

The Sound of Silence **Luke 23:50–56**

The Big Idea: When God seems absent and his plan feels unfinished, faith is often demonstrated in humble obedience to what we know in extraordinary, unseen acts of faith.

Introduction: In our modern era, we are accustomed to a story moving from tragedy to resolution in as little as 60 minutes. But Luke’s Gospel slows us down at a surprising place, a pivotal place, perhaps the most important and most difficult place, the day between the cross and the resurrection. Of all the possible days to make us pause and wait, this one makes us anxious. Here’s what has happened.

- Jesus has died.
- The disciples are scattered.
- All hope seems buried.

Luke tells us that Joseph of Arimathea takes Jesus’ body down and places it in a tomb. The women carefully watch where He is laid. They prepare spices for Jesus’ body and then they go home and keep the Sabbath. It’s that simple. It’s that profound.

And then, the story stops. Whaaaaat?

- There is no resurrection yet.
- There are no angels in the garden delivering messages of good news.
- There is just awful, painful, excruciating silence.

For the disciples, this moment must have felt like the end of everything they hoped for. The story of Jesus seemed unfinished, but it has come to a screeching, undeniable halt.

Yet Luke is teaching us something very important in this text. Our faith doesn’t always have to look dramatic as in healing the sick, perplexing the Pharisees or raising the dead. Sometimes our faith looks like simple obedience and patient trust in God when he seems so very, very silent.

What does it look like? Well...this -

First: Faith Acts When Others Do Not. vs 50-51.

Notice several things with me please.

- a) Luke introduces Joseph of Arimathea as a “good and righteous man” – 50

All four gospels mention Joseph but we are unsure of where Arimathea is. It may be Ramathaim-zophim, the hometown of the prophet Samuel, 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

- b) What we know about Joseph is that he did not agree with the Sanhedrin's council to condemn Jesus – 51
- c) Luke notes he was “*looking for the kingdom of God.*” This may mean he was particularly moved when Jesus announced “the kingdom of God is near” in Mark 1:15.

“*The kingdom of God*” refers to God’s reign, his rule and authority breaking into the world to restore creation and govern His people in the way he originally intended in Eden. The OT celebrated the vision of God’s kingdom ruling over everything.

Psalm 103:19 - *The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.*

d) Other than this moment, right here, we don’t know a lot about Joseph. What we do know is that when almost everyone else has disappeared from the scene, Joseph steps forward in a very public, risky way.

John 12:42 tells us that “many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it...”

This must have been true of Joseph, at one time or another, but now, in a very important moment, Joseph steps forward, identifies himself as a disciple of Jesus and cares for the Lord in a unique way.

APP: This is what faith is, isn’t it? It’s the Holy Spirit moving you to believe and act in a way that is often contrary to the world around you. And the way isn’t always dramatic. Simply faithful.

Second: Faith Acts When the Future Is Uncertain. v 52.

- a) Imagine the circumstance. Joseph goes to Pilate to ask for Jesus’ body – 52.
- Pilate had just turned Jesus over to a mob.
 - The Romans had just crucified Jesus.

Such a text proves that:

- Jesus was dead
- Joseph acted bravely

Mark 15:43 - *Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.*

- At this point, he’s publicly identifying with a crucified criminal.
- This request risks his reputation, influence, and perhaps, most of all, his safety.

- There's no going back.

Matthew 10:32 - *So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven...*

- b) At the very moment when Jesus and his followers appear defeated and scattered, Joseph steps forward.

APP: Is this what “looking for the kingdom of God” looks like?

Hebrews 11:1 - *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

APP: How does this “*looking or the kingdom of God*” by faith affect my response to bad news, to marriage difficulties, hopelessness with a child, switching jobs, etc. For Joseph, it meant acting in faith when there was no human reason to do so.

What does that mean?

