

**THE  
SEVEN  
WOUNDS  
OF  
CHRIST**

**WHERE SKEPTICS, CYNICS  
AND SEEKERS FIND  
UNEXPECTED HEALING**

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*The Seven Wounds of Christ*

Published by CLC Publications

*U.S.A.*

P.O. Box 1449, Fort Washington, PA 19034

*UNITED KINGDOM*

CLC International (UK)

Unit 5, Glendale Avenue, Sandycroft, Flintshire, CH5 2QP

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN (hardcover): 978-1-61958-258-3

ISBN (e-book): 978-1-61958-259-0

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Cover design by Mitch Bolton.

## DEDICATION

To my community of friends living in metro Atlanta,  
born in sixty-five different nations of the world,  
who have become my family—my home—  
known as Lilburn Alliance Church.

You are a miracle!

I love and honor you for so many reasons.

You prove to me every day  
by the marriages saved,  
diseases healed,  
addictions conquered,  
identities restored,  
guilt and shame removed,  
self-hatred overcome,  
family legacies recovered  
and lives redeemed,  
that there truly is healing  
in the seven wounds of Christ.

# CONTENTS

	Foreword . . . . .	11
	<i>by Dr. Mike Plunket</i>	
	Preface . . . . .	15
1	Walk with Me! . . . . .	21
	<i>His Wounds, Our Healing</i>	
2	The Sweat of Jesus . . . . .	37
	<i>Reshaping Our Wills</i>	
3	The Face of Jesus. . . . .	55
	<i>Recovering Our Identity</i>	
4	The Back of Jesus . . . . .	67
	<i>Regaining Our Health</i>	
5	The Head of Jesus. . . . .	79
	<i>Reclaiming Our Dignity</i>	
6	The Hands of Jesus. . . . .	91
	<i>Reestablishing Our Productivity</i>	
7	The Feet of Jesus. . . . .	103
	<i>Restoring Our Authority</i>	
8	The Side of Jesus. . . . .	119
	<i>Redeeming Our Hearts</i>	
	Small Group Study Guide. . . . .	135
	Notes. . . . .	145

## FOREWORD

**F**or many years I have had the privilege of partnering with Fred Hartley in the College of Prayer International and facilitating prayer gatherings throughout the world. We have seen God move in miraculous and healing ways all across the globe. In the presence of Christ, the blind received their sight, the lame walked and the deaf heard. To the glory of God, prayer movements have begun in small villages and in the highest halls of government. And everywhere we have been, people have shared with us their deep wounds—wounds that have come from family, church and friends.

Fred takes you to the only place where your wounds can be healed. I believe that our wounded healer, the Lord Jesus Christ, wants to use this book to transform your wounds into triumphs, redeem your pain and keep you from wasting your sorrows. The key to your healing

is your union with Christ. Fred lays out the vital connection between the wounds of Jesus and the healing power He has made available for your wounds. The Holy Spirit makes the things of Jesus real to you. The Spirit's work is to smite you with the beauty of Jesus and bring forth beauty from your ashes. When you come to the Lord for healing, more often than not, the Holy Spirit brings up painful memories from your past. Memories hold on to the pain of wounds. While grieving your wounds is always helpful, nothing is more powerful than inviting the healing presence of Jesus into the memories and into the pain.

I was at a large youth conference when a teenage girl came to me for ministry. The young woman had responded to the gospel by giving her life to Christ, and her friends were so excited for her. However, the next day, as she reacted to a message about the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for godly living and Christian service, she began to lose control of herself. She started experiencing strange physical manifestations and the emotional reactions of a person who had been abused, so she came to me for help. When I saw this young woman for the first time, it struck me how pale and withdrawn she looked. Her eyes were lifeless. She would not look at anyone directly and seemed to be trying to disappear. I found out that she was around fifteen years old and that

during her sophomore year of high school she had been gang raped. The pain and fear of that terrible violation had come flooding back to her as she attempted to yield her life to the fullness of the Holy Spirit. She sat before me broken and afraid.

There are no words to speak to such a wound, no pat answers. I asked her if we could invite Jesus into her wounds, into her pain. She said yes. We began to pray and seek the Lord together. She willingly opened up the memory of the rape again, only this time allowing Jesus to minister to her pain. I watched her as I prayed with her. Her forehead clearly indicated by its movement that she was reliving that awful event. She shared with me that she was not alone but that Jesus had taken her into His arms and was wiping away her tears. Her memory and her wounds would never be the same. She would never have to remember that violation of her person without seeing Jesus there, protecting and embracing her.

