



Death by Love: Letters from the Cross

Mark Driscoll , Gerry Breshears

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Real people. Real sin. Transformed lives. A compilation of heartfelt letters written from a pastor to his people that explains Jesus' work on the cross.

Death by Love is a unique book on the cross of Jesus Christ. While many books debate the finer points of the doctrine of the atonement, what is often lost are the real-life implications of Jesus' death on the cross for those who have sinned and have been sinned against. Written in the form of pastoral letters, Death by Love outlines the twelve primary effects of Jesus' death on the cross and connects each to the life of a different individual.

Driscoll, one of America's most influential pastors, and Breshears, a respected theologian, help readers understand, appreciate, and trust in Jesus' work on the cross in a way that will transform their lives. Both deeply theological and intensely practical, this book shows how everyone can find hope through the death of Jesus Christ.

"This book is brutally honest about sin and suffering, and wonderfully hopeful as it points us to our true Savior."

Timothy S. Lane, Executive Director, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation

"The stories portrayed in the chapters of this book are all too real, but more importantly, the pastoral responses offer riveting applications of the cross for true and lasting transformation."

Bruce A. Ware, Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Practical and powerful. It applies the sufficiency of Jesus to the real-life challenges we face in the church every day. If you work with hurting people you need Death by Love."

Dan Jarrell, Teaching Pastor, ChangePoint Church, Anchorage, Alaska

"A key reason for my confidence in this book is its brilliant presentation of the historic theology of the cross and how it defends reprehensible attacks against it."

Gregg R. Allison, Associate Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"The authors connect squarely with our ever-changing culture, declaring the central doctrine of Jesus' death and why it is important."

Bill Mounce, President, BiblicalTraining.org

Death by Love: Letters from the Cross Details

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From Reader Review Death by Love: Letters from the Cross for online ebook

Kurt says

Mark Driscoll has a heart! With feelings and everything! For a few years now, I have been a fan of Mark Driscoll's theology and his ability to communicate. Driscoll is someone who takes the Bible very seriously and has a great respect for God, and he speaks hard truths on a consistent basis, so I am regularly challenged when I listen to his podcasts or read his books. Unfortunately, he has an abrasive and condescending style, and it's hard to hear his heart underneath the growly demands for men to step up and be Driscoll-style men. This book, though, is a chance for him to really express his pastoral side, as he examines a variety of characteristics of Jesus' death and resurrection, in the context of offering counsel to struggling people in his life. The book really puts a practical and human face on what could easily be academic theological questions - who would care about the doctrine of Christus Victor? Someone who feels helpless in the grip of demonic forces. Who would care about the doctrine of propitiation? Someone who feels guilty about feeling righteous anger toward sin. This book is a nearly flawless triumph, allowing Driscoll to carefully explain theological concepts in a way that makes them compassionate and relevant. I generally avoid recommending Driscoll books to readers who haven't heard enough of his sermons to peek past the pugnacious bluster, but this book is true and loving and a compelling read for anyone.

Jason Custer says

The basic idea of this book intrigued me so much that I bought it while browsing in my seminary library. Basically, what Driscoll does is write letters to people he has met with in his church and address their different issues by expounding on different aspects of Christ's atonement. So in essence he is using the cross as a means of counseling and applying Christ to different problems that come up in everyday affairs within the church body.

For example, he talks about how Christ is the propitiation for someone whose dad used to beat him. In other words, because Christ took the wrath of God on our behalf, we are able to get rid of our wrath towards those who have sinned against us. Or for someone who is demonically oppressed, Driscoll holds forth the concept that Jesus is the Christus Victor and has conquered all evil forces in the cross. He does this same thing with a dozen or so different people who are wrestling with different issues.

I'm not sure I fully agree with everything that Driscoll says (or even his typically overbearing tone in the letters), but the method of dealing with issues in the body by pointing to Christ seems very biblical to me. It was very helpful to see someone applying biblical theology to what people wrestle with from day to day, and to see how Christ's death, burial, and resurrection can be practically applied to all sorts of things. In that light, I do very much appreciate the Christocentric teaching in this book and the constant reminder to always be pointing people back to Christ for everything.

If nothing else, I wish more pastors would read this book and take seriously Driscoll's method of applying Christ to people's issues (even if they may disagree with some of his theology or things he says in this book). I think the book would be very helpful for those who are not pastors as well - but it is especially important for pastors.

