

The Way of the Cross... What He carried...

1: Jesus is condemned

He carries a crown of thorns... a painful sign of his kingship.

The long sharp thorns of the acacia tree pierce the thin skin of his head and the soldiers jeer at the comic king.

He was there when the acacia tree came to be in the world. He decreed its golden yellow flower-heads and its resilience to harsh desert conditions.

That which he made now makes him bleed.

The thorns are the spines of our spitefulness,
the sharpness of our cynicism, the cuts of our carelessness.

He carries the wounds we inflict on our neighbours, our family, on the vulnerable person who threatens our comfort.

The thorns will become the jewels in his crown of redemption, his reign of forgiveness, as the kingdom of God unfolds in his presence.

**Lord Jesus, give us the courage to say 'sorry' when we have hurt someone
– no matter how painful the cost.**

2: Jesus takes up the cross

He carries a beam of wood...

He is a carpenter by trade... he knows the weight and the feel of wood...
the long rough grain of the vessels which carried water to the leaves... the warmth
of the adzed surface, the dry sharpness of the bark.

He knows the many decades and centuries it takes to grow a tree. He knows how quickly it can be chopped and fashioned into tools, oxen-yokes, chairs, tables, and the Romans' instruments of death.

He carries the beam as he would carry a child or an injured person on his shoulders,
like a shepherd carries a sheep.

He carries us, our heavy weight upon his shoulders - with a love which is not noticed.

Lord Jesus, help us to share the burdens of others in the Spirit of Love.

3: Jesus falls

He carries a burden too heavy for mortal man...

his human frailty falters and he falls with the weight of the world on his back...
the sorrow, the poverty, the hunger, the disease and the oppression...
the greed, the envy, the cruelty, the injustice and the indifference.

He was there when men and women came to be,
when they were called to fullness of life...
he came to rescue them from the pits of despair, or arrogance ...
to enter their darkness in all its vastness and confusion.

He came not to condemn... but was condemned.

*'He made himself nothing and
became obedient even to death on a cross.'*

Lord Jesus, remind us daily not to judge or condemn our neighbour

4: Jesus meets his mother

He carries the fullness of love within his being:

That love which gave him birth and nurtured him to manhood.
That love which is bonded through birth to his mother,
and nurtured through childhood.
That love which knows no bounds... is limitless and timeless.

His mother's look will break his heart
for he carries the pain of loving...
the pain of knowing the pain she cannot bear...
the pain of knowing she is beside him despite the unbearable.

His heart breaks for the world's pain
just as his mother's heart breaks for his pain.

God is Love and the fullness of God is in him.

Lord Jesus, sustain us when our own hearts are broken

5: Simon helps Jesus carry his cross

Jesus carries his helplessness.

'Save yourself' they jeered, 'if you are a king!'

He is weak with pain and loss of sleep...
a helpless exhausted convict amidst the circus crowd...
at the mercy of those who push him on and up the hill.

Simon is commanded to help...
only allowed to help to get the show moving onwards.
Simon is the stranger in the crowd who helps... who brings relief...
a moment of respite on the journey to hell.

Jesus carries our helplessness...
when we have reached the end of our capacity to cope.

Lord Jesus, reach out to support us through the darkest journeys in life.

6: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Jesus carries the true image of God...

God who loves us enough to die with us and for us.

*He was in the form of God...
taking the form of a servant.
bearing human likeness, sharing the human lot...
even to the point of death... on the cross.*

Veronica... the mythical saint who wipes his face...
like a nurse who longs to ease the suffering.
Her name in Latin... 'vera icon'... means 'true image'.
Jesus' face is the face of compassion... the face of God.
And Veronica wipes the tears of God.

His image becomes reflected indelibly in the faces and lives of those who look to
him with compassion.
His image is reflected in the faces of all who show compassion to others.

Jesus, enable us to see your face in everyone we meet

7: Jesus falls again

Jesus carries the shards of wood that pierce the skin on his back.

He bears the rough beatings of the soldiers who force him up and on to the city's rubbish dump.

He has walked these same streets with friends
and is now abandoned by them.

He has preached of love and forgiveness
and now feels the full force of fear and revenge.

He carries the pain of those who are beaten, imprisoned, tortured, outcast.

He carries the agony of inhumanity:

the depravity of those who enjoy inflicting pain...

the injustice of those who condemn the vulnerable to hunger and homelessness...

the fearfulness of those who cast out the sick and dying.

'Forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

Lord Jesus, forgive us when we know not what we do

8: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

Jesus carries the pain of the helpless and the voiceless:

The women who bear the pain of childbirth,
who grieve for lost children or the stigma of childlessness,
who are cast out as widows,
who have no rights in their society,
who suffer domestic abuse,
who stand by helplessly as their children are taken away or brutalised or abused.

He carries their helplessness upon his shoulders and longs to bring the healing touch of love into the hard hearts of men.

