



Living the Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing

By C.J. Mahaney

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What Really Matters

Have the extremities taken over and left the core of your faith forgotten? Do you get confused by what you feel versus what is real? Let dynamic pastor C. J. Mahaney strip away the nonessentials and bring you back to the simplest, most fundamental reason for your faith: Jesus Christ. This book is packed with powerful truth that will grip your heart, clear your mind, and invigorate your soul. Chapters include “Breaking the Rules of Legalism,” “The Cross Centered Day,” and “Assurance and Joy.” Get ready to behold a breathtaking view of what God intends to accomplish in and through you every day. You’ll discover how embracing this cross centered life is both our highest privilege and greatest responsibility.

His Gift, Your Hope

Do you desire more passion for Jesus Christ? Return to the very essence of your faith—the cross of Christ. Here, the deepest truths of Calvary will stir your passion for Him into an unquenchable fire.

“Never lay it aside. Never move on,” says C. J. Mahaney, who shows you how to center every day around the life-giving reality of the gospel and how to escape the pitfalls of legalism, condemnation, and feelings-driven faith.

PRAISE

C. J. Mahaney’s *The Cross Centered Life* and *Christ Our Mediator* are life-changing books whose unique messages are even more powerful when combined. *Living the Cross Centered Life* is a careful melding of these two books with new content as well. For readers who have not yet discovered the stand-alone books, or for Mahaney fans ready to cherish their favorites in a new package, this book is sure to become a treasured classic.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for C.J. Mahaney

“Every Timothy needs a Paul. C. J. is mine...and this book contains his life-message. It is my handbook for pursuing a cross centered life. Read it yourself, and let God realign your life.”

-JOSHUA HARRIS, Pastor and bestselling author

“C. J. Mahaney is the most spiritually infectious Christian I know! His passionate pursuit of Christ is so enviable to me because it flows out of both his own daily contemplation of the Savior as well as his intimate knowledge of the Word of God. Would to God that all true believers be infected with a huge dose of the same kind of enthusiasm for living the cross centered life. If you read and seek to apply what C. J. skillfully writes in this wonderful book, you just might find yourself contracting the same glorious disease he has, with the joyful hope of spreading it all around!”

-LANCE QUINN, Pastor-teacher at The Bible Church of Little Rock, Little Rock, Arkansas

“You’re holding the book you want to read to begin living the Christian life. You’re also holding the book you want to read to help you continue living the Christian life. There’s no other place to begin living the Christian life than at the cross. There’s no other place to keep living the Christian life than at the cross. C. J. Mahaney’s *Living the Cross Centered Life* will help you do that.”

-MARK DEVER, Senior pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, D.C. and author of *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*

“My friend C. J. Mahaney gives us a fresh look at our Lord and His cross. He lives the cross centered life, and is therefore qualified to talk about it. C. J. has a passion for Jesus and His people, and I was drawn closer to Jesus through this book. What higher complement could I offer?”

-RANDY ALCORN, Bestselling author of *The Grace and Truth Paradox* and *The Treasure Principle*

“C. J. Mahaney is one of our generation’s most genuine and heartfelt proclaimers of the cross of Jesus Christ. In this unexaggerated book, readers will encounter the winsome zeal of a man who has found in Christ the greatest of treasures and a joy that must be shared.”

-DONALDS WHITNEY, Author of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* and *How Can I Be Sure I'm a Christian?*

“The great nineteenth century Scottish pastor, Horatius Bonar once wrote, ‘If we would be holy, we must get to the cross and dwell there.’ C. J. Mahaney takes us to the cross in such a way that we can indeed dwell there. This is a book to be read and reread many times. Its message will never grow old or out of date.”

-JERRY BRIDGES, Author of *The Pursuit of Holiness*

“With tenderness and power, C. J. illustrates the critical difference between snacking on the benefits of the cross, versus surveying the wonders of the cross. It’s the difference between living as consumers, versus loving as the consumed...the difference between having a theology of grace, versus running boldly to the throne of grace. This is a must and magisterial read!”

-SCOTTY SMITH, Senior pastor at Christ Community Church in Franklin, Tennessee

About the Author

C. J. Mahaney leads Sovereign Grace Ministries in its mission to establish and support local churches. He served as pastor of Covenant Life Church in a Maryland suburb of Washington, D.C., for twenty-seven years before handing the role to Joshua Harris. He is the author of *The Cross Centered Life*, *Christ Our Mediator*, *Humility: True Greatness*, and *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God: What Every Christian Husband Needs to Know*. C. J. and his wife, Carolyn, have three married daughters and one son. They make their home in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

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At the Core

Life's Most Important Truth Can Be the Easiest to Forget

The Cross is the blazing fire at which the flame of our love is kindled, but we have to get near enough for its sparks to fall on us.

-John Stott

Each of our lives is centered on something. What's at the center of yours?

Think about it for a moment. What's really the main thing in your life? Only one thing can truly be first in priority; so what's at the top of your list, second to none?

Or let me put it this way: What are you most passionate about? What do you love to talk about? What do you think about most when your mind is free?

