

DAVE EARLEY

THE  
CHRISTIAN  
LIVING  
SERIES

THE  
*CRUCIFIXION*  
FACTOR

# **THE CRUCIFIXION FACTOR**

**By Dave Earley**

## Preface

- *How can I be free to be the person God made me to be?*
- *Is it possible to walk in the mighty flow of the power and favor of God instead of the pitiful energy of me?*
- *What will it take for my ministry to make a miraculously multiplied impact for my Master?*

Hungry hearted servants of the Savior seek answers to such questions.

The answers are found in the Crucifixion Factor.

- *Why is this happening to me?*
- *What did I do to deserve this?*
- *When, if ever, will it stop?*
- *What do I do when trite sayings and familiar truths quiver like midgets in the face of a mountainous season of unceasing suffering, silence, and sorrow?*

Such are the questions that swirl in through the minds of good, godly people when unexpected, uncontrollable, and seemingly unending trouble ambushes them.

The answers to these questions also lie in the Crucifixion Factor.

If you are like me, you dislike sermons and books that promise more than they can deliver. You should. But when I tell you that the Crucifixion Factor has the answers to these questions. I am not blowing smoke. I stand firmly on the testimony of the Bible, the example of its heroes, the teachings of the masters of the spiritual life, and the biographies of highly potent saints through the centuries.

### ***All of Me is Dead***

For several years my life priorities / key roles had been very clear. I had seven of them. There were:

1. God/Christian
2. Cathy/ Husband
3. Sons / Father
4. Health / Person
5. Family / Son & Brother
6. Church / Pastor
7. Ministry beyond my church / Author & Speaker.

I prayed over them daily, thought about them frequently, and invested myself in them fully. They were the locus of my attention, the focus of my time, and the essence of my identity. A few years ago, all were going wonderfully well. Some were racing along at high gear, others cruising at a good clip, and a few just getting off the ground. I felt alive, vital, and proud. Although I was not satisfied, I can now see that I was quite proud of where I stood in each area, and where I was headed. I secretly enjoyed the fact that people envied me and admired me for the status I enjoyed.

Then it began to happen. Over the space of a few years each one of my priorities and cherished roles went through some sort of agonizing death. They all passed through a season when they were painfully pierced, cruelly hung, left gasping, expired, and thrown into a grave to be left alone, and hidden in silence. Some of the deaths were tangibly physical - for example, both my Mom and Dad passed away, along with my wife's father. The crucifixion of other treasured priorities was also emotionally painful – for example, during one six month period one my books netted negative royalties. That means that it had more copies returned than purchased. Ouch!

But regardless of how they died, all were incredibly painful, and looking back, all vitally necessary. Some were visible to others and very public knowledge. Others died unnoticed and were thrown into a common grave without even an obituary. Some expired rather suddenly, while others fought off death longer.

But they all died.

And with them, so did I.

But I'm not unique in this regard. Countless others have walked the way of the cross. Just as the cross was unavoidable for Jesus, it is unavoidable for those who follow Him. Just as its shadow stretched menacingly over His life before the foundation of the world, even so, its shadow extends across the path of the Christian.

I write these words as a follow traveler. This is not my story. It's our story. I am no expert on this process, and in one sense, would rather not be. Death by crucifixion is incredibly painful. But I have studied the Word, consulted with the ancient masters, and been down the path. I write to help you understand. I write to encourage. And I want to assure you: There is a resurrection on the way.

I was (and still am) a man who desperately longed for the power for His resurrection. (You do as well, or you would not have picked up this book). This little book is based on one clear, Biblical, tested, undeniable, unavoidable, life-giving, clarion premise.

**There can be no resurrection without a crucifixion.**

## Chapter One

# No Crucifixion, No Resurrection

*"When Christ calls a man, He bids Him to come and die." - Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

*"No one can be a true servant of God without knowing the principle of death and resurrection." – Watchmen Nee*

*"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." – Paul in Philippians 3:10-11*

### **Resurrection Power!**

"Sold out," that's what we called it. "Giving God all of your life;" "Putting Jesus first;" "Living under His Lordship." A few months earlier I had "made the commitment, put it all on the altar and made Jesus Lord of my life." It felt good allowing Jesus to "sit on the throne of my heart." I did not know much about the Christian life except that I

loved God, and I longed for more of His power. I found that I desperately needed the power to say 'no' to temptation, to witness to my friends, and to pray with greater urgency and with bigger results.