I asked if she had heard Him say anything else. She said, "Yes. He is asking me to forgive those who did this to me." One by one, one name at a time, she forgave the rapists out loud with me. I knew that she would have to forgive them for her own healing and freedom, but I had not asked her to do so. Jesus asked her, and she did it. When she opened her eyes, she was not the same

person. Jesus had given her, in only a few moments, a substantial healing. Her eyes were bright and shiny. She held her head erect and was able to look me right in the eye with dignity and freedom. The Holy Spirit had made the healing of Jesus real to her, and she was smitten with His beauty.

Press into this book. Make the exchange—your pain for His healing. Let the Spirit of God smite your heart with the beauty of Jesus. Jesus is more real than your pain.

Dr. Mike Plunket  
Professor, Nyack College,  
Alliance Theological Seminary  
Lead Pastor, Risen King Alliance Church



## PREFACE

Ground Zero: The point on the earth's surface above and below an exploding nuclear bomb. The central point in an idea of fast change or intense activity.

**T**he cross of Christ marks ground zero for all humankind throughout human history. When Jesus walked down the Via Dolorosa, the path of pain, to the place of His crucifixion, His sufferings formed a nuclear explosion of epic proportions and impacted everything above the cross and beneath it—both the justice and mercy of God above and the desperate wounds of humanity below. In this book, we will journey along the places where Christ's seven wounds occurred, and we will discover the explosive work of Christ that does not destroy but rather heals wounded, brutalized people. The combined wounds of Christ form the central point of redemption that brings the fastest life

change and most intense healing activity anywhere on the planet.

This week, as I finish editing this book, I am in Jerusalem of all places. While walking the streets of the Old City, I have realized something I never noticed in my earlier trips here: cynics, skeptics and seekers are all here, gathering around Christ's wounds. And as we walk through this book, you and I will be among them. Throughout these pages, we will walk together down the street known as the Via Dolorosa, the path of pain.

Let's face it—we are bruised and bleeding people. Though our wounds have come to us in ruthless and unexpected ways—whether financial, emotional, marital, moral or physical—we have each walked our own path of pain and have our own ways of dealing with suffering. Some of us pick our scabs obsessively only to make them bleed again, while others of us try to look the other way in denial. As C.S. Lewis wisely wrote, "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."<sup>1</sup> Sooner or later we need to face the music, no matter how bad the music sounds. Wounds require attention.

It is always easier to face our wounds when we know there is a cure. The wounds of Jesus do just that. Jesus' wounds are not for religious people but for wounded

people. There is nothing religious about the cross. Jesus was not crucified in a church between two candelabras; He was nailed to a cross that stood between two thieves. For this reason, this book is not so much for religious people but for people willing to face their wounds. The words of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah explain well the truth that Jesus' wounds were meant to heal ours: "Surely he took up our pain / and bore our suffering. . . . He was pierced for our transgressions, / he was crushed for our iniquities."<sup>2</sup> Jesus' wounds are our wounds, and His wounds are for our healing. Somehow as we walk the Via Dolorosa, our paths of pain converge with His path of pain. But let's not get ahead of ourselves! We will discover our healing as we move forward one step and one wound at a time.

Make no mistake about it—the cross is a scandal! Even the first-century preacher Paul said that he preached of "Christ crucified, a stumbling block [*skandalon*]."<sup>3</sup> A *skandalon* was a moveable stick that served as a trigger in a trap. It was like a hidden and bent sapling used to catch prey. Those of us who have ever felt ripped off, cheated and scandalized in life will discover that we have a friend in Jesus who was more scandalized than any of us could imagine. No matter how deep our wounds or how acute our pain, the wounds of Jesus go deeper.

This book will take us on a step-by-step journey along the Via Dolorosa, where we will investigate each of Jesus' seven wounds at the places where He received them. We will begin our discussion of each wound with a medical explanation of what Jesus experienced. Yes, a down-to-earth scientific explanation. We want to initially understand Jesus as the man of the first century in order to maintain the objectivity of our study.

Each chapter contains three parts. The first is titled Christ's Surrender. Too often we bundle the wounds of Christ together in a single unjust violent incident and thereby miss the fuller impact of His suffering. In reality, each of Jesus' wounds corresponds to a separate voluntary choice of surrender by Christ. He willingly submitted Himself to seven distinct experiences of extraordinary pain, each one for a distinctive redemptive purpose.

