



Lamb of God

Connect 7 Daily Devotions

February 14-April 1



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Lamb of God

2018 Lent Sermon Series

This year the season of Lent begins on February 14th, Valentine's Day, a day in our society and culture that has been dedicated to love. We often express that love in the color red, lacy hearts on cards and little baby cherubs that shoot arrows. Without a doubt the focus (or should we say fixation) of our modern day Valentine's celebration is almost exclusively on romantic love. It is all fine and good for the most part, who cannot use a little more romance in their lives? But true love is so much more than getting a Valentine's Day Card or a box of chocolates. Even the most expensive diamond ring cannot compare to the true love God has for us.

During the season of Lent, we are going to look at the extraordinary love that God has for each of us. It is much, much more than romantic love. So what is love? The Bible tells us that **"God is love."** Jesus said, **"Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends."** God loves us sacrificially. God loved us enough to sacrifice His only Son upon the cross for us to give us eternal life. Now that is love!

In the Bible, God shows His love for us in the symbol of the Lamb of God. The Lamb of God directs our attention to Jesus and His ultimate sacrifice on the cross. John the Baptist said, **"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"** These words summarize Jesus' mission and help us understand the significance of his death and resurrection. During the 40 days of Lent we are going to take an in-depth look at the Lamb of God. Each week we will look at a different aspect of the Lamb of God; first on Sunday and then digging deeper on Wednesdays. These **Connect 7 Devotions** will enrich our understanding of God's great love for us through Jesus, the Lamb of God.

February 14

Ash Wednesday

Theme: *Do Overs!*, Joel 2:12-14

Readings: Psalm 51:1-13, Joel 2:12-19, 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

February 18

Theme: *Behold the Lamb of God-(Why Sacrifices?)*, John 1:29

Readings: Psalm 51:7-19, Hebrews 10:1-10, John 1:29-34

February 25

Theme: *The First Sacrifice*, Genesis 3:21

Readings: Genesis 3:8-24, Colossians 3:12-17, Mark 15:16-20

March 4

Theme: *The Sacrifice of the Son*, Genesis 22:10-13

Readings: Genesis 22:1-18, James 1:12-18, Mark 1:9-15

March 11

Theme: *The Sacrifice of Exchange*, Leviticus 16:20-22

Readings: Leviticus 16:16-22, Romans 5:1-11, John 11:45-53

March 18

Theme: *The Sacrifice Predicted*, Isaiah 53:6-7

Readings: Isaiah 53:1-12, 1 Peter 2:21-25, Mark 15:16-20

March 25

Palm Sunday

Theme: *The Sacrifice for Freedom*, Exodus 12:5-6

Readings: Exodus 12:1-13 29-32, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 1 Cor. 5:7, Mark 11:1-11

March 29

Maundy Thursday

Readings: Exodus 24:3-11, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Mark 14:12-26

March 30

Good Friday

Theme: Tenebrae (Service of Darkness)

April 1

Easter

7 AM Sunrise

Readings: Exodus 15:1-11, 1 Cor. 5:6-8, John 20:1-18

10 AM Festival

Readings: Isaiah 25:6-9, Rev 5:6-14, Mark 16:1-8

Connecting to Worship: February 18

Theme: *Behold the Lamb of God-(Why Sacrifices?)* John 1:29 “The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Readings: Psalm 51:1–13, Joel 2:12–19, 2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10, Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Monday, February 12

Get Up And Start Over

Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him. —Psalm 37:24

Are you feeling “down” today? Are you discouraged because of your experience yesterday? In an unguarded moment, did you stumble and fall by yielding to sin?

There is something worse than falling down—it is staying down. The wicked fall and shall not rise, but with the Christian it is not so. Though we do sometimes fall, we will not be content until we are restored. We should not sin, but too often we do. The apostle John wrote, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). But here’s the good news: “These things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins” (2:1-2). Admit your failings. Don’t worry over them, but confess them. Before Jesus died for us, He knew that we would continue to struggle with sin, so He made provision for our daily cleansing.

Make a fresh start each day by taking time to confess your sins, to admit your weakness, and to ask God for His strength to do what He wants you to do. As you depend on the Lord’s grace and strength, you will soon know what victory really is!

We’re thankful, Lord, that when we fall

We can begin anew

If humbly we confess our sin,

Then turn and follow You. —Sper

Success means that you get up one more time than you fall down.

Tuesday, February 13

Tears Of Repentance

Peter went out and wept bitterly. —Luke 22:62

My husband, a self-proclaimed computer illiterate, purchased a computer to help him with his business. After giving him a few pointers, I left him alone to do some experimenting. It wasn’t long, however, before I heard a slightly panicked voice from the office: “Hey, where’s that ‘uh-oh’ button?”

What he had been looking for, of course, was the “undo” key that lets you backtrack when you’ve made a mistake. Have you ever wished for one of those in life? A provision to reverse, repair, or restore what’s been broken or damaged by sin?

After Jesus’ arrest, Peter, one of His beloved disciples, denied three times that he knew Him. Then, we read, “the Lord turned” and simply “looked at” him. Peter “went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61-62). His tears were most likely tears of shame and repentance. No doubt he wished he could undo his actions. But Peter wasn’t left in his misery. After Jesus’ resurrection, He restored Peter, giving him opportunity to reaffirm his love (John 21:15-17). When you sorrow over sin in your life, remember that God has provided a method of restoration. “If we confess our sins,” He will “forgive us” and “cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

We’re thankful, Lord, that when we fall We can begin

anew If humbly we confess our sin, Then turn and

follow You. —Sper

The way back to God begins with a broken heart.

Wednesday, February 14

Praise from Pure Hearts

A broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. Psalm 51:17

During my friend Myrna's travels to another country, she visited a church for worship. She noticed that as people entered the sanctuary they immediately knelt and prayed, facing away from the front of the church. My friend learned that people in that church confessed their sin to God before they began the worship service.

