

# Turning: *Holy Week Meditations on Peter & the Cross*

By Andrew Comiskey



Andrew Comiskey

In the church calendar, Holy Week marks the end of Lent. Lent corresponds with the 40 days of prayer and fasting Jesus spent in the desert. That time served as an intensive preparation for His ministry. As He was tested, so are His disciples in this focused season of sacrifice. We seek to identify and release to God various things that hinder our following Him.

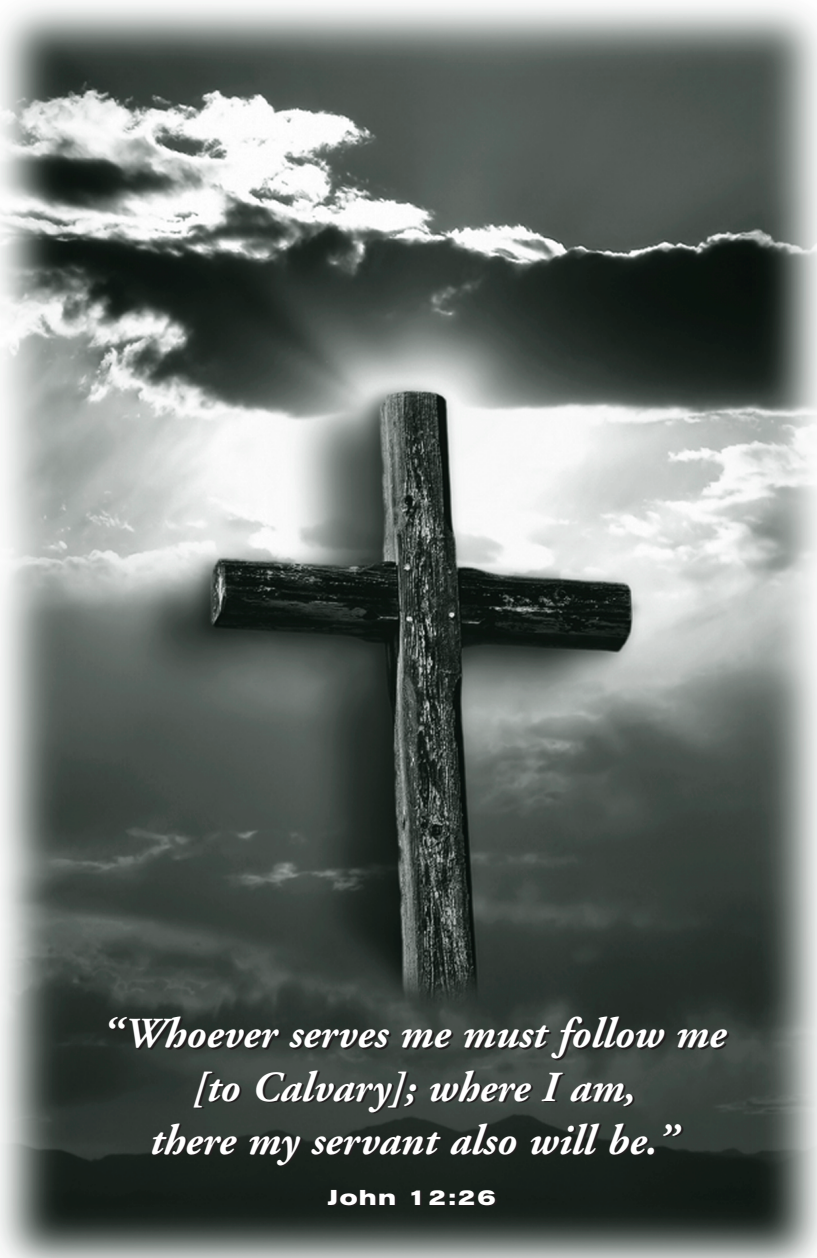
Yet sacrifice alone serves no purpose unless we avail ourselves to Him, both in His suffering and in His rising. The cross is thus the central symbol of Lent and Holy Week: Jesus' life of obedience to the Father which reached its awful, glorious conclusion at Calvary.

Lent and Holy Week reminds us that the empty cross—Christ Resurrected—is not to be the Christian's only focus. Jesus made crucifixion a mandate for all who choose to follow Him. In prophesying His passion to come in John 12, Jesus said: "Whoever serves me must follow me [to Calvary]; where I am, there my servant also will be." (v.26)

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*"Whoever serves me must follow me [to Calvary]; where I am, there my servant also will be."*

John 12:26

# Beneath Thy Cross

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

Am I a stone, and not a sheep,  
That I can stand,  
O Christ, beneath Thy cross,

To number drop by drop  
Thy blood's slow loss,  
And yet not weep?