Philip Brown says

Loved it. Didn't care much for his comments on the extent of the atonement, but still very good.

James E. Robinson, III says

This is a powerful book. Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington, has compiled a collection of letters to folks he has met through his ministry.

The letters:

- * Demons Are Tormenting Me, Jesus Is Katie's Christus Victor
- * Lust Is My God, Jesus Is Thomas's Redemption
- * My Wife Slept with My Friend, Jesus Is Luke's New Covenant Sacrifice
- * I Am a 'Good' Christian, Jesus Is David's Gift Righteousness
- * I Molested a Child, Jesus Is John's Justification
- * My Dad Used to Beat Me, Jesus Is Bill's Propitiation
- * He Raped Me, Jesus Is Mary's Expiation
- * My Daddy Is a Pastor, Jesus Is Gideon's Unlimited Limited Atonement
- * I Am Going to Hell, Jesus Is Hank's Ransom
- * My Wife Has a Brain Tumor, Jesus Is Caleb's Christus Exemplar
- * I Hate My Brother, Jesus Is Kurt's Reconciliation
- * I Want to Know God, Jesus Is Susan's Revelation

These chapters, each about 20 pages, all follow a similar format: an introduction of the letter, the letter, then a question and answer section penned by Gerry Breshears.

Each letter follows a similar format too: introduction, the problem, the solution, conclusion. In traditional Pastor Mark fashion, he doesn't mince words. He is both, caring and loving, while being brutally honest.

Many folks tend to focus on specific parts of the Bible in their teachings and readings about Jesus. This book may shock some as it covers the many areas that Jesus life, death and resurrection that impact each of us.

Quick quiz: Which one doesn't fit? *My Daddy Is a Pastor* was written to his 4 year old son, Gideon. The topic, as you can see, unlimited limited atonement. Being sure to cover Wesleyanism, Arminianism and 5 point Calvinism, i'm sure his son will do well in his theology class, after he finishes watching Barney. We'll call this chapter a flyer, though the letter conclusion is spot on: don't pick and choose what you believe out of the Bible.

If you are not a Christian, consider reading this book to get a real insight into what Christians believe and why. If you are a Christian, this should be required reading.

Lauren says

This book was really good. The stories were downright heart breaking. The authors did an amazing job with addressing the people as well as answering questions. There are many points in this book I will be returning

to.

James Bunyan says

Wonderful to spend chapter after chapter focusing solely on what happened at the cross and seeing that applied to a whole bunch of different people in the letters Driscoll writes. It's a bit explicit with many of the chapters seemingly addressed to people who have sinned sexually in some way, but very helpful and deeply pastoral.

Sort of like an applied "Cross of Christ," dealing with a different facet of this precious jewel of christian theology each chapter.

Here are the chapter headings, in case it's worth going back over just one of the aspects of the cross:

Introduction

We Killed God: Jesus Is Our Substitutionary Atonement

"Demons Are Tormenting Me"

Jesus Is Katie's Christus Victor

"Lust Is My God"

Jesus Is Thomas's Redemption

"My Wife Slept with My Friend"

Jesus Is Luke's New Covenant Sacrifice

"I Am a `Good' Christian"

Jesus Is David's Gift Righteousness

"I Molested a Child"

Jesus Is John's Justification

"My Dad Used to Beat Me"

Jesus Is Bill's Propitiation

"He Raped Me"

Jesus Is Mary's Expiation

"My Daddy Is a Pastor"

Jesus Is Gideon's Unlimited Limited Atonement

"I Am Going to Hell"

Jesus Is Hank's Ransom

"My Wife Has a Brain Tumor"

Jesus Is Caleb's Christus Exemplar

"I Hate My Brother"

Jesus Is Kurt's Reconciliation

"I Want to Know God"

Jesus Is Susan's Revelation

Appendix:

Recommended Reading on the Cross

Graham Heslop says

Theologically rich pastoral application of the work of Christ. Driscoll is refreshingly candid about sin and clear on Scripture. He also demonstrates righteous anger and pleads like a prophet for repentance. Read it and give it away

Kyle says

It's not often I refuse to finish a book. Regardless of worth I tend to trudge through and finish what I started. I could only finish half this book. I just didn't see the point of continuing.