This act of humility is a picture to me of what David said in Psalm 51: "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise" (v. 17). David was describing his own remorse and repentance for his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. Real sorrow for sin involves adopting God's view of what we've done—seeing it as clearly wrong, disliking it, and not wanting it to continue. When we are truly broken over our sin, God lovingly puts us back together. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). This forgiveness produces a fresh sense of openness with Him and is the ideal starting point for praise. After David repented, confessed, and was forgiven by God, he responded by saying, "Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise" (Ps. 51:15).

Humility is the right response to God's holiness. And praise is our heart's response to His forgiveness.

Dear God, help me never to excuse or minimize my sin. Please meet me in my brokenness, and let nothing hold me back from praising Your name.

Praise is the song of a soul set free.

Thursday, February 15

The Blame Game

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! —John 1:29

I've been blamed for a lot of things, and rightly so. My sin, failure, and incompetence have caused grief, anxiety, and inconvenience for friends and family (and probably even for strangers). I've also been blamed for things that were not my fault, things I was powerless to change.

But I have stood on the other side of the fence hurling accusations at others. If they had just done something different, I tell myself, I would not be in the mess I'm in. Blame hurts. So whether guilty or not, we waste lots of time and mental energy trying to find someone else to carry it for us. Jesus offers us a better way to deal with blame. Even though He was blameless, He took upon Himself the sin of the world and carried it away (John 1:29). We often refer to Jesus as the sacrificial lamb, but He was also the final scapegoat for everything that is wrong with the world (Lev. 16:10).

Once we acknowledge our sin and accept Christ's offer to take it away, we no longer have to carry the weight of our guilt. We can stop looking for someone to blame for what's wrong with us, and we can stop accepting blame from others trying to do the same.

Thanks to Jesus, we can stop playing the blame game.

Help me, Lord, to be honest when I am at fault and to confess that to You—instead of looking for someone else to blame. Thank You for taking my blame on Yourself.

Honesty about our sin brings forgiveness.

Friday, February 16

Our Covering

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Psalm 32:1

When talking about faith in Jesus, we sometimes use words without understanding or explaining them. One of those words is *righteous*. We say that God has *righteousness* and that He makes people *righteous*, but this can be a tough concept to grasp. The way the word *righteousness* is pictured in the Chinese language is helpful. It is a combination of two characters. The top word is *lamb*. The bottom word is *me*. The lamb covers or is above the person. When Jesus came to this world, John the Baptist called Him “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). We need our sin taken care of because it separates us from God whose character and ways are always perfect and right. Because His love for us is great, God made His Son Jesus “who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus, the Lamb, sacrificed Himself and shed His blood. He became our “cover.” He makes us righteous, which places us in right relationship with God.

Being right with God is a gift from Him. Jesus, the Lamb, is God’s way to cover us.

*Dear Lord, thank You for dying on the cross for me
and covering my sins so that I can have a
relationship with You.*

**The only permanent covering for sin is the blood of
Christ.**

Connecting to Worship, February 18

Theme: Behold the Lamb of God-(Why Sacrifices?) John 1:29 “The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Readings: Psalm 51:1–13, Joel 2:12–19, 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10, Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Connecting to Worship: February 25

Theme: *The First Sacrifice*, Genesis 3:21, And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Readings: Genesis 3:8-24, Colossians 3:12-17, Mark 15:16-20

Monday, February 19

A Book For Pilgrims

You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God. —Leviticus 18:4

Many people who determine to read the Bible through in a year get bogged down and quit about halfway through Leviticus. After the fascinating narrative in Genesis and the dramatic deliverance in Exodus, Leviticus seems to unfold with all the excitement of a technical manual for ancient clergymen. But don't let the priestly details fool you. This is a textbook for pilgrims, a life-guide for people who have been delivered from their past and are on their way toward a glorious, God-planned future. Near the center of the book we find God's charge to His people. He told them they must not imitate the people of Egypt where they had been, nor the practices of those in Canaan where they were going. In Leviticus 18:4, He said to them, "You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God." Leviticus is also filled with word pictures of God's salvation, painted almost 1,500 years before Jesus was born. Every offering and sacrifice points to the cross of Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

On your journey from Genesis to Revelation, don't let Leviticus stop you. Instead, let it be a wonderful bridge that takes you from the sacrifices to the Savior. *The offerings of animals, Were made in days of old, To point us to the Lamb of God, His sacrifice foretold.* —Fitzhugh

The Old Testament altar points to the New Testament cross.

Tuesday, February 20

House Of Symbols

According to the law, almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. —Hebrews 9:22

Our neighbor was startled when two young men walked into her home uninvited. She screamed, and they ran out. Yet no one would accuse her of failing to be hospitable. If you enter someone's house, you come in on that person's terms. We sometimes forget that the same principle applies to our entering into the presence of God. This was made clear in the Old Testament "house of symbols" known as the tabernacle (Exodus 25–27). Its construction and the arrangement of the objects within it teach us that we come into God's presence only on His conditions.

Consider, for example, the bronze altar of sacrifice (27:1-8). Bronze in Scripture stands for divine judgment of sin. The slaughtering of sheep and goats on the altar symbolized the results of sin. An unmerciful death for innocent animals pointed forward to a coming substitute, the sinless "Lamb of God." When Jesus died on the cross of Calvary, His sacrifice was more than adequate to atone for the sin of all people (John 1:29). The only way to approach God is on His terms. We must receive the forgiveness He offers to us through Christ.

*Saved by the blood of the Crucified One!
Now ransomed from sin and a new work begun,
Sing praise to the Father and praise to the Son—
Saved by the blood of the Crucified One! —
Henderson*

Christ will receive you if you will believe Him.