The second part is Our Healing. Every wound of Christ corresponds to a wound in you and in me. While all seven of Christ's wounds reflect the completeness of His atonement, looking at each one individually will help us appreciate what Jesus did for us and also appropriate it.

We will end each chapter with the final part, A Twenty-First-Century Healing. This section will provide an honest and accurate real-life story to illustrate how Jesus'

wounds bring healing today. In the last book of the Bible, we are told of followers of Jesus who “triumphed over [the devil] / by the blood of the Lamb / and by the word of their testimony; / they did not love their lives so much / as to shrink from death.”<sup>4</sup> All eight of these real-life stories dramatically illustrate that Jesus’ wounds offer us healing as well as victory. God wants to heal us, and He also wants us to be overcomers.

A person could certainly read *The Seven Wounds of Christ* in a single sitting—it should take less time than watching a full-length movie. I recommend, however, reading this book in just over a week, a single chapter each day. Take your time. Chew on it. Let it soak in. Don’t just read it—think! If you are in a small group and want to use the book for a stimulating eight-week study, group application questions are included at the end of the book for your convenience.

My deepest appreciation in writing this book goes to my greatest treasure and inspiration, my wife, Sherry; to my loyal and efficient administrative assistant, Heather Hatcher; to my proofreader, Ann Miller, and editor, Becky English; to my Managing Editor, Erika Cobb, who walked with me through thick and thin; to my contributing historic and biblical experts Josh Smith and Bill Hyer; to my medical science experts Dr. Art Nitz, MD, (PhD, faculty professor of Physical Therapy for

thirty years at the University of Kentucky) and Stephen Trinidad (fourth-year honor student at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City); and to Cesar Castellanos for his pastor's heart and inspiring book *Victory Through the Blood*, elevating the benefits of each of Christ's wounds. And finally, I am indebted to Christ and His good people at Lilburn Alliance Church, who demonstrate to me every day that there truly is healing in the seven wounds of Christ.

Getting to write this book is unquestionably one of the greatest privileges of my life. It has made me feel less like a scholar and more like the donkey that carried Jesus into Jerusalem. While I did my best to effectively communicate the potency of His wounds, my role is virtually nothing compared to what Christ endured to receive them.

# 1

## WALK WITH ME!

### *His Wounds, Our Healing*

*When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be."*

John 19: 23–24

**T***he Via Dolorosa is a narrow, well-worn street that cuts through the Old City of Jerusalem like a scar on a cheek. This unassuming road starts in the garden of Gethsemane at the base of the Mount of Olives, enters the Old City at the Lion's Gate, and proceeds through the Muslim Quarter into the Christian Quarter until it reaches the Church of the Holy*

*Sepulcher. It is arguably the most visited street in the world even though it measures only a thousand meters, or approximately 3,280 feet.*

*Via Dolorosa is Latin for “way of grief;” “way of sorrow” or “way of suffering”—or simply, as we will call it, “the path of pain.” The path is marked by nine stations of the cross; there are five additional stations inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.<sup>1</sup>*

*On this path of pain, Jesus received His seven wounds.*

Let’s take a walk. The Old City of Jerusalem is buzzing with activity. Street vendors wheel out their racks of prayer shawls, T-shirts and water pipes, while others hand squeeze delicious pomegranate juice. A moped whizzes by. Everyone is getting ready for a big day. The air is crisp, the aroma of freshly grilled shawarma awakens people’s appetites, and the atmosphere pulsates with a strong cadence of vitality. It’s going to be another pristine day in the Old City. There is no city on earth like Jerusalem.

Our hike normally takes thirty minutes at walking speed—a little more than a thousand steps—but today we will spend several hours along the path of pain. Our objective is not simply to get from point A to point B in record time but to familiarize ourselves with the historical places where Jesus’ wounds occurred and to pause at strategic sites. We want to learn what we can about



Jesus and His seven wounds—and face some of our own wounds along the way.

## THE HILL OF THE SKULL

We start our walk at the scene of Jesus' crucifixion: Golgotha, known as “the hill of the skull,” where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher now stands. This is actually where the Via Dolorosa ends, but because in many ways it is ground zero, it is only appropriate for us to begin our overview of Jesus' path of suffering here.