On the one hand I appreciate the aims of the book. It was clear to me that Driscoll and Breshears sought to make their pastoral ministry theological. For this I applaud them. This was written by a pastor and a theologian with a pastoral purpose. This is a worthwhile development and I greatly admire this movement. It would have been easier for them to do one or the other, but they did not. Further, they are serious about their reflections on the cross. They seek to move beyond a simple understand of it but pull together a breadth of significance for the power and scandal of the cross. Kudos. Further I can see how Driscoll is such compelling and polarizing figure. He's to the point. He pulls no punches. He writes tersely and one reads him easily. He comes across as a "you're either with him or against him" type of guy.

On the other hand there was much that I could not swallow. Although they added a paragraph to the introduction stating they purposefully decided to forgo discussion of the resurrection even though it was necessary for understanding the death of Jesus to focus exclusively on his cross. This was an unfortunate decision on their part. Understandable from a literary standpoint. Disaster from a theological standpoint. I for one cannot make sense of the cross apart from the empty tomb. Closely related to this criticism is the reduction of all of Jesus' work to the cross. This move seemed to empty his life of messianic purpose. As far as I could tell, Jesus may as well have been incarnated on the cross. It seems to me that the healing Jesus might have something to say in some of these pastoral situations. Sadly this was not considered. Again it makes sense from a literary standpoint but has troubles holistically. Third I grew tired of reducing anyone who opposed their presentation of the cross as either limp-wristed men or straw-man "liberals". Fourth I found it strange that most (all?) of the scenarios I read involved persons with some sort of church background. Strangely not all of the churches were criticized. Makes me wonder if their own church was given a free pass. I'm sure if we looked hard enough any church would have its own successes and failures of call. Finally, I could not get past his treatment of men and women. All the troubles of men stemmed from bad fathers in their lives or weakness on the man in questions part. Women, however, were only victims. Any blame was passed onto the male who failed to protect them. This lead to a strange fixation on appearances. The most appalling case (and what finally forced my hand in putting the book down) was this:

"She was ashamed that she had been raped and controlled by a guy who was not handsome, smart, successful, or kind--in short, a loser. To make matters worse, the loser boyfriend had ended up cheating on her with another, less attractive girl, which added to her shame. Eventually she got out of the relationship with the loser cheating boyfriend, thanks in part to the intervention of the new boyfriend, her future husband,

who cared for her."

No doubt this is a horrific and heartbreaking lot in life. I fail to see how looks or success has anything to do with it though.

Finally as I read I was reminded of Moltmann's words on the cross in light of the resurrection in his own work on the subject:

"The Cross is not and cannot be loved. Yet only the crucified Christ can bring the freedom which changes the world because it is no longer afraid of death."

Christopher says

Great book explaining the gospel and how that applies to real life scenarios.

Tschrister says

This is an excellent book. Driscoll's style is very straight forward, and he doesn't pull any punches. If you want soft, flexible, or seeker-friendly Christianity than this book is not for you. If, however, you want straightforward honest biblical truth, then read this book.

Death by Love is great because it deals with real people in real life down-and-dirty situations. Not every story will apply directly to every reader, but you will undoubtedly find something to glean from each one, and I'm certain that one or more of the situations addressed will apply directly to you and/or someone close to you to whom you want to be a witness.

One of the strengths of this book is how it is structured. Each chapter starts with a short description of a different person that gives pertinent information to the reader about that person's background and situation. That is followed by a lengthy letter from Driscoll as pastor to the person. Each chapter concludes with a question and answer section in which Driscoll's co-author Gary Breshears directly answers some of the tough questions that may have arisen during Driscoll's letter.

The meat of each chapter is Driscoll's letter, where he addresses things directly in the person's life—whether good, bad, ugly, heartbreaking, sad, difficult etc. Driscoll hits everything dead on and definitely doesn't skirt any issues—*especially* the tough issues. Here's a non-exhaustive list of some of the issues dealt with in this book:

- Rape
- Incest
- Financial trouble
- Abuse (sexual, verbal, emotional)
- Fake Christianity
- Pride
- Self-righteousness
- Demonic activity
- Infidelity/Adultery

- Hate/Anger
 - Terminal illness
 - Lust
- ... and on and on ...