- We should be faithful in the only moment we have which is the present.
- We should hope in the future God has promised, regardless of circumstances.
- Our eschatology should shape our ethics. (Our belief should form our behavior)

IMP: It means that faith does not wait until circumstances look hopeful. How might that translate into your life now?

Third: Faith Demonstrates Devotion Simply for Jesus. vs 53-56.

- a) Joseph takes down the body of Jesus – 53a
- b) He wraps it in linen and places it in a new tomb cut in stone – 5b
- c) The women follow and observe the location of the tomb - 55
- 4) They prepare spices and ointments for his burial - 56

This is all hard to watch. From the disciples' perspective, Jesus is dead and their mission is over. Yet their actions express reverence for, faith in and love for Jesus. More, their devotion is offered without any expectation of resurrection.

IMP: Think about that. This is what devotion without expectation, just love for Jesus, looks like.

APP: How might we apply this? May I offer two thoughts?

- Faithfulness is about a person, not a plan. Christianity is a relationship, not a strategy.
- Love for Jesus expresses itself through simple acts of private, daily devotion.

Fourth: Faith Obeys What It Knows to Obey. v 56b.

- a) It's true the women prepare burial spices for Jesus' body – 56a.

b) Yet Luke notes that they then rest on the Sabbath – 56b

Wait. Wait. Wait a minute. (That’s how I felt studying this passage). Something monumental is happening here.

c) Think about this Sabbath

- A Sabbath occurs every 7 days, making 52 Sabbaths per year.
- Jesus was about 33 years old when he was crucified.
- That means he lived through 1,716 Sabbaths.
- But Israel enjoyed more than 80,000 Sabbaths.
- And this is the last one.

So, the Sabbath in Luke 23:56 is not just another Sabbath.

It sits between two world-changing events:

- The finished work of redemption occurred on Friday
- The new creation starts on Sunday
- Then on one Friday afternoon, Jesus said: “*It is finished.*”
- And on the Sabbath that followed, the world rested beside the completed work of the cross.
- On Sunday morning, the new creation began.

So.....these women aren’t just resting *on* the *sabbath*. They’re resting *in* the *Sabbath*.

Mark 2:28 – *The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.*

Matthew 11:28 - *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Colossians 2:16-17 - *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

Hebrews 4:9 - *So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.*

Jesus is our Sabbath

That’s the *theological thought*. But what about the *practical thought*?

APP: The passage ends with silence and waiting. How do you like silence? How do you like waiting? The cross was Jesus’ cross. These 3 days are the disciples cross.

But....and this is important though hard. The women’s grief does not cancel their obedience. Even in sorrow they continue to honor God’s commands. Even in confusion, they continue to love Jesus.

Potential correlation? There are all kinds of places in the Bible where God is absent, yet present. It's an important truth for us to see and trust.

For instance, the book of Esther doesn't mention God by name, but he is everywhere.

- The words God, Lord (YHWH), or prayer do not appear.
 - There is no direct reference to worship, sacrifice, or the temple.
 - God is never addressed or spoken to.
 - And yet, there are a series of providential 'accidents' (Well glory!)
- Esther becomes queen at the precise moment the Jewish people are threatened.
 - Mordecai overhears the assassination plot against the king.
 - The king cannot sleep and reads the record of Mordecai's loyalty.
 - Haman is forced to honor the very man he intended to destroy.
 - The decree against the Jews is ultimately reversed.

How did this happen. Well, at one point in the book, Mordecai says, *"Relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place..."* (Esther 4:14) **That other place is Heaven!**

d) The Bible repeatedly connects faith with patient waiting.

Lamentations 3:25–26 - The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

Psalm 46:10 - Be still and know that I am God. (Bryan recently led us in a study of Psalm 46 during our staff meeting).

Psalm 27:14 - Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Psalm 37:7 - Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him...

APP: We often live between promise and fulfillment, already and not yet. In those moments, faith looks like obeying Jesus in silence while waiting.

