies by edition, so none is claimed here).

Our application, not his emphasis: if he refused every anesthetic, then the garden is not a crack in his composure, and the Son of God is not a stranger to dread.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Maximus the Confessor

Maximus is the Church's great teacher on exactly this verse. Against those who would give Christ only one will, he insists that in Gethsemane we hear a true human will, with its natural shrinking from death, freely conforming itself to the Father: "not what I will, but what you will." The human "no" of Eden is answered by a human "yes," spoken at the point where saying yes cost the most. He suffered for this teaching, and the Church defined it after him.

His writings on the two wills of Christ, especially the Gethsemane prayer (Tier 2: summary of his teaching, which the Church received at the Third Council of Constantinople in 680-681).

A modern voice worth having in your pocket, though not one of tonight's three: Pope Benedict XVI reads the Gethsemane chapter of Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week the same way, as the healing of our refusal inside Christ's costly consent.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 612:** the agony at Gethsemane. The paragraph quotes the "let this cup pass from me" form, speaks of the horror death represented for his human nature, and teaches that by accepting in his *human will* that the Father's will be done, he accepts his death as redemptive. (Do not put "accepts it freely" in quotation marks; that phrase is not 612's.)

- **CCC 2600:** Luke emphasizes that Jesus prays before the decisive moments of his mission, including the Passion. For the further claim that Christ takes our prayer into his own, cite **CCC 2606** rather than stretching 2600.
- **CCC 1767-1768:** the passions are in themselves neither good nor evil; they are morally qualified insofar as they engage reason and will, and passions "are morally good when they contribute to a good action." This is the framework the sealed answer needs, and it is the one most anxious Catholics have never been given.
- **CCC 1735:** imputability and responsibility for an act "can be diminished or even nullified" by fear and other psychological factors; essential precision for the sealed answer.

THREAD WATCH (leader only, never read aloud)

Payoffs tonight: the troubled-Jesus thread from Session 1 and the Psalm 42 refrain from Session 3 (the *perilypos* discovery). Land both, and keep the lexical claim clean: the verb *tarasso* is paid off by **John 12:27**, where Jesus says "Now is my soul troubled" facing this very hour. Mark 14:33 uses different Greek (*ekthambeisthai*, *ademonein*) and is the Synoptic summit of anguish language, related in substance, not the same word. If a leader who checked Session 1 goes looking for *tarasso* in Mark 14, they will not find it, and now they know why.

The body thread develops: an angel strengthens Christ (Luke 22:43) as an angel fed Elijah. Name the echo when it surfaces; do not yet reveal where the thread ends (grace through matter, the sacraments, Session 6).

The sealed envelopes open tonight. Run the ritual exactly as scripted below. The order matters: text first, discovery second, envelopes third, answer last. Do not let the answer arrive before the garden has done its work.

Session Goals

1. Let the group sit inside Christ's real anguish without rushing to resolution.
2. Land the *perilypos* discovery: the lament psalms return in Jesus's own mouth.
3. Open the sealed envelopes and answer the question with doctrinal precision and pastoral gentleness.
4. Teach the Gethsemane prayer as the anxious person's pattern: Abba, honesty, yet.

The 90 Minutes

- **0:00** Gather and opening prayer (5 min)
- **0:05** Win (10 min)
- **0:15** Build part one: Mark 14, the discovery (30 min)
- **0:45** The unsealing: envelopes and the answer (20 min)
- **1:05** Build part two: Hebrews, the steelman (15 min)
- **1:20** Send (5 min)
- **1:25** Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer (5 min).
- **Non-cuttable, and protect them ruthlessly:** the Live Discovery, the unsealing, and the silence around it. This is the night the study exists for.
- **If you run long, cut in this order:** (1) compress the Win to W1 alone, (2) shorten Send S1 sharing, (3) read the Dig Deeper aloud without discussion. Do not buy time from the unsealing.

PART 2: DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, on the night you were betrayed you went out to the garden, and you took your fear with you. Bring us with you tonight. Let us watch with you one hour. Teach us to pray as you prayed: with your Abba, with your honesty, and with your yes. You who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Win

W1. Where were you when you last felt truly out of your depth? Who, if anyone, did you let see it?

W2. Growing up, what did you absorb about whether strong people show fear?

Build

Read Mark 14:32-42 aloud, slowly, with silence after verse 36. Do not rush this reading; it is the summit of the study.

1. Mark says Jesus "began to be greatly distressed and troubled" and Jesus himself says "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (14:33-34). Stay with the plain sense: what is actually happening to Jesus in this garden? Resist the urge to soften it.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Among the strongest emotional language the Gospels apply to him. "Greatly distressed" (*ekthambeisthai*) conveys intense distress or alarm; "very sorrowful" (*perilypos*) is deeply grieved, sorrow all around; "even to death" means the anguish itself feels lethal. He falls to the ground (14:35). Stay inside Mark for now; Luke gets opened later tonight. Whatever we were taught about composure, the Gospels were not embarrassed to show us this: true God and true man, in true anguish, hours before the cross. He also does not hide it: he brings three friends and tells them exactly how bad it is (14:33-34). No performance, no bravado.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Say: "Listen to his sentence again: *My soul is very sorrowful*. You prayed something extremely close to that, out loud, last week. Find it, and tell me what you notice." Let them hunt back to Psalm 42-43 and its refrain ("Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?"), and let them say what the resemblance is before you add anything. Then supply the leader note: in the Greek Old Testament the early Church read, that refrain uses the very word Mark records, *perilypos*. Then ask question 2.

