



EXPERIENCING  
*the*  
CROSS

YOUR GREATEST OPPORTUNITY *for*  
VICTORY OVER SIN



HENRY BLACKABY

EXPERIENCING  
*the*  
CROSS

HENRY BLACKABY

Multnomah® Publishers, Inc. *Sisters, Oregon*

---

To my wife, Marilyn,  
who exemplifies the "cross of her Lord"  
in her own life.

---

EXPERIENCING THE CROSS  
published by Multnomah Publishers, Inc.

© 2005 by Henry T. Blackaby  
International Standard Book Number: 1-59052-480-2

Cover design by Studiogearbox.com

Italics in Scripture quotations are the author's emphasis.  
Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from:

*The Holy Bible*, New King James Version

© 1984 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Other Scripture quotations are from:

The Holy Bible, *English Standard Version* (ESV)

© 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

Used by permission. All rights reserved.

*The Holy Bible*, New International Version (NIV)

© 1973, 1984 by International Bible Society,

used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House

The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)

*Multnomah* is a trademark of Multnomah Publishers, Inc.,  
and is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.  
The colophon is a trademark of Multnomah Publishers, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,  
or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical,  
photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission.

For information:

MULTNOMAH PUBLISHERS, INC. • 601 N. LARCH ST. • SISTERS, OR 97759

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Blackaby, Henry T., 1935-  
Experiencing the Cross / Henry T. Blackaby.  
p. cm.  
ISBN 1-59052-480-2  
1. Christian life—Baptist authors. 2. Holy Cross. I. Title.  
BV4509.5.B545 2005  
232'.4—dc22

2005016999

05 06 07 08 09 10—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

# CONTENTS

|  |   |
|--|---|
| INTRODUCTION: <i>Take Up Your Cross and Follow</i> . . . . . | 5 |
|--|---|

## PART ONE

### THE CROSS IN THE HEART AND MIND OF GOD

|   |    |
|---|----|
| CHAPTER 1: <i>The Divine Necessity of the Cross</i> . . . . . | 11 |
| CHAPTER 2: <i>Straight from the Father's Heart</i> . . . . .  | 20 |
| CHAPTER 3: <i>A Promise Given in Blood</i> . . . . .          | 28 |

## PART TWO

### THE CROSS IN THE LIFE OF THE LORD JESUS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| CHAPTER 4: <i>His Path of Obedience</i> . . . . .          | 37 |
| CHAPTER 5: <i>True Death</i> . . . . .                     | 42 |
| CHAPTER 6: <i>Christ Made Sin</i> . . . . .                | 47 |
| CHAPTER 7: <i>The Cross and the Resurrection</i> . . . . . | 53 |

PART THREE  
THE CROSS IN THE BELIEVER'S EXPERIENCE

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| CHAPTER 8: <i>Crucified with Christ</i> . . . . .             | 63  |
| CHAPTER 9: <i>The Cross Brings Fullness of Life</i> . . . . . | 68  |
| CHAPTER 10: <i>Source of Every Blessing</i> . . . . .         | 74  |
| CHAPTER 11: <i>Victory Over the Enemy</i> . . . . .           | 85  |
| CHAPTER 12: <i>Take Up Your Cross</i> . . . . .               | 91  |
| CHAPTER 13: <i>What Our Sin Really Is</i> . . . . .           | 96  |
| CHAPTER 14: <i>Your Sin and the Cross of Christ</i> . . . . . | 109 |
| CHAPTER 15: <i>Freedom from Sin</i> . . . . .                 | 117 |
| CHAPTER 16: <i>The Path of Surrender</i> . . . . .            | 137 |
| CHAPTER 17: <i>The Path of Discipleship</i> . . . . .         | 154 |
| CHAPTER 18: <i>The Path of Witness and Ministry</i> . . . . . | 165 |

# TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW

*A Quest for Deeper Understanding*

Jesus knew that His followers had difficulty understanding—or bearing—His clear teaching about what He faced after their final trip to Jerusalem. Death on a Roman cross was a hard thing to comprehend, let alone accept. Even so, He patiently taught them what that cross would mean—to Him, to them, and to the whole world.

He told them: “He who does not *take his cross* and follow after Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:38). He said “to them all”: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and *take up his cross daily*, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

And in plain words He declared: “Whoever does not *bear his cross* and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27).

