

“Practical and spiritual, heart-warming and affectionate, these reflections on the cross will be enjoyed over a good cup of coffee, in the comfort of your home, when traveling, or anywhere and by anyone who is looking to find gospel solace in our sometimes confused times.”

JOSH MOODY, Senior Pastor, College Church, Wheaton;
President, God Centered Life Ministries

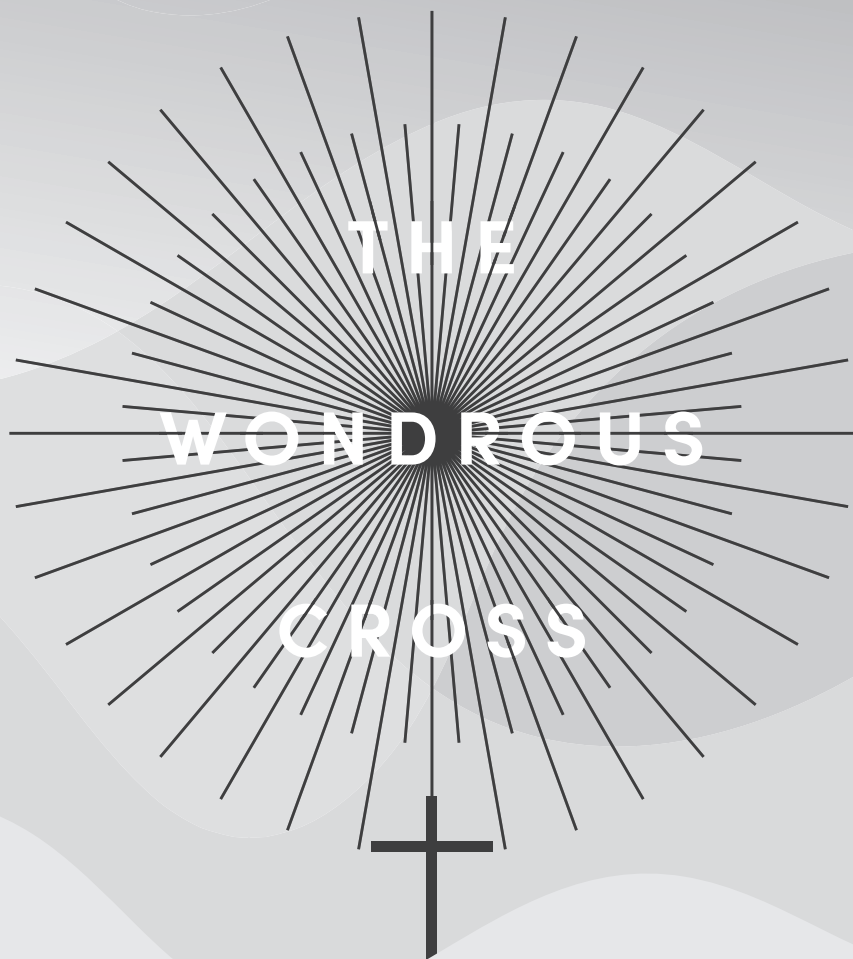
“Wil and Lorraine Triggs’s *The Wondrous Cross* will put a gospel-spring in your step throughout the day, as it leads you along the Markan trail from the transfiguration to the cross. The authors’ bright and penetrating reflections contain some surprising turns that will both delight and convict. This is, at once, a winsome and serious book—full of good cheer, perfect for Lent and any other season.”

R. KENT HUGHES, Former Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary; Senior Pastor Emeritus, College Church, Wheaton

“*The Wondrous Cross* is a proverbial breath of fresh air. It rises above the conventional book of devotionals with its variety, creativity, and real-life authenticity. It is both edifying and what is familiarly called a page-turner (a book that invites you to keep reading). It offers two for the price of one—forty days of daily Lenten devotionals, and a book that you can read with edification and delight in one or two sittings any time of the year.”

LELAND RYKEN, Professor Emeritus, Wheaton College and Author

THE
WONDROUS
CROSS



REAL LIFE REFLECTIONS FROM THE
TRANSFIGURATION TO THE CROSS

WIL & LORRAINE TRIGGS

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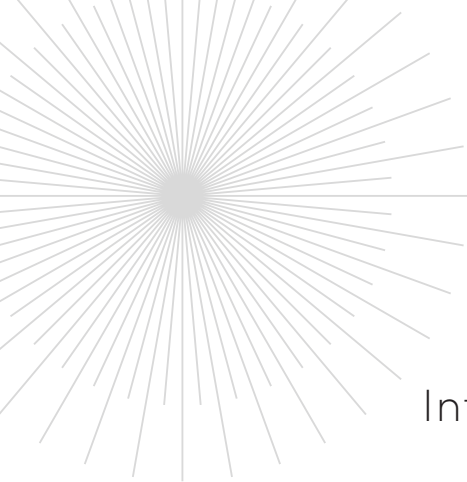
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Introduction

There are a few things you should know before you read this book.