Don't diminish those moments. That's actually extraordinary faith. You know this is true from your own experience. God is often doing His deepest work when heaven seems silent, and you are living by faith.

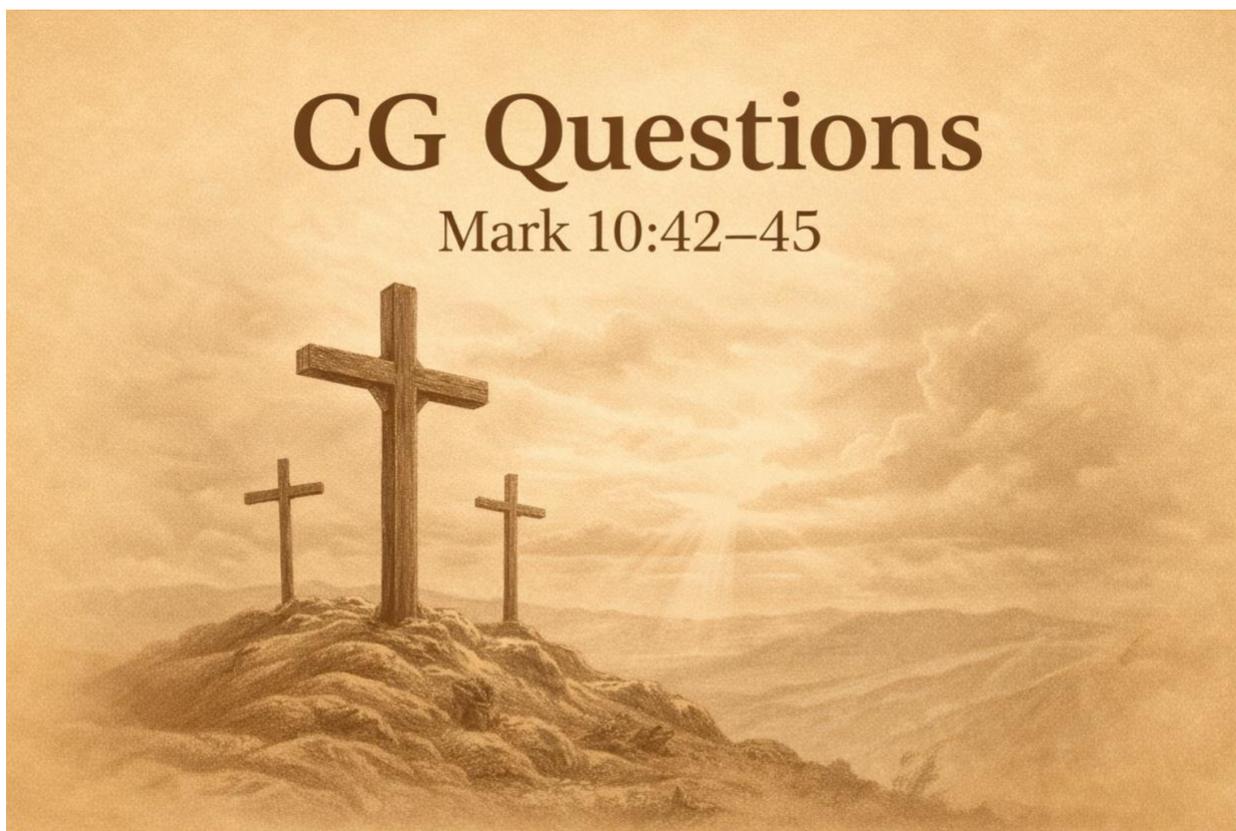
Conclusion: Luke records what may be the most silent moment in the whole gospel story. Jesus is in the tomb. The disciples are grieving. Heaven is not only quiet. It may be stymied.

- Yet the silence is not God's abandonment.
- It is the stillness before the great gettin' up morning of the resurrection.