The cross is not just His; the cross is mine, and the cross is yours. It’s an unconditional and uncontestable requirement if we would follow Him as a disciple. Would it not be important, then, for us to clearly understand the cross’s role and meaning in our lives?

There is nothing more central to the entire Christian life than this theme. It's an absolute essential in the experience of every believer, the very heartbeat of our faith. This is true for many reasons, and in this book I want to explore some of them.

---

*Too many of God's people  
are missing what He intends  
for them to experience,  
and an inadequate grasp of  
the cross lies at the heart  
of this tragedy.*

---

As we journey together through these pages, I want to introduce you to how the cross reveals incredible dimensions of the heart and mind of God. In fact, we cannot begin to appreciate God's eternal purposes—or His eternal nature—without a thorough understanding of the cross of Christ.

Too many of God's people are going through life missing most of what their Father in heaven intends for them to experience, and an inadequate grasp of the cross lies at the heart of this tragedy.

## STAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

I'm greatly honored that the Lord has granted me this opportunity to teach you, though in a sense I tremble when I consider the nature of these truths, truths that affect lives for eternity. The cross is one of the most difficult topics for me to handle, and I'm fully aware that to teach a truth wrongly or inadequately is no minor matter. It's very serious to God and has serious consequences for His people. To grasp only a partial truth is to have only a partial encounter with God, and so much is needlessly missed.

So our time together in these pages will focus on the

Scriptures and the fullness of what they tell us about the cross. As a steward of God's truth, I want to accurately divide His Word—to carefully confront each passage before God in the context of the entire Bible.

In one sense, our goal in this book is simple. We want to locate key Scriptures on this theme, carefully unfold them, and provide fuel for what I hope will be choice and productive moments for meditation and careful thought in the coming days—and for the rest of our lives.

As we apply what we encounter here—as we seek to let these truths penetrate and transform our daily lives—we will experience wonderful results from this investment of our time.

I fully recognize that the Holy Spirit alone is our teacher. He may use me as a tool, but no human teacher can open your heart and convince and convict you of the truth of God's Word and how it bears on your life. Only His Spirit can do that. And as He does, you're actually *experiencing* God; His Word is not simply principles or concepts to increase your head knowledge, but a vehicle for your *relationship* with the living God, a personal encounter that anchors His truth in the center of your being, equipping and encouraging you to live it from your heart.

So I want you to *know God* in all the Scriptures we explore together—and then apply what He shows you.

#### THAT YOU MAY BE OVERWHELMED

My prayer is that this book's message will be an open door to so much more—that you'll discover truths in Scripture that





will challenge and encourage you for the rest of your life. I strongly encourage you to obtain this book's companion Study Guide to guide you in your quest, and to keep it open as you explore the pages to come.

In the months and years to come, may you always be captivated and compelled by the magnitude of what God has done in the cross.



PART ONE

The Cross  
in the Heart  
and Mind of God


*Where It All Began*

*“It has been given to you to know  
the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.”*

MATTHEW 13:11

When we speak of the cross in its larger biblical meaning, we aren't thinking just of the crucifixion of Jesus—about His experience with the wood and the nails. It's a much, much bigger picture than that. In fact, we're viewing God's entire plan to redeem a world. We're looking at the whole redemptive event...as *God* sees it, not just as we perceive it.

So “the cross” isn't just the physical cross, His physical death on an actual beam of wood, though this was certainly at



the critical center of God's plan and purpose. But the essence of what happened that day went far, far beyond the cruel physical realities of execution by crucifixion.

The cross transcends the physical dimension, and it also transcends time. To fully understand it, we must see the cross as the whole work of God that began in eternity, for Jesus is the

---

*As the cross reaches back into eternity, so it thrusts forward as well.*

---

“the Lamb slain *from the foundation of the world*” (Revelation 13:8), and our eternal life is something “which God, who cannot lie, *promised before time began*” (Titus 1:2). How amazing! Even before the time of Adam and Eve and their fall into sin, the cross was on the mind and heart of God.

Just as the shadow of the cross reaches back into eternity, so it also thrusts forward. The full meaning of the cross ultimately includes the resurrection of Jesus, and later we'll see how this unbreakable link between His death and resurrection became the foundational message of the early church. And so it remains to this very day.

There's absolutely nothing in all of human history that equals this event we call the cross. But in the first part of this book, I want you to especially think of it as more than history's biggest fact; I want you to allow the Spirit of God to lay the heart of God over your own heart, so you begin to sense what the cross meant to our Father in heaven.