It was Easter Sunday morning and our youth pastor was preaching in the sunrise service. Our group of high school students had turned out in force to support him. His text was Philippians 3:10-11 – Paul's priority and passion. His topic was "Resurrection Power." Through his message, he kept saying that the same awesome power that raised Jesus from the dead 2,000 years before was available to us today. I don't remember what else he said, but I do recall desperately wanting that "Resurrection Power."

I still do. So, do you. Otherwise you would not be reading this book. Not long after we begin our Christian journey we are faced with the realization that the Christian life is a highly challenging endeavor. The challenge surrounds issues such as being godly in an ungodly world, living in the Spirit when the flesh is so strong, walking in the spiritual realm in a physical material world, and focusing on eternity when everything around us shouts out the importance of the "here and now." Without this power, we cannot genuinely love our enemies, or those who can never repay us. Without it we'll never find the grace to truly forgive those who abuse us. We need supernatural power to pray effectively, share our faith boldly, give sacrificially, serve silently, and suffer unjustly.

We also need the resurrection power to serve God effectively. Without the power of God, we will never see spiritual captives set free, sinners converted, saints disciplined and churches planted on a large scale.

We don't go very far in trying to live the life of the follower of Jesus until we confront our blatant inability to really live the life God calls us to and we have always

wanted. God has so designed the spiritual life to operate in such a fashion so that it is absolutely impossible to live it without His supernatural power, or as my youth pastor called it, "Resurrection power." We all want resurrection power. We all need it.

If my youth pastor mentioned the rest of the passage, the parts about "the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" I don't remember it. Maybe he did and I was too immature to grasp the concept. Anyway, Paul made the idea of crucifixion central in his prayer. He sandwiched the crucifixion between the desire for the power of the resurrection and the realization of that power.

### **No Crucifixion, No Resurrection.**

There is no resurrection without crucifixion. This is the one cold, hard, irrevocable, unbreakable, immutable, unavoidable reality in the spiritual life. Life will be confusing and deeply troubling unless and until this fact is fully appreciated and firmly grasped. No matter how deeply we'd like to deny it and regardless of what we do to avoid it, this truth will not be bypassed, cannot be outrun, and won't be tricked. There is no resurrection without crucifixion.

It seems obvious, but everything in our inner person and the world around us cries out otherwise. We have been told that life, real life, is there for the taking and all we have to do is reach out and grab it. We have been given formulas on how to maximize our potential. We have accepted the notion if we can dream it and conceive it, we will achieve it. In the words of the old pastor, we have hoped to wear a crown without first going to the cross.

But it just is not so. In the Kingdom of God, there is no resurrection without a crucifixion. There can be no supernatural life without a profound experience of death.

Lest this sound overly pessimistic, there is another firm fact that we must understand and that is this: The resurrection always leaves us much better off than we were before the crucifixion. What I hope to do in this book is help you accept and comprehend this reality so that you can endure the pain of crucifixion and enjoy the pleasure of resurrection.

## **Jesus Tried to Tell Us**

### *No Crucifixion, No Multiplication*

As He was fast approaching the time of His own crucifixion, Jesus made a point of sharing this principle with His followers. He did it to help them understand what was going to happen to Him. He also did it to help prepare them for what they would later experience. In doing so, He told us what the resurrection of a multiplied life is about.

*"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.- John 12:23-27*

*"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."*

Jesus wanted all of His followers then, and now, to appreciate that His death would lead to greater glory. I think this fact helped Him handle the hideous agony that was to come with such amazing grace.

*"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."*

In relating to His culture, Jesus used the example taken from agriculture. He discussed the necessary process of a kernel of wheat "dying" alone, hidden in the ground before it could sprout into a stalk of wheat carrying many kernels, producing numerous stalks each carrying many more kernels.

Jesus' point is that by dying, He would ultimately multiply His life, His ministry, and His impact. He wanted His followers to understand the universal principle that by dying, not doing, we achieve our greatest fruitfulness. In other words, "you gotta die if you want to multiply."

*"The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."*

Jesus states the same truth a slightly different way. If we try to hoard the life we have been given, it will be forever lost. But when we give it away, it will be kept forever. Very soon He would be laying down His earthly life and ministry trusting that God would return to Him greater life throughout eternity.

*“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”*

Just in case any of His hearers thought He was only speaking of Himself, Jesus pointedly applied these principles to anyone who hoped to be His follower. We must follow Him wherever He goes. We must take the same road He took...and His road led to a cross.

No Crucifixion, No Glorification

He wanted no one to be mistaken. To further clarify the absolute necessity of crucifixion in the life of His followers He continued:

*"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?"*

*No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"*

*Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."*

*The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.*

*Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."*

*He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. - John 12:27-33*

These words of Jesus summarized and amplified His previous ones regarding His imminent death. Not only did He have to die to multiply, but He is also saying that He

came to die in order to glorify the Father. His approaching death would certainly not be for His pleasure, but would be for His Father's glory.