2. So the vocabulary of the lament psalms is on his lips in the garden. What does that mean for last week's session, and for everyone who has ever prayed those psalms in fear?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It means the prayer book of the anxious is the prayer book of Christ. The Word made flesh, needing words in the dark, reached for the same *perilypos*-soul vocabulary that the Church prayed in her Greek psalter. (Precisely: he does not recite the refrain, "Why are you cast down"; he speaks a first-person declaration in its language. The echo is what carries the weight, and it carries plenty.) So St. Augustine's teaching from last week lands with full force: on his reading of the Psalms, when you pray a lament, Christ prays with you, and the garden shows why that is more than a figure of speech. Every anxious Christian who has ever muttered "why are you cast down, O my soul" has been praying in very good company.

3. Take the prayer of 14:36 apart clause by clause: "Abba, Father"; "all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me"; "yet not what I will, but what you will." What is each clause doing? What would the prayer lose if any one of them were missing?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"Abba, Father": intimacy first; the prayer happens inside a relationship, not before a tribunal. "Remove this cup": total honesty; Jesus actually asks for the hard thing to be taken away, which means asking for relief is not unbelief. "Yet not what I will, but what you will": the anchored will; the request is real and the surrender is real, in the same breath. Drop the first clause and prayer becomes negotiation with a stranger. Drop the second and it becomes performance, the polished prayer that hides the person. Drop the third and it becomes a demand. All three together are the pattern this study has been building toward: the anxious heart's complete prayer.

The Unsealing

*Hand back the sealed envelopes. Say something like: "Three weeks ago you wrote your answer to a question: **Is anxiety a sin?** You have just watched the sinless Son of God greatly distressed and troubled, sorrowful unto death, his sweat like great drops of blood. Open your envelope. Read what you wrote. Then let's talk." Give real silence, then invite anyone willing to share what they wrote and whether the garden changes it. Only after the group has talked, share the answer below. Take your time; for some people in the room this is the most important twenty minutes of the study.*

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Held next to Gethsemane, the answer comes in three precise pieces. **First: the feeling is not the sin.** Jesus experienced overwhelming distress, and Scripture says of him "in every respect... tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb 4:15). The Church teaches that Christ took a complete human nature with true human passions, true sorrow and true fear (Aquinas, ST III q. 15, aa. 6-7), and she teaches generally that the passions are in themselves neither morally good nor morally evil; they take their moral quality from how reason and will engage them (CCC 1767-1768). So the involuntary felt experience of anxiety, the dread, the body's alarm, the thoughts that arrive unbidden, is not itself sin. The feeling, as feeling, never was the sin. **Second: much of it is not fully voluntary**, and the Church weighs that: responsibility for an act "can be diminished or even nullified" by fear and other psychological factors (CCC 1735). A panic attack is not a moral act; a temperament is not a verdict; an illness is not a vice. **Third: freedom enters in what we do with fear**, and here the garden shows the way rather than wagging a finger. Fear can be carried away from God, into despair of him or into refusing what we know to be his will, or it can be carried to him, with an Abba, an honest request, and a yet. Where sin exists in this territory it lives in what the will consents to and cultivates, not in the weather of the heart, and even there the culpability may be partial. So to the question you sealed: the trembling itself, no. And the One who trembled in the garden truly knows human fear, and knows and has compassion on yours.

Pastoral note for the leader, not read aloud: someone may push the third point, asking whether their own worry has been sinful. Do not adjudicate individual souls from the front of the room; that is what confessors are for, and scrupulous consciences especially need a regular confessor, not a group verdict (Session 1 panel). The public teaching stays public: feeling, no; involuntary, weighed; the will's direction, that is between each person, their confessor, and God, and God is merciful.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "But Scripture commands it"

Build it at full strength. Before anyone leaves with the answer, put the strongest objection to it in the room, because it is the reason many of them believed the opposite in the first place. Scripture does not merely describe anxiety; it forbids it, in the imperative, repeatedly: "do not be anxious" six times in Matthew 6:25-34, "have no anxiety about anything" (Phil 4:6), "do not be anxious" again in Luke 12:22. Commands imply the power to obey.

If anxiety were morally neutral weather, why would the Lord command against it at all?