The power that lies in each letter is the way in which Driscoll applies the incredible work of Christ on the Cross to *every* one of the issues dealt with, and demonstrates clearly how Christ's sacrifice specifically covers each one. This is an intensely practical application of Christ's redemptive work for modern people in modern situations like nothing I've read before. If you think Christianity doesn't apply in today's world, read this book.

The introduction to this book is a 14 page graphic and academic explanation of Christ's work on the cross (Titled *We Killed God*) that absolutely blew me away. Even as a person who has been a Christian for 20+ years, Driscoll's Gospel explanation ignited my heart with humbling wonder and awe at what God did for us. I'm glad Driscoll started there, because it is that unbelievable atoning work that is the common thread woven through the rest of the incredibly diverse stories found in this book.

Lastly, one could argue that despite the tremendous variance between the letters' recipients stories, this book becomes repetitive at times. This is probably a true assessment, but I feel this is actually the strength of this book, and that it was absolutely necessary, given the book's format, for these reasons:

- 1] Each chapter/letter is a complete package in an of itself. They do not inform one another or build on concepts already presented earlier. They could be read separately or in any order and still be complete.
- 2] The whole point is that the gospel story of Christ's work on the cross applies to everyone, no matter what their situation. Therefore the gospel is presented in every single letter. It is, however, presented carefully to apply to the specific situation/issue at hand.

I'd also note that reading about the amazing salvation story should never grow tiresome. It is the crux of our Christian faith and the single greatest event in the history of the world. Examining the different facets of Christ's atoning work again and again served to strengthen my faith and encourage my personal boldness in sharing the Gospel.

P.S.— As a graphic designer, I was excited to find that the content exceeded the well-done visual design of the book. There's nothing worse than an amazing graphic layout to arouse one's expectation only to be followed by the let down of bad content and loose theology (re: Rob Bell's books).

Tyler says

I have not read all of Mark Driscoll's writings, but this is the best books of his I have read yet (one of the best books of any author at that!). In a style untypical of Driscoll's other writings, this book is a collection of 12 letters that he personally wrote to 12 individuals he has pastored; each covering a different aspect of how the Crucifixion of Jesus on the cross adequately satisfies the struggles each individual is dealing with. The topics covered include: Jesus as Christus Victor, redemption, justification, propitiation, gift righteousness, Jesus as the New Covenant Sacrifice, expiation, atonement, ransom, Jesus as Christus Exemplar, reconciliation and revelation (i.e. Jesus is the revelation of God the Father, not the book of revelation in the Bible).

The book is theologically packed. However, reading each topic through the lens of a personal experience in

letter format make this book engaging and insightful. Therefore, I think this book is helpful for a wide range of understanding and experience individuals have with the Cross of Jesus. From the non-Christian who's seeking answers to the pastor seeking to love and shepherd his flock well.

After each chapter, there are a list of common questions and answers (Breshears writes these) on each topic presented. These are explained well, benefiting those who are using them to obtain answers as well as those who want insight into how to explain the answers to others. Additionally, there is an Introduction chapter that beautifully covers the history of crucifixion and the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross. This history helped me understand more clearly the lengths Jesus went to pay for my sin, as we live in a culture without the brutality of crucifixion.

Concerning the chapter on atonement, Driscoll presents his view of "unlimited limited atonement." While you may not agree with this view (or with Driscoll in general, like many—he has a lot of critics) I would encourage you to not let this stop you from reading this chapter or the book. For more information on the atoning work of Jesus' death, I would recommend Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology, chapter 32.

One last thing from a book nerd...I would recommend getting the hardcover copy. You'll likely want to reread the book or use it for reference and this will help it be more durable. It also has one of the coolest book covers I've ever seen and that, to me, makes it worth paying a little more to get the hardcover.

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It's all about Jesus.

Adam says

This is a hard book to rate. I appreciated all the intricacies that the book dives into about the cross. The Bible says that there is nothing on Earth more glorifying to God than the cross so studying it to more fully appreciate it is definitely worth the deeper dive. I took a lot away from it in that respect. That being said the book for long stretches was hard to read. It was extremely repetitive in points and verses to support the points. With the thrust of each letter boiling down to the exact same thing, 12 chapters seemed unnecessary when the point could have been driven home in 4-5 chapters.

