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THE
CROSS

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INSPIRATION *and*
ENCOURAGEMENT *for* YOUR LIFE

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LUCADO
INSPIRATIONAL
READER

HOPE *and* ENCOURAGEMENT
for YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE

MAX LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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Page design by Mandi Cofer.

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Any italic in scripture quotations reflects the author's own emphasis.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lucado, Max.

The Lucado inspirational reader : hope and encouragement for your everyday life / Max Lucado.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8499-4830-5 (hardcover)

1. Christian life—Miscellanea. I. Title. II. Title. III. Title. IV. Title. V. Title.

BV4504.3.L84605 2014

248.4—dc23

2014033369

Printed in the United States of America

11 12 13 14 15 QG 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To Marcelle Le Gallo—celebrating thirty years
of glad service at the Oak Hills Church*



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Acknowledgments

*H*eartfelt thanks to the hundreds of folks who have contributed time and talent to the creation of these books for the last twenty-five-plus years. Editors, publishers, designers, printers, sales teams, bookstore workers, illustrators, publicists—I'm grateful.

A few key team members have provided oversight to every single page of each book: Karen Hill, Liz Heaney, Carol Bartley, Steve and Cheryl Green, Susan Ligon, and David Moberg. I cannot say enough about your contributions. Thank you.

And deepest love to the dearest family this side of heaven.

The Cross
A Triumph of Tenderness

*T*he cross.

It rests on the time line of history like a compelling diamond. Its tragedy summons all sufferers. Its absurdity attracts all cynics. Its hope lures all searchers.

And according to Paul, the cross is what counts.

My, what a piece of wood! History has idolized it and despised it, gold-plated it and burned it, worn and trashed it. History has done everything to it but ignore it.

That's the one option that the cross does not offer.

No one can ignore it! You can't ignore a piece of lumber that suspends the greatest claim in history. A crucified carpenter claiming that he is God on earth? Divine? Eternal? The death slayer?

No wonder Paul called it "the core of the gospel." Its bottom line is sobering: if the account is true, it is history's hinge. Period. If not, it is history's hoax.

That's why the cross is what matters.

—NO WONDER THEY CALL HIM THE SAVIOR



*The diadem of pain,
which sliced your gentle face,
three spikes piercing flesh and wood
to hold you in your place.
The need for blood I understand.
Your sacrifice I embrace.
But the bitter sponge, the cutting spear,
the spit upon your face?
Did it have to be a cross?
Did not a kinder death exist
than six hours hanging between life and death,
all spurred by a betrayer's kiss?
"Oh, Father," you pose,
heart-stilled at what could be,
"I'm sorry to ask, but I long to know,
did you do this for me?"
—HE CHOSE THE NAILS*



*L*ike a master painter God reserved his masterpiece until the end. All the earlier acts of love had been leading to this one. The angels hushed and the heavens paused to witness the finale. God unveils the canvas and the ultimate act of creative compassion is revealed.

God on a cross.

The Creator being sacrificed for the creation. God convincing man once and for all that forgiveness still follows failure.

I wonder if, while on the cross, the Creator allowed his thoughts to wander back to the beginning. One wonders if he allowed the myriad of faces and acts to parade in his memory. Did he reminisce about the creation of the sky and sea? Did he relive the conversations with Abraham and Moses? Did he remember the plagues and the promises, the wilderness and the wanderings? We don't know.

We do know, however, what he said.

"It is finished."

The mission was finished. All that the master painter needed to do was done and was done in splendor. His creation could now come home.

"It is finished!" he cried.

And the great Creator went home.

(He's not resting, though. Word has it that his tireless hands are preparing a city so glorious that even the angels get goose

bumps upon seeing it. Considering what he has done so far, that is one creation I plan to see.)

—*NO WONDER THEY CALL HIM THE SAVIOR*



*N*ails didn't hold God to a cross. Love did.

—*WHEN GOD WHISPERS YOUR NAME*



*S*ix hours, one Friday.

To the casual observer the six hours are mundane. A shepherd with his sheep, a housewife with her thoughts, a doctor with his patients. But to the handful of awestruck witnesses, the most maddening of miracles is occurring.

God is on a cross. The creator of the universe is being executed.

Spit and blood are caked to his cheeks, and his lips are cracked and swollen. Thorns rip his scalp. His lungs scream with pain. His legs knot with cramps. Taut nerves threaten to snap as pain twangs her morbid melody. Yet, death is not ready. And there is no one to save him, for he is sacrificing himself.

It is no normal six hours. . . . it is no normal Friday.

Far worse than the breaking of his body is the shredding of his heart.

His own countrymen clamored for his death.

His own disciple planted the kiss of betrayal.

His own friends ran for cover.

And now his own father is beginning to turn his back on him, leaving him alone.

A witness could not help but ask: Jesus, do you give no thought to saving yourself? What keeps you there? What holds you to the cross? Nails don't hold gods to trees. What makes you stay? . . .

Six hours. One Friday.

Let me ask you a question: What do you do with that day in history? What do you do with its claims?

If it really happened . . . if God did commandeered his own crucifixion . . . if he did turn his back on his own son . . . if he did storm Satan's gate, then those six hours that Friday were packed with tragic triumph. If that was God on that cross, then the hill called Skull is granite studded with stakes to which you can anchor.