Confession: neither of us comes from faith traditions that observe Lent. Forty readings for the days leading up to Easter sounds like a Lenten devotional and this book can be used between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. Since Sundays are excluded from the forty days of Lent, each Sunday you may like to spend some time praying and reflecting on the previous week of devotions. You could also use this resource in the days following Easter or any season of the year. There is no time of year when reading Scripture, praying to God and living the gospel are out of season. These actions are always good, and we should do them often in all seasons.

The gospel changes everything. At least, it should. The gospel, the good news, is *why* Jesus died on the cross and then rose back to life. But Jesus and his Spirit also shape *how* the gospel transforms us and the world around us. This shaping happens in quiet and often unexpected ways. Our prayer is that this journey will infuse the gospel with new life in you, and through you to the world around you. Dare to let God bring light to your heart, your day, your people, your world.

In these forty readings we walk through the life of Jesus from his transfiguration to the cross. We will use the Gospel of Mark's narrative as our anchor, with side trails to the other Gospels and the Old Testament.

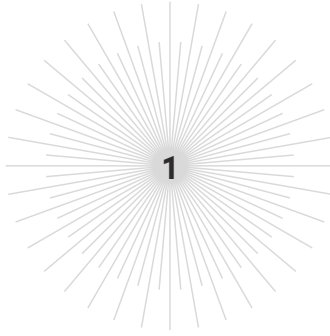
After all, all of Scripture points to Jesus. These devotional readings are meant to help in deepening our commitment to Jesus Christ through giving greater attention to God, to his created world and to the people around us.

At the end of each chapter, we give an action point in one of these three areas:

1. **Pray out loud:** Say a prayer to Jesus. Say it out loud when no one but he can hear. You can pray the words in our devotionals or use them as a springboard to talk to Jesus from your heart. Vocalizing prayer uses our body more fully than an internal prayer of unspoken thoughts.
2. **Crossroad:** Repentance means stop, turn around, follow Jesus. How might God be calling you to turn around and change course, to confess sin and find his forgiveness, and to walk more fully in his path?
3. **All things new:** Take a generous look outward. See afresh the people and the world around you. Embrace these in new ways as we together approach the cross of Jesus.

The Wondrous Cross, our title, comes from one of our favorite songs of this season, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” Written in 1707 by Isaac Watts, this hymn is one we sing every year. Originally a symbol of shame and humiliation, the cross Jesus bore for us became a place of wonder and surprise. The surprise, the joy, is that Jesus brings eternal life and truth in unexpected ways—humility over pride; sacrifice over subjugation; a mule instead of a stallion. It’s always unexpected, yet it is thrillingly right and true. This comes to life in our lives in individual Spirit-guided ways.

Let’s walk this path together, drawing nearer to the cross and finding a wonder that is beautifully not our own.



My Favorite Stuffies

Typically, at the start of the school year, stuffies (stuffed animals) show up to our Sunday school for five- and six-year-olds. We never turn away stuffies of any color, critter or costume.

I understand this attachment to stuffies. When my son was young, his treasured Winnie-the-Pooh stuffie came with him on a family weekend in Chicago. We had checked out of the hotel when our son wailed, “I left Pooh Bear in the room.”

In seconds, the concierge and the front desk became involved in our family drama to retrieve Winnie-the-Pooh. When the concierge announced that Pooh Bear had been reunited with his family, everyone applauded.

I thought of stuffies when I read 2 Chronicles 13 for my Bible study. Abijah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel, were at war when Abijah questioned Jeroboam’s battle plan: “And now you think to withstand the kingdom of the LORD in the hand of the sons of David, because you are a great multitude and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made you for gods” (v. 8).

It probably comes from hanging out with young children, but I started to laugh as I imagined Jeroboam’s warriors with their little golden-calf stuffies tucked under their arms—too attached to leave them behind.

I wish I could laugh at the stuffies in my life, but like those mighty warriors, I am too attached to them to leave them behind. One favorite stuffie is Creature Comfort. Then there's the twin stuffies Achievement and Accolade. The coolest stuffie talks, and her name is Miss Opinion. When paired with Bluetooth, she can come with me anywhere, anytime. Oh, how I love Miss Opinion.

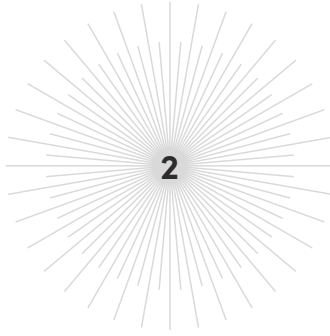
Your stuffie collection might be different from mine, but not our shared attachment to them. It's the attachment that tethers us to the here and now, to what we can see and to what we think we control. Our gaze is distinctly horizontal, looking for a human savior to rescue us.

In his book, *The Heart in Pilgrimage*, Leland Ryken features a devotional by Richard Baxter, "The Saints' Everlasting Rest." Stuffies probably weren't on Baxter's mind when he wrote this devotional, but he did offer a solution for our attachment to them: look up to our eternal rest. Baxter wrote, "take one walk every day in the new Jerusalem." He calls to mind Daniel, who "in his captivity, daily opened his window toward Jerusalem, though far out of sight, he went to God in his devotions; so may the believing soul, in this captivity of the flesh, look toward Jerusalem which is above."¹

Crossroad

Perhaps the best way to prepare for resurrection—both Christ's and our promised one—is to escape from our captivity by opening our windows and taking a daily walk in Jerusalem. What windows do you need to open to take that walk today?