Press, then answer from the text. Notice first what the same Scriptures do: they show the sinless Son of God in exactly this distress, and Hebrews calls him tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sinning. So the imperatives cannot be aimed at the involuntary passion he himself bore. What they are aimed at is what he shows us in the very next breath: the direction of a frightened heart. "Yet not what I will, but what you will" is the obedience the commands ask for, and it is offered from inside the fear, not after it has gone. That is why Matthew grounds his command not on "nothing bad will happen" but on "your heavenly Father knows," and why Paul's command comes with practices attached, which is next week. The command is real, and it is a command about where to put your weight, not about what your body is allowed to feel.

BUILD, THEN PRESS "If he is God, the fear was theater"

Build it at full strength. A thoughtful skeptic, or a thoughtful believer, objects: "Jesus knew the ending. He predicted his resurrection three times. A man who knows Sunday is coming cannot really dread Friday; the agony reads as performance, staged for our benefit. And if it was real, how is he God?" Let the group feel the dilemma's edge: it seems the agony must be either fake or unfitting.

Press, then answer from the text and the Church. The dilemma dissolves once you take the Incarnation at full strength. The Church confesses one Person in two complete natures: Christ has a true human soul, true human emotions, and a true human will, which the Church solemnly affirmed at the Third Council of Constantinople in 680-681 against those who would delete it. Knowing an outcome does not anesthetize a human nature; a patient told the surgery will succeed still dreads the surgery, and no one calls the dread theater. Hebrews says he "learned obedience through what he suffered" (5:7-8): the anguish was the arena of a real human obedience, not a pageant. And St. Maximus's reading goes deeper: precisely there, in real dread, a true human will freely said "not what I will, but what you will," and our ancient "no" began to be healed inside his costly "yes." Fake fear could heal nothing. It was real, and that is the good news.

4. Read Hebrews 4:15-16. Because we have a high priest who has been where we are, the writer draws a conclusion beginning "Let us then with confidence draw near." Why is confidence the conclusion, of all things?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because the throne we approach is occupied by someone who sympathizes from experience: "in every respect... tempted as we are." The anxious person's deepest fear about God is often that he is a disappointed inspector. Hebrews replaces that picture: the throne is "the throne of grace," and the one seated there has wept, dreaded, and sweat as it were great drops of blood. You are not explaining fear to someone who has never known it from inside. So: confidence, "that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Help in time of need is Gethsemane's angel (Luke 22:43), still on duty.

DIG DEEPER

Luke 22:43: "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him." The Father's answer to "remove this cup" was not removal; it was strength inside the trial, delivered to a human body in a garden, exactly the Elijah pattern (bread and an angel under the broom tree). Note honestly: your RSV2CE footnotes that some ancient manuscripts lack verses 43-44; the Church receives them as Scripture. Luke names no material means here, so hold the parallel loosely: Elijah was given bread, and Christ is given strength, and in both the help comes inside the trial rather than instead of it. *Our thread, not Luke's claim:* watch where this pattern of help delivered to a body is finally heading. Two sessions remain.

Send

S1. What did you write in your envelope, and what would you write now? (Share only what you wish.)

S2. Who do you know who is carrying the second wound, the belief that their anxiety makes God disappointed in them? What could you say to them this week, now that you have been to the garden?

Live It This Week

- **Pray the Gethsemane pattern nightly:** one prayer with all three clauses. Abba (address him intimately), honesty (name the actual thing and ask for what you actually want), yet (hand it over: "yet not what I will").
- **Watch one hour.** Once this week, if at all possible, take a real hour, or a real half hour, of quiet before the Lord, ideally before the tabernacle or the Blessed Sacrament: "could you not watch one hour?" Bring nothing to fix. Just watch with him.
- **Retire the shame that was never yours.** If what you wrote condemned you simply for feeling fear, or for symptoms that arrive unbidden, write beside it: *the feeling itself is not a sin*, and tear that condemnation up. If your envelope names something else, something you know you have chosen, keep it and bring it to confession, which is exactly where it belongs and where mercy is waiting.

Memory verse: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:36)

Closing Prayer

*Father, in the garden your Son was sorrowful unto death, and he did not sin;
he asked for the cup to pass, and he gave you his will.*

*Take from us tonight every ounce of shame we have carried for our fear,
and teach us his prayer: Abba, the truth, and your will be done.*

Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

PART 3: LEADER REFERENCE CARD

PASSAGE	WHERE IT IS USED
Mark 14:32-42	Main text: the agony, the prayer, the sleeping friends
Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5	Live Discovery: the refrain returning in Christ's mouth (<i>perilypos</i>)
Luke 22:39-46	Second text: the angel, the sweat like blood (with RSV2CE footnote noted)
Heb 4:15-16	Question 4 and the sealed answer: tempted as we are, yet without sinning; the throne of grace
Heb 5:7-9	Steelman answer: loud cries and tears; learned obedience through suffering
John 12:27	Thread payoff (from Session 1): "Now is my soul troubled"
Is 51:17; Jer 25:15	Leader background only: the cup of the prophets
Matt 6:25-34; Phil 4:6; Luke 12:22	Build, then press: the imperatives objection to the sealed answer
CCC 612; 2600; 2606; 1767-1768; 1735	Catechism Connection and sealed answer precision