

You Can't Experience Abundant Life Without This Critical Ingredient

Lord, I cry out to You because I want to know You more deeply. I want to experience more of Your love and its governance or control in my life. I want to live a life that sacrifices my desires for Yours. Help me to be a person who sacrifices of my life in order to fulfill Your will in my life.

Ironically, one of the most critical ingredients for a vibrant faith in Jesus is a life of sacrifice. It's one of great paradoxes of our faith. To live a life of abundance requires our sacrifice—sacrifice of our agendas, our desires and our ambitions for His. But when we learn to set aside our own will and plans for the will and plans of God, that is when we truly live. True life cannot be experienced in Christ without sacrifice. When Jesus calls us to come and follow Him, He calls us to a life of laying down our lives in order to live the life Christ through us.

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. Movies like *Son of God* and *The Passion of the Christ* give 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, but 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.

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.

Years ago, I was privileged to see a pre-release 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: "And if (we are) children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him" (8:17). Somehow, our Western culture and consumer capitalism have convinced us that God's grace is merely to make life a joy ride to heaven and that persecution and suffering either ended with the New Testament or they 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.

Learn to Encounter Jesus

God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. (2 Cor. 5:21).

Imagine Christ at Calvary. Recall the crucifixion scene. Meditate quietly on the day when Jesus became sin for us. Imagine hearing His words: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Now remember why Jesus had to become sin—or more personally, who did He do this for?

Why did Jesus go through all of the suffering He went through on that dreadful day? Or more to the point, for whom did Jesus go through all of the pain and agony of Calvary? Why did Jesus have to feel the relational pain and abandonment of His heavenly Father? It was because of His love for you. In quiet reflection, say these words to yourself, "He did it for me. He did it for me." Now take some time and respond to the Lord.

Jesus, when I remember how You went to Calvary because You loved me, my heart is filled with feelings of _____. Thank You, Lord, that You became sin so that I could be made right with God. My heart is overwhelmed at the way You sacrificed Yourself for me. Help me to live a life of sacrifice in response to You. {eo}

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