Stop here and think about those moments in your life. I think we can benefit from faith of Joseph and several women whose actions demonstrate -

- quiet courage,
- simple devotion, and
- faithful obedience

while waiting for God to finish his great work. And they have no idea that next Sunday is about to come!!!



Observation – What does this passage say?

1. Where are we in the story of Jesus' life and ministry in this passage?
2. How does Luke describe Joseph of Arimathea in verses 50–51? What characteristics stand out about him?
3. What actions does Joseph take in verse 52 after Jesus dies?
4. According to verse 53, how does Joseph treat Jesus' body?
5. What do the women do after Jesus is buried (vv. 55–56)?
6. What detail does Luke include about the women's obedience at the end of the passage?

Interpretation – What does this passage mean?

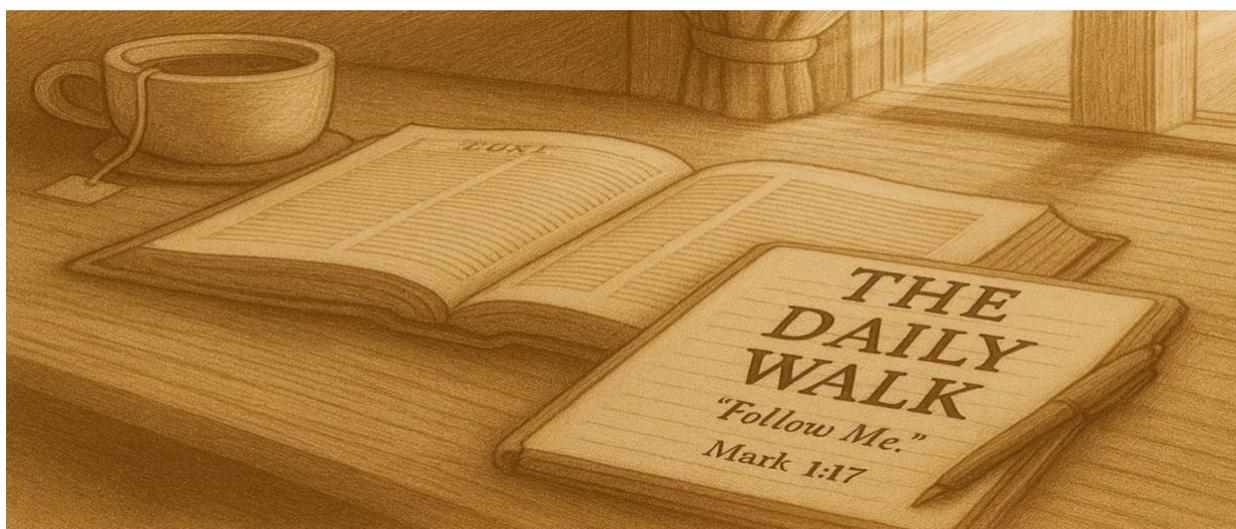
7. Why might Luke emphasize that Joseph had not consented to the council's decision?
8. What does it mean that Joseph was "looking for the kingdom of God"?
9. Why would asking Pilate for Jesus' body require courage?
10. From the disciples' perspective, how might this moment have felt like the end of the story?
11. What does the women's obedience to the Sabbath reveal about their faith during a time of grief and uncertainty?

Correlation – What other Bible passages endorse this interpretation?

12. Read Hebrews 11:1. How does Joseph's action illustrate faith in something not yet seen?
13. Read Matthew 10:32–33. How does Joseph's public identification with Jesus reflect this teaching?
14. Read Lamentations 3:25–26. How does this passage speak to waiting for God's salvation?
15. Read Psalm 46:10. What does it mean to "be still" in a season when God seems silent?

Application – How do I live this passage?

