

# A Call to Sacrifice

Almost 2,000 years have passed since the **death** and **resurrection** of our Lord. Yet we still witness the powerful impact Christ's passion has in our world. The huge box-office success of *Son of God* joins the lineup with movies like Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, giving us a vivid reminder of the incredible **suffering** and shame our Savior endured to atone for our sins and reconcile us to the Father. We may question why these portrayals have to be so bloody and graphic; however, the scenes are clearly in the Gospels. Nearly one-third of each is devoted to the last week of Jesus' life. Blood and **suffering** are infused in the very foundations of the Christian faith.

How are Jesus-followers to respond? We must embrace the shock and shame of the agonizing death of our Savior. We must sense the horror and heartache of the bloody payment for sin. Yet we also experience unspeakable joy of the provision made possible through the wondrous cross. We embrace the **crucifixion** and the **resurrection**, the **passion** and the **power** at the same time. It is bittersweet and almost confusing.

Years ago, I was privileged to see a prerelease viewing of *The Passion of the Christ* with a group of local pastors. I can't really describe what I felt and experienced both during and following this powerful depiction and unforgettable testament of my Lord's suffering.

I became physically ill from the stress and emotion. While driving home from the theater, I reached into my handbag for something to relieve my headache. The Lord clearly spoke to my spirit, "I wasn't able to reach for an Excedrin Migraine. I suffered it all without any painkillers."

If suffering and sacrifice are an integral part of Scripture and the life of Christ, the question we must ask ourselves is:

“Are suffering and sacrifice a part of my life?” Spurgeon once wrote that he was “certain that he had never grown in grace one-half so much anywhere as upon the bed of pain.”

Paul told the Romans, “We are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory” (Rom. 8:17, NIV). Somehow, our Western culture and consumer capitalism have convinced us that God’s grace is merely to make life a joy ride to heaven—that persecution and suffering either ended with the New Testament or are limited to other countries.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was well-acquainted with suffering. He so eloquently wrote, “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer reminds us, “Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master. Following Christ means *passio passiva*, suffering because we have to suffer.”

A true follower of Christ is called to take up His cross. It is a call to allegiance to the suffering Christ; therefore, it is not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to sacrifice.

What are the consequences of refusing? Will we forfeit intimacy with Christ and cease to follow Him? If we are crucified with Christ, will we find our lives again in the fellowship of His joy and grace? Is God challenging us to join with Paul in pressing “toward the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”?

The call resounding for Christ’s church, especially in America, is the call to personal sacrifice. Not merely sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice or to claim I know Him in the fellowship of His suffering. The call is for the same reason that Christ suffered—that others might experience His resurrection life. Paul proclaimed, “I rejoice in my

sufferings for you, and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for His body, that is, the church" (Col. 1:24, HCSB).

We are not called to be God's pitiful people, too weak to break the chains of indifference that bind us to the status quo. We are called to be God's chosen people, empowered by God's grace and moving toward the promise of sacrificial love.

The meaning of the cross and the meaning of life are witnessed through His willingness to sacrifice for others, to be hurt for others, to die for others. In Jesus' darkest hour, the voice of God breaks through, asking us the question: "Now do you understand how much I love you?"

**Kay Horner** *is the executive director of the Awakening America Alliance.*