A new commandment I give you: 'Love one another as I have loved you'

Lord Jesus, show us how to love one another as you love us

9: Jesus falls a third time

Jesus is spent.

He can carry no more but the helpless resignation of what is to come...
the white fear of bodily pain... the desperate effort to deny the inevitable.

Surrounded by a noisy crowd, he bears the deafness of the condemned.

Surrounded by the rotting refuse of society, he bears the smell of fear.

Surrounded by his own people, he bears the isolation of the outcast.

His followers are nowhere to be seen. They are embarrassed, frightened.

He carries their bitter disappointment at the outcome of all they had hoped for.

They hoped for a new kingdom on earth...

a new justice in social order... the healing of all ills.

They are let down, bereft of a purpose, a reason for going on.

He was the man who challenged authority,
who embraced lepers, gave sight to the blind, ate with sinners,
opened eyes and ears and gave the voiceless hope.

How did it come to this? ... Why could God let this happen?

He knows, but can no longer reach them...

only the passage of events and time will bring them to the fullness of God's love.

Lord Jesus, be near us in our darkest fears

10: Jesus is stripped of his clothing

He carries his robe... a seamless piece of cloth... wrapped round his waist as the
last vestige of public dignity.

It was a cloth of delicate beauty and great craftsmanship...

robust yet light, woven in one piece from top to bottom, like a high priest would
wear as he went about his duties.

This was the billowing robe which drew the crowds to listen to him on the hillside.

This was the robe where children buried their smiling faces as he told them stories.

This was the robe which the woman touched and was healed.

Now the cloth is stained with his sweat and blood and mud.

They strip him of even that, and now he carries the humiliation of public nakedness,
the belittling of him to the level of an animal hunted for recreation and slaughter.

Lord Jesus, sustain us through ridicule and shame.

I I: Jesus is nailed to the cross

He carries our anger, our fears, our sorrows, our doubts

He is held by nails between two criminals.
Between two responses to his presence.

And here the fourth nail is driven home....
What is the point of God?

“If you are God save yourself and us!”

“Remember me, sinner that I am”

Two responses from the depths of suffering:
blame and plea.
The arms which gave us life, reach out to both.

He carries our small disappointments, the lost hopes and shattered dreams.

He carries the huge ravaging hurts, where tragedy bites and the tectonic plates of a lifetime shift.

He carries the lives which are lost before they have hardly begun,
the lives cut short, the lives savagely realigned by grief or injury or abuse.

He carries the howls of grief at the never-ending hours of death... the emptiness of the days that follow.

He carries our doubts. He knows about doubt... the other face of faith... he wrestled with doubt in the garden and even now cries he is forsaken.

And gazing from the cross itself he sees it all. He sees us as we are.
He loves us beyond imagining.

‘He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...’

Lord Jesus, when we are torn apart, hold us tightly

I 2: Jesus dies on the cross

He carries a broken heart.

He sees his mother... a friend... so close and yet so far away.
And the terrible loneliness in dying.

'I thirst'

A cry. 'My God - where are you!'
His heart breaks.

Then silence.

How can a loving God allow this to happen?
The silent final spear thrust — *'There is no God'*

His heart is broken for every person who shares this pain.

The water flows silently from his broken heart.
Water of life... an awakening of life to come.

Lord Jesus, fill our emptiness, and heal our broken hearts

I 3: Jesus is taken from the cross

His body carries the hopes of God

His body carries the hopes of God through the hardest of hells –
through the hell of a mother, a father, cradling the body of their child...

the hopes to bridge the chasm between earth and heaven,
between death and life,
between us and Him.

His body is the grain of the new harvest...

*'Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies...
it can bear no fruit.'*

Lord Jesus, breathe new life into every tragedy.

I4: Jesus is laid in the tomb

Jesus carries the marks of his life into the dark stillness of the tomb.

His body carries the injuries of hatred inflicted by torturers and executioners.

He carries too the linen cloths of love
wrapped gently round him by his family and friends...
those who were helpless to stop the events...
who will ever remember and weep for him...
whose lives have been changed by him
and whose future will be shaped by him.

The linen cloths are a final human act of loving kindness...
a last outpouring of helpless grief for one so loved...
a promise of the bond between the living and the dead.

Jesus body waits for his fulfilment... for a new dawn,
a new day, a new life to transcend death.
Waits for the question at daybreak...

'Who are you looking for?'

Lord Jesus, keep our eyes on you.

I5. The Break of the Morning

The tomb is empty. The body is gone.

'Who are you looking for?' - the gentle voice of the Gardener asks.

Her expectations blind her to the man who is the Gardener of Life and Love...
the true vine.

'Mary!' ...and the way her name is spoken opens her eyes.
'Do not cling, but go...and tell the others...'

He speaks your name, my name, every name, with motherly longing...
...an invitation to Life...

What will we do? Who are we looking for?

Lord Jesus, open our eyes to see you – here – now.