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One Word That Changed My View

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I'm not sure why Jesus brought Peter, James and John into the garden of Gethsemane with him. Did he hope, like disciplined sentries, they would alertly stand guard? Or, was he like a soldier who lets his young son sleep with him the night before he leaves for a far-away war so he can cherish him for a short time? Or, was their presence like the picture a warrior wears in a locket around his neck, close to his heart, to remind him of the one he's fighting for?

I don't know. But I do know in spite of their indifference, Jesus showed an understanding of their struggle when he told them, "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matthew 26:41). I'm sure if the disciples had known Judas was on his way to the garden with troops, they would have stood guard.

Had they known Jesus would die the next day, they would have prayed. But self-absorption and indifference kept them from hearing his earlier comments about his impending betrayal and death. From their perspective the night seemed routine--Jesus prayed as he always prayed and they tagged along. Exhaustion pulled down their eyelids and they slipped into sleep.

A Single Word

What I just wrote about the disciples is what I always believed. I thought they slept because in Matthew 26:43 we're told, "He again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy." But that's only part of the story. While reading through Luke's gospel I saw a single word I had never noticed before.

In Luke 22:45 "He came to His disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? It’s enough. The hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." The word: *sorrow* in the original language speaks of grief or anxiety. It's the same word used by Matthew to describe the Lord's emotional state in Gethsemane.

They Escaped Into Sleep

The disciples weren't indifferent. They understood what Jesus meant when he said he would be betrayed, arrested, tried and killed. They realized he meant it would happen immediately. And when they heard him crying out in agony (Hebrews 5:7-10) they knew something terrible was about to happen. Rather than fight through their fear and anxiety, they curled up on the ground and fell asleep. They escaped the pain of reality by slipping into a painless sleep.

The temptation they needed to resist was the temptation to allow their fear to replace their faith in Jesus. On that night they failed miserably. Yet, Jesus loved them no less. In spite of this, on the night of his greatest fear, he wanted them close enough to hear his cries . . . so close he could quickly get to them.

More Human, More Compassion

Knowing why the disciples slept makes them seem more human. And Christ's compassion more understandable. I mean, I'd feel more compassion for someone I thought cared about me than someone who seemed indifferent. Jesus knew they weren't just tired. He knew they were fearful about what would happen to him.

They were anxious about their own future. The Lord knew the temptation to allow fear to overwhelm them and us during times of impending loss is intense. Yet, he told the disciples how such a temptation can be resisted. He said, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

A single word helped me rethink an important scene in the Bible. It's also helped me rethink how I respond when I fear a loss.