Those six hours were no normal six hours. They were the most critical hours in history. For during those six hours on that Friday, God embedded in the earth three anchor points sturdy enough to withstand any hurricane.

Anchor point N^o1—*My life is not futile*. This rock secures the hull of your heart. Its sole function is to give you something that you can grip when facing the surging tides of futility and relativism. It's a firm grasp on the conviction that there is truth. Someone is in control and you have a purpose.

he One who has the right to
condemn you provided the way
to acquit you. You make mistakes. God
doesn't. And he made you.

Anchor point N^o2—*My failures are not fatal*. It's not that he loves what you did, but he loves who you are. You are his. The One who has the right to condemn you provided the way to acquit you. You make mistakes. God doesn't. And he made you.

Anchor point N^o3—*My death is not final*. There is one more stone to which you should tie. It's large. It's round. And it's heavy. It blocked the door of a grave. It wasn't big enough, though. The tomb that it sealed was the tomb of a transient. He only went in to prove he could come out. And on the way out he took the stone with him and turned it into an anchor point. He dropped it deep into the uncharted waters of death. Tie to his rock and the typhoon of the tomb becomes a spring breeze on Easter Sunday.

There they are. Three anchor points. The anchor points of the cross.

—SIX HOURS ONE FRIDAY



*T*here was something about the crucifixion that made every witness either step toward it or away from it. It simultaneously compelled and repelled.

And today, two thousand years later, the same is true. It's the watershed. It's the Continental Divide. It's Normandy. And you are either on one side or the other. A choice is demanded. We can do what we want with the cross. We can examine its history. We

can study its theology. We can reflect upon its prophecies. Yet the one thing we can't do is walk away in neutral. No fence sitting is permitted. The cross, in its absurd splendor, doesn't allow that. That is one luxury that God, in his awful mercy, doesn't permit.

On which side are you?

—*NO WONDER THEY CALL HIM THE SAVIOR*



*T*he sinless One took on the face of a sinner so that we sinners could take on the face of a saint.

—*HE CHOSE THE NAILS*



*O*ur Master lived a three-dimensional life. He had as clear a view of the future as he did of the present and the past.

This is why the ropes used to tie his hands and the soldiers used to lead him to the cross were unnecessary. They were incidental. Had they not been there, had there been no trial, no Pilate and no crowd, the very same crucifixion would have occurred. Had Jesus been forced to nail himself to the cross, he would have done it. For it was not the soldiers who killed him, nor the screams of the mob. It was his devotion to us.

So call it what you wish: An act of grace. A plan of redemption.

A martyr's sacrifice. But whatever you call it, don't call it an accident. It was anything but that.

—*GOD CAME NEAR*



*O*h, the hands of Jesus. Hands of incarnation at his birth. Hands of liberation as he healed. Hands of inspiration as he taught. Hands of dedication as he served. And hands of salvation as he died.

The crowd at the cross concluded that the purpose of the pounding was to skewer the hands of Christ to a beam. But they were only half-right. We can't fault them for missing the other half. They couldn't see it. But Jesus could. And heaven could. And we can.

Through the eyes of Scripture we see what others missed but what Jesus saw. "He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross" (Col. 2:14 NLT).

Between his hand and the wood there was a list. A long list. A list of our mistakes: our lusts and lies and greedy moments and prodigal years. A list of our sins.

Dangling from the cross is an itemized catalog of your sins. The bad decisions from last year. The bad attitudes from last week. There, in broad daylight for all of heaven to see, is a list of your mistakes.

God has done with us what I am doing with our house. He has penned a list of our faults. The list God has made, however, cannot be read. The words can't be deciphered. The mistakes are covered. The sins are hidden. Those at the top are hidden by his hand; those down the list are covered by his blood. Your sins are "blotted out" by Jesus (see KJV). "He has forgiven you all your sins: Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over his own head on the cross" (Col. 2:14 PHILLIPS).

This is why he refused to close his fist. He saw the list! What kept him from resisting? This warrant, this tabulation of your failures. He knew the price of those sins was death. He knew the source of those sins was you, and since he couldn't bear the thought of eternity without you, he chose the nails.

The hand squeezing the handle was not a Roman infantryman.

The force behind the hammer was not an angry mob.

The verdict behind the death was not decided by jealous Jews.

Jesus himself chose the nails.

So the hands of Jesus opened up. Had the soldier hesitated, Jesus himself would have swung the mallet. He knew how; he was no stranger to the driving of nails. As a carpenter he knew what it took. And as a Savior he knew what it meant. He knew that the purpose of the nail was to place your sins where they could be hidden by his sacrifice and covered by his blood.

He knew the price of those
sins was death. He knew
the source of those sins was you, and since
he couldn't bear the thought of eternity
without you, he chose the nails.

So Jesus himself swung the hammer.

The same hand that stilled the seas stills your guilt.

The same hand that cleansed the Temple cleanses your heart.

The hand is the hand of God.

The nail is the nail of God.

And as the hands of Jesus opened for the nail, the doors of heaven opened for you.

—*HE CHOSE THE NAILS*



*P*aul said, “The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is my only reason for bragging” (Gal. 6:14 NCV). Do you feel a need for affirmation? Does your self-esteem need attention? You don’t need to drop names or show off. You need only pause at the base of the cross and be reminded of this: The maker of the stars would rather die for you than live without you. And that is a fact. So if you need to brag, brag about that.

—*TRAVELING LIGHT*