Jesus also wanted his followers to fully understand that His death would occur by being "lifted up" in crucifixion. Crucifixion was the most painful, torturous, dreaded form of death for a man in Israel in that day. It was death at the hands of their enemies. It was execution in absolute public dishonor and humiliation. It was death by the most brutal, painful means developed by the evil ingeniousness of the Romans.

Jesus further explained that by being "lifted up" on the cross He would ultimately draw all men unto Himself. In other words, He had to die to multiply.

Just so no one missed it, He concluded with one final comment. This whole discussion was referring to "the kind of death He was about to die."

Let's summarize what Jesus said:

1. He had to die to multiply.
2. He had to die to glorify.
3. He had to die by being crucified.
4. His followers can expect nothing else.

I read those four sentences with mixed feelings. Part of me is flooded with waves of thanksgiving. Even though I am so unworthy, Jesus knowing faced the torture of the cross for me.

Part of me feels excitement and encouragement. Jesus said that there is a clear path to multiplication of life and glorification of God. My life purpose is: "to know, love and glorify God and be used of Him to reach as many people for Jesus, as deeply as

possible, in the least amount of time." I desperately desire to glorify God. I have studied the Bible long enough to know that it's not about me, or my glory. It is all about Him and His glory. I also live to multiply my life. Every major ministry decision I have made has been spurred by that passion. Jesus showed the way.

But, to be honest, another part of me feels dread. I don't like the way of the cross. There is nothing nice or convenient about crucifixion. It cannot be glamorized or sugarcoated. Calvary was the epitome of agony. Betrayal, rejection, abandonment, misunderstanding, injustice, shame, humiliation, dishonor, and scorn flowed like a river mixing with torture, brutality, pain, blood, and anguish to create the lowest death anyone ever faced. I don't want to go there.

But I must. So must you. It is the narrow path to the power of His resurrection. It is the only path. Previously He had made this abundantly clear.

*And anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. – Matthew 10:38*

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. – Matthew 16:24*

*Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Mark 8:34*

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23*

*And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. – Luke 14:27*

## **Their Dreams Were Reborn**

Jesus was not the only one to find the resurrection waiting on the other side of the cross. A simple survey of the Bible reveals the universal nature of the crucifixion factor and the resurrection principle in the lives of God's servants.

At the tender young age of 75, Abraham was given the dream of fathering a son and ultimately a special nation. For 25 years his dream lay dead in Sarah's barren, aged womb. Finally, the dream took flesh as Abraham held in his 100-year-old arms his tiny baby son, Isaac.

Job dreamed of a prosperous life for his ten children. His dream was brutally executed when all of his 500 oxen, 500 donkeys, and 3,000 camels were stolen, his 7,000 sheep were killed, all of his servants were murdered, and his children were killed when their house where they were dining blew down on top of them in a strong wind. If that was not enough agony for one man to bear, later he awoke to find himself covered with excruciatingly painful, oozing boils. Yet, later he experienced resurrection as his health returned, his income doubled and he enjoyed ten new children.

Joseph was given the dream of being a leader, but his dream died when he was kidnapped by his brothers, thrown down an empty well, and sold into slavery. It died

again when he was unjustly thrown into prison and forgotten. But it was reborn as he was miraculously promoted to the position of Prime Ministry.

Moses had an un-crucified passion to deliver his people, which caused him to commit murder and be forced to flee for his life. For 40 years he languished in a grave referred to as the backside of the wilderness. But one day, the dream of being a deliverer was rekindled as the Lord spoke to Him from out of a burning bush and commissioned him to deliver God's people.

Hannah's womb was dead and her rival abused her for it. In deep, desperate bitterness, she poured out her broken heart out to God until He answered. Miraculously her dead dream took life as she became pregnant and bore a special son. In ecstasy she held her son, Samuel, and dedicated him to the Lord.

As a teen, David watched sheep until he was unexpectedly anointed as Israel's next king. He dreamed of shepherding God's people when his victory over Goliath launched him on a meteoric rise from lowly shepherd to national hero and outstanding general. Then one day, King Saul was overcome with jealousy and wanted him dead. David's dream died as he ran through the Judean wilderness from Saul and his army. It was reborn when he was finally crowned King of Israel.