Wednesday, February 21

True Sacrifice

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. —John 15:13

Eric was one of the good guys. As a police officer, he saw his work as service to his community and was fully committed to serving at all costs. Evidence of this desire was seen on the door of Eric's locker at the police station, where he posted John 15:13. In that verse, our Lord said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." Those words, however, were not merely noble ideals. They expressed Eric's commitment to his duty as a police officer—a commitment that demanded the ultimate price when he was killed in the line of duty. It was a real-life display of the heart of true sacrifice.

Jesus Christ lived out the powerful words of John 15:13 within hours of stating them. The upper room event where Jesus spoke of such sacrifice was followed by communion with the Father at Gethsemane, a series of illegal trials, and then crucifixion before a mocking crowd.

As the Son of God, Jesus could have avoided the suffering, torture, and cruelty. He was utterly without sin and did not deserve to die. But love, the fuel that drives true sacrifice, drove Him to the cross. As a result, we can be forgiven if we will accept His sacrifice and resurrection by faith. Have you trusted the One who laid down His life for you?

*'Twas not a martyr's death He died,
The Christ of Calvary;
It was a willing sacrifice
He made for you—for me. —Adams*

Only Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, can declare guilty people perfect.

Thursday, February 22

A Heart of Compassion

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Colossians 3:12

Seven of us were attending a musical production at a crowded amusement park. Wanting to sit together, we tried to squeeze into one row. But as we did, a woman rushed between us. My wife mentioned to her that we wanted to stay together, but the woman quickly said, "Too bad," as she and her two companions pushed on into the row.

As three of us sat one row behind the other four, my wife, Sue, noticed that the woman had an adult with her who appeared to have special needs. She had been trying to keep her little group together so she could take care of her friend. Suddenly, our irritation faded. Sue said, "Imagine how tough things are for her in a crowded place like this." Yes, perhaps the woman did respond rudely. But we could respond with compassion rather than anger.

Wherever we go, we will encounter people who need compassion. Perhaps these words from the apostle Paul can help us view everyone around us in a different light—as people who need the gentle touch of grace. "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col. 3:12). He also suggests that we "bear with each other and forgive one another" (v. 13).

As we show compassion, we will be pointing others to the One who poured out His heart of grace and compassion on us.

Your compassions never fail, Father. May we mirror Your heart by showing compassion to others.

Compassion is understanding the troubles of others.

Friday, February 23

Always An Upgrade

Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; . . . but above all these things put on love. —Colossians 3:12,14

When I'm about to leave the house, sometimes my wife, Martie, stops me and says, "You can't go to the office dressed like that!" It's usually something about the tie not matching the jacket or the color of the slacks being out of sync with the sportcoat. Though being questioned about my fashion choices may feel like an affront to my good taste, I have realized that her correcting influence is always an upgrade.

Scripture often calls us to "put on" attitudes and actions that match our identity in Christ. Sometimes we are known by the clothes we wear, but we can make Jesus known by wearing attitudes and actions that reveal His presence in our lives. The apostle Paul advised us to set the fashion standard by modeling the wardrobe of Jesus' compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and forgiveness (Col. 3:12). And, he added, "above all these things put on love And let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (vv.14-15).

Clothing ourselves in Jesus' likeness begins with spending time with Him. If you hear Him say, "You can't go out like that!" let Him lovingly take you back to the closet so He can clothe you with His likeness. It's always an upgrade!

Lord, help us to see ourselves the way You see us. By Your Spirit teach us to adorn our lives with the attitudes and actions You have designed for us as a public statement about our identity with You.

Clothing ourselves with Jesus' attitudes and actions shows His presence in our lives.

Connecting to Worship: February 25

Theme: The First Sacrifice, Genesis 3:21, And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Readings: Genesis 3:8-24, Colossians 3:12-17, Mark 15:16-20

Connecting to Worship: March 4

Theme: *The Sacrifice of the Son*, Genesis 22:10-13, Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear

God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son

Readings: Genesis 22:1-18, James 1:12-18, Mark 1:9-15

Monday, February 26

Correct Gently

Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another.

—Colossians 3:12-13

At the end of a conference in Nairobi, Kenya, our group traveled from the conference center to a guesthouse to prepare to fly back home the next morning. When we arrived, one person in our group reported that she had forgotten her luggage back at the conference center. After she left to retrieve it, our group leader (always meticulous on detail) criticized her sharply to us in her absence. The next morning when we arrived at the airport, the leader discovered to his dismay that he too had left his luggage behind. It and his passport were back at the guesthouse. It was now going to cost us even more to go for his baggage. Later, he apologized and said to all of us, “I’ll never criticize so harshly again!” Because we all have faults and weaknesses, we should bear with one another and forgive each other when things go wrong (Col. 3:13). We need to be constructive in our criticism and “clothe [our]selves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (v.12 niv). When correction is necessary, it should be done with kindness and love. In that way we become imitators of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear God, You know that there are times when I just don't feel patient and humble and gentle. Those days in my life, the fruit of Your Spirit seems in short supply. Please enable me to love others today.

The keys to effective relationships are gentleness and humility.

Tuesday, February 27

Is My Uniform On?

Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering. —Colossians 3:12

Ken Robinson, who is now a pastor, at one time served as a police officer. He said people treated him differently when he was in uniform than when he was off duty and wearing plain clothes. Something about the badge and “blues” gained him instant respect and authority. He was often addressed as “Sir.” When he told people something, they believed him. And when he gave an order, they were quick to obey. Robinson concluded, “I guess the clothes made the difference. And in uniform, I acted with more confidence.” In Colossians 3, the apostle Paul told followers of Christ to put on a new uniform. First he described the clothes we are to “put off” (vv.8-9). Then he told us what kind of uniform we are to “put on” (vv.12-14). In place of anger, wrath, slander, dirty language, and lies, we are to put on mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love. Most people respond positively to someone with these virtues. Their respect grows. They talk and act differently toward such a person. They listen to his words, acknowledge his authority, and are drawn to the God he represents. What you wear makes a big difference. So ask yourself this question: Do I have my spiritual uniform on?