16. Have you ever experienced a time when God seemed silent or His plans felt unfinished?
Can you share it?
17. What helped sustain your faith in that time?
18. Where in your life right now might God be calling you to remain faithful even when the outcome is uncertain?
19. What might it look like for you to identify openly with Christ in your current environment?
20. How can we remain faithful in ordinary obedience during seasons of waiting?
21. How does remembering the resurrection strengthen your trust in God during difficult times?



Monday. Read: Luke 23:50–51

Think. Joseph of Arimathea is described as a man who was “looking for the kingdom of God.” Even when Jesus had died and hope appeared buried, Joseph still belonged to God’s kingdom.

Reflect. Waiting is not wasted time in the Christian life. Joseph’s years of waiting prepared him for this moment of faith.

Apply. Where are you currently waiting for God to act? Ask the Lord to shape your expectations around His kingdom rather than your immediate circumstances.

Pray. Father, help me live with my eyes fixed on Your kingdom even when I cannot see what You are doing.

Tuesday. Read: Luke 23:52

Think. Joseph approaches Pilate and asks for Jesus’ body. This act publicly identifies him with a crucified man.

Reflect. Following Christ sometimes requires courage precisely when His cause looks weakest.

Apply. Where might God be inviting you to identify openly with Christ right now? Look for one opportunity this week to acknowledge Christ openly in conversation or action.

Pray. Lord Jesus, give me courage to stand with You when it costs something.

Wednesday. Read: Luke 23:53

Think. Joseph wraps Jesus’ body and lays it in a tomb. From his perspective, the story appears finished.

Reflect. God’s greatest work was unfolding at the exact moment the disciples believed everything was lost.

Apply. Can you think of a time when you later realized God was working in a situation where you once saw only loss?. Entrust one unresolved situation in your life to God today.

Pray. Father, help me trust Your work even when I cannot yet see the outcome.

Thursday. Read: Luke 23:55–56a

Think. The women prepare spices to honor Jesus. Their love for Him continues even when their understanding is incomplete.

Reflect. Devotion to Christ often expresses itself in simple acts of faithfulness like Joseph and these women exercised.

Apply. How can your everyday life demonstrate love for Christ? Serve someone today as an expression of your love for Jesus.

Pray. Lord Jesus, let my love for You shape my daily actions.

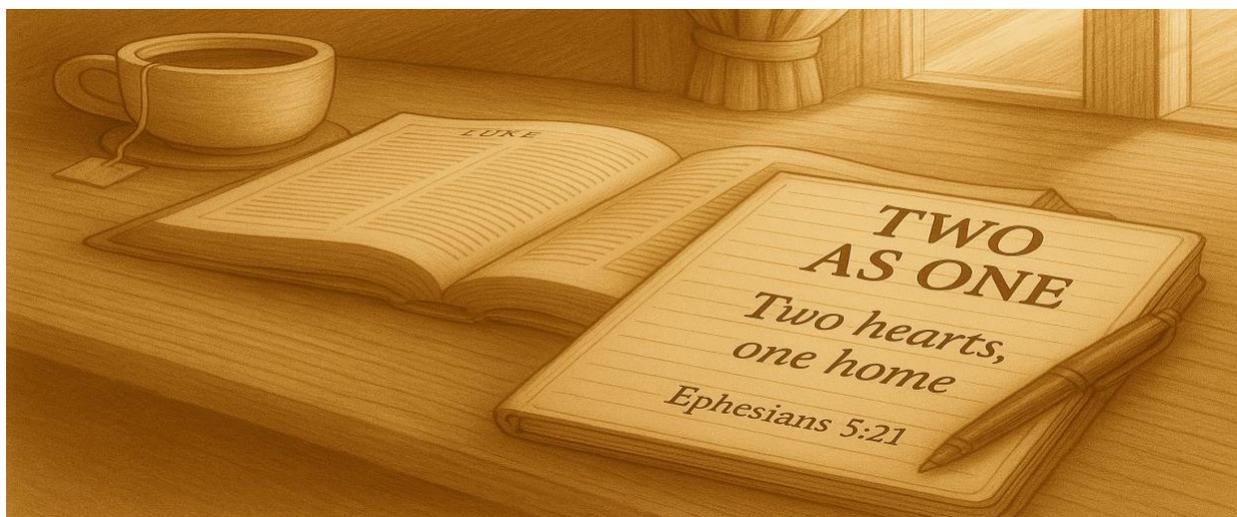
Friday. Read: Luke 23:56b

Think. After they prepare the spices, the women rest on the Sabbath according to God's commandment. Even in grief, they do what they know is right to do and continue to obey God.