The principle of crucifixion swept over the woman caught in adultery as she shamefully waited her stoning. Death broke Martha's heart as her brother Lazarus died and was laid in a tomb while the miracle-doer, Jesus, idly did nothing. Death of his dream of being the Lord's spokesman forced Peter to hide in shame after he denied the Lord three times. Mary knew crucifixion as her beloved son, Jesus, was executed before her eyes.

However, the brilliant light of the resurrection dawned on the “sinful woman” as she heard Jesus say, “Go and sin no more.” It shown on Martha when Jesus commanded her dead brother, “Lazarus come forth,” and the servants to “Loose him and let him go.” It rose over Mary when on the Sunday morning the angel in the Garden told her, “He is risen!” It transformed Peter when the Resurrected Redeemer fixed him in the eye and said, “Go and feed my lambs.” It was undeniable when Peter stood before the crowd and preached the miracle sermon on the Day of Pentecost and 3,000 souls were saved.

## **The Resurrection Factor**

Fantastic fulfillment, incredible liberty, supernatural power, overflowing life, and multiplied ministry are possible. The power of the resurrection can be yours. But the shadow of the cross lays across the path. Are you in? Read on.

The key to living the supernatural life of the fruitful follower of Jesus Christ is living with resurrection power. The path to such the resurrection life always first leads through the cross and the grave. It is a process that may occur in a matter of days, as it did in the case of Jesus, or decades, as in the case of Moses. It is not something that we can control.

Let me say that in this book, I generally use the concepts of crucifixion, the grave and the resurrection in a metaphorical sense. Although such phenomena probably are not what happens to us *physically*, they do impact us literally on a spiritual, emotional level, and often on a financial, vocational and/or relational level as well. .

The plan for this book is simple. I will give a brief definition of the way I am using each concept. Then we will examine each stage in greater detail using the backdrop of Bible personalities. In doing so we'll flesh out the picture with examples from those who have lived since then. Finally we will tie it all together. Throughout, I hope the Lord will breathe strong encouragement to you as you walk the path.

First, let's first define the terms:

### **Crucifixion**

Crucifixion describes the painful process of dying as a result of circumstances beyond your control. During this process, you feel betrayed or misunderstood by people, abandoned by God, and bereft of hope. It is a process of seeing your dreams die. That which is taken could be your career, ministry, or reputation. It could be the loss of an aspiration, a relationship, a bank account, your health, or anything else you may hold dear. It could be the departure of a family member.

Make no mistake, crucifixion does not merely hurt. It kills. It lays waste to "self" and all that comes with it. In describing her crucifixion experience, Sheila Walsh writes, "God had planned to deliver me from myself in the ruins of my life...some of God's most precious gifts come in boxes that make your hands bleed to open them." 1 Sheila Walsh in *The Desert Experience*, Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2001, p. 172

### **The Grave**

The Grave marks the period follows crucifixion. It is a time of deep silence from God, hidden-ness from others, and darkness regarding the future. It is often confusing or numbing. You will feel forgotten, unnoticed, and powerless. The grave is a lonely, cold, dark place.

## **Resurrection**

Resurrection is a new birth to a higher life. It yields supernatural power, profound insight, and focused priorities. Dreams are reborn. That which seemed totally impossible during the time of crucifixion is now reality. God does exceedingly abundantly above all you could ask or think. Your impact for God may be multiplied exponentially.

Resurrection frees you to be the person you were created to be. It allows you to become the best you. Resurrection always leaves you better than you were before crucifixion.

I don't know where you find yourself in this process. Maybe you are in the throes of crucifixion. Possibly your dreams are lying silent and lifeless in the grave. Or it could be that you have already completed the process, or maybe you have yet to begin. At any rate, I know this book will help you navigate the waters and arrive at the divine destination God has for you.

## Chapter Two

# The Way of the Cross

*... Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. – Peter (1 Peter 2:21)*

Every path leading to the power of the resurrection inevitably proceeds through the painful passion of the crucifixion. Dreams die before destinies are realized. But resurrections do come.

### The Day Dwight Died

Converted at the age of 18, Dwight flung himself into Christian work a few years later. The next decade was a whirlwind of spiritual progress and effective ministry. His Sunday school grew to previously unprecedented size of 1,500 boys and girls, all from off the street, most coming to a life-changing relationship with Christ. When the nation went to Civil War, Dwight, as a leader of the Young Men Christian Association, went to work as an evangelist, winning numbers of soldiers to Christ.

He poured his energies into three important building projects. First a home for his wife and growing family. Second, he launched a Chicago church that rapidly grew in impact, and size. Third, he raised the funds and oversaw the creation of the first large, multi-purpose YMCA building in America. All this time, he was out speaking around the country three or four days a week in large conferences, and churches.

