

Journey to the Cross

based on the Stations of the Cross



Developed by Donna J. Olsen

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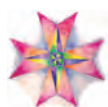
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Journey to the Cross

a Lenten Experience based on the Stations of the Cross
in five sessions of one to one-and-a-half hours each

Journey to the Cross is designed to help participants:

- learn about the Lenten devotion known as the Stations of the Cross
- worship using the Stations of the Cross
- understand and share Jesus' feelings and experiences on the way to Calvary
- identify with the persons—good and bad—who were involved in his crucifixion
- prepare for Easter hope

Overview of the Five Sessions

The five sessions are:

- Introduction and History of the Stations of the Cross
- Jesus is Condemned—The Journey Begins
- Jesus is Given Help—Simon and Veronica
- Living with Wounds—Mary, Jesus' Mother
- The Journey into Hope—Jesus is Crucified

Information about the Stations of the Cross

The Stations of the Cross are an ancient and traditional representation of the sacred journey Jesus made as he carried his cross through the streets of Jerusalem to Calvary. Today, as we follow the fourteen stations, we follow in his footsteps, pausing to reflect on his experiences, and meeting persons who hurt him, helped him, and loved him.

Journey to the Cross offers an informative and meditative format in which participants can share with Jesus in his journey, think and pray about his crucifixion, explore the meaning it can have in their own lives, and understand the relationship between grief and Easter hope.

A booklet or handout script of the stations is included in this resource. You may wish to use an alternate version, which could be substituted for the one provided.

Each 90-minute session includes a reading of the fourteen stations followed by information, discussion, and prayer or meditation time. The sessions can be done in one hour if times for each activity are abbreviated. The sessions could also be combined together into a one-day retreat experience.

The final session should include an experiential representation of the fourteen stations. Walking among pictorial representations as the Stations are read aloud is recommended. Fourteen original drawings of the Stations of the Cross by **LeaderResources** artist Mary Kenny and the meditations accompanying them are provided for this purpose in a separate file. You can also use the Stations in your church (if any) or a neighboring church or other images you may find or create.

Other Stations of the Cross for Liturgical Use

Any Stations of the Cross script may be used with this resource. Dozens of options can be found at <https://pastoral.center/stations-of-the-cross>.

Journey to the Cross

SESSION ONE

Introduction and History of the Stations of the Cross

Supplies needed for this session:

- Newsprint and marker
- Copies of the stations booklet or one of the recommended books for each participant
- Copy of the handout “Stations of the Cross”
- Handout of map of Jesus’ Journey from Gethsemane to Golgotha (which may be reproduced or enlarged for presentation)
- Pictures and statues depicting the crucifixion or the fourteen stations
- Candles
- Handout “Praying with a picture or icon”

Session Outline:

- ✠ Introduction
- ✠ Read together Stations of the Cross
- 📖 History of the Stations
- ✠ Jesus’ Journey through Jerusalem
- ✠ Meditation with icons

✠ Introduction	<i>Large Group</i>	15 minutes
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Welcome and Get-Acquainted Time

Invite participants to introduce themselves to the larger group, stating

- their name
- why they have chosen to attend *Journey to the Cross*
- what they hope to get out of the program

Overview of Journey to the Cross

Journey to the Cross is a Lenten program based on the Stations of the Cross. The fourteen stations depict Jesus' path along the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, beginning with his trial and ending with his crucifixion and burial. Each night of our class will focus on a major character or event represented in the stations. During each session we will read through the fourteen stations, learn information about a key person whom Jesus met, discuss our reactions to this person, and end with meditation or prayer.

✠ Read Stations of the Cross	Large Group	10 minutes
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Read aloud all fourteen stations using the stations booklet provided or similar text.

📖 History of the Stations	Large Group	15+ minutes
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Distribute, read and discuss handout *"The Stations of the Cross"* (at the end of this session).

✠ Jesus' Journey through Jerusalem	Large Group	25 minutes
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This section includes an overview of Jesus' journey, and helps participants understand the location and geography of the places where the events occurred. Drawing on scriptural accounts and using the map, tell the events beginning with Jesus' journey from the Upper Room to Gethsemane as a story, and pointing out the location of each event on the handout at the end of this session. Highlight the distances covered as he was forced to travel across the city several times before his death. Stress his isolation as Peter and the disciples abandon him, as the foreign soldiers and the crowds along the streets ridicule him. If available, use additional maps, slides, and/or pictures to make the sites, distances, and emotions vivid.

