1. Jesus is condemned

"I was expecting the death sentence. I've been getting under their skins for a while: speaking up for the poor and the down-trodden; widows and orphans; tax-collectors and prostitutes - anyone at the bottom of the pile. I've been openly critical of the religious leaders. They hated my direct style: it challenged their authority and power. Things were bound to come to a head sooner or later and it suited them to get rid of me."

We can be quick to condemn people without even bothering to get to know them. First impressions are everything. Anyone who doesn't match up to the image can be cast aside.
Lord, help us to see the good in everyone; to look past appearances; to be less quick to judge and condemn.

2. Jesus carries the cross

"I could hardly stand under the weight of the cross, it was so heavy. I was thinking about everything that had happened: the mock trial; the mob clamouring for my blood; the rough treatment by the soldiers; and, worst of all, being betrayed by Judas, one of my best friends, and abandoned by those closest to me. When it came to the crunch, Peter, my right-hand man, denied three times over that he even knew me! Recalling all this made it even harder to bear."

We can be so wrapped up in our own lives that we don't notice the needs of those around us. We prefer a fun night out to staying in with a friend who's feeling down. We see depressing news reports and just switch to another channel.
Lord, make us more aware of the problems and needs that burden our friends, family and all your people, near and far.

3. Jesus falls for the first time

"It was hard to carry the cross: it was such an awkward shape and unbelievably heavy. I was already weak from the beatings, but the soldiers kept pushing me along. All of a sudden I lost my footing and stumbled, fell straight to the ground. My knees were cut, my hands badly grazed. The pain was awful, but they just laughed and pushed me roughly, shouting at me to get up again. That was just the start: it was nothing compared to what was to come later."

There's nothing more humiliating than falling down in public. We 'fall' every time we look stupid in front of our classmates or our friends; every time we're made fun of for not saying or doing the 'right' thing or not wearing the 'right' clothes; every time we don't match up.
Lord, help us to look with kindness on people who don't fit in and to be there to support others if they fall.

4. Jesus comes face to face with his mother

"My mother has to look on, helpless, as I am jeered at, spat on, insulted, pushed around. How can she bear it? Yet she stands there calmly accepting everything that is happening, just as she accepted God's amazing request to give birth to a child. She was just a kid, little more than a girl herself. But she said 'yes' without hesitation and followed God's plan for her life. Now it's my turn to do as God asks and say 'yes' to my fate."

It's hard to let our parents down, to realise we've disappointed them. We know that they are always there for us, yet we long to make our own decisions and to have more space.
Lord, help us to see that they only want the best for us and to respond to their love with affection and respect.

5. Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross

"I'd just come in from the country, minding my own business, and before I knew what was happening, I was forced to carry the cross. I didn't want any part in it, but, hey, when a hulking great soldier is pointing a lance in your face, you don't stop to argue. So I picked up the cross, put it on my back and carried it up the hill for them. Man, it was some weight! I nearly fell down several times. By the end I couldn't even stand up straight. What I want to know is, why? What had this guy Jesus done to deserve such a horrible death? I know I should have spoken up for him. But I was afraid that they might turn on me, so I kept quiet."

How often do we see injustice being done and say nothing? A kid being picked on in the playground; someone being accused of something we know they haven't done; people being made fun of or left out just because they are different.
Lord, make us bolder to respond when others need our help.

6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

"I didn't stop to think whether the soldiers would hit me or push me away. I just had to do something. The blood was streaming down his face from the crown of thorns on his head. They'd pressed it down hard, so the spikes stuck right into his skin. He bore it so humbly, never made a fuss or tried to pull it off - maybe he didn't have the strength. I was standing quite close to him, so I used my veil to wipe away some of the blood and sweat. It was all I could do for him."

Are we bold enough to go against the crowd and make friends with someone who is unpopular and unloved? Or do we go along with everyone else so as not to lose face?
Lord, give us the strength to stand up for what is right and not worry about what other people will think.

7. Jesus falls for the second time

"As if the first time wasn't bad enough, now here I am falling down again. I had tried so hard to carry this heavy cross with dignity. But then I realised that I had to be utterly humiliated to fully appreciate the misery some people suffer. This way, I can look them in the eye and say: 'I understand your pain, I am one with you.'"

Looking a failure in front of others is a nightmare. The pain and embarrassment is unbelievable. And even when it's not you but someone else going through it, that's awful too. You feel so awkward. Do you laugh it off and pretend you haven't noticed to spare their feelings? Or do you look the other way?
Lord, inspire us to show true compassion to those who fall in whatever way. Teach us not to be judgemental, but to make use of the opportunity to show your love to them.

8. The women of Jerusalem weep for Jesus

"It was just so awful. Jesus was beaten and dragged along, made to carry his cross, treated with such disrespect by the soldiers, the crowd screaming: 'crucify him.' We couldn't bear to see him suffering. We tried to be brave, to accept what was happening, but then someone started to cry and that was it: we couldn't hold back the tears any longer. We all started weeping and wailing uncontrollably."