Outwardly Dwight was a picture of spiritual power, yet he knew all of the activity was mostly the result of his own energy and zeal. He was financially broke, emotionally burnt-out and spiritually bankrupt. He became deeply discouraged. Exhausted by his ministry treadmill, Dwight began to cry out to God for help. Once in a prayer meeting he even broke down, rolling on the floor, and groaning to God for spiritual power.

[Sarah Cooke, *Wayside Sketches*, (Grand Rapids: Shaw, 1895), p. 363

Days later an answer came to Dwight in an unexpected form. Sunday night, October 8, as he finished preaching in his church, a fire alarm rang out. Drought-like conditions and a strong wind quickly spread the fire across the city. Within minutes flames engulfed huge sections of the town. The next morning a broken-hearted Dwight surveyed the damage. Four square miles of city was totally consumed, 18,000 buildings destroyed, 100,000 people left homeless and over 1,000 people dead. Destroyed by the fire were the three buildings Dwight had spent himself to see built: the new YMCA, Dwight's church, and his house. Now they were nothing but ashes.

Insurance had been held on any of the buildings leaving nothing with which to rebuild. Dwight had to begin an exhausting campaign to raise funds to try and rebuild and he hated it admitting, "My heart was not in the work of begging. I could not appeal. I was crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit." [D.L. Moody to C. H. McCormick, 15, April 1868, MBI archives].

For Dwight, the anguish of his incredible loss stretched into a agonizing season in the grave of honest evaluation and numbing introspection. The purpose of the cross is always one thing death, death to self. Dwight confessed,

“God seemed to just be showing me myself. I found I was ambitious; I was not preaching for Christ, I was preaching for ambition. I found everything in my heart that ought not be there. For four months, the wrestling went on within me. I was a miserable man.” [Lyle W. Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1997, p.156]

### ***There is a Resurrection Coming***

Crucifixion leads to a rebirth of true spiritual power and truly effective ministry. Later Dwight wrote, “After four months the anointing came.” Describing it he said, “Ah, what a day! – I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it, it is almost too sacred an experience to name – Paul had an experience he never spoke for fourteen years – I can only say God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand.” [A. P. Fitt, *The Life of D. L. Moody*, Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.], p. 65.

Dwight explained his experience to his friend D. W. who recorded it in his diary: “God blessed him with a conscious incoming to his soul of a presence and power of His Spirit such as he had never known before. His heart was broken by it. He spent much time just weeping before God so overpowering was the sense of His goodness and love. [D.W. Whittle diary quoted in James F. Findlay, Jr. *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist, 1837-1899* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 132

The change in Dwight was profound. His In describing the resurrected Dwight one of his biographers wrote, “the quality of his relationship with God and his

discernment of the difference between God's call and man's was so sharpened, and his power in ministry so enlarged that it sometimes seemed to him as if he had scarcely been alive—let alone useful—until this blessed time" Lyle W. Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D. L. Moody*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1997), p. 159. Such is the power of the resurrected life.

### **Resurrection Power!**

Soon after this event, Dwight could not escape the sense that the Lord wanted him in to spend some time in England resting, studying and praying about his future. So he went. However, eventually he was recognized and a pastor asked him to preach. Revival broke out in the church and 400 people made professions of faith during the ten days of impromptu meetings. Later he made the amazing discovery that Marianne Adlard, a bedridden girl, had literally prayed him over to England to be the tool of revival in her church. As a result, Dwight was given opportunity to be the tool of revival in many other English churches.

Dwight manifested the power of the resurrection in every association. A decade and a half before becoming President of the United States Woodrow Wilson in describing Dwight mentioned an unusual encounter in a barber shop. "I became aware that a personality had entered the room and sat in the chair next to me." Wilson continued, "I purposely lingered in the room after he left and noted the singular effect his visit had upon the barbers in that shop. They talked in undertones. They did not know his name, but they knew something had elevated their thought. And I felt that I left that place as I should have left a house of worship." Woodrow Wilson as quoted in John

McDowell, *What D.L. Moody Means to Me*, (Northfield MA; the Northfield Schools, 1937),  
p. 23

Dwight L. Moody returned home to Chicago a new man and new ministry was born. Orphanages, schools, ministry opportunities for women, and large crusades resulted. Most of his efforts still live and thrive today 125 years later. They include the Moody Press publishing company, the Moody Bible Institute, and Moody Church. Scholars estimate that in the pre-television age, Moody preached the gospel to over 100 million people and over one million made professions of faith in Jesus Christ. That's resurrection power!