- Last Supper (Lk 22:7-23)
- After nightfall
- Jesus prays in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:39-46)
- After dinner; c. 725 yards or about a half mile (as the crow flies, longer because the streets wind) from the upper room
- Jesus arrested in Gethsemane (Lk 22:47-53)
- Later that night
- Jesus before High Priest (Lk 22:54-65)
- Later that night; back to about the same area of Jerusalem as the upper room, so another 700 yards or almost a half mile
- Jesus before the Council
- Early on Friday morning; possibly in the temple area which was another c. 550 yards or more than a quarter mile across town

- Jesus before Pilate (Lk 23:1-5)
- Friday morning at Pilate's palace; c. 550 yards or more than a quarter of a mile across the city
- Jesus before Herod (Lk 23:5-12)
- Later on Friday morning; c. 475 yards or more than a quarter of a mile back towards the upper room location
- Jesus back before Pilate and sentenced to death (Lk 23:13-25)
- Still later on Friday morning; c. 475 yards or a quarter mile back across town
- Jesus is crucified (Lk. 23:26-47)
- About noon on Friday; c. 350 yards or a bit less than a quarter mile from the Praetorium, carrying the cross beam for part of this distance
- By straight lines, Jesus travels the distance of about 2½ miles; since the roads in Jerusalem are winding, it's likely that he travels more than 3 miles with nothing to eat or drink from sundown on Thursday to his death on Friday afternoon. During part of this time he is beaten and forced to carry a heavy beam of wood. (Note: these are *very* rough approximations of distances. And the exact location of places is not agreed upon by experts. This is to give you an idea of what Jesus might have experienced.)