Reflect. Our faith often lives between promise and fulfillment, doesn't it? The disciples had no idea resurrection morning was coming.

Apply. Where in your life do you feel as though you are living between those two moments? Continue doing what you know is right while trusting God with what remains unfinished.

Pray. Father, strengthen my faith while I wait for Your purposes to unfold.



Monday. Read: Luke 23:50–51

Think. Joseph lived as someone who was “looking for the kingdom of God.” What a glorious perspective.

Reflect. Every home, even ours, is shaped by what it hopes for most. That's a revealing thought.

Apply. What does it look like for your relationship to pursue God's kingdom together? Discuss one practical way your home does not reflect God's kingdom. Discuss one way it can do so this week.

Pray. Lord, shape our relationship around Your kingdom and Your purposes.

Tuesday. Read: Luke 23:52

Think. Joseph courageously identifies with Jesus at a very scary time. This means that...

Reflect. Faith sometimes requires courage when circumstances appear discouraging.

Apply. Where might you as a couple need courage to follow Christ right now? Encourage each other in your commitment to follow Christ faithfully and then pray for each other daily.

Pray Father, strengthen our courage to follow Christ together.

Wednesday. Read: Luke 23:53

Think. Joseph honors Jesus even when the future, his future, appears uncertain. (He publicly identified with Jesus after his death. Does this mean, only after his death?)

Reflect. Trust grows when couples remind each other of God's past faithfulness. That's a great thought we should regularly practice. (Teana and I often say to Teana, "Remember when God...?")

Apply. What is one moment when you clearly saw God's hand in your lives? Share that story together today.

Pray. Lord, help us remember Your faithfulness when we face uncertainty.

Thursday. Read: Luke 23:55-56a

Think. The women demonstrate devotion through their actions and Sabbath rest. They do what they know to do, and what they can do, even though it appears insignificant.

Reflect. Faith often grows through shared practices like those on the Discipleship Wheel.

Apply. How can you strengthen your spiritual rhythms in your relationship? Are there particular spokes on the DW you can fulfil together. Define that and then practice it/them together this week.

Pray. Jesus, deepen our practical devotion to You and strengthen our unity by doing so.