*Lord, may I live that all may see
The love of Christ revealed in me,
And help me flee all sin and shame
Lest others scoff at Your dear name. —DJD*

Can people tell that Christ is in you before you tell them?

Wednesday, February 28

The Hidden Life

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. —Colossians 3:17

Some years ago, I came across a poem by George MacDonald titled, “The Hidden Life.” It tells the story of an intellectually gifted young Scot who turned his back on a prestigious academic career to return to his aging father and to the family farm. There he engaged in what MacDonald called, “ordinary deeds” and “simple forms of human helpfulness.” His friends lamented what they saw as a waste of his talents.

Perhaps you too serve in some unnoticed place, doing nothing more than ordinary deeds. Others might think that’s a waste. But God wastes nothing. Every act of love rendered for His sake is noted and has eternal rewards. Every place, no matter how small, is holy ground. Influence is more than lofty acts and words. It can be a simple matter of human helpfulness: being present, listening, understanding the need, loving, and praying. This is what turns daily duty into worship and service.

The apostle Paul challenged the Colossians: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,” and “do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance” (Col. 3:17,23-24). God takes notice and delights in using us.

Dear Lord, may I be willing to be hidden and unknown

today, yet ready to speak a word to those who are weary. May Your Spirit touch my words and make them Your words that enrich and refresh others.

The way to accomplish much for Christ is to serve Him in any way we can.

Thursday, March 1

A Test Of Faith

God will provide for Himself the lamb. —Genesis 22:8

When I was a boy, I disliked the story of Abraham going to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son Isaac. Why would God tell Abraham to do such a thing? I was an only son, and I didn’t want that happening to me! My parents assured me that God was testing Abraham’s faith. And he passed that test. Even with the knife in his hand, Abraham believed God (Gen. 22:8-10). He had learned that the Lord could be trusted.

It is easy to make a profession of faith. But the real test comes when God asks us to lay our dearest treasures on the line. As with Abraham, the issue becomes one of obedience. A businesswoman lost a high-paying job because she wouldn’t compromise her standards. And a pastor was driven from his church when he obeyed God’s Word and spoke out about racism in his congregation.

Shouldn’t these people have been rewarded when they did the right thing? Faith meets its toughest test when we feel that the Lord has not rewarded our faithfulness.

You may be faced with giving back to God something you feel He has given you. Learn to see this test as an opportunity to demonstrate your faith in the One who always keeps His promises—even when you don’t understand.

*Be still, my soul—the Lord is on thy side!
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to thy God to order and provide—
In every change He faithful will remain. —von Schlegel*

Faith is the ability to see God in the dark.

Friday, March 2

Eight Cows On The Altar

God tested Abraham. —Genesis 22:1

Pastor Ed Dobson was speaking to a congregation on “putting all on the altar” in total surrender to Christ. After the service, an old German farmer came forward. He told Dobson that he had eight cows that were dying, which would mean great financial loss, and he had been struggling with accepting this as God’s will. Then he said, “Because of your message, I have found peace. Tonight I put them all on the altar.”

Christ’s lordship touches every area, every relationship, every concern of our lives. If we are willing to submit to Him, any loss in life will be seen as an opportunity of giving back to God what is rightfully His and trusting Him to provide what is needed.

When God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, He seemed to be undermining His own purposes. Isaac was the son of promise through whom God would bless the world. Yet Abraham’s faith had grown strong over the years, and baffled though he must have been, he said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb” (Genesis 22:8).

The issue is the same for us. Can we entrust everything to God—our possessions, job, health, family? If we commit ourselves to Him each day and thank Him for every blessing, our confidence in Him will survive any test.

*You have longed for sweet peace and for faith to
increase,
And have earnestly, fervently prayed;
But you cannot have rest or be perfectly blest
Until all on the altar is laid. —Hoffman*

**Submission to God means taking our hands off
what belongs to Him.**

Connecting to Worship: March 4

Theme: *The Sacrifice of the Son*, Genesis 22:10-13, Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son

Readings: Genesis 22:1-18, James 1:12-18, Mark 1:9-15

Connecting to Worship: March 11

Theme: *The Sacrifice of Exchange*, Leviticus 16:20-22, “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness

Readings: Leviticus 16:16-22, Romans 5:1-11, John 11:45-53

Monday, March 5

Trial by Fire

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life. **James 1:12**

Last winter while visiting a natural history museum in Colorado, I learned some remarkable facts about the aspen tree. An entire grove of slender, white-trunked aspens can grow from a single seed and share the same root system. These root systems can exist for thousands of years whether or not they produce trees. They sleep underground, waiting for fire, flood, or avalanche to clear a space for them in the shady forest. After a natural disaster has cleared the land, aspen roots can sense the sun at last. The roots send up saplings, which become trees. For aspens, new growth is made possible by the devastation of a natural disaster. James writes that our growth in faith is also made possible by difficulties. “Consider it pure joy,” he writes, “whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2–4). It’s difficult to be joyful during trials, but we can take hope from the fact that God will use difficult circumstances to help us reach maturity. Like aspen trees, faith can grow in times of trial when difficulty clears space in our hearts for the light of God to touch us.

Thank You, God, for being with us in our trials, and for helping us to grow through difficult circumstances.

Trials and tests can draw us closer to Christ.

Tuesday, March 6

Count It All Joy

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life. —**James 1:12**

A pastor placed this sign on his door: “If you have problems, come in and tell me all about them. If you don’t have any problems, come in and tell me how you avoid them.” What do we do when problems come unannounced and with great intensity? James told us to “count it all joy,” because trials do not happen without a reason. He said, “The testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete” (James 1:3-4). Armed with this understanding, our prayer changes from asking God “why” to thanking Him for what He is doing. Having endured many trials and facing a new struggle with cancer, *Our Daily Bread* author Joanie Yoder shared her thoughts in a letter: “I have relinquished my destiny to God’s will. Nothing, praise God, not even cancer, can thwart His will. I may have cancer, but cancer doesn’t have me—God alone has me. So in this light, I would value your prayers that Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.” Trials are unavoidable and unpredictable, and they come in an unimaginable variety. Knowing that our sovereign God will walk with us and use trials to deepen our maturity, we can count them “all joy.”