Not so those women loved  
Who with exceeding grief  
lamented Thee;

Not so fallen Peter weeping bitterly;  
Not so the thief was moved;

Not so the Sun and Moon

Which hid their face  
in a starless sky

A horror of great darkness  
at broad noon—

I, only I.

Yet give not o'er,  
But seek Thy sheep,  
true Shepherd of the flock;

Greater than Moses,  
turn and look once more  
And smite a rock.

## Turning: Holy Week Meditations...

Continued from Page 1

In this call to follow Jesus, cross-in-hand, we discover how poorly we do it. Consider the ease with which we set down our crosses to pick up the minor comforts we promised Him we would deny. Perhaps this is one of Lent's main tasks: to mirror who we are and are not. In this gap between our faltering aspirations and Himself, we discover mercy.

A wise woman wrote: "How do we measure the gravity of sin and the incomparable vastness of God's love for us? By looking at the magnitude of what God has done for us in Christ."

No one exemplifies this gap, and how God bridges it for us, like Peter. Peter the Impetuous, Peter the Patron Saint of Loose Cannons, Peter full of zeal and pretense and cowardice...And the one man Jesus deemed the Rock of the Church.

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No one represents us better. Peter reminds us of how much we do not see, how flimsy our claim to 'radical' commitment may actually be. As we explore Peter's relationship to Jesus in the next few devotionals, we discover mercy at its most pure and powerful.

First, Jesus mirrors to us the truth of how readily we betray Him. Then He extends to us unfailing love. His mercy, received in the depths of sin, grants us the chance to turn more fully unto Him and His purposes. Exemplified by Peter, this turning makes otherwise flaky saints solid as a rock. **DSM**



## Meditation 1- The Glare of Grace

Faithful and powerful as He is, Jesus is a realist. He mirrors reality to us. Jesus does not withhold from us the truth of who we are. He reflects dangerous grace.

His authority is obvious: He made us, we bear His image; He is uniquely aware of the beauty we possess and the nobility we are capable of. And He sees darkness marbled in us, sin that mars an otherwise noble image.

In that mixture, we tend toward self-deception. We are aware of some personal goodness, and we are aware that He is God: All-Good

*"Lord, to whom shall we go?  
You alone have the keys  
to eternal life..."*

JOHN 6: 67, 68

and All-Powerful. Yet we see Him and ourselves 'through a glass darkly'; we may catch glimpses of pure reality, then distort what we do see, followed by long dark blanks.

Our sight is limited, as prone to revelation as to deception and self-protection. So Jesus

must mirror reality to us. That is dangerous; Jesus' vision crucifies the illusion of our 'all-knowing'. And it is welcomed. Always grace-filled, Jesus mirrors back to us what is best and what is broken.

Our challenge is to position ourselves before the mirror who is Christ. Then, with greater and truer sight, we avail ourselves to the mercy we did not know we needed prior to such sight.

Peter leads the way for us. He was a faith-filled man, his heart turned toward the humility and majesty of Jesus. When many were confused as to the nature of Christ, claiming that He was John the Baptist, Elijah, or another prophet like Jeremiah, Jesus asked His disciples: "Who do you say I am?"

Peter stepped forward and answered clearly: "You are Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt 16: 13-16)

The Gospel of John records Peter's declaration of faith in another way. Confused and threatened by Jesus' disruptive effect upon the 'religious', many disciples forsook Him.

Jesus asked those that remained: "You do not want to leave too, do you?"

Peter responded as one whose heart had been

won over, as one who had closed all doors to other "messianic" prospects. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the keys to eternal life..." (Jn 6: 67, 68)

His declaration of Jesus as the Son of God is solid and simple. Peter's faith barred him from other loves; his true sight of Jesus cleared all other gods out of his temple.

Then Jesus mirrors back His vision of who Peter is: "And I tell you that you are Peter [the Rock], and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matt 16:18, 19)

Peter's simple and clear declaration of faith renders him solid in Jesus' eyes, the very foundation on which Jesus will build His church. This is a divine confirmation unlike any other!

And one that would be refined. Peter's solid foundation of faith had to endure the bonfire of all his vanities. His acute vision was matched by what he did not see. Peter had yet to discover the cross. He had yet to behold himself in the eyes of the Crucified God.

When he does, his response will not be as orthodox. **DSM**

## Meditation 2- The Light of Blindness

"Did you ever look inside yourself and see what you are not?" asked the crippled daughter of her spiritually crippled mother in a Flannery O'Connor short story.

