

## DEAREST AND BEST

God created Adam and Eve, put them in the Garden of Eden, and He walked with them. He gave them everything they needed to be completely taken care of in all ways. He only had one tree that they must NOT eat from in the Garden. The enemy of God tempted Eve, and she and Adam chose (of their own free will which God had given to them), to eat from *that* tree (Genesis 2:16). When they did that, they caused a separation from God that affected not only *them*, but *all* humans since that time (me and you, too). **BUT GOD** already had a way designed for people to be reunited with Him. That Way was His own Son coming to Earth as an innocent man and paying for our sins with His own life (1 John 4:10). That is why the terms 'dearest and best' belong to Jesus. He **sacrificed His life** because **He loves us: me and you**. **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life"** (John 3:16). All we have to do is *believe* and *receive* His forgiveness. **"For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved"** (John 3:17). The Cross is *God's Sign of Love for us*.

## RUGGED AND LOVED

The ruggedness of the cross reminds us that this very same Son of God, Jesus Christ, understands our pain and suffering because He also had pain, and suffering. He can identify with us. He understands us and wants to comfort us and bridge the gap between us and His wonderful loving Father. Understanding this, if

you are ready to be reconnected to God and come into a living relationship with God, pray this simple prayer and mean it with your whole heart: *"Dear God, I now see that You love me and have made a way for me to be reunited with You through Your Son, Jesus Christ and His death on the Cross to pay the penalty for my sins. Thank You. Please come into my life today with Your Holy Spirit and help me to be the person that You created me to be. In Jesus name I pray. Amen."*

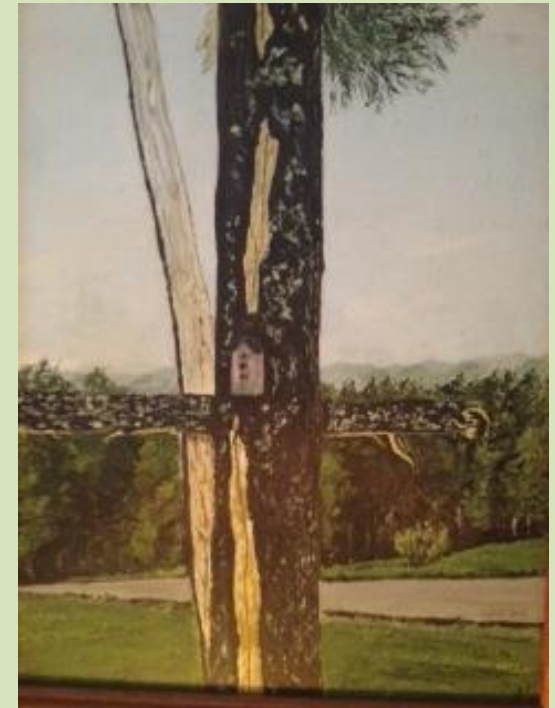
Congratulations! It is time for a celebration. Jesus said (about you!) **"In the same way, there is more joy in Heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away"** (Luke 15:7 NLT). Now, to get to know God and His Son Jesus, better, read the bible starting with the Gospel of John, and continue to talk to Him (pray) daily. He loves you and is waiting to hear from you!



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# Rugged Old Cross

**What does it symbolize?**



**WHY DO WE CHERISH IT?**

## HISTORY OF THE CROSS

The story of the cross begins back in the time of the Phoenicians. They brought it to the Romans who adopted it (crucifixion) as their way of keeping the people they conquered under control and 'cleaning up' those lands of criminals. The cross was seen as an instrument of torture and people were afraid of it. Even Jesus Christ Himself was crucified on a cross. Sadly, the cross is still used as a way to torture and kill other people today. But, since the time Jesus died, the cross has taken on another deeper meaning and one that can instill *hope*. To understand how it became a symbol of hope, let's look at the story of *one* such cross.

## THE RUGGED OLD TREE

The story of the cross on the front of this brochure began as a pine tree that grew to about 70 feet. This tree withstood decades of sun, wind, rain, snow, and high winds. One day in 1997, in the presence of witnesses, lightning struck it. The lightning cracked it and instantly caused a piece of the tree to turn sideways forming a crossbar. Amazingly, the lightning jumped a little wooden birdhouse on the tree and left it intact, and continued down to the bottom of the tree to the ground. The tree was turned into a cross on that day. People called this "A Maine Miracle." The news about this tree/cross spread across the area and many people came to see it. People were in awe. They instinctively knew that something special had happened.

## THE CROSS: THE WAY

The picture on the back of this brochure shows what remains of this miracle tree today. As you can see, the crossbar and tree still form a cross. It is very old and rugged. So, why do people still come to see it? Simply put, when Jesus came, lived, and died on the cross, He transformed the meaning of the cross into a symbol of hope by the sacrifice that He made for us. He didn't die on the cross because He was guilty of any crime or sin; He died *in our place* as a substitute for each one of us. **We** are the sinners who deserve death. **"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, so also death through sin was passed on to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).** But Jesus came and died for *ALL* of mankind *once and for all* so that we don't have to pay for our own sins. He reconciled us to His Father. **"For if, by the trespass of the one man [Adam] death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive an abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!" (Romans 5:17).**

## THE CROSS: THE SYMBOL

This is why people visit the cross. It stands as a visual reminder of what Jesus did for us. People wear the cross as a personal reminder of how much God loves them. **"This is how God's love was revealed among us: God sent His one and only Son into the world, so that we may live through Him" (1 John 4:9).**

## THE OLD RUGGED CROSS

Many people are inspired by the cross. One particular man named George Bennard in 1913 wrote a song called The Old Rugged Cross. The song starts with these lyrics:

"On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame; And I love that old cross where the Dearest and Best for a world of lost sinners was slain".

These song lyrics capture some of the complexities in the meaning of the cross. The cross was an emblem (symbol) of suffering and shame. But Jesus Christ (the Dearest and Best) transformed this emblem into a symbol of freedom, victory, triumph and hope. Death could not hold Him. He rose from the dead three days later and is alive forevermore "...I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1:18).

## SUFFERING AND SHAME

The religious leaders charged Jesus with being a heretic and blasphemer of God. Jesus was beaten, bruised, bled, and He even carried His Cross on His back to Calvary where He was crucified. He died like a criminal, even though He was innocent. Why? **"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"** (Heb 12:2). He died *in our place* for *our sins*.