CHAPTER I

# THE DIVINE NECESSITY OF THE CROSS

*Was There No Other Way?*



*It is the gift of God.*

EPHESIANS 2:8

When we recall the horror and frightful injustice of God's pure and blameless Son being crucified, the question often comes: *Why?* We want to know: Could there not have been some other way? Was there no other way to save us from sin?

If you haven't yet done so, I urge you to stand in the presence of God and ask Him, "Why did Jesus have to die?" Then linger in prayer until He gives you His answer.

Throughout the Scriptures, God makes clear the divine necessity of the cross. It had to happen; it was God's purpose, and *there was no other way*. If there had been, we can be absolutely certain that God would have provided it.

That's why, in this world of so many religions, a Christian declares unashamedly that Jesus Christ alone is the way and the

truth and the life, and that no one can come to the Father and to eternal salvation except through Him. If the cross was God's only way of providing human redemption, then Jesus Christ is surely the only Savior there is for all mankind.

### ETERNITY AS GOD VIEWS IT

The reason we often fail to grasp the divine necessity of the cross is that we don't view eternity as God views it. What does God know about eternity that you and I often fail to realize?

Recall in your mind the familiar words of John 3:16. If you could choose one word that represents the core—the very heartbeat—of what God is saying here, which word would it be? “Loved”? “Gave”? Perhaps “everlasting life”?

Actually, it's the word *perish*.

Think about that: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Death is at the very foundation of that statement—eternal death—a destiny that's inescapable by our own efforts.

In Ephesians 2:12, Paul tells us to remember something we often forget: “You were without Christ...having *no hope* and without God in the world.” Humanly speaking, none of us has any eternal hope of anything...except to perish.

Yet this inescapable fact brought a response from God's heart, one that causes us to bow in wonder and awe as we truly consider it: He so *loved* the world that He *gave* His only Son...so we would *not* perish!

Something about that word *perish* made the cross eternally

necessary, requiring God to give up His Son, with no other effective strategy being possible. That word *perish* says something about eternity that we don't usually take in.

And the reason we fall short of seeing eternity as God sees it is that we fail to view sin as God views it.

---

*We fall short of seeing*

*eternity as God does because we*

*fail to view sin as He views it.*

---

## THE PROOF OF SIN'S MAGNITUDE

How serious is sin?

Serious enough that to provide a way to deal with it, God the Father ordained the death of His own beloved Son, a death far more profound than physical death, as we'll study later. His Son was "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26, HCSB); His Son was "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19); "In Him was *life*, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). But sin—your sin and mine—necessitated this One's death.

Have you realized, therefore, how the cross reveals more of the magnitude of sin than all the wars and atrocities and human cruelties throughout recorded history?

God understands the seriousness of sin because all sin—*every* sin—is a personal offense against our God and our Creator. In that sense, there are no "little sins"; any and every sin a person commits places that person in enmity with the Father.

Not many people seriously think of themselves as God's enemy. Even believers often resist this way of thinking. They'll

say with all sincerity about their past, “Well, I wasn’t really going *against* God; I just wasn’t going with Him.” But they’re sincerely wrong. God’s perspective is all that matters, and He says in His Word that we were His enemies (Colossians 1:21). Or as Jesus put it, “He who is not with Me is against Me” (Matthew 12:30).

### FOR THE SAKE OF HIS GREAT NAME

In Ezekiel 36, God is ready to announce to His people the new covenant which will initiate our spiritual rebirth and renewal. Speaking through the prophet, the Lord will tell the people of God, “I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.” He will promise them, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.... I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes” (Ezekiel 36:25–27)

But first He tells His people something else. He lets them know that what He’s about to do, He is doing not for their sake, “but *for My holy name’s sake*, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations” (vv. 22–23).

And how did God sanctify His great name among the people of Israel? He sent them into captivity in Babylon and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. He did this to restore the holiness of His name, because His people in their sin had profaned His name among the nations. God severely chastened His covenant people in full view of the nations. All the nations could see what God did to His chosen ones, and all could see and begin to understand that the God of Israel is a holy God.

That’s how serious Israel’s sin was in God’s eyes.

Ezekiel 36 is a passage God has powerfully used in my own heart and life, and I'm often disturbed by all that it implies. When Christians today sin consistently, they affect how the world understands God. In fact, they profane His name by their sin. What then should we expect God to do? Doesn't the world today need to see and know that God is holy? Wouldn't God be entirely right and just, therefore, to bring severe affliction upon His people today, so the nations of the world can see His holiness displayed through His discipline of His chosen ones?