*Heavenly peace, divinest comfort,
Here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whatever befall me,
Jesus doeth all things well. —Crosby*

We can endure trials in this life because of the joys in the life to come.

Wednesday, March 7

It's in the Attitude

Consider it pure joy . . . whenever you face trials of many kinds. -James 1:2

Regina drove home from work discouraged and tired. The day had started with tragic news in a text message from a friend, then spiraled downward in meetings with co-workers who refused to work with any of her ideas. As Regina was talking to the Lord, she thought it best to put the stress of the day aside and made a surprise visit with flowers to an elderly friend at a care center. Her spirits lifted as Maria shared how good the Lord was to her. She said, "I have my own bed and a chair, three meals a day, and help from the nurses here. And occasionally God sends a cardinal to my window just because He knows I love them and He loves me."

Attitude. Perspective. As the saying goes, "Life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we react to it." The people James wrote to were scattered because of persecution, and he asked them to consider their perspective about difficulties. He challenged them with these words: "Consider it pure joy . . . whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2).

We are each on our own journey of learning to trust God with hard circumstances. The kind of joy-filled perspective James talked about comes as we learn to see that God can use struggles to produce maturity in our faith.

*Lord, please change my attitude about hard times.
Bring about joy, perseverance, and maturity in me.*

**God can bring times of growth out of our times of
heartache.**

Thursday, March 8

Tale Of Two Goats

In all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest. — Hebrews 2:17

Two goats without blemish stood before the high priest in the bright Middle Eastern sun. Lots were cast, and the priest slowly led one to the altar to be killed as a sin offering for the people. Its blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. That goat was a sacrifice.

The other goat, known as the scapegoat, portrays another truth. The priest placed both his hands on its forehead and confessed the sins of Israel. Then the goat was led out into the desert and turned loose. As it wandered away, never to be seen again, it symbolically took Israel's sins along with it. They were gone. The people were reconciled to God. That goat was a substitute.

Both of these goats were pictures of what Christ would do for us. The cross became an upright altar, where the Lamb of God gave His life as a sacrifice for sin. And what the scapegoat symbolically portrayed for Israel—the removal of their sins—Jesus fulfilled in reality. He became our substitute. Because of our identification with Him as believers, our sins have been taken away completely.

Two goats representing two truths: sacrifice and substitution. Both were fulfilled in Christ when He died on the cross and made full atonement for our sins. Praise God!

*Guilty, vile, and helpless we,
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full atonement! Can it be?
Hallelujah, what a Savior! —Bliss*

Jesus took our place to give us His peace.

Friday, March 9

Solving The Mystery

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. — Romans 5:8

One of the most popular tourist attractions in England is the giant stone pillars of Stonehenge. These massive pieces of granite are also a great source of mystery. Every year, people travel to Stonehenge with questions such as: Why were they erected? Who accomplished this extraordinary engineering marvel? And perhaps we wonder most of all how they did it. But visitors leave having received no answers from the silent stones. The mystery remains.

The Scriptures speak of a greater mystery—the fact that God came to live among us as a man. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 3:16, “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.”

This brief overview of the life of Christ—the mystery of godliness—is remarkable. What prompted the Creator of the universe to come and live and die for His creation, however, is not a mystery. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). God’s great love for us is at the root of the mystery of godliness, and the cross has made it plain for all to see.

Lord, we may not understand everything You have done for us, or how You have done it. But we know You love us and sent Jesus to die for us, and that is all we need to know.

How Christ became a human being may be a mystery, but God’s love isn’t.

Connecting to Worship: March 11

Theme: *The Sacrifice of Exchange*, Leviticus 16:20-22, “And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness

Readings: Leviticus 16:16-22, Romans 5:1-11, John 11:45-53

Connecting to Worship: March 18

Theme: *The Sacrifice Predicted*, Isaiah 53:6-7 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. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth

Readings: Isaiah 53:1-12, 1 Peter 2:21-25, Mark 15:16-20

Monday, March 12

Our Substitute

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. —

Romans 5:8

Ed Leonard, an employee of a Canadian mining company, was working in Colombia, South America, when he was captured by rebel soldiers in 1998. In an unprecedented move, Norbert Reinhart, the owner of the company, secured Leonard's release by taking his place. Reinhart was then held hostage for 94 days. Centuries ago, Jesus took our place, becoming our substitute. Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." So profound is the meaning of that act that scholars have struggled to explain its mystery. The Bible teaches that God loves us but must uphold His perfect justice by punishing us for our sin. As part of His plan to redeem us, He sent His Son Jesus to become a member of the human race (John 1:18). Although He was sinless, Jesus, who is fully God and fully man, took our punishment on the cross. With sin's penalty paid, He rose from the grave and offers forgiveness and eternal life to all. Just knowing these facts, though, doesn't mean that we are forgiven. We must admit that we're helpless, lost sinners (Romans 3:23), turn from our sins, and personally reach out in faith to Christ and receive His offer of forgiveness. Then He truly is our Savior, our Substitute.

*Was it for crimes that I have done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown!
And love beyond degree! —Watts*

**Knowing a creed is no substitute for knowing
Christ.**

Tuesday, March 13

Love Undeserved

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world. —1 John 4:9

Years ago in North Carolina, Judge Clara Warren served in the juvenile court system. She was known for her strict interpretation of the law, but also for her love and compassion.