To spot the truth in oneself is not only difficult but painful. Each of us possesses a certain native blindness, something persistent in us that resist the light. We fear the naked bulb that reveals friends as enemies, devoted things as idols, 'love' that is actually a dance of dysfunction.

Perhaps more than anything we fear the exposure of ourselves—loved by God and yet loveless, committed yet empty, seemingly righteous and yet critical and demeaning,

named by God and yet oblivious to His ways.

Even in Jesus' name, we can be deceived and yet insistent that we are not. "The old man" is really that self-preserving part of the self that wants Jesus on our own terms. We refuse mirrors that expose those faulty terms.

Here we discover the part of ourselves which claims to love the cross but which will do anything in its power to avoid the cross.

Look at solid Peter. Fresh from his confirmation as the Rock, Peter fails the test that awaits him exactly two verses later. In v. 21, Jesus prophesies His death and resurrection: "Jesus began to explain to His disciples that

He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

Peter can't stand it. Tripping over the cross, Peter blurts out "Never Lord!" The new doctor of the church, empowered by fresh authority, possesses zeal but not wisdom.

God's vision of power is yet not the Rock's. Peter does not grasp how divine might is only realized through surrender. Glory demands humiliation; strength in God's economy is always preceded by often excruciating weakness. *Continued on Page 4*

### ...The Light of Blindness

Continued from Page 3

Jesus response to Peter is merciless: "Get behind Me, Satan!" (v. 23) The Rock's stumbling over the cross becomes a stumbling block to Jesus. The new doctor is out—outside the divine plan, that is.

From a Rock to an agent of Satan—Jesus is unflinching in mirroring the truth to Peter. He insisted that Peter, whose faith rendered him foundational to the church, become founded in the truth of the cross.

This must have challenged Peter's cross-free assertion of allegiance. Such commitment appears noble but that is actually counterfeit, a man-centered form of religion full of bluster and sentiment yet lacking divine power. In the cross, "the weakness of God is greater than man's strength." (1Cor 1:25)

Jesus' hard words—the harsh mirror He holds up to Peter—are intended to break the apostle's husk, the hard shell Jesus referred to in John 12. There He said that the seed had to die in order to multiply itself many times over. As in this passage, Jesus was not only referring to Himself and His

crucifixion, but also to the death required of those who would follow Him.

Servants of the Master must walk His way. Death precedes life, and surrender precedes assertion of power, first for Christ and then for His disciples.

In the very context of Peter's confirmation and humiliation, Jesus said to them all: "If anyone would come after Me, He must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." (Matt. 16:24) "Whoever serves Me must follow Me [to Calvary]; where I am, there My servant also will be..." (Jn 12:26) **DSM**

## Meditation 3 - A Water-Repellent Rock

It is no easy thing to see ourselves in the Light of Jesus' gaze; He is lovingly severe with us at times, intent on our seeing who we are (and are not) in light of who He is. In that gap, in the sting of minor humiliations, our hearts either tenderize or toughen. We either fall forward into His mercy or flee His gaze altogether. Blessed are those who fall into pools of living water, the grace that halts us in order to heal us.

Peter did not bolt. But he remained a slow learner. Just before the Passover meal, according to John 13, Jesus began to reveal "the full extent of His love" (v.1) by washing the disciple's feet. In Holy Week, we commemorate

*"Blessed are those who fall into pools of living water, the grace that halts us in order to heal us."*

this event on Maundy Thursday, from the Latin "mandatum", referring to Jesus' mandate of the disciples to wash one another's feet (Jn 13:14).

Jesus came to Peter with basin and towel, ready to get low and cleanse his lowliest part.

Feet in the Hebrew culture designated the most humble part of a person. Unlike today, feet were filthy as a result of hiking dirty roads in sandaled feet.

This washing is prophetic, a foreshadowing of Jesus' life being poured out on the cross. His river of blood and water is the basin and towel, His body the basin. Foot-washing also foreshadows Paul's words about the body of Christ when he writes: "Those parts of the body we think are less honorable we treat with special honor... God has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it." (1Cor 12: 22, 24)

Feet represent the most awful parts of us, the parts least likely to succeed, the untouchable zones. These are the dimensions of our humanity which smell, that are unruly, that we stub unto more of a stench. These are the areas that are dangerous, and that can cripple God's will for us unless they are properly attended.

We hide our bloody feet. The religious man will even use spiritual language and rationale as to why he should hide them. In most Christian cultures, we lead out with our best foot forward, and may make Herculean efforts to conceal the club foot we drag behind.