## **Jesus Shows the Way**

The death drama of Jesus outlines a diagram by which we can chart our own process on the road to the power of the resurrection. Hopefully you will not necessary experience all of the aspects of suffering Jesus endured. But you will experience many of them. As you read these characteristics some may resonate deeply with your experience. Remember that suffering is a necessary step in the road to resurrection power.

### ***Gethsemane: The Beginning of Sorrow***

The Gospels help us understand the beginning stages of the crucifixion period. Let's go back to the hours following the Last Supper when Jesus and His men retreated

to the Garden of Gethsemane for the night. Here we will begin to see the emotional pain that preceded the agony of the cross. A person going through the crucifixion factor will experience some of this sorrow.

### *1. Intense Pressure*

After the meal Jesus and his men walked east out of the city of Jerusalem to a series of hills covered with trees called the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39). Here they settled down for the night at the foot of the hills in a place known as the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36). As an olive tree orchard, its base contained wooden olive presses, used for crushing the olive to derive its precious oil. The word "Gethsemene" means "oil press." In a profound fashion it referred not only to the squeezing of the olives, but also to the pressure beginning to be applied to the Son of God. In fact the pressure more than a human body is designed to withstand. It was so intense that when He knelt to pray the capillaries in his forehead burst causing him to sweat blood (Luke 22:44).

A crucifixion phase may involve a period of overwhelming stress and strain. It may not cause you to sweat blood, but it can feel like it. When Peter sabotaged his own dream of being the Lord's loyal spokesman, it broke his heart and he wept bitterly (Luke 22:62). Job's wife pressured him to curse God and die (Job 2:9). Abraham gave into the pressure from his wife and ended up having a child with his maid Hagar (Genesis 16:2-4). David felt so constrained that he fled the country, and tried to find asylum with the enemy. When they wouldn't trust him, he pretended to be insane (1 Samuel 21:10-15). Dwight Moody was exhausted in his frantic service to God and the nagging sense that he could never do enough.

Your crucifixion will involve great stress and strain. It may involve overwhelming financial pressure, the tension of a broken relationship, the shock of the death of a loved one, the gut-wrenching pain of a job loss, or as in Jesus case, a foreboding sense of dread for what lay ahead. Regardless of the cause, the pressure is intense.

## *2. Disappointment in Others*

Jesus spent three years pouring his life into his disciples. He gave Peter, James, and John intimate access to his personal life unlike anyone else on earth. He had been there for them time and again. When the pressure of His pending arrest and trial began to mount, they did not come through.

In the Garden Jesus sought refuge in prayer. Three times Jesus asked his disciples to stay awake and pray with Him. Three times they failed (Matthew 26:38-45). This had to be terribly disappointing to Him. Disappointment is part of the process.

David was broken hearted to have his King become his enemy, his father-in-law his nemesis. Joseph would have been devastated to have his brothers capture him, plot his death, throw him into an empty well, and then sell him into slavery (Genesis 37:18-28). His disappointment would have compounded in being unjustly accused, thrown into prison and forgotten (Genesis 39:16-20, 40:23).

Often as we draw near the cross, we are let down by those around us. People we had grown used to being able to count on will not come through when they are most needed. It will hurt.

### 3. *Betrayal and Injustice*

That night 2,000 years ago was suddenly a blaze with torch light as a Jesus' disciple, Judas, led a posse of soldiers to arrest Jesus (Matthew 26:47). Judas was one of the twelve men closest to Jesus. Jesus had loved him, taught him, and called him "friend." Judas approached Jesus in the Garden and betrayed him with a kiss (Mark 44-45). In those times in that part of the world such a kiss was an outward sign of homage, love and affection. Yet, Judas used that token of affection to hand Jesus over to His executioners. I cannot imagine the sorrow such betrayal must have brought to Jesus.

From the moment of the illegal arrest through each of the trials Jesus endured that night, justice was sidestepped, and lies were propagated. Then next thing you know, an innocent man had been condemned to die.

Joseph was betrayed by his own brothers and David by his father-in-law. Job was betrayed by his 'friends,' who instead of using his great loss as an excuse to comfort him, used it as a reason to accuse and rebuke him.

One of the most painful aspects of the crucifixion season can be feeling betrayed by those you trusted, misunderstood by those around you, and unjustly treated by the system you are in AND at the same time feeling helpless to stop the unjust circumstances as they unfold before you and to you. Few nails will ever pierce so deep as that of the betrayal of a "friend."