---

*Wouldn't God be entirely  
just to bring affliction upon  
His people today so the  
world can see His  
holiness displayed?*

---

Don't take this passage lightly. It devastates me to think about it, and causes me to pray, "O God, is there anything in my life, in word or deed, that misrepresents You to people who watch or listen, causing them to take lightly who You are? Are they kept from hearing You because of how I live or what I say? If that's so, I ask You, Lord, to do in me what's necessary to cause them to realize that *You take sin seriously.*"

## GOD'S RADICAL TREATMENT OF SIN

God knows full well—as we could never know—the appalling destructiveness of sin. He *knows* what sin has done to us; He *knows* how it hurts and impairs us. For every sin we've committed, He understands the full harm done to ourselves and to others, as well as the awful affront which it is to Him. In the cross, therefore, He made complete and total provision for every aspect of what sin has done or ever could do.



And as we'll see later, because of the totality of what God did in the cross, absolutely nothing can now come into our lives to make us less than what God wants us to be and to become. In Christ and in the cross, God has already abundantly provided us with everything we need to deal with everything that confronts us.

This is true because God, through the death of His Son, purposed to deal *radically* with sin—not just with our individual sins (plural), but with the sin nature in human beings, with the whole presence of sin (singular), which is the root cause of all our individual sins.

#### REMINDERS ALL AROUND US OF SIN'S SERIOUSNESS

Failing to view sin seriously shows how little we understand about the reality that surrounds us every day of our lives. God has given us reminders of the seriousness of sin in the form of His judgments against sin in Genesis 3, judgments that continue to this day.

As a pastor for a church in Saskatchewan on the prairies in the heart of Canada, I officiated at many funerals. When those funerals occurred in the depths of winter, the graves had to be dug in ground that was frozen several feet down, hard as a rock. It made me think of the judgment the Lord God pronounced upon Adam: “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Genesis 3:17, ESV). Ever since Adam's sin, God has cursed the ground so that it's unyielding, or stays prone to yield the wrong things—“thorns and thistles” (v. 18), and requires painful toil

to produce our food. If we take notice of this and think about it, we may wonder why God continues to bring such a judgment. Don't you suppose it's meant to serve as a constant reminder of how serious sin is to the mind and heart of God?

Or think of His judgment upon Eve and on every mother since then: "In pain you shall bring forth children" (v. 16). When a mother today experiences the intensity of labor pains, do we say, "Thank You, Lord God, for reminding us of the reality of the seriousness of sin"?

In the graciousness of God, every moment of experiencing His continuing judgment provides us an opportunity to remember how tragic sin is, how it turns us into His enemies, and how costly it is for God to deal with it.

—————  
*Every moment of experiencing  
 God's judgment provides  
 an opportunity to remember  
 how tragic sin is.*  
 —————

That's why it's incredibly good news that "when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Romans 5:10). Our sin against God, our enmity against Him, required nothing less than the cross; and that ultimate sacrifice is exactly what God provided!

### JESUS RECOGNIZED THIS DIVINE NECESSITY

Jesus Himself knew and accepted this divine necessity of the cross. This is clear in His first mention of the cross in the Gospels, in Matthew 16:21:

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things...and be killed, and be raised the third day.

The Savior didn't hint that these things *might* happen, or even predict that they *would* happen—but rather declared that they *must* happen. There could be, there would be, no other way.

Jesus again emphasized this necessity in the very significant teaching moments He had with His disciples after His death and resurrection:

He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! *Was it not necessary* that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25–26, ESV)

To demonstrate this necessity to them, He went directly to Scripture, to the Old Testament:

He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things *must be fulfilled* which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and *thus it was necessary* for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day.” (Luke 24:44–46)

He was telling them, “All this *had* to take place—the Scriptures themselves say so.” Thus was it written, and thus was it necessary.

Paul taught the same thing: “Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*” (1 Corinthians 15:3). The cross was inevitable—planned by the Father from the beginning, and plainly revealed to His people in His Word.

So whenever you come into God’s presence and ask Him, “Why did Jesus have to die? Was there no other way?”—let Him show you from the Scriptures how the cross was necessary for the redemption of the whole world. Then let Him apply that truth to your heart. Let it sink in how it was all *for you*...and exactly what you need.