

## Faith Under Fire Study 6: *In The Garden*

by Lt. Ashley Koebel

### The Story

The olive trees were a welcome sight to see. The cool of the night enveloped him. It was refreshing. Peter stepped over the mangled root protruding from the ground to come beside his teacher. He gently placed a hand on his shoulder knowing this had been a difficult week. The men made eye-contact, and then Jesus placed his hand on Peter's, "thank you." Peter smiled, nodded and let go, slowing his pace to wait for his brother, Andrew.

These had been some exhausting days. There was not a solitary day with Jesus that had not been tiring for Peter and the disciples, but these days had been different. Where to begin? Some of the men said it began when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. You would think people would roll out the red carpet, but there was a massive mix of emotions. There were those who were ready to make him king, and those who were ready to have him killed. Two of the disciples had already reported receiving offers from religious leaders to trap Jesus. Jesus had a loyal following though. No one would ever betray him. At least, the thought was unthinkable.

To make Peter's mind a little more clouded, as usual, Jesus said some strange things tonight. If only he were more straightforward! He always spoke in parables. The disciples would try to understand, discuss and debate, and then Jesus would enlighten them later. During dinner earlier, Jesus had said something about betrayal. Peter was sure he was not speaking literally, but it was another one of his parables.

Peter would have to ponder what Jesus meant by that betrayal thing later. His teacher motioned to him. Jesus had already called over James and John. Peter met the three toward the front of their group. It almost went without saying that Jesus was going to call these three further. He had done it before. The other time had been miraculous. Peter wondered what was in store now.

James, John and Peter followed Jesus closely. They were all so exhausted. Jesus was exhausted too. Peter watched as Jesus' graceful demeanor was somewhat changed. That's what a lack of sleep and constant celebrity can do to you. Jesus foot brushed one of the many protruding olive tree roots. It was not enough to knock him over, but it was enough to throw his balance. Peter had seen Jesus trip before, he was with the guy 24-7. It was bound to happen. Each time Peter had seen it, Jesus had burst into convulsive laughter. Jesus didn't look like he was in the mood for laughing right now. Jesus turned and said the words the disciples could practically recite, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

It always happened like this. The twelve went to a solitary place, the three when further, and finally Jesus went on his own to be with his Father. What had never happened before was this: Jesus said, *“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”* Peter began to feel nervous. Peter had never believed that all of this craziness began when Jesus raised Lazarus. He completely believed it had all started when Jesus chose to leave the safe country-side and journey to Jerusalem. He had warned him not to, but Jesus said something about his Father. Why was Jesus here? Had he finally pushed himself too far? As Jesus walked away, Peter worried, but his eyes quickly became heavy and he closed them just for a minute.

## The Scripture

### ***Matthew 26:36-41(NIV)***

*36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”*

*39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*

*40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. 41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

## Going to the Garden

Most people try to make space between their troubles and themselves. It really is a survival tactic. If a threat is perceived, you either disarm the threat, or remove yourself from the situation. It makes perfect sense. It is usually the right thing to do. Going to the garden is usually a peaceful thing. What about when the garden is on fire?

Each of the stories in this Bible study series highlights the life and faith of particular characters. Abraham believed that God would give him a legacy. Hannah hoped enough to lay her heart out on the line and pray. Jehoshaphat believed God was the strongest ally he could have. Nehemiah left everything he knew because God put a vision in his heart. Paul, though a captive and a prisoner, chose to be faithful to a centurion that could not understand his faith. Each of these stories has fire in them. Each of these stories has faith.

## **Hold Faith's Hand**

There have been times in life that I have felt my faith weaken. There have been times in life that I have seen the faith of others all but disappear. At least, that is how it feels, and that is how it appears. Jesus, in Gethsemane teaches us that faith is not about a feeling or an appearance. Real faith doesn't exist without fire. Real faith only exists when someone is willing to walk through the fire.

Life is generally good for me. I have no complaints, but I do have times that stretch me. I, like you, have experienced loss and grief I cannot explain. But, following the example of Jesus I hope and pray that together you and I will both hold Faith's hand and walk through the fire. Let us follow the lead of the saints who went before us. Fire is where our faith becomes real. Let us walk on.

***“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matthew 26:41***