#### *4. Abandonment and Denial*

At the sight of the soldiers arresting Jesus, and during the trials, His disciples ran off in hiding (Matthew 26:56). At the time of His greatest need, they were nowhere to be found. At the first sight of persecution Peter, who had publicly pledged his loyalty to Jesus, denied Jesus outright three times (Matthew 26:69-75)!

Make no mistake, the way of the cross can be the loneliest place on earth. Many so-called friends will not only abandon you, but may even deny you at the very moment you need them to stand up for you.

#### *5. Abuse*

Jesus was mocked, spit upon, beaten and whipped. His back was shredded like hamburger. His face was so swollen from the blows, that he was nearly unrecognizable. The physical abuse He experienced was incredible. It was part of His crucifixion.

Abuse may accompany your crucifixion. Joseph was kidnapped, thrown into a well, and sold as a slave. Along with the brutal loss of flocks, servants and children, Job also endured the verbal insults of his so-called friends. Hannah was chided by her rival.

#### *6. Rejection*

Jesus had spent three years healing the sick, feeding the hungry, teaching the lost, and even raising the dead. Earlier in the week, the grateful crowd had lauded Jesus, welcoming him to the city, proclaiming him with loud Hosannas as the Messiah. Yet, just a few days later, the fickle folk were easily persuaded to not only abandon Jesus, but also to cry out for His blood through crucifixion (Matthew 27:22-25). They not only rejected His message, they completely rejected Him.

The sting of rejection is severe, especially when the rejecters had been the object of active love. Pressure, disappointment, dismissal, denunciation, false accusation, misunderstanding, and mistreatment - such is the way of crucifixion. You may not taste the entire palette of Gethsemane sorrow, but you will taste some. Yet, this is but the beginning of sorrows.

### **Isaiah 53: The Portrait of Pain**

Approximately seven hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet, Isaiah saw and heard things no other man had seen. While on earth, he saw the throne of God. He heard the seraphim worship and the Lord speak. Isaiah was given a glorious glimpse down the corridors of time and gazed at the glories of the coming millennial kingdom. He also saw and recorded in amazing detail the suffering of the Messiah.

When he saw the Messiah, Isaiah's vision must have stunned him. Imagine the Messiah, the Chosen One, the Son of God, crushed and broken. Soberly the prophet recorded what he saw. We can not comprehend the extent of Jesus' anguish, but using Isaiah's prophecy as a guide to the feelings, we can walk through the process. Isaiah's words add to the template we can use for navigating our own painful period of crucifixion.

#### *1. Despised*

*"He was despised and rejected by men...Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not." – Isaiah 53:3*

Isaiah must have been stunned to see the way the world would treat its Savior. In his vision he saw that Messiah would be “despised and rejected by men (Isaiah 53:3).

It is one thing to be ignored and quite another to be looked down on and passed over. Each slight and every bit of nasty treatment will kill you more and more. When you are in a crucifixion phase, the rejection compounds and the humiliation mounts.

Joseph knew such rejection by his own family, as his brothers kidnapped him and threw him into an empty well to die. Then they sold him into slavery and lied to his father saying Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

David was despised by his father-in-law, King Saul. Saul so hated him that he tried to kill David with the violent toss of a javelin, twice. Later, he led an entire army in pursuit of David.

## *2. Sorrow and Grief*

*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering... -  
Isaiah 53:3*

Isaiah named the Messiah “A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3 NASB). The Messiah not only wore sorrow as a coat, He had an intimate relationship with grief.

In the crucifixion phase, grief becomes a companion. Swiss-born psychiatrist Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross counseled hundreds of patients and their families through her research into death and dying. In her book, On Death and Dying she described the classic pattern of the coping strategies of patients who know their diagnosis is terminal

(Scribner; Reprint edition, June 9, 1997). Her groundbreaking research identified five common-stages of grief. As a pastor, I have seen these stages experienced not only with persons who were terminally ill, but also with people who had a chronic illness, lost a loved one, were let go from a job, and who went through a divorce. People being led down the path of crucifixion will experience most, if not all the stages of grief as well.

For the person in the crucifixion phase, the stages may look like this:

- Denial: "“No, not me.” This initial shock may make the surrounding events seem like a bad dream that can’t be real.
- Anger or Resentment : “Why me?” This blaming may be directed against the God, others, or even themselves.
- Bargaining: “Lord, what do I have to do to get out of this?” “If I cannot get out of this, how can I speed it up?”
- Depression: “I don’t care any more.” Great heaviness and sorrow settles in
- Acceptance: “I am dead.” Calm, yet grim resignation is reached.