Formal church buildings have always made me feel awkward. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Old City of Jerusalem would be no exception, except for one thing: This is the exact location where most scholars and historians tell us Jesus was crucified. It sits just outside the original wall around the Holy City. It is where criminals were taken to be executed.

Inside the church, I am jostled by a throng of people from virtually every nation on earth waiting to see the precise historic stones where Jesus was crucified. As I inch ever closer, fighting to maintain my place in line, I am initially hit with the overkill of religious symbols—the gaudy velour drapes and tacky candelabras that make the scene look less like a historical shrine and more like the lighting department at Home Depot. But

then I see what I had been hoping for—my eyes lock on the ancient stones that mark the place where the cross of Jesus stood. Much to my delight, I discover that a sizable outcropping of limestone has been preserved under a large plate of protective Plexiglas. This spot marks the place where the majority of Jesus' blood was poured.

Some around me kneel. Many weep. Both men and women stare with laser-like focus, riveted on the rocks over which He died. People are respectful, even reverent. Some take pictures, but the moment is too weighty, too profound for anyone to cheapen it with a selfie. Everyone seems to have the same sense: This is more about Jesus than anyone or anything else. I have been to this exact spot a dozen times before, but I never felt what I feel today. Having spent the previous twelve months extensively researching the seven wounds of Christ, I am overwhelmed with unexpected emotion as I realize that my passion, my suffering, is viscerally linked to Christ's. It is as if I am the only one standing here. I feel connected with God on an unusually deep level—spiritually, intellectually and emotionally. From the moment my eyes see the rock, all the historic significance of the grotesque mangling and physical abuse Jesus suffered seem to simultaneously draw my heart to God. I sigh. My arms fall limp to my sides. My mouth drops open.

As I stand gazing, I am overwhelmed by the realization that the seven wounds in Jesus' body from which He bled are as equally accessible to you and me today as they were to His followers two thousand years ago. I exhale slowly in profound gratitude. I shake my head and cry out loud, "My God, my God, how much You must love me to subject Your Son to such hostility. And to think that You did it for me—for all of us!"

In one way or another, the goal of this short book is to give you, too, a similar moment of profound and even breathtaking appreciation of the seven wounds of Christ. I will do my best to accurately stick with the facts we know from historical documents; thankfully, the final hours before Jesus' dead body was laid in the tomb have been meticulously recorded. You, however, can reach your own conclusions. Whether you are a skeptic, cynic or seeker, I respect your perspective and invite you to think objectively about the death of Jesus, whom many call the Christ, the Anointed, the Messiah.

Though I have many times walked past the historic stones of Golgotha, something new hits me this time. Standing around me are Japanese, Filipinos, Brazilians, Europeans, Arabs, Nigerians, Christians, Jews and even Muslims, each one elbowing their way ever closer to the precise stones on which two thousand years ago

the blood of Jesus was poured out. The mass of seekers press uncomfortably close together, barely capable of containing their eagerness to get a firsthand eyewitness look at these historic stones.

I realize that we are staring at more than archeological ruins. As a historian, I have visited ancient stones and archeological digs in countless other locations, but none of them have generated this level of electricity. What makes these stones so supercharged is that all of us who are observing them share one thing in common: We are all wounded people looking for healing. Toward the end of our journey, we will return here to these stones to take a closer look, but for now we must move on.

## THE WHIPPING STONE

A mere one hundred meters from the place of Jesus' execution is a little-known excavation site forty-five feet underground. We turn left down a narrow unmarked alley and trek down three flights of stairs to see a Roman whipping stone, only recently discovered. Most pilgrims walk right past the stairway and miss this gem.



Roman whipping stone

Huddled together in the dimly lit stone chamber, we stand around an ancient Roman whipping stone that rises in the middle of the chamber and dates back two thousand years. Here criminals were tied and brutally beaten with the flagellum. Off to the side, chiseled in the stone floor, a dice game resembling a chess or backgammon board shows where soldiers gambled. “While it is impossible to guarantee with 100 percent accuracy that this is the exact location where Jesus was ruthlessly beaten prior to crucifixion,” our antiquities expert explains, “it is certainly likely. It is strikingly similar to the way the ancient documents describe the beating of Christ, with both its whipping stone and its game board

where soldiers gambled for Jesus' robe." The voice of our tour guide echoes through the all-stone enclosed room as he reads the penetrating words of Isaiah, the ancient Hebrew prophet.

*Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.<sup>2</sup>*

Every word echoes in the stone chamber where we stand—and deep within our souls. The single word that stands out to me is “our”—our griefs, our sorrows, our transgressions, our iniquities. All of a sudden it hits me—Jesus did it all for us! His wounds were for our wounds. Then I am hit with the words “with his wounds we are healed.” Really? I think to myself. Do Christ’s wounds somehow carry a miraculous power still potent enough

to pack a healing wallop today—for my precious daughter, Andrea, who is right now battling stage IV cancer?

After a full minute of silence, our teacher suggests, “I want you to think for a moment right now about the wounds in your own life, in the lives of family members, friends, loved ones. Take a minute or two in isolation before you leave this place, and think about your wounds. Take this opportunity to confront your own woundedness, fears and insecurities. Remember—with His wounds we are healed.”

I am overwhelmed with emotion. Once again I feel as if I am the only one present. Tears roll down my cheeks as I hold my wife’s hand. We lock eyes, and I notice that she too is crying as we think of our daughter in Dallas battling inoperable large B-cell lymphoma that has wrapped itself around the major blood vessels surrounding her heart. Lord, is there healing here today for our precious daughter, Andrea? Will You extend healing to her?

Having studied the seven wounds of Christ for the past year, my mind easily recalls each one, and I think deeply: If He was pierced for our transgressions, this must mean that He was pierced for my transgressions too. If He was crushed for our iniquities, my iniquities must have been included. If the chastisement that brought us peace was upon Him, that means it can bring

me peace as well, right? If by His wounds, we are healed, could that mean that my precious daughter, Andrea, is included?

As I look around at the others in the chamber, it is obvious that Sherry and I are not the only ones crying. Tears moisten virtually every face. It makes perfect sense. Every tear is linked to a very real and personal heart wound—emotional, moral, spiritual, marital, financial. George has just lost his job and is battling the wound of self-worth. He is terrified about his future. Sharita was divorced last year and, as a single mom, is fighting a spirit of rejection and loneliness. Helen recently acknowledged that she was sexually abused as a child and has spent most of her adult life battling guilt, shame and sexual brokenness. All at once, I understand why millions of people every year, from virtually every nation on earth, flock to Israel—and specifically to the Via Dolorosa, the place of Christ's pain and suffering. We are all wounded people visiting the sites of Jesus' wounds.

In a real way, Jesus' wounds are our wounds. It is impossible to accurately consider the historic wounds of Jesus without fully recognizing and embracing our own wounds. Not only are Jesus' wounds our wounds, but Jesus' wounds are our healing. Isaiah was clear when he prophesied that our healing would come from the

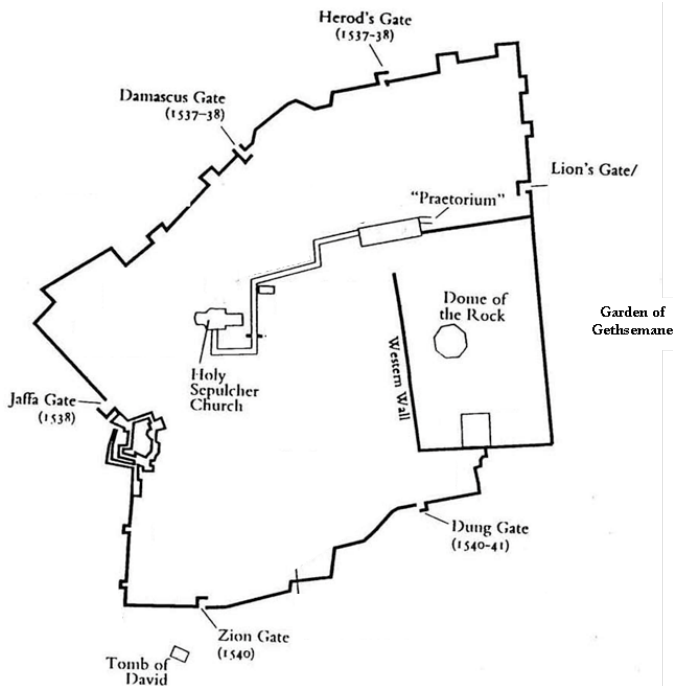


wounds of Christ. Jesus was wounded for us! When we think of His wounds, we do not just sympathize with them or rejoice that He sympathizes with ours; rather we encounter our healing within His wounds. Jesus was wounded that His wounds might heal ours.

