

The lamb that is slain forms one of the most iconic images of scripture. In it is a picture, not just of death, but of the death of something gentle and unassuming. When Jesus was crucified on the cross no great danger was averted, no evil adversary thwarted, but the gentle and loving God of all creation, innocent of all wrongdoing, was killed for the very fact of his righteousness. In this image we have the most powerful juxtaposition of cruel and sinful man, and the glorious and loving savior who dies to set men free. This image is the image of fruitfulness, both for creation as a whole and in our lives in particular. How do we make this image part of who we are, growing in love for those around us? Let's work on that this week.

## Day 1

### Attention & Curiosity

It is very easy to get wrapped up in our lives, to think about all our responsibilities, plans, and dreams. It is easy to take no notice at all of those around us, and if we do notice to do so only in terms of how they advance or retard our plans. I was watching a movie recently where a young girl was completely lost and forgotten about by a father who was consumed by his job as a police officer catching crooks, and a mother who was consumed by her battle with inner demons. The resulting neglect was far worse than any hatred could ever be, causing the young girl to act out in self-destructive ways. In our world, this story is so common as to barely be worth remarking upon. It doesn't have to be. We can give those around us attention, seeing them as individuals that are not just bit players in our own drama, but worthwhile individuals with their own hopes, dreams, frustrations, and wounds. We can go a step further and become curious about those we encounter, wondering what their past, present, and future will be. We can wonder about their relationship with God, and what eternity awaits them. We can lift up a prayer for those we encounter, asking God to bless them with a knowledge of His love for them, and also asking how we might play a part in that, being ready for that part if the opportunity to play it arises. There is a whole world around us, let's begin to see it.

Verses: 1 John 3:17, 1 John 4:16, Romans 13:10

Prayer Topics: Intention, Consideration, Wisdom

## Day 2

### Be an Agent of God's Love

As Christians we are all aware of God's love for the world, including the lost. We often pray for the world, that it might know the love of God, and we beseech God to show his love to those who may not know Him. But does it occur to us in those prayers that we as believers are to be the conduits of that love. When we ask God to show his love, what do we expect that to look like? Having a good day? Getting just the right dress? Winning the lottery? Having an illness go away? Does it cross our minds that only a person can love? That it takes will, personality to love someone else? That if God is to really reveal himself as the God of love it must be through a human being? Does it also occur to us that the undeniable proof of love is found in sacrifice? That the lamb that was slain shows up in jeans and a t-shirt (or whatever else you are wearing)? It is important to us to understand that this does not mean we are to weird people out by being too familiar with them or forcing some kind of relationship that the other person does not want, but it does mean being open to the part God may have for us to play, which means actively looking for that part so that when the time comes, we are ready. I am not saying that any of this is easy, but that if we want to see our lives become fruitful, we must be ready to play a part in the glorification of creation, and that equals some form of sacrifice most of the time. This sacrifice carries with it great reward, let's find out just how great.

Verses: John 15:13, John 13:35, 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

Prayer Topics: Love, Willingness, Eagerness, Readiness

Day 3

Participate in Growth

Do we see ourselves as part of the growth of those around us? Loving others involves serving them sacrificially, but it also means helping them to grow. God begins the process of salvation wherever we might be in our lives, but that is not the end of the story. As Christians, we are often prepared to serve others, but I find it rarer that we are prepared to help others grow. Are we helping others along the path to glory? Are we accepting the great invitation to cultivate not only the physical world but other people as well? Are the people you are investing yourself in becoming more mature, more capable, more glorious? If not, why not? Could it be that your desire to help, and maybe even your need to help is more about you than about what is good for them? Are they capable of more but you expect less? Would you treat your child the way you are treating them, or would you have higher expectations? It is often much more difficult, and requires greater sacrifice, to help people to grow than it does to help them stay the same. The love of Christ is transformational, we are being transformed into Christ-likeness and He is sharing His glory with us through that process. Are we useful in that process with others? Are we helping creation to be fruitful? Let us take joy in the growth of others, and be part of the process that makes it happen.

Verses: 2 Peter 3:18, 1 Timothy 4:15, Hebrews 6:1

Prayer Topics: Humility, Progress, Glory

Day 4

Unify in Conflict

When we find ourselves in conflict with others, what is our goal? It is easy to get caught up in the desire to be right, as we often put a higher premium on intelligence than we do love. But what should we be trying to accomplish in the conflicts we find ourselves in? Well, it would be my hope that we try to become more like Christ in our conflicts, and that we endeavor to help others do the same. When this happens, the conflict becomes redeemed by the growth in Christ that occurs in all participants, and a greater unity results as all have moved closer to Christ, and therefore to each other. Pride can be a great enemy, causing us to put our own image and glory ahead of the glory and unity that can be found if Christ is made the goal of resolving the conflict. In order to thwart the effects of pride, it is necessary for us to embrace the image of the lamb that was slain, dying to ourselves and our glory, finding love and unity as the replacement. Most of the time, after a conflict is over we realize we could have done a much better job of handling it. We will find, I believe, that if we follow the counsel of days 1 through 3 of this week's conversations, we will be better able to take advantage of the opportunity of conflict when it arises. Preparation is key, and preparing our hearts for conflict by making a practice of actively loving others will yield great fruit in all of our lives.

Verses: James 4:1-2, Ephesians 4:26, Matthew 5:9

Prayer Topics: Purity, Redemption, Grace

Day 5

Use Words Well

One of the main ways we can love one another is with how we speak to and about other people. This starts in our mind. Because Adam was called to name the animals, calling things by their proper names is fundamental to operating in the world effectively. Most of the time, what goes through our minds about others is not accurate for one reason or another, but often it has to do with a lack of charity or generosity on our part. We must learn to talk to ourselves about others in a loving way. Next, we must learn to talk to others about others appropriately. There is no room for gossip or slander when we talk to others, for the simple reason that it spreads our uncharitable thoughts about our brothers and sisters. Finally, we must learn to speak to other people properly about themselves. We must learn to address others in an uplifting, encouraging, and when appropriate, admonishing way. He who can use his words correctly is a perfect man, and most of us fall far short of perfection. We can, however, begin to pay attention to our words and work to make them appropriate to a disciple of the lamb who was slain. The fruit is worth the effort, for us and for others.

Verses: Ephesians 4:29, Psalm 19:14, Matthew 12:37

Prayer Topics: Labels, Truth, Generosity of Spirit