### 3. *Judged by Others*

*“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.” – Isaiah 53:4*

Imagine, the sinless Messiah who as He started down the path toward crucifixion, was deemed by others as being judged and found sinful by God. If Messiah's suffering was considered to be punishment deservedly doled out by the hand of the righteous

God, you had better be sure that you will be judged as well. The self-righteous will smugly say things like, "I guess God thought it was time to humble him" or "She must not have been all that spiritual after-all," or even "If they had only more faith they wouldn't be in that condition."

Judgment is a part of the process. Job was completely frustrated and broken by the accusations of his critical friends. They insisted to his face that his suffering was the product of his sinfulness and that he needed to take it like a man.

#### *4. Crushing, Ripping, Piercing Pain*

*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities... - Isaiah 53:3*

Although you probably won't necessarily suffer for the sins of another you will experience extreme suffering similar to that Jesus bore. Some of it will rip you apart. Some will cut too deep for words. And it will crush you. You'll feel be broken, seemingly beyond repair.

#### *5. Suffering in Defenseless Silence*

*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. - Isaiah 53:7*

Jesus could have called a legion of angels to right the wrong of His crucifixion, but He suffered in silence. He refused to defend Himself.

One of the worst aspects of the crucifixion saga will be those times when you can say or do nothing to remedy the pain, defend yourself, or even explain your situation. To do so would either be impossible or blatantly sinful. Or even worse, no one would listen. You may feel naked, and defenseless, helpless to stop the attacks that will rain down upon you.

#### *6. Sovereignly Selected Suffering*

*Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,*

Who really killed Jesus? Obviously the Roman soldiers physically carried out the despicable deed, but the blame stretches far beyond them. They acted under the orders of the weak, crowd-pleasing Pilot. Yet, he was swayed by the bloodthirsty crowd. They were incensed by the jealous Jewish leaders. But they were only able to arrest Jesus without a mob scene because of the betrayal of his 'friend' Judas. And we know Judas' heart had been filled by Jesus arch-enemy, Satan. So who killed Jesus?

I did. Beyond all of them, theologically I know that in a real sense it was my sin that nailed Jesus to the cross. Jesus was wounded for my transgressions. My sin was laid upon him.

But according to the prophet Isaiah, responsibility ultimately goes beyond all of us. Surprisingly, it goes higher up, deeper down, and further back. Isaiah clearly states the name of the One with whom ultimate blame resides. He said, "it was the LORD's will to crush him."

Unbelievable!

I don't think any human can fully understand or appreciate that statement. Think of it - God gave His only son Jesus to die for us. He allowed it. He could have stopped it at anytime, yet did not. The crushing of the Son was the will of the Father.

The hardest part of dealing with the crucifixion factor may well be this part. Somewhere in the process you will become grievously aware that ultimately, the immense pain, incredible loss, and hopeless situation came to you from God. He allowed it. He is ultimately the one behind it all. This is His will for your life. All the trite sayings about God wanting you happy and healthy crumble and blow away like leaves in a New England winter before this sobering truth.

Joseph recognized it when in describing the horrible events he had experienced he told his brothers, "you meant it for evil *but God* meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20 italics added). He saw that God had been back there all along, "meaning it" bad for good.

Job recognized it as well, when he said

## **Bruce's Wasteland**

In his book, *The Dream Giver*, Bruce Wilkinson tells of the time he and his wife Marlene, launched a magazine by faith obeying God at great personal cost. For five months he asked God to provide and for five months God seemingly did nothing. Finding themselves in debt more than five years salary, they called a meeting to shut the magazine down. For Wilkinson, it was a crucifixion, the death of a dream. He calls it

his Wasteland experience. Later he describes what he called his Wasteland experience with these painful words,

*“It felt like God had watched from the sidelines while we went down in flames. It was one of the most disillusioning seasons of my life...Before long I felt adrift in anger and confusion.”* Bruce Wilkinson, *The Dream Giver*, Sisters, Oregon, Multnomah Publishers, 2003, p. 114

Yet, crucifixions can lead to resurrections. Bruce writes,

*“It wasn’t until later that I can look back on that season and see that God had been faithfully at work. What we couldn’t know then was that He had plans for a different kind of magazine, the Daily Walk, and He was preparing us to accomplish it. Today Walk Thru the Bible publishes ten magazines every month... One million devotional magazines later, it’s clear God did not let us down. God just had a bigger dream than we could have achieved or even imagines at the time.”* Bruce Wilkinson, *The Dream Giver*, Sisters, Oregon, Multnomah Publishers, 2003, 115

### **Warning!**

*If you are in the midst of the crucifixion season, it will look extremely dark. Light is coming. But I must warn you. It may get much darker before the light comes bursting through.*