✠ Meditation with icons

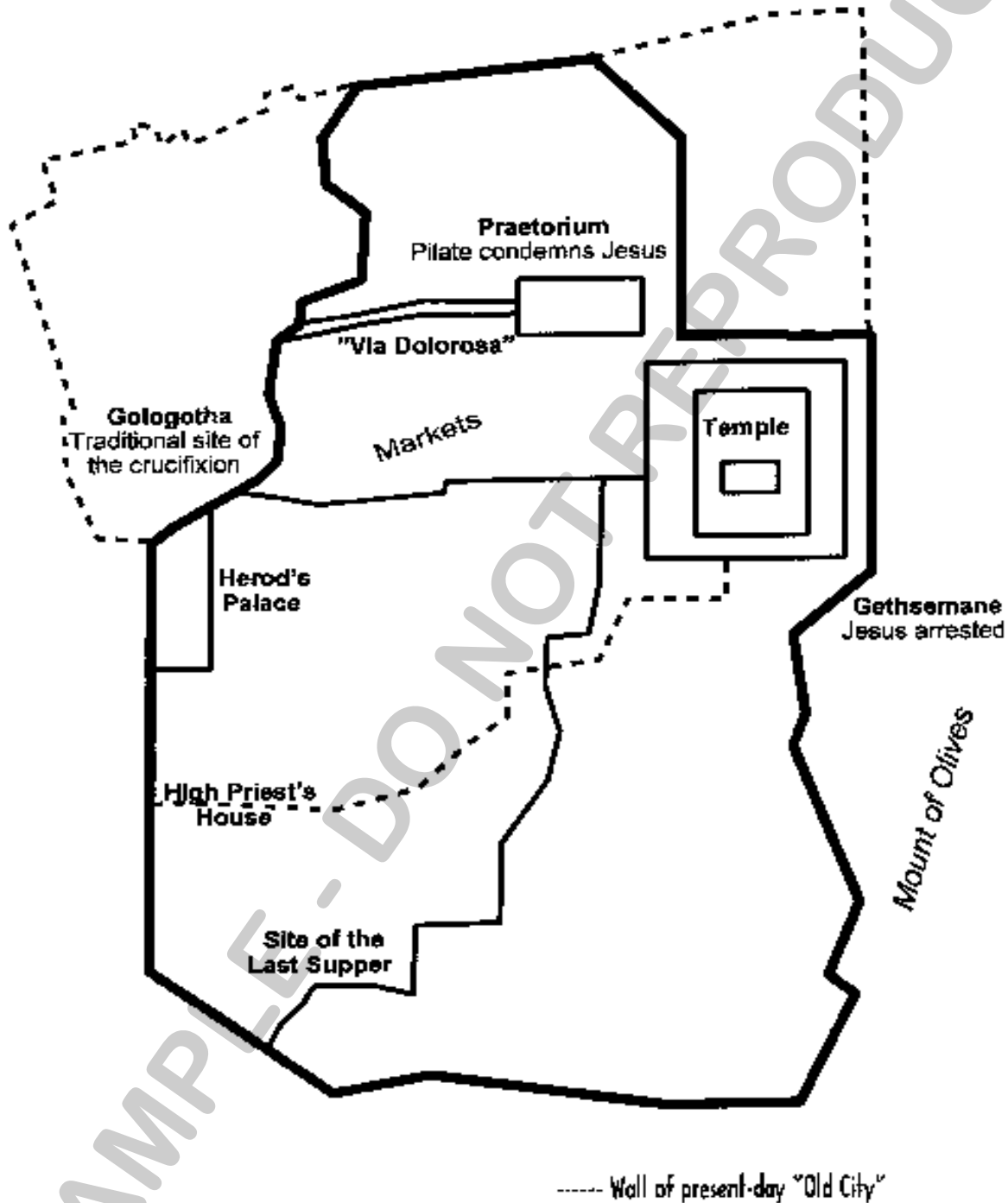
Large Group

remaining time

Distribute pictures, crucifixes, statues, and other representations of the crucifixion and the Stations of the Cross or use the ones provided with the stations booklet. Have a variety of materials for choice and allow persons to choose an item to use for meditation during the session and at home. If time permits, invite class members to display their items and explain their choice. Distribute copies of "Praying with a picture or icon" and/or "Praying with an Object" (if you are including some items that are just objects rather than just pictures) and discuss with participants. You may also want to distribute copies of "Praying the Rosary" for those who may wish to try this devotional prayer at another time. You may wish to remain in your class area, or move into the church for meditation time. Light candles and dim the lights! *Note: Watch your time! Persons unfamiliar with this form of prayer may become restive after ten or fifteen minutes.*

Conclude with a simple sung chant, such as "Wait for the Lord," "Jesus, Remember Me," or "Stay with Me," (all from the Taizé tradition). Or use another spoken prayer.

Jerusalem at the time of Jesus



The Stations of the Cross

Today, the “Stations” are usually a series of fourteen carvings or pictures designed for devotional purposes depicting incidents in Jesus’ final journey, from his trial at Pilate’s house, to his entombment. Often, they are arranged on the walls of a church or classroom, and worshipers visit the stations in order, reciting prayers and meditating on each incident. The traditional stations are a mix of scenes drawn from Scripture and tradition. The fourteen stations are:

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|--|--|
| 1. Jesus Is Condemned | 8. Jesus Comforts the Women of Jerusalem |
| 2. Jesus Receives His Cross | 9. The Third Fall |
| 3. The First Fall | 10. Jesus Is Stripped |
| 4. Jesus Meets His Mother | 11. Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross |
| 5. Simon of Cyrene Carries the Cross | 12. Jesus Dies |
| 6. A Woman (or Veronica) Wipes Jesus’ Face | 13. Jesus’ Body Is Taken from the Cross |
| 7. Jesus Falls a Second Time | 14. Jesus’ Body Is Laid in the Tomb |

Every year on Good Friday, Christian pilgrims retraced Jesus’ steps along the path which came to be called the Via Dolorosa. Information about this practice is recorded in the diary of a woman named Egeiria, who recorded what she saw when she made her pilgrimage in the second century.

In the Late Middle Ages, when the Holy Land was occupied by Turks, it became impossible for Christians to travel to Jerusalem. Devout believers who could no longer visit the holy sites constructed replicas of the sacred places and gathered around them for prayer. The Franciscans encouraged Christians around the world to practice this form of prayer and devotion, and by the end of the sixteenth century, the fourteen stations had become a decorative and devotional element of nearly every Christian church.

The fourteen stations have been unchanged since the eighteenth century. Today, the Stations offer us an opportunity to reflect on Jesus’ suffering, as well as his great love. We realize that, as we follow his steps, we share in his journey and in his love.

Praying with a picture or icon

Read the following steps a couple of times and then begin:

1. Select a picture or painted icon of Jesus, Mary, or a saint. Place it in a position where you can view it without obstruction and find a comfortable position for yourself close to the picture.
2. Close your eyes and express, in words or without, your desire to experience God's presence through the picture and your desire to give up whatever might prevent or block that experience. If you are using a picture of Jesus, you might silently repeat his name in rhythm with your breathing.
3. When you feel centered, open your eyes and look at the picture. Look into the eyes and spend a moment reaching for God through the eyes of the icon. Let go of any thoughts that emerge (imagine them floating away from the picture in bubbles). Keep your eyes very still and just focus on letting yourself be known by God through the icon's eyes. Remain in that place of God seeing and knowing you for about 15-20 minutes or until you feel ready to move on.
4. When you are ready, close your eyes and mentally envision the picture. Let it gradually fade into pure presence as you gradually become the icon. Then try to sense the eyes of the icon re-appearing as *your* eyes, God seeing the world through you. In your imagination, look out from the icon with the eyes of God and see what emerges. Rest in this for a moment and then gradually return to the room by becoming aware of your body, what is around you and then opening your eyes.

