Preschool–Grade 6

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: Watch and pray. Good intentions are not enough to stand against temptation; prayer is how we put God's will first, the way Jesus did in Gethsemane.
Bible passage: Matthew 26:30–46. Students read it out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." *Matthew 26:41 (KJV)* and "And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." *Matthew 26:39 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Matthew 26:30–46. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses, or go around the room a few verses each.

1. Opening game: Agree or Disagree (5–10 minutes)

Name one side of the room "agree" and the other "disagree." Read each statement, and students walk to the side they choose: 1) If I really mean it, I'll never fall into that sin. 2) It's okay to tell God I don't want to do something hard. 3) Prayer changes me, not just my situation. 4) Being tired is a good excuse to skip praying. Ask a few students on each side why they chose it. Say: "Matthew 26 speaks to every one of these."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Read out loud: Matthew 26:30–35. Students take turns, a few verses each. Old words in this passage:

- **an hymn** (26:30): a song of praise to God
- **offended because of me** (26:31): stumble and fall away because of what happens to Me
- **smite the shepherd** (26:31): strike the shepherd; Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7 about Himself
- **verily** (26:34): truly; **deny me thrice** (26:34): say three times that you don't know Me
- **likewise also said all the disciples** (26:35): every one of them made the same promise

Read out loud: Matthew 26:36–46. Old words in this passage:

- **yonder** (26:36): over there; **sons of Zebedee** (26:37): James and John (4:21)
- **sorrowful and very heavy** (26:37): deeply sad and weighed down; **tarry** (26:38): stay
- **this cup** (26:39, 26:42): the suffering ahead of Him; He had said He would be betrayed to be crucified (26:2)
- **nevertheless** (26:39): but still; **not as I will, but as thou wilt**: not what I want, but what You want

- **temptation** (26:41): being pulled toward sin; **the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak**: inside you want to do right, but your own strength gives out
- **except I drink it** (26:42): unless I go through it; **thy will be done**: let what You want happen
- **the hour is at hand** (26:45): the time has come; **the Son of man**: the name Jesus used for Himself
- **he is at hand that doth betray me** (26:46): the one who is betraying Me is here

Teach the key moment. Write Matthew 26:35 and 26:40 side by side on the board. Say: "Look at both. In verse 35 Peter says he'll die for Jesus. In verse 40 he can't stay awake for one hour. Peter meant it; his spirit was willing. But his flesh was weak (26:41). Good intentions are not enough. Now look at Jesus: deeply sorrowful (26:38), and He prayed three times (26:44). He told God plainly how hard it was, and He still prayed, 'thy will be done' (26:42). Then He stood up and went to the cross (26:46). Prayer is how we line our will up with God's."

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Peter and all the disciples promised they would never deny Jesus (26:35). Why do you think they were so sure?
2. Jesus told His closest friends, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful" (26:38). What does that teach us about being honest with God and with trusted friends?
3. What is the difference between "the spirit indeed is willing" and "the flesh is weak" (26:41)? Where do you see both in your own life?
4. Jesus prayed the same words three times (26:44). When is it right to keep praying about the same thing?
5. "Not as I will, but as thou wilt" (26:39). What is one area where it's hard for you to pray that?
6. Jesus said, "Rise, let us be going" (26:46). How can prayer give you strength to face something hard instead of running from it?

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4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: **watch** means stay awake and alert; **enter not into temptation** means don't walk into the pull to sin; **the spirit indeed is willing** means inside you truly want to do right; **the flesh is weak** means your own strength gives out. In Matthew 26:39, **a little further** means a short way past the three disciples; **fell on his face** means He bowed down to the ground; **this cup** means the suffering ahead; **nevertheless** means but still.

Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Matthew 26:41 this week; keep working on Matthew 26:39 next week too.

5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "In the garden Jesus prayed, 'thy will be done.' Then He went to the cross for us. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the Holy Ghost, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."

Pray with the students, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

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6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. Where is my spirit willing but my flesh weak right now? Be honest.
2. When in my day could I "watch and pray" before the temptation comes, not after?
3. Write a short prayer that tells God something hard, and ends with "not as I will, but as thou wilt."
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: set one time each day to pray, even when you're tired. When you feel pulled toward something wrong, stop and pray first.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that Jesus prayed in Gethsemane and went to the cross for us. Our spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak. Teach us to watch and pray, to be honest with You, and to say, 'thy will be done.' In Jesus' name, amen."

If a student asks why Jesus prayed: Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, fully God and fully man (1 Timothy 3:16). As a man, He prayed, and He showed us how to pray when things are hard.
What comes next: while Jesus was still speaking, Judas came with a great multitude with swords and staves, and they took Jesus (Matthew 26:47–50). Peter later denied Him three times, just as Jesus said (26:69–75). This lesson stops at verse 46; the cross lesson picks up the story.

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