One day Judge Warren took reporter Phyllis Hobe on a tour of a correctional facility. Hobe was surprised by the judge's sincere concern for many of the inmates. She was helping them to get into schools and find jobs when they were released. She even continued to care for them if they were readmitted. "How can you keep on loving them?" the reporter asked. "They don't seem to appreciate all you've done for them." The judge explained that she didn't love them because she wanted to receive their thanks. She simply loved them, expecting nothing in return. Isn't that how God loves us? The Bible tells us that He loved the world so much that He gave His Son to die for us (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). Though sinful and ungrateful, every man, woman, and child is the object of His love. Yes, He longs for our loving obedience. But when that doesn't happen, He continues to love us no matter how unlovable we are.

Dear Father, enable us to love others the way that You love us. —Vernon Grounds

*O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be. —Matheson*

Nothing is more powerful than God's love.

Wednesday, March 14 ***The Power Of Demonstration***

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. —
Romans 5:8

“If I can make a point with an explosion, I do.” That’s the motto of chemistry teacher Susan Willson, 1995 Science Teacher of the Year in Texas. Al Balmer, her colleague at McNeil High School in Round Rock, won the same award in 1996. His classroom ceiling bears the marks of numerous soda-bottle “missile” launches, and the walls are pockmarked from being struck by mousetrap-propelled cars.

These enthusiastic educators use creative ways to demonstrate the scientific principles they’re trying to teach. “I’ve tried to show these kids how I fell in love with physics,” Balmer says, and “how it relates to their life.”

A true passion doesn’t confine itself to words alone. We see this vividly in God’s dealings with us. Paul wrote, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). God gave us His Son to show us the extent of His love. Jesus Christ came into this world to die on the cross, freely giving His life to pay the penalty for our sin. God said, “I love you!” and showed it through the most remarkable demonstration the world has ever seen. Has it moved your heart to trust Him as your Savior?

*God sent His Son to die for us;
No other life would do.
So why not trust in Christ today—
Accept His gift to you. —JDB*

**Nails could not have kept Jesus on the cross had
love not held Him there.**

Thursday, March 15 ***Lessons in Suffering***

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. -2 Corinthians 11:30

The close-up image on the giant screen was big and sharp, so we could see the deep cuts on the man’s body. A soldier beat him while an angry crowd laughed at the man whose face was now covered with blood. The scenes appeared so real that, in the silence of the open-air theater, I cringed and grimaced as if I could feel the pain myself. But this was only a film reenactment of Jesus’ suffering for us.

Reminding us of Jesus’ suffering, Peter wrote, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). While suffering comes in different forms and intensity, it is to be expected. Ours may not be as intense as that experienced by Paul, who for the sake of Christ was beaten with rods, stoned, and shipwrecked. He was attacked by bandits, and he endured hunger and thirst (2 Cor. 11:24-27). Likewise, we may not suffer like those who endure severe persecution in cultures where Christianity is not welcomed.

In some form or another, however, suffering will come our way as we deny ourselves, endure harassment, bear insults, or refuse to engage in activities that do not honor the Lord. Even exercising patience, avoiding revenge, and forgiving others in order to foster good relationships are forms of following in His steps.

Whenever we encounter suffering, may we remember what Jesus endured for us.

*What have you learned about God through your
trials?*

**The school of suffering teaches us lessons that we
could learn in no other classroom.**

Friday, March 16

Persecution That Backfired

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. —1 Peter 2:21

In AD 64, someone set fire to Rome. A few days later, two-thirds of the city lay in smoldering ruins. A rumor spread that the emperor Nero had set the fire because he wanted to rebuild the city and name it after himself. Needing a scapegoat to get himself off the proverbial hot-seat, he chose to blame a defenseless and unpopular minority—Christians. He then initiated such intense persecution that he's been referred to as the first Antichrist. It's believed that both Peter and Paul were martyred during this time.

Because Christianity was new and its followers still relatively few, the sadistic treatment that Nero leveled against believers, which included using them as human torches to light his palace garden, continued with little opposition.

His persecution eventually backfired, however. Instead of weakening the new faith, it strengthened it. History tells us that within a few hundred years Christianity became so influential that Emperor Constantine made it the official religion of the Roman Empire.

God always has a purpose in persecution. He will use it for good if we follow the example of Christ, who, “when He suffered, He . . . committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

The purposes of God are right,
Although we may not see
Just how He works all things for good
And transforms tragedy. —Sper

**It is better to suffer for the cause of Christ than
for the cause of Christ to suffer.**

Connecting to Worship: March 18

Theme: The Sacrifice Predicted, Isaiah 53:6-7, 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. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth

Readings: Isaiah 53:1-12, 1 Peter 2:21-25, Mark 15:16-20

Connecting to Worship: March 25

Theme: *The Sacrifice for Freedom*, Exodus 12:5-6, Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, 6 and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

Readings: Exodus 12:1-13 29-32, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 1 Cor. 5:7, Mark 11:1-11

Monday, March 19

Standing Tall

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. —1 Peter 2:21
It has never been easy to be a slave. In the days of the Roman Empire, slaves were called “human tools.” Old or sick slaves could be thrown aside like a worn-out saw. Sometimes Christian slaves suffered additional indignities because of the antagonism of their pagan masters. The apostle Peter gave those slaves some challenging instructions. He told them to respond to the injustice of their situation with the dignity Christ displayed. They were to take their lead not from their emotions but from Christ’s example in suffering as He went to the cross (1 Pet. 2:20-24). There is an old story of a Persian prince with a physical deformity that forced him into a constant stoop. The prince had a statue made of himself as he would appear if he were straight and tall. Day after day he stood before the figure and wished he could be like it. According to the legend, the prince eventually stood as straight as the statue. That tale captures what it means to follow the example of Jesus. Even as those first-century slaves bent under the weight of their inhumane treatment, they could stand as tall as Christ by following the example of their suffering Savior. Is some injustice bringing you low? Look to your Master! We can stand tall when we stand with Him.