It's easy to go along with the crowd and get sucked in to their emotions - sometimes you don't even realise it's happening. And it's easy to say 'how awful' when you hear of someone's suffering without really letting it touch your heart. It takes a jolt to realise that true compassion means getting involved, getting your hands dirty, doing everything you can to help.
Lord, give us the grace to see through your eyes so that we may respond to the needs of others with love and compassion.

9. Jesus falls for the third time

"Could it get any worse? Now I've fallen down again and I can barely find the strength to pick myself up. The pain and humiliation are almost too much to bear. Last night, when I prayed alone in the garden, I asked my Father to release me from this burden, not to ask this of me. But even as the words left my lips, I knew that I had to go through with it. I knew what God already knew: that it had to be this way. Words alone would not have been enough to show my tremendous love for mankind. It had to be undignified, degrading, demoralising, pitiful. Nothing less would do."

Sometimes you think things just can't get any worse, you've reached rock bottom. And you have to face it on your own because friends and family don't understand what you're going through.
Lord, we know that you have promised to always be there for us, no matter what we do, no matter how bad things seem. But it's hard to believe that promise when we feel abandoned. Help us to trust you and to turn to you when times are tough.

10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes

"As if I hadn't already suffered enough, now they tear my clothes from me, leaving me naked and exposed. They taunt me, calling me a king, but now I am worse than the poorest beggar in the land. But all this must be endured to show them how much I loved them, how much I still love them, despite everything that has happened, every harsh word, every beating, every indignity."

We all want to look good, have the right clothes to wear, keep up with the latest fashion, fit in with the crowd. But there's a danger of the label taking over and hiding away our true identity. Underneath the clothes, who are you? Can you let the 'real you' shine through?
Lord, guide us when we decide what to wear so that we never value 'designer labels' more than caring for the needs of others. Help us to focus on what really matters.

11. Jesus is nailed to the cross

"I know I must find it in my heart to forgive my tormentors. They are only playing their part in this unfolding drama. But surely they know I am innocent of the charges against me, unlike the criminals who hang either side of me. One of them mocks me, urging me to call on God to save me if I really am His Son, but the other stops him, saying they deserve their fate. He asks for my mercy and forgiveness. I am touched by his humility - it will earn him a place in heaven today."

Often it's easier to stand by and say nothing, even when you know something is wrong: to hide your embarrassment with a joke or a throw-away remark. But there is another option: we can choose to speak out for what is right, just like the good thief on the cross.
Lord, we pray that we will always value the truth, even when voicing it comes at a cost to our own pride.

12. Jesus dies

"I've been hanging here for hours now in this scorching hot sun: a slow, agonising way to die. This thirst is unbearable. I call out for a drink but all they give me is vinegar, bitter tasting and sour, like the bitterness of the people who were so eager for my blood. Did they not realise that I only wanted the best for them, to bring them to the fullness of life, to free them from the chains that bind them, chains of resentment and hate? But now it is over. I give up my spirit to my Father in heaven. Tomorrow they will know how much I loved them and they will begin to understand."

When people let us down and we feel utterly alone we can glimpse a little of the suffering Jesus endured in his final moments on the cross. It seemed as though God had deserted him, but we know that without Jesus' death there could be no resurrection and no promise of eternal life.
Lord, when the problems of life seem to overwhelm us, remind us that tomorrow will bring a new day, full of new possibilities.

13. Jesus is taken down from the cross

"I'm from Arimathea - a Jewish town. I've been a follower of Jesus for a while now, but in secret. Okay, so I didn't join in with the other members of the Council when they turned against Jesus, but I was too scared for my own safety to stop them. Well maybe I didn't stand up for Jesus while he was still alive, but I can do something for him now. I plucked up my courage and went to Pilate to ask for the body. Pilate seemed surprised, but he said 'yes' - to be honest, I think he was feeling guilty about what he'd done. He knew that Jesus should never have been executed."

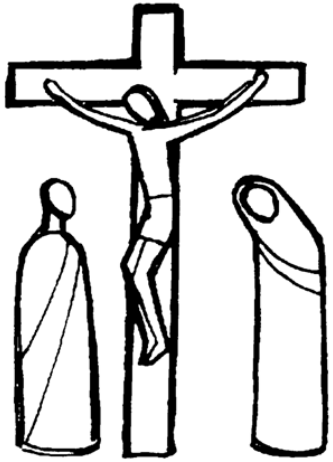
Joseph of Arimathea knew that Jesus was being wrongly accused but he was too afraid of the people in authority to speak out. He didn't want to risk his own skin. Then something happened that changed everything: Jesus died.
Lord, forgive us for the times when we lack the boldness to act as we should. Take away our fear and embarrassment and help us to be more open about our faith.

14. Jesus is placed in the tomb

"I feel really bad that I kept quiet about being a disciple. I should have worried less about what people think or whether it would get me into trouble. But I can make amends now. I've got an empty tomb prepared ready for him. Nicodemus came with me - he used to visit Jesus too, but in secret, under cover of night. After what's happened this week, I guess it's time for us both to come out from the dark."

Like Joseph and Nicodemus, we may be slow to make a commitment, but God's patience is boundless - he never gives up on us.
Lord, concern about what other people might think often blocks our way to the right path. Be our inspiration on our journey of faith, that we may be wiling disciples and show your love to everyone we meet.

STATIONS of the CROSS for Young People



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