Or try this: What is it that defines you? Is it your career? A relationship? Maybe it's your family, or your ministry. It could be some cause or movement, or some political affiliation. Or perhaps your main thing is a hobby or a talent you have, or even your house and possessions.

It could be one of any number of good things—but when it comes to centering our life, what really qualifies as the one thing God says should be the most important?

Maybe your life's passion is not so much a single focus as a constantly shifting gaze. After all, today's marketing culture bombards us with never-ending offers of something newer, something better. Sadly, an obsession with the latest innovation and the trendiest pursuit—and all in up-to-the-minute style—is as common inside the church as outside.

New things will always come along. Many will be useless, some will be good, a few will be better—but what's the one thing that's really best, according to God?

The Only Essential

Here's how Paul answers that question for us: "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you.... For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins."¹

First importance. Paul is pointing us to the one transcendent truth that should define our lives. In the midst of our various responsibilities and many possible areas of service in the kingdom of God, one overarching truth should motivate all our work and affect every part of who we are: Christ died for our sins.

This, Paul says, is the main thing. Nothing else—not even things that are biblical and honorable—are of equal or greater importance than this: God sent His Son to the cross to bear His wrath for sinners like you and me.

If there's anything in life we should be passionate about, it's the gospel. And I don't mean passionate only about sharing it with others; I mean passionate in thinking about the gospel, reflecting upon it, rejoicing in it, allowing it to color the way we look at the world and all of life.

"The gospel," writes Jerry Bridges, "is not only the most important message in all of history; it is the only essential message in all of history. Yet we allow thousands of professing Christians to live their entire lives without clearly understanding it and experiencing the joy of living by it."² Neither you nor I want to be numbered among the believers who live out that tragedy.

That's why our attention must continually be drawn back to what John Stott calls "that great and most glorious of all subjects—the cross of Christ." In the Scriptures we discover a profound urgency for focusing all we are and everything we do around the gospel of the cross. For not only does this good news come first chronologically in our Christian experience, but it stays foremost in critical importance for creating and sustaining our joy and our fruitfulness—a fact we too often overlook.

Our Constant Danger

A concern expressed by D. A. Carson, Bible scholar and professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, is well justified: "I fear that the cross, without ever being disowned, is constantly

The gospel is history's only essential message.

in danger of being dismissed from the central place it must enjoy, by relatively peripheral insights that take on far too much weight. Whenever the periphery is in danger of displacing the center, we are not far removed from idolatry."³

John Stott agrees: "All around us we see Christians and churches relaxing their grasp on the gospel, fumbling it, and in danger of letting it drop from their hands altogether."⁴

Every day, we all face the temptation to move away from the gospel, to let it drop from our hands and hearts. Three main tendencies in particular tend to draw us away:

1. Subjectivism, which means basing our view of God on our changing feelings and emotions.
2. Legalism, which means basing our relationship with God on our own performance.
3. Condemnation, which means being more focused on our sin than on God's grace.

Later in this book we'll examine each of these tendencies more closely and discover how we can overcome them. But the first and most important thing you can do—always—is simply to make sure the gospel is at the

very center of your life. What's the main thing in your life? What is truly "of first importance" to you? It might be something perfectly honorable, perfectly legitimate; but if it's something other than the gospel—are you willing to repent to God and reorder your life? Let me urge you to do whatever it takes to make the gospel your passion. Ask God to change your heart so you can personally affirm for your own life the words of Galatians 6:14—"Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We Never Move On

But maybe this thought is nagging you: If we as Christians have already come to believe in the gospel—if we've already received the gift of salvation He purchased for us with His precious blood—why focus any longer on the cross? Isn't it time to give our full attention to more "mature" matters of living out our faith?

Nope.

Read slowly and listen carefully to one of my favorite quotations: "We never move on from the cross, only into a more profound understanding of the cross."⁵ The cross and its meaning aren't something we ever master.

In *Living the Cross Centered Life*, I hope to help lead you in that pursuit, in that pathway toward a more profound understanding.

George Orwell once noted that "sometimes the first duty of intelligent men is the restatement of the obvious."⁶ One purpose of this book is to restate the obvious yet oft-neglected truth of the gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ and bring it before you again—vividly and compellingly—so that you more deeply grasp the crucial importance of never taking it for granted.

If you think for a moment that the truth of the cross is something you've already adequately understood—if you suspect your life is already cross centered—allow me to bring to your attention some symptoms that arise from not being cross centered. Do any of the following describe you?

Do you think the truth of the cross is something you've already adequately understood?

- You often lack joy.
- You're not consistently growing in spiritual maturity.
- Your love for God lacks passion.
- You're always looking for some new technique, some

"new truth" or new experience to pull all the pieces of your faith together.

If you can relate to any of these symptoms, let me encourage you to keep reading. As you learn to live a cross centered life, you'll learn...

- how to break free from joy-robbing, legalistic thinking and living.
- how to leave behind the crippling effects of guilt and condemnation.

- how to stop basing your faith on your emotions and circumstances.
- how to grow in gratefulness, joy, and holiness.