When you are finished, you might want to reflect on the following questions:

- What was it like to try to let yourself be seen and known by God?
- What did you feel?
- What happened when the eyes of the icon became your eyes?
- Was there any moment when you especially felt God's presence?
- What did you learn about yourself and/or God?

Praying with an object

Read the following steps a couple of times and then begin:

1. Select an object as the focal point for your prayer. This might be a nature object, sacred object or symbol. Place the object near you or position yourself where you can easily reach out and touch the object.
2. Close your eyes and express, in words or without, your desire to experience God's presence through the object and your desire to give up whatever might prevent or block that experience.
3. When you feel centered, open your eyes and look at the object for awhile.
4. Then close your eyes and touch the object, turn it over in your hands, feel its texture, smell it. If it makes a sound, listen to it; perhaps even taste it. Do this slowly, with your eyes closed. Use each of your senses to explore the object.
5. Now open your eyes and look at it again, this time from different angles. Turn it around and over. . . examine it closely without giving any thought to anything other than seeing the object.
6. When you have thoroughly explored your object, think about its functions. What is its place in the world? Give thanks to God for creating this object and the world.
7. Then consider possible symbolic associations. . . what things in your life and world come to mind as you reflect on this object? Pray that God will reveal what you can learn from it but don't worry about whether you get any big revelations or not. Just ask the question.
8. Ask whether the object suggests a course of action. . . sometimes it will, sometimes it won't.
9. Talk with God about what you have felt, discovered or learned.

When you have finished, you might want to reflect on these questions:

- What did you feel, discover or learn about yourself, the object and/or God?
- Did your meditation take you into a different way of being with God?

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Praying the Rosary

Praying the entire rosary means beginning at the crucifix with the Apostles Creed, Lord's Prayer (1st bead), three Hail Marys (next 3 beads) and a Gloria Patri (last single bead). You then go around the circle three times (once for each set of Mysteries) repeating Hail Marys on each of the ten beads and the Lord's Prayer on the single beads. However, I recommend you begin with just one of the mysteries, either the joyful (especially in Advent) or sorrowful (especially in Lent) to start. You can also use the Nativity, Agony in the Garden, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Descent of the Holy Spirit.

Once you are ready to begin your selected mystery, pause for a moment before each decade (set of ten beads) to read and recall the event. Then begin saying the Hail Marys while simultaneously meditating on the event. This will feel rather awkward, like rubbing your stomach and patting your head at the same time! But hang in there. Eventually the recitation of the prayers will fall into the background and you can focus on the event. The prayers will become automatic and will occupy that part of your mind that wants to think about something else and distract you from focusing on the event. Sometimes it helps to envision a picture of the event and hold that in your mind. Go slowly, breathe deeply and relax into the prayer space.

The Joyful Mysteries:

- The annunciation of Jesus's birth of Mary by Gabriel
- The visitation of Mary to Elizabeth before John the Baptist's birth
- The nativity (birth of the Christ child)
- The presentation of Jesus in the temple
- Finding Jesus in the temple amazing temple leaders with his wisdom

The Sorrowful Mysteries:

- Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane
- Scourging at the pillar during the trial
- Crowning of Jesus with the crown of thorns; mocking his kingship
- Carrying Jesus's cross to Golgotha
- Crucifixion

The Glorious Mysteries

- Resurrection of Jesus
- Ascension of Jesus
- Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
- Assumption of Mary into heaven
- Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven

The Hail Mary prayer said at each bead is:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

The Gloria Patri is:

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

For more resources on understanding, praying, and creatively approaching the rosary, please see: <https://pastoral.center/rosary-devotions>

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Journey to the Cross

SESSION TWO

Jesus is Condemned—The Journey Begins

Supplies needed for this session:

- Copies of the stations booklet or one of the recommended books for each participant
- Bibles
- newsprint and marker
- copies of handouts “Jesus is Condemned—The Persons Involved”
- copies of the closing prayer

Session Outline:

- ✠ Read together Stations of the Cross
- ✠ Starting the Journey
- 📖 The Trial
- ✠ Getting a Perspective
- ✠ Closing Prayer

✠ Read Stations of the Cross	<i>Large Group</i>	10 minutes
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Read aloud all fourteen stations using the stations booklet or similar text from another source.