For further reading: Daniel 6:10, 23–27.



I Give Up

A good friend's Facebook post upset me. It wasn't about me, but about something close to my heart. That hurt. So, I decided to tell him, ironically, by text.

He explained that this post was his way of finding truth, but he was sorry; I mattered to him more than any truth he was looking for on social media posts. He also said he was going to give up social media for Lent.

Ah, giving up things. In ancient times, people sacrificed to appease gods, even and especially the false ones. When people talk of their denials today, it seems more like the path to a pagan temple than a life-changing road to Calvary.

Yet Lent give-ups are temporary; they only last until Easter Sunday. Nor can we fallen humans sacrifice like God did. It's impossible. We can't atone or intercede. And the finished work of Jesus means we don't have to.

That's why I'm giving up on giving up.

Instead I'll take hold of something new. Maybe I'm going to take hold of prayer, speaking to God audibly when no one else is around to hear. Or perhaps in church on Sunday, I'm going to make eye contact and listen. Someone is waiting to hear hello, pray together, be the messenger. Help me find that person and not look away.

Life is the anti-Groundhog Day. Every day is new. There are no repeats.

As I give up giving up, my heart-battered, head-throbbing soul cries out: Be on the lookout for Jesus today; let the Word explain himself along the way—what he does, who he is. It is to be like a ewe lamb that is lost, then found; to drink cool water from the still waters; to eat like one who has not eaten in forever; it is to lap up, like water or bloody meat, from the lowest manger.

I will not give up on him who has taken all my sin completely to the utmost—drinking the cup only he could hold. The Potter could mold the chalice; swallow the dregs to the very last breath; and then fold the linen graveclothes when he was done with death.

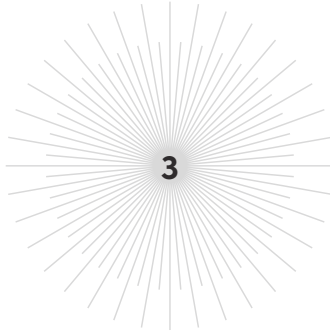
I long to see Jesus. I long to be like the disciples who recognize him again, hear the not-me word when he breaks the bread and remember how he appears in their midst like he had never gone—because he never had and never will. Still Jesus is here—in word and flesh; he will always be ever nearer than near.

Pray out loud

Jesus' love is wondrous to behold, yet beyond us—even us in his grasp. Down he reaches, beyond the farthest, to find farther fathoms further down; down he bends. He travels on foot beyond the very last bend.

Take my hand, my dear ones; we've a wedding to attend.

For further reading: Psalm 40:3-8; Ephesians 2:8-9.



Off My Pedestal

Forget Queen Victoria and even William Shakespeare. On this London trip, as a Sunday school curriculum editor at the time, I wanted to find one statue—Robert Raikes, the founder of the modern-day Sunday school movement.

My husband spotted the statue first—in the shade of the Victoria Embankment Gardens, behind The Savoy. The description on the base read: “Robert Raikes/Founder of Sunday Schools/1780. This statue was erected under the direction of the Sunday School Union by contributions from teachers and scholars of the Sunday Schools in Great Britain.”

I imagined Sunday school teachers encouraging the children to bring in coins to help build the statue, then organizing a field trip to see it.

Whether you like statues or not, we do like having control of who we place on our pedestals—flawed people elevating other flawed people to almost God-like statuses. We like to elevate ourselves and others.

In Mark 9:2-8, Jesus’ transfiguration has an ordinary beginning: “... Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain.” Then the most extraordinary event took place: they saw Jesus’ glory. They saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. They saw glory, and said ... let’s build tents, three tents.

I think Mark was being generous when he noted that Peter “did not know what to say” (Mark 9:6). God had the final say in the cloud on top of the mountain: “This is my beloved Son, listen to him!” (v. 7). Jesus is greater than Elijah, greater than Moses. He cannot be contained in any tent or statue. But a few verses later, the disciples were ready to unpack the other two tents as they argued about which of them was the greatest—which of them deserved the statue, or should I say status. I would have been right in the thick of that argument.

About eight days before the transfiguration, Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Jesus didn’t say *climb up on a pedestal*, but *take up your cross*. Lose your life to save it.

There’s one other thing Jesus wants us to take up—his kind yoke and light burden—as we learn from his gentle and lowly heart. He wants to remove our burdens and give us rest for our souls.

I must rest from pitching that tent for my current idol, rest from that next time I kick the base of my pedestal—tempted to climb back up—and rest from trying to earn his grace or prove myself to him.

Jesus sees and loves us. His unwavering presence is the path to hope and change. The cross, the empty tomb and the words in Scripture are enough—not etched in a monument, but written on our hearts by the nail-scarred hands of God himself.

All things new

What pedestal do you need to climb down from?

For further reading: Mark 8:34–37.