



I'm pretty sure that February's book of the month is the one book, outside the Bible, that has had the greatest effect on my life. *Living the Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing* was written to ensure that Christians understand and think rightly about the cross of Christ and its implications for our lives. He accomplishes that aim with warmth, passion, and clarity.

CJ Mahaney doesn't just tell you about the cross and its implications; he writes in a way to make you feel it: "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" (Stott).

Believing in, trusting in, thinking about, appreciating the good news of the cross—that Jesus died in the place of sinners to free us from sin's power and penalty so that we can be reconciled to God and enjoy Him forever—is not *just* for evangelism. Sometimes Christians think that preaching the gospel is an evangelical aim only, as if once someone believes the gospel and "gets in" then it is time to move on to other doctrines. Sadly, this is the way I was thinking about the gospel (and the cross) until I first heard CJ preach on the subject and read the first version of this book. I was immediately changed.

In fact, this book and the Biblical priority of the message of the cross that it proclaims have had a profound effect on Grace Bible Church as

well. May we never, as individuals and as a church, move past or neglect this of-first-importance central truth.

A strength of this book is that it refuses to treat the cross as a vague symbol or theological category but as a vivid and violent truth that reveals our Savior's grace and love. It leads the reader to consider what actually happened there and why it matters. In fourteen short chapters, Mahaney shows the necessity of the cross, the wonder of substitution, and the everyday outcomes of Christ's finished work. His aim isn't merely to inform, but to make the cross the daily framework for worship, repentance, service, and perseverance.

There is a "rubber-meets-the-road" practical usefulness. It directly confronts legalism—the subtle but deadly habit of living as though God's favor must be earned and maintained by our spiritual performance. Legalism doesn't always look like extra rules; sometimes it looks like anxiety, comparison, pride, or despair when we fail. But the cross exposes the lie beneath it: if Christ has fully atoned for my sin, then I cannot add to His work. The cross kills boasting, kills self-righteousness, and teaches us to obey from gratitude rather than to obey for acceptance.

The cross also helps the Christian avoid condemnation, where some Christians live functionally "on probation," keeping a respectful distance from God, and assuming that ongoing guilt is a sign of humility. But "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Rightly viewed, this freedom is not a license to sin, but it is the very thing that fuels holiness.

I have read this book more than a dozen times in my life and have blessed each time. I would love if the entire church were to read (or re-read) this book together this February. *Jacob Hantla*

Suggested One-Month Reading Plan

Approximately 5 pages per day

Week 1: Feb 2-8

Foreword, 3 pages

Introduction: At the Core, 10 pages

1. The Climax and the Key, 8 pages

2. The Divine Order, 13 pages

Week 2: Feb 9-15

3. Searching the Mystery, 13 pages

4. The Divine Dilemma, 7 pages

5. The Divine Rescue, 8 pages

6. Staring into the Cup, 8 pages

Week 3: Feb 16-22

7. Your Face in the Crowd, 6 pages

8. The Scream of the Damned, 7 pages

9. What God Understands, 5 pages

10. Assurance and Joy, 7 pages

11. Breaking the Rule of Legalism, 11 pages

Week 4: Feb 23-Mar 1

12. Unloading Condemnation, 8 pages

13. The Cross Centered Day, 15 pages

14. Never Move On, 10 pages