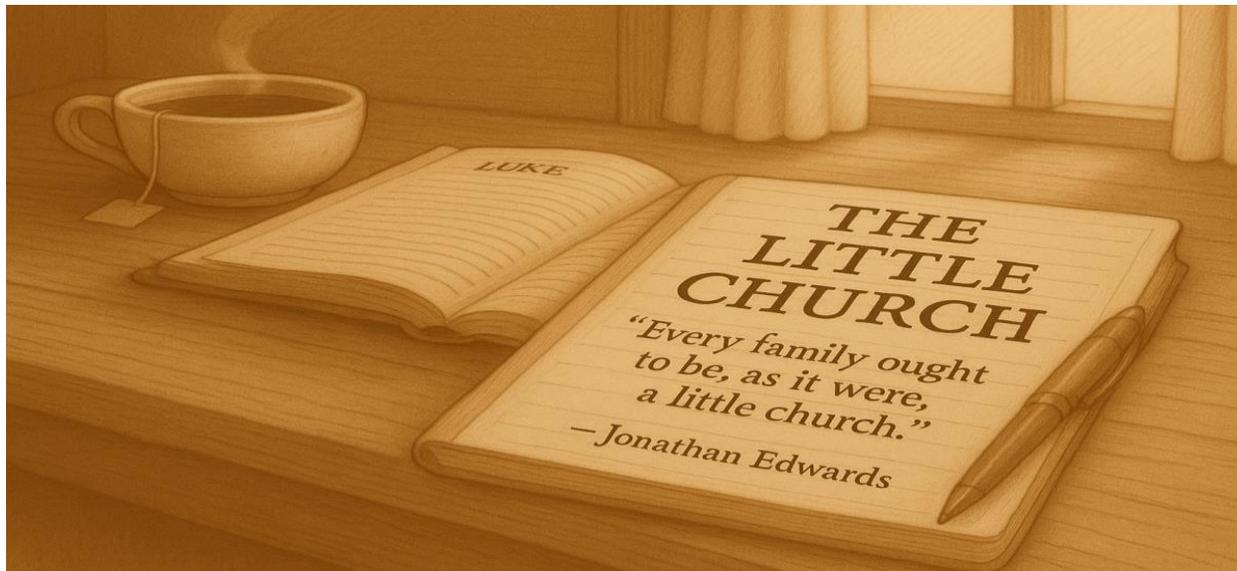
Friday. Read: Luke 23:56b

Think. After they have done all they can, the women rest according to God's command, not knowing Jesus is their Sabbath and that he will be resurrected on Sunday.

Reflect. Waiting, though it may be the hardest part, is often an essential part of God's work in shaping our faith.

Apply. Name one area where God is inviting you as a couple to trust Him with something unfinished? Encourage each other to trust God's timing as you wait on him to act.

Pray. Father, help us trust You as a couple while we wait on the answers to our prayers.



Monday. Read: Luke 23:50–51

Think. In this passage, we meet Joseph, a man who was waiting for God's kingdom.

Reflect. Joseph trusted God even when things looked confusing and he didn't know the future.

Apply. What helps us trust God when we do not understand what He is doing? Today we can remind each other that God's plans are always good, even though we don't understand them.

Pray. Lord, help our family trust Your kingdom.

Tuesday. Read: Luke 23:52

Think. Joseph very bravely asks Pilate for Jesus' body.

Reflect. This means that Joseph shows courage by standing with Jesus even though he didn't think Jesus could help him.

Apply. When might it be hard for us to stand for what we believe? Today, let's God to help us follow Jesus with courage. Let's also encourage each other where we know it is hard to obey God.

Pray. Jesus, help our family be brave when we follow You.

Wednesday. Read: Luke 23:53

Think. Joseph lovingly places Jesus' body in his own tomb. (Jesus is the only person who has ever borrowed a tomb. He knew he would not be in it when Joseph needed it.)

Reflect. At that moment the story looked finished, but we know that God was still working.

Apply. Have we ever experienced something that looked bad at first but later turned out good? Today we can trust that God is working even when we cannot see it.

Pray. Father, help our family trust You and to encourage each other.

Thursday. Read: Luke 23:55–56a

Think. The women show their love for Jesus through their actions of preparing spices for his body.

Reflect. Loving Jesus changes the way we treat people, in and outside of our home.

Apply. How can our family show love for Jesus today? How can we show Jesus' love for each other today. Let's choose one way to serve someone today.

Pray. Lord, help our family show love for You.

Friday. Read: Luke 23:56b

Think. On the Sabbath, the women rest and wait, even though waiting can be very hard.

Reflect. Yet, even when the story felt unfinished, God was preparing for resurrection morning.

Apply. How does knowing the resurrection was coming help us trust God today? Today we thank God that His story is never finished.

Pray. Lord, help our family trust You while we wait.

Note: Parents, when discussing the Apply portion of the family devotion, it might be good for each of you to reveal some area where your faith is being tested, etc. In each Apply question, you go first and demonstrate to your children how you are trusting God between Friday and Sunday.