Yet to deny foot-washing is to deny the very person of Jesus and His passion: the bloody God pouring out His life to remove the stench of sin, the basin of God—His body, meeting us at our least honorable. He who receives such washing welcomes Christ and His foot-washers, right where God most desires him.

But we must be ready. God is faithful to mirror back to us our lack of readiness for foot-washing, just as He did for Peter. Peter asked Jesus as He knelt down: "Are you going to wash my feet?" (v.6) Upon hearing His 'yes', Peter refused adamantly the offer: "No, You shall never wash my feet." (v.8)

The Rock, the doctor of the Church, refuses foot-washing as stubbornly as he refused Jesus' cross. Jesus replies simply: "Unless I wash you, you have no part of Me." (v.8)

Peter was not ready for the cross and its benefits. He had yet to die to old religious notions. The zealot still wanted to protect Jesus from His passion and from his own smelly feet. The two are profoundly related. Jesus broken body, releasing a flood of cleansing, corresponds to our human brokenness and its defilement. Peter wanted neither a broken God nor the revelation of his own brokenness.

Maybe Peter was not yet desperate, not enough anyway. The Rock had more bluster in him yet, more of that good carnal energy that champions the Savior yet refuses to get saved. He did not yet see Jesus clearly. He did not see himself clearly. The mercy that might have made him meek eluded him.

Yet Peter's time would come, and in the meantime, Jesus washes his feet. Jesus awaits the time when its meaning would become clear to Peter. He waits to reveal the full extent of His love to the water-repellent Rock. **DSM**

## Meditation 4 - Eating the Cross

Foot-washing prepared the disciples for Passover. The meal itself, described in Matthew 26:20-28, is a continuation of Jesus revealing the full extent of His love. During this meal, Jesus prophesies that He will be the body broken, the blood shed "for the life of the world." (Jn 6:51)

If foot-washing foretold cleansing from sin, then the bread (Jesus' broken body) and the cup (Jesus' shed blood) represent sustenance. Communion conveys the Real Presence of

of highly individualized units; we are one beautiful broken unit partaking of a single loaf and cup. At the Lord's table, we sit together with Christ and His disciples as one unit representing the worldwide communion of saints.

Around that table we fulfill the truth that "together with all the saints we are learning to grasp the height and width and depth and breadth of the love of Christ..." (Eph. 3:18)

As we gaze around that table we see the one right next to us we have chosen purposely to avoid.

But at that table we can no longer dismiss him or her. We behold Christ between us, extending to each of us the same meal; He implores us to release them quickly unto Him and His provision for them. Such forgiveness fulfills Jesus prayer to the Father when He said: "I in them and You Father in Me; may they be brought to complete unity..." (Jn 17: 23)

The washing of feet prophesies the cleansing flood released at Calvary, the basin, His body on earth; the communion meal conveys the sustenance of Jesus' love made manifest on the cross. These are mercies unimagined, disorienting to our natural sensibilities, until Jesus reveals them to us.

The disciples struggled to grasp these mercies. Their feet washed, their stomachs full, they still did not yet see themselves clearly. Nor did they behold Christ and His purposes clearly. Yet His mercy prevails. He prophesies the falling away of those who had just partaken of His most tender and profound expressions of mercy.

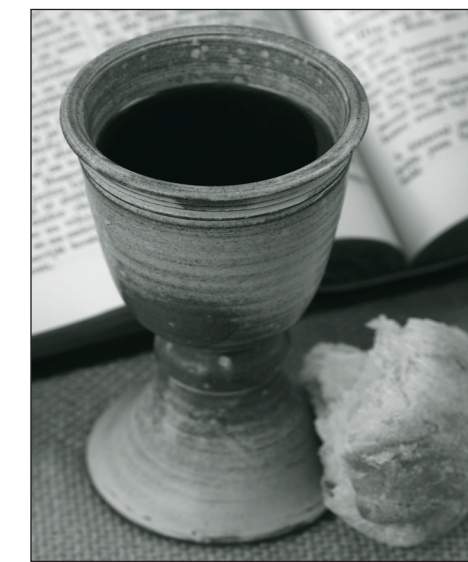
"This very night you will all fall away because of Me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." (Matt. 26:31)

Amazing love. God prophesies restoration to His beloved betrayers before they violate Him. That is mercy: the all-knowing, all-seeing grace that knows our inability to be faithful and makes a way for us to fulfill our vows.