Acknowledging His woundedness goes hand in hand with acknowledging ours. This short book is as much about self-discovery as historic discovery. It takes us on a trip back two thousand years in time, and at the same time it takes us on a trip deep within our own souls. Without a trip to both locations, reading this book would be a waste of time. As we examine the seven wounds of Christ, the wounds will examine us. They have a way of getting under one's skin. Before we know what has happened, Christ's wounds will lead us to the profound reality that God wants to get beneath the surface of our lives. Many people struggle with denial when it comes to facing personal brokenness, inner woundedness and emotional pain because they feel hopeless. If we look only at our wounds, we will be hopeless. If we look to Christ's wounds, however, our hopelessness will begin to fade, and the hope of healing will start to rise. This is why the gospel of Christ is called the good news. The wounds of Jesus may convert you to hope, and hope is the doorway to your healing.

## THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

We leave the underground chamber of the whipping stone, and after a twenty-minute walk, we come to the garden where Jesus received His first wound. Gethsemene, a place Jesus loved and where the Via Dolorosa actually begins, is one of the only sites along the path of pain whose original natural beauty has been preserved.



The Via Dolorosa in modern-day Jerusalem

Many of the olive trees that stand today, with massive trunks nearly fifteen feet in circumference, are in fact two thousand years old. Here in the garden, Jesus processed many of His life-changing moments, and this beautiful place also provides us with a chance to reflect on what we've already seen and to prepare for what is to come.

As we walk through this book, I have three suggestions. *Have hope.* Without hope it is impossible for us to face our wounds. We tend to run and hide from our wounds and weaknesses, but there is nothing more hopeful than knowing that there is a God who loves us so much that He has already sent His Son to be wounded with our wounds.

*Get real.* There is nothing on earth more raw, real and naked than the cross where Jesus died. He had nothing to hide, and He held nothing back. If we want to meet Him at the cross, He expects as much from us. The best definition of humility I ever heard is this: Humility is the willingness to be known for who we are. No mask. No cover-up. No pretense. Just come as we are, wounds and all. When Christ received our wounds, He already made a public spectacle of our sin and shame. He already let the cat out of the bag, so we no longer need to hide.

*Go deep.* There is no way Jesus allowed the metal stakes to be driven through His wrists and ankles and

the spear to be thrust into His side, only to have a superficial relationship with us. If the cross tells us anything, it is that God wants to go deep. Just as Jesus' wounds went deep into Him, He wants His healing to go deep into us. The fact that Jesus was wounded is historically irrefutable. By the grace of God, before the end of this book, we will fully understand that it is equally irrefutable that His seven wounds can bring healing to us today.

### **A TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY SEEKER**

Michael was a wounded man with a wounded heart. He felt condemned and filled with shame. He is the first of eight wounded people we will be introduced to throughout this book. Although he lived in the Old City of Jerusalem—the crossroads of the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam—and had grown up hearing arguments for each of these major religions, he felt lost. Not knowing where to turn and with a sense of deep desperation, he came to the Church of the Sepulcher. It was the same night, of all nights, that my team and I just happened to be walking the streets of the Old City with a purpose of our own—to talk to people about the love of Jesus.

Michael told us, “I came here as a last ditch effort. I am so depressed that I want to die. Either Jesus will help

me or . . .” He broke down. It was no coincidence that we were there to meet him. Even more significantly, it was at the exact place where Christ was wounded for him. Michael was seeking answers, and it’s fair to say that God was seeking him. Two of our team members looked into Michael’s eyes and felt his despair, loneliness and emptiness. Michael told them his story; and that night, as they stood within a few feet of the place where Christ was first wounded, they told Michael about the wounds of Christ and then led him in prayer. That night Michael encountered God’s love for perhaps the first time in his life. He learned firsthand that the wounds of Christ are for our healing.



There is love in the wounds of Jesus. If you miss the love, you miss the point. Love is what led Jesus to the cross, and it’s what initiated God’s redemptive plan. Perhaps you’ve heard these words before: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>3</sup> Again, God is not seeking a superficial relationship with

you. He loves you. He wants to go deep with you—as deep as the wounds of Christ.

Now that we have gotten an overview of the Via Dolorosa and understand where we are going, it's time for our journey to begin. We'll start at the base of the Mount of Olives in the garden of Gethsemane, just outside the Old City.