

## Introduction to the series

Many schools are increasingly interested in exploring Christianity as a world faith in religious education and collective worship. In [Where in the World?](#) (BRF, 2018), we sketched out some of the many ways Christians around the world express and live out their faith. The study of church buildings provides another useful window into understanding this multicultural and international phenomenon followed by roughly one-third of people on the planet.

Church buildings reflect a country's history, its human geography and the beliefs and traditions of that branch of the Christian world that uses them. Across the world, many churches of a similar tradition ('denomination') will show international similarities in design and usage, while others reflect their local cultures and communities. Each has a story to tell that reflects something of the Jesus story that has affected billions of people through the centuries.

Each of the churches in this series supplements others that can be found in [Churches from around the World](#) (BRF, 2019).

As with the collection of [crosses from around the world](#), the overall aim remains the same:

- to enable children and adults to see churches through the eyes of other cultures and traditions;
- to prompt discussion and debate on why they continue to be significant places for so many communities;
- to explore how Christians in a wide variety of places, different times in history and in different circumstances, have lived out their faith together using buildings like this.

## Props

- The images supplied here, as a slideshow.

## Preparation: feeling lonely

*Show this picture of the kneeling Jesus:*

[Gethsemane garden sculpture \(photo by Roger Mills\)](#)

Can you remember a time when you felt really lonely? Nobody understood you. Your friends and family had let you down, and you felt completely on your own. I hope you've never had that experience, but if you have I hope that things got better and that you found someone to talk to. If you're feeling a bit like that at the moment, then please, find somebody trustworthy to talk to, and do share what's going on. We weren't made to be lonely. We need someone else to understand us.

Today's story is all about someone feeling like that.



## Development: the garden

Jesus was really worried. He knew something bad was about to happen to him. Jesus and his friends had just shared a meal, and now they'd come out to the garden of Gethsemane for some fresh air - and because Jesus needed some space to pray. His friends didn't have much of a clue about what was going on, even though Jesus had told them his enemies were gathering to capture him. But his friends, Simon Peter, James, John and the others, couldn't believe it. Arrest Jesus? No one would dare! 'If they try, we'll fight for you!' they said, waving their swords.

### [Gethsemane garden \(photo by Rachel Hudson\)](#)

Jesus shook his head, asked his friends to keep watch and went off to pray in the darkness.

'Father God', he prayed. 'Is this really what you want? Is there no other way? Really?'

As he prayed, he could see the place up by the temple where every year, a priest would bring out a goat to sacrifice for all the people. Was something like that about to happen to him? His enemies in the temple wanted him dead, because he was too much trouble.

'Please, Father God,' he prayed, 'if there's another way, let me take it.'

He was trembling, sweating as he prayed, concentrating hard, sorting out his thoughts. No one else knew what it was like to be Jesus. No one knew as much as he did about what was going to happen. The priests running the temple would stop at nothing to get rid of him, and the Romans would be incredibly cruel. Very soon, his enemies would come and arrest him, there would be a trial, torture... and worse. It would be horrible. Should he run away? That would be easy. Take the road out of town, under cover of darkness. Go north back to Galilee, where he had family. People would understand.

But Jesus kept praying, praying for his friends, for his people and everyone else in the world who needed to know God's love. And that wouldn't happen if Jesus ran away from his enemies.

'Very well, Father God. If that's the only way, I'll take it.'

He got up, dusted himself down and went back to his friends, who had fallen asleep nearby. In the distance, Jesus could hear a crowd of men coming closer, talking loudly, some bearing flaming torches.

'Hey, wake up!' said Jesus. 'It's time to make some very good choices... very quickly! Start praying now!'

What happened next? Some temple guards turned up, and there was a confrontation. Jesus' friends ran away, and Jesus was arrested, taken and put on trial. The rest is a story for another time. But as for the place where this happened, the garden of Gethsemane: thousands of people visit it every year, to see the place where Jesus prayed and to get a sense of what it must have felt to be so alone and so frightened. But Jesus didn't run away; he stood his ground and made sure his friends got



away safe.

There's a big church in Gethsemane now, built to remember what happened.

[Church of All Nations, Gethsemane - exterior \(photo\)](#)

Inside the church, the ceiling and windows are dark blue and purple, to give a sense of the darkness surrounding Jesus that night.

[Church of All Nations, Gethsemane - interior \(photo by Fliss Tunnard\)](#)

There's also a place that some believe to be the spot where Jesus was kneeling and praying, on bare rock. And so, remembering his story, people come to this spot to pray as well.

[Church of All Nations, Gethsemane - rock altar \(photo by Roger Mills\)](#)

Gethsemane isn't a cheerful place. But it is calm, like the weather after a fierce storm has passed. Christians believe that somewhere here, the Son of God was in such pain, knowing what was going to happen. But he stuck with it, for the sake of his people. And in the end, he won.

I wonder...

- What does it feel like to hear this part of the story?
- What questions might you have for his disciples, who fell asleep when Jesus asked them to keep watch?
- What sorts of prayers might people pray when they come here, like this man in the picture?

[Gethsemane garden - man praying \(photo by Jeremy Cooper\)](#)

Sometimes, life can be very difficult. We face hard choices and temptations, having to choose between doing the easy thing and doing the right thing. And there seems to be no one who can help us with that choice. But Christians believe there is someone, because Jesus knew exactly what it was like, and they believe Jesus is the human face of God.

There's a really old American gospel song that goes:

*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen,  
Nobody knows but Jesus.  
Nobody knows the trouble I've seen,  
Glory, Hallelujah.*

And that is why, when Christians feel full of sorrow, they pray to Jesus. Because he's been there, and he can give people courage, to find a way through to the other side.



## **After**

Let's think about people we know who are struggling with difficult times and difficult choices.

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, be with all those who are finding life difficult, and be their light through the darkness. And if we're feeling alone in the dark as well, help us to find a friend we can talk to. Amen.

## **Information for teachers**

This creative (and selective) retelling of the gospel narrative focuses on the dilemmas faced by Jesus prior to his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane. Its location in Jerusalem is now an international pilgrimage site featuring the Church of All Nations, which was completed in 1924 as a symbol of hope and reconciliation after World War I.