*To earthly wisdom honor is as gold,
The strong will rule—the rest must serve instead;
But our Example cut a different mold—
He stooped and bathed the feet of men He led. —
Gustafson*

Standing tall for Christ means stooping to help others.

Tuesday, March 20

The School Of Pain

I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. —Psalm 119:75

In his book *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis observes that “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Suffering often helps us to redirect our focus. It shifts our thinking from immediate circumstances so we can listen to God concerning His work in our lives. Life as usual is replaced by a spiritual schoolroom. In the Old Testament, we read how the psalmist maintained a teachable heart even during painful circumstances. He accepted them as orchestrated by God, and in submission he prayed, “In faithfulness You have afflicted me” (Ps. 119:75). Isaiah the prophet viewed suffering as a refining process: “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction” (Isa. 48:10). And Job, despite his laments, learned about the sovereignty and greatness of God through his troubles (Job 40–42). We are not alone in our experience of pain. God Himself took on human form and suffered greatly: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). The One with nail-scarred hands is near. He will comfort us and teach us in our suffering.

Dear Lord, life is so hard sometimes. I confess that I don't always see Your purpose in my trials. Help me to trust You, and teach me to become the person that You desire me to be.

We learn the lesson of trust in the school of trial.

Wednesday, March 21

Virtue Exemplified

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. —1 Peter 2:21

In the late 1940s, a young mother was stricken with polio and became an invalid. She astounded people by the way she accepted her affliction and ran her household from her bed. Her brother-in-law said to me, "I have heard a lot of talk about 'supernatural grace,' but I never knew what it was until I saw it shining through her."

We often do not know the full meaning of a virtue until we see it lived out in a person's life. Think of how Jesus responded when the soldiers mistreated Him. They pressed a crown of thorns into His head, struck Him repeatedly, and mocked Him by clothing Him in a purple robe and bowing before Him in jest (Mark 15:16-20). They were unaware that He had the power to kill every one of them by speaking a single word.

About 35 years later, Peter vividly remembered that scene. He told his readers that Christ had set an example for them as they faced persecution (1 Peter 2:18-25). In Jesus, God became a flesh-and-blood human being to show what He is like. Because Jesus lives in us by His Spirit, He expects us to exemplify His goodness and grace.

Whether we suffer like that invalid mother or endure persecution like the Master, we can demonstrate the same virtue He modeled on the cross. —Herb Vander Lugt

*The difficulties in our lives,
The obstacles we face,
Provide the opportunity
To show God's power and grace. —Sper*

God's love is the blessing in every trial.

Thursday, March 22

The Passover Picture

Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. —1 Corinthians 5:7

The day of Israel's first Passover was full of excitement and mystery for the Hebrew boys and girls. They saw their fathers roast lambs over an open fire. They watched them sprinkle blood from the lambs on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses. They listened with wide-eyed wonder as their fathers told them that an angel of death would kill the firstborn in every house that was not marked by the blood.

In the evening, wearing their sandals and dressed for immediate departure, family members gathered in groups just large enough to consume a whole lamb. They ate the Passover meal, which included bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. After midnight they gathered up their possessions and left Egypt to begin a new way of life as a free people.

Israel's slavery in Egypt pictures for us as believers in Christ the bondage to sin from which we have been delivered. The slaughtered lamb points to Jesus Christ, "our Passover, [who] was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). The sprinkling of the blood speaks of the act of faith by which we receive salvation.

Have you experienced the joy of salvation that comes to those who put their trust in the Lamb of God?

*All praise to the Lamb, accepted I am,
Through faith in the Savior's adorable name;
In Him I confide, His blood is applied;
For me He has suffered, for me He has died. —
Wesley*

**The Lamb who died to save us is the Shepherd who
lives to
lead us.**

Friday, March 23

Your Children Will Ask

When your children say to you, “What do you mean by this service?” . . . you shall say, “It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord.” —

Exodus 12:26-27

One of the most important events in Jewish history is the exodus, when God freed His people from the bondage of Egypt. Prior to leaving Egypt, the Israelites were commanded to eat a special meal called the Passover. As an act of judgment upon the Egyptians, God said that He would strike down every firstborn son, but He would *pass over* the houses that had the blood of a lamb on the top and sides of the door frame (Ex. 12).

To commemorate this act of judgment and grace, God’s people would share in the Passover meal. God said that one day their children would ask: “What do you mean by this?” They were then responsible to retell the story of the exodus and God’s salvation. God did not want the story of His great salvation to get lost in one generation.

When our children ask us about our values, lifestyle, prayer in decision-making, Bible-reading, church attendance, and worship, we have a responsibility to answer them. We are followers of Jesus. We must retell the story of how He became our Passover Lamb. His blood is the marker over our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin but are free to serve the Eternal One of heaven.

What are you teaching the children?

How great, O God, Your acts of love!

Your saving deeds would proclaim

That generations yet to come

May set their hope in Your great name. —D. De Haan

A parent’s life is a child’s guidebook.

Connecting to Worship: March 25

Theme: The Sacrifice for Freedom, Exodus 12:5-6, Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, 6 and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

Readings: Exodus 12:1-13 29-32, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 1 Cor. 5:7, Mark 11:1-11

Connecting to Worship: April 1

Theme: *The Sacrifice Enthroned* Revelation 5:12, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

Readings: 7 AM Sunrise, Exodus 15:1-11 1 Cor. 5:6-8 John 20:1-18

10 AM Festival, Isaiah 25:6-9, Rev 5:6-14, Mark 16:1-8

Monday, March 26

Purge Out The Old

Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. —1

Corinthians 5:7

Several days before their New Year celebration, many Chinese families give their home a thorough cleaning. There’s a Cantonese saying that goes: “Wash away the dirt on *ninyabaat*” (28th day of month 12). They practice this tradition because it is believed the cleaning sweeps away the bad luck of the preceding year and makes their homes ready for good luck. When the apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth, he asked them to give their lives a thorough cleansing—not for good luck but to please God. He told them to “purge out the old leaven” (1 Cor. 5:7). Paul used the Jewish feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:1-28) as a backdrop for this statement. Leaven (yeast) was a symbol of sin and corruption and was to be removed from Jewish homes to celebrate these festivals (Deut. 16:3-4). Because Jesus is the Passover Lamb who cleanses us from sin, the Corinthians were to scour their hearts and remove the leaven of sexual immorality, malice, and wickedness from their lives and their assembly (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

Out of gratitude to Jesus for His sacrifice, let us purge out the sin in our lives and celebrate the holiness that only He can bring.