✠ Starting the Journey	<i>Large Group</i>	15 minutes
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Our journey begins, as Jesus’ did, with confusion, fear, fatigue, lies, and love. Tonight’s discussion explores the feelings of the persons involved in his trial. Read together Mark 14:53–65, 15:1–5. Ask the group to note characters involved, their feelings and actions; list on newsprint.

📖 The Trial	<i>Small groups</i>	30 minutes
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Divide into five Character Clusters. Give each cluster an identity representing a character or group of characters involved in Jesus’ trial. If the class is small, omit Pilate’s group; it is important to have enough persons in each cluster for discussion to occur. If the class is very large, have two clusters representing each character or group of characters.

Cluster One: the priests, scribes, and Temple elders

Cluster Two: those who gave false witness

Cluster Three: Peter and the absent disciples

Cluster Four: Pilate

Cluster Five: the guards

Using the handout sheet “Jesus is Condemned—The Persons Involved”, give members of each cluster information pertaining to their character(s). Go over the directions labeled “Before You Begin Your Discussion” and the discussion questions themselves. Allow 10-15 minutes for discussion. *The purpose of the Character Groups is to familiarize persons with their assigned characters.*

At the end of this time, break up the clusters and form Trial Groups, having one or more representatives of each character in each group. (If your session is only one hour long, omit this step.) Remind persons to stay in the role of their character, and discuss from their various viewpoints: **What should be done with this man Jesus?** *The purpose of the Trial Groups is for characters to discuss strategies for dealing with Jesus.* Encourage lively discussion.

✿ Getting a Perspective	<i>Large Group</i>	30 minutes
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End the role play by asking persons to stand up and move their chairs into a circle. If there is time, allow each group to report on their discussion. Discuss in the large group:

- + What feelings did you experience as you portrayed your character?
- + How did the characters’ actions affect the outcome?
- + How did you feel about Jesus?
- + How are these situations similar to those we encounter today?
- + What can we learn about the nature and consequences of sin?
- + About our own responsibility?

✝ Closing Prayer

End the session with the closing prayer such as the one found on the handout.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God,

who gave us your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross,

and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy:

Help us to die daily to sin,

that we may live with him forever in the joy of his resurrection;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and forever.

Amen.

JESUS IS CONDEMNED—THE PERSONS INVOLVED

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The high priest, chief priests, elders, and scribes

You believe the Church was founded by God. You are faithful servants who are loyal to your Church and wish to protect her from this rabble-rouser who will get you all into trouble with the Roman government. Among you, there are a variety of secret motives. Some of you are motivated by self-interest; you do not wish to change a system which works to your comfort and advantage. Others are intrigued by the new ideas this person offers. As church leaders, it is up to you to bring order and safety into this very dangerous situation. If only you could be sure what charges to bring against him!

Before you begin your discussion:

- + Read through the information listed above; ask for clarification if needed.
- + Close your eyes and imagine you are this character.
- + Examine your feelings, your hopes for what will happen next.

When everyone in your group is ready, discuss the following questions. Use “I statements” (*I feel*_____. *I think*_____.) to make sure you take on the personality of your character.

Discussion Questions for Character Clusters

- What do we want to happen?
- How can we make sure things go the way we want?

Discussion Question for Trial Groups

- What should be done with this man Jesus?

JESUS IS CONDEMNED—THE PERSONS INVOLVED

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Those who gave false testimony

You have some acquaintance with the accused; some have seen and heard him, and some have listened to the reports of others. All of you have something to say; your testimony does not agree. Some say this man was a teacher; others say he was a healer or an exorcist who cast out demons. Some of you say that he was planning to destroy the beloved Temple. You heard him say he would tear it down and build another one by magic, without using his hands. You have misinterpreted his words, but it is important to make sure no one thinks you are as rebellious as this criminal. This is your moment to shine; you have a chance to speak in front of important leaders. Everyone hears you and responds.

Before you begin your discussion:

- + Read through the information listed above; ask for clarification if needed.
- + Close your eyes and imagine you are this character.
- + Examine your feelings, your hopes for what will happen next.

When everyone in your group is ready, discuss the following questions. Use “I statements” (*I feel* _____. *I think* _____.) to make sure you take on the personality of your character.

Discussion Questions for Character Clusters

- What do we want to happen?
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Discussion Question for Trial Groups

- What should be done with this man Jesus?