The other thing that was hard was that I couldn't really relate to the sin issues used. He obviously has a preoccupation with sexual sin, perhaps subconsciously he believes it to be on a different plane than other sins, because every chapter brought up the person's sexual history, even when it wasn't particularly relevant. He also defined all people's sins through the men in their lives, including a girl's dad for not keeping tabs on her at all times as a teenager, you know, cause that isn't a joint responsibility of parents. Nearly all of the chapters were addressing such extreme cases instead of perhaps sins that hit a wider audience (pride, shame, lies, apathy, etc.) which made the book harder to connect with in the starts of each chapter. That combined with repetition in the remaining pages of each chapter and you can see why this isn't much of a page turner.

Lastly, my other gripe is that when addressing these issues that leave giant scars in people's lives, he just plows right through any sensitivity or trying to meet them on a personal level. I know you are trying to focus on biblical/theological truth in the book but if you seriously wrote such tone deaf personal letters then I would love to have a published follow up book where people's reactions are documented. The book just kept making me think over and over about how ill equipped most pastors are for counseling people as fellow human beings as opposed to the silent masses who don't respond during the course of a weekly sermon.

Dray says

Sit back, Goodreadians, for I'm ready to tell you a story.

My story has a little to do with the actual book, a fair amount to do with the author, and a lot to do with the impact the author has had on my life, though I've never met him.

You can glean from the one star this impact is not positive.

Some years ago, I was accepted for a ministries internship at a large church in my city. At the time, I had aspirations of being a pastor, and I thought this would be a good opportunity to gain experience. I got accepted along with three other early 20-somethings.

A month before the internship actually started, I got a call to come in for a meeting. I immediately had that uneasy feeling that it was not a good meeting. Sure enough, it was a Your Facebook Is Inappropriate meeting. (Now I understand that they were about to be my employer and had every right to survey my Facebook for unprofessional things. However, the stuff they were upset about were things like pictures of me in a spaghetti strapped sun dress, and me holding a cocktail.)

I was brought in to an office with two male pastors who immediately told me I was leading a double life. They said that my Facebook profile showed a completely different person than my application. Keep in mind this was the **FIRST TIME I HAD EVEN MET** one of the pastors, and the **SECOND** time I had met the other. So the double life accusation was maybe a bit premature.

Then, they proceeded to tell me what was okay to wear and not to wear, and mentioned that they were pleased with my current outfit, that is was "appropriate." I had just come from my job as a teller and was wearing slacks and a sweater vest. Thanks.

So where does this book come in?

Fast forward a month and I have begun working at the church. Every week we have a staff meeting and are to have read one chapter per week from this book. The pastors are obsessed with Mark Driscoll and even though I would bring up issues with the reading every week (usually his views on "a woman's place"), my concerns were dismissed and I was told this book was telling the gospel so I had to agree with it. We were given an assignment: the 4 interns had to write a letter (a la this book) to ourselves from God about our greatest sin.

So I write out this crazy emotional letter about sexual "sin" and it was gritty to say the least. THEN, we go in for our weekly meeting and I find out I have to read it in front of the two male pastors and the other three interns...whose letters are all about not being strong enough Christians and their pride and some other fake crap. So I'm reading this aloud and mortified and emotional and sobbing and at the end of it they said they weren't going to discuss it because it was taking away from the other three letters.

All of this to say...

Mark Driscoll and his crazy ass spiritual abuse (see this article) is affecting more than just the members and ex members of his church. He has gained enough of a following that even churches halfway across the country are studying his books and taking on his cultish ideals.

It is dangerous and extremely harmful. Suffice it to say, I did not pursue ministry and have since stopped

attending church, to the absolute dismay of my mother.

I haven't even touched on Driscoll's obsession with women being submissive helpers because I'd be here all night ranting.

I'm just so grateful to have a fiance who happily ignores gender roles with me. Because they're bullshit, and so is Mark Driscoll.

Mikaela says

I thought this book was terrible, and actually couldn't finish it because I was so disgusted.

Ryan Hawkins says

For what it is, I really enjoyed it. Although many might argue that Driscoll has recently fallen to a bad place, this book here is irrelevant to that subject because in it he undoubtedly provides great responses to these difficult pastoral situations. They were very intriguing to read. But most importantly, I gained more of a love for the cross of Christ more because of reading it. It was unique because it wasn't just theology, but theology literally put into practice in people's lives. Very helpful. I wish more books like this were written.