The holiness of God demands

A heart that’s pure within,

Yet grace unites with holiness

To purge the heart from sin. —D. De Haan

Sin’s contamination requires the Savior’s cleansing.

Tuesday, March 27

A New View Of Change

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep. —
John 10:14

People hate change, or so I hear. But the change we generally resist is the kind that we think will make our situation worse rather than better. We eagerly change jobs when it means higher pay and more influence. We happily move to a bigger house in a better neighborhood. So it’s not change in general that we hate; it’s change that involves loss—sometimes physical; other times emotional or psychological. Change is both inevitable and necessary. If everything stays the same, no one is growing. But we have a Shepherd who guides us through change and leads us to a better place. Getting there may be difficult, as it was for the Israelites in reaching the Promised Land. They grumbled when their situation got worse rather than better (Ex. 15:24; Num. 14:2). But we have the example of Jesus. In less than a week, He went from being the leader of many to being abandoned by all. Between Palm Sunday and Good Friday, the Good Shepherd became the Passover Lamb. Because Christ willingly went through suffering, God elevated Him to the highest place (John 10:11; Phil. 2:8-9). Not all change is pleasant, but when we’re being led to a better place by Someone who loves us, we don’t need to fear it.

I know not, but God knows;

Oh, blessed rest from fear!

All my unfolding days

To Him are plain and clear. —Flint

**Faith in Christ will keep us steady in the stormy sea
of change.**

Wednesday, March 28

Learn The Cost

You were bought at a price. —1 Corinthians 6:20

We gave our 2-year-old son a pair of new boots recently. He was so happy that he didn't take them off until it was bedtime. But the next day he forgot all about the boots and put on his old sneakers. My husband said, "I wish he knew how much things cost."

The boots were expensive, but a young child doesn't know about working hours, salaries, and taxes. A child receives the gifts with open arms, but we know that he can't be expected to fully appreciate the sacrifices his parents make to give him new things. Sometimes I behave like a child. With open arms I receive God's gifts through His many mercies, but am I thankful? Do I consider the price that was paid so I can live a full life?

The cost was expensive—more than "corruptible things, like silver or gold." As we read in 1 Peter, it required "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1:18-19). Jesus gave His life, a high price to pay, to make us part of His family. And God raised Him from the dead (v.21). When we understand the cost of our salvation, we learn to be truly thankful.

Lord, help me to understand, to take in what it meant for You, the Holy One, to bear my sin. Remind me to give You thanks for salvation and for all the ways You show me Your love throughout my day today.

Salvation is infinitely costly, but absolutely free.

Thursday, March 29

Praiseworthy

I heard the voice of many angels around the throne.
—Revelation 5:11

The Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestra and Symphonic Choir were presenting their annual Christmas concert. Near the conclusion, they were joined by the 4,000 members of the audience in singing, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King." I got chills when we sang the words, "And heaven and nature sing."

Despite the magnificence of that moment, it was but a faint shadow of the praise that will be raised to the Lamb in heaven. Jesus is worthy of the adoration and praise of all beings: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12).

In Revelation 5, we read John's description of a widening circle of praise to the Lord. It begins with "four living creatures and the twenty-four elders" (v.8). They are joined by angels numbering "ten thousand times ten thousand" (v.11).

But that's not all. Every creature in heaven, on earth, and in the sea will one day sing, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (v.13). You don't have to wait for that day to sing praise to the Lamb. He is worthy of your praise right now!

*Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy. —Watts*

Praise is the overflow of a joyful heart.

Friday, March 30

The Lamb Wins

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive . . . honor and glory and blessing! —Revelation 5:12

Spontaneous celebrations of freedom erupted all across Eastern Europe in the late 1980s as atheistic and tyrannical governments suddenly disintegrated.

One of the more unusual displays of liberty took place in Czechoslovakia on November 27, 1989. Although church bells had not been heard in that freedom-starved nation for 45 years, at noon that day every church bell in the country began to ring. The pigeons were as startled as the people. A sign placed on the front lawn of a church in Prague summed up the joy of the moment. It read simply: The Lamb Wins.

That triumphant message evokes a picture of the meekness and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout the pages of Revelation, He is portrayed as the Lamb who redeems us. Yet despite the gentleness represented by a lamb, Jesus is also the mighty Judge who will defeat all who oppose Him. The reign of God's Messiah will not come peacefully. The imagery of Revelation 19 is full of God's fierce power and His violent judgment. In that day the nations will gather for a great rebellion against God (v.19), but they will be destroyed in a moment (v.21).

The Lamb will win. Praise the Lamb!

*Every knee in heaven is bending
To the Lamb for sinners slain;
Every voice and harp is swelling—
"Worthy is the Lamb to reign." —Anon.*

The Lamb who died is the Lord who lives.

Connecting to Worship: April 1

Theme: The Sacrifice Enthroned Revelation 5:12, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

Readings: 7 AM Sunrise, Exodus 15:1-11 1 Cor. 5:6-8 John 20:1-18

10 AM Festival, Isaiah 25:6-9, Rev 5:6-14, Mark 16:1-8