These aren't the overhyped promises of an author wanting to convince you to read his book. These are God's promises to all who keep responding with their whole lives to the gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Too many of us have moved on from that glorious plan. In our never-ending desire to move forward and make sure that everything we think, say, and do is relevant to modern living, too many of us have stopped concentrating on the wonders of Jesus crucified.

Too many of us have fumbled the most important truth of the Bible, and therefore we've suffered the consequences.

But it's not too late to change. It's not too late to restate and reestablish the obvious truth as the most important truth in your life—and to be caught up as never before in wonder over the love and grace of God.

More Real Than Ever

In the church where I've served since 1977, our consistent pursuit has always been to keep the gospel central in everything we do. We never assume that there's already sufficient understanding, appreciation, and experience of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified."⁷

A while back I received a thank-you e-mail from a young woman who recalled her reaction when she first heard me identify the gospel as our church's lasting passion and priority. She told me, "I remember sitting there thinking... 'What does he mean? Yes, we're saved because Jesus died for our sins. But don't we then focus on other aspects of the Christian life?'" Meanwhile, under our teaching she began recognizing: that there was a problem deeper than my outward expressions of sin (harsh words, complaining, etc.)...

I was learning about the sin in my heart and the motives at the root... I vividly remember driving down the road one day, and God opening my eyes to see that I'm a wretched sinner to the very core of my being. In that second I thought, What am I to do?! Instantly I was clearly aware that this is why Jesus Christ came and died on a cross—for me.... I laughed out loud, and said, 'My God, only You could show me what a wretched sinner I am and make it the greatest news I've ever heard!' The truth of Jesus' sacrifice became more real to me than ever before.

More real than ever before. Can you say that as well? Luther once said he felt as if Jesus Christ died only yesterday.

Is that how you feel?

Through what we experience together in this book's pages, I hope you'll learn to feel that way consistently, and become committed to live that way as well. As we cultivate our understanding and appreciation for the cross, as we

live the rest of our earthly days feeling increasingly as if Jesus' death happened only yesterday, we'll be more and more astonished and overwhelmed by God's grace.

Only then will we more deeply understand and experience God's grace in a way that consistently engages our passion.

Grace More Amazing

I received another recent expression of thanks from a man who concluded his letter with these words: “I am amazed by the power of the gospel over and over, and have increased in my own love of the Savior. I can’t believe that I have been saved from what I deserve.”

Jesus Christ died only yesterday?

Amazed by the power of the gospel, over and over—can you say those words about your own experience as well? Do you continue to find your salvation an incredible miracle as you recall the judgment you genuinely deserve?

If not...what can bring about a change? What is it that can make the gospel of God and His grace more deeply and consistently amazing to us? In our busy lives, how can we more often be gripped by gratitude and enflamed in passion for the Savior...and cast off lukewarmness and dullness in our spiritual experience?

For me, grace is never more amazing than when I’m looking intensely at the cross, and I believe the same will be true for every child of God. There’s nothing more overpowering and captivating to the soul than to climb Calvary’s mountain with childlike attentiveness and wonder, with all the distractions and wrong assumptions cleared away.

That’s what we’ll aim for in these pages. We’ll trust our Shepherd to show us the unique path of righteousness He walked and to give us a profound glimpse into the depths of anguish it brought Him. It was an anguish infinitely darker than any death-shadowed valley you or I will ever pass through, but by better understanding His suffering, we’ll grow in a consistent joy and zeal that will equip us for whatever trials God brings our way in the process of our sanctification.

Recalling John Stott’s imagery in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, we want to stay near enough to the “blazing fire” of the cross to be showered with its sparks and to find the flame of our love freshly kindled.

Worthy of an Angel’s Tongue

Before going on, I have to confess something personal: Although on most days I recognize how inept and inadequate I am in various areas, I’m never more acutely aware of my inadequacy than when I address the suffering of Christ and its meaning. I savor this privilege, yet when I teach and preach these things I consistently find myself physically weakened and emotionally overcome. So I acknowledge my dependence on God’s strength in articulating this message, while also affirming my confidence in the One whose strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Our God is good, He is gracious, He is kind, and He’s eager to glorify His Son and edify His people. So I proceed, full of faith in Him...and confident that by the Holy Spirit’s prompting, you’ll join me in tears and in unspeakably joyful gratitude as we climb up Calvary together and gain a deeper understanding of what really happened there, and the staggering reasons behind it.

The subject of the cross, Charles Spurgeon once said, “is worthy of an angel’s tongue. And this also is true: It needs Christ himself completely to expound it.”⁸ In humble agreement with this prince of preachers on the infinite worth and

wealth of this topic, I add as well the prayer it prompted from Spurgeon: that God would “by his own Spirit expound it to your heart.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Irma Hughes:

The book untitled Living the Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing contain a lot of information on this. The writer explains her idea with easy approach. The language is very easy to understand all the people, so do not necessarily worry, you can easy to read this. The book was authored by famous author. The author will bring you in the new time of literary works. You can read this book because you can keep reading your smart phone, or product, so you can read the book inside anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can start their official web-site in addition to order it. Have a nice learn.

Richard Swisher:

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Margaret Walker:

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Gary Johnson:

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