Blind Peter leads the blind. With typical bluster, he insists his response to Christ will be different than his wayward colleagues. Peter vows to go the distance.

"Even if all fall away on account of You, I never will," said Peter. "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered. "This very night before the rooster crows, you will disown Me three times." But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You." (Matt. 26: 33-35)

The Rock dies hard. Yet Mercy prevails; Jesus promises, in essence: 'I will meet you in your abandonment of Me. My merciful love toward you shall liberate your turning back to Me.' **DSM**



*"Christians exist as far more than a group of highly individualized units; we are one beautiful broken unit partaking of a single loaf and cup"*

## Meditation 5 - Water from the Rock

Peter received both the healing and sustaining power of the cross through foot-washing and communion. Yet that power eluded him. Perhaps his need for that cross had yet to dawn. He still believed in his own cross-bearing capacity, the sheer power of his own allegiance to Jesus.

Having yet to suffer in full the humiliation of his infidelity, Peter continued to be stumbled by the prospect of Christ's humiliation.

Jesus' prophesied Peter's three-fold denial of Himself. In Luke 22: 54-62, we behold its fulfillment: the Rock boldly distancing himself from Christ, refusing any awareness of Him, let alone allegiance. The one who set himself apart by naming Christ as God, the sole source of salvation, refuses Him when the heat is on. Peter preserves himself in the face of Christ's arrest; to three inquirers, he denies the truth about Jesus and his true self.

But the power of the passage rests not on his denial but rather his repentance. By this point, we are used to blind, blustery Peter. But repentant Peter is quite another thing. The key verses in Luke 54-62 come after his third denial: "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter...and he went outside and wept bitterly." (vs. 61, 62)

Jesus turned first. This was the threshold of change. Yes, Jesus had rebuked the Rock sternly before, had washed his feet, fed him bread from Heaven—all preparation for the

*"The Lord turned  
and looked straight  
at Peter...  
and he went outside  
and wept bitterly."*

LUKE 22:61,62



pivot that would change Peter forever. Jesus turned first. One glance from the eyes of Jesus, burning with tender mercy, and Peter saw his sin. More importantly, he saw Jesus as the sole enabler and object of his devotion.

One wise woman put it this way: "In the presence of His integrity, our pretense is exposed. In the presence of His constancy, our cowardice is exposed. In the presence of His fierce love for us, we either fall down and worship Him or do anything we can to extinguish the light..."

Perhaps Peter would have rather looked in any one's face than Jesus' at that moment. He was exposed—his self-deceiving ways more apparent than at any other time. But such exposure ploughed deep ground in Peter's heart. That is Real Presence: the Lamb of God revealing the truth of His servant's sin in order to heal him.

Peter broke, and water poured from the Rock. His tears manifested a turning unto the Savior as he had never done before.

True repentance can occur only as God looks at us. He turns toward us, our only hope from the stranglehold of both the prostitute and the Pharisee. We can suffer a kind of narcissistic sorrow over sin. Truly

this is wounded self-love, founded more on social shame or loss of a beloved idol than over genuine spiritual grief.

But when the God of fierce love turns toward us, we can feel deeply our sorrow over sin—our inspired regret at running away from our only Hope, the sole Source that loves us deeply in the full glaring light of who we are in our pretense and cowardice.

One wise man said it like this: "Genuine repentance consists of feeling deeply our helplessness, of knowing how God comes to us when we are completely broken."

God deals firmly yet gently with us in our waywardness, the gap between what He wills, and who we are. He persists to shine the light of His mercy, daring to expose sin and brokenness in order to heal us.

Henry Drummond writes: "Today perhaps the Lord is turning and looking at you. Right where you are, your spirit is far away, dealing with some sin, some unbearable weight. God is teaching you the lesson Himself, the bitter and sweet lesson of your life, in heartfelt repentance. Stay where you are. Today, don't look away."

Let Him reveal mercy in your nakedness, fiery love burning tenderly from His gaze. **DSM**

## Meditation 6 - For Good Friday

Peter reveals to us the revelation of sin that invites mercy. But not all turn toward Christ in the light of such exposure. A tearful pivot is one thing; a posture of murder—seeking to extinguish the Light—is another.

One pastor observed: "I remember being at a retreat when the leader asked us to think of someone who represented Jesus in our lives. One woman said: 'I had to think hard about that one: I kept thinking—Who is it that told me the truth about myself so clearly that I wanted to kill him for it?'"

"This is the verdict—light came into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." (Jn 3:19, 20)

"According to John, Jesus died because He told the truth to everyone He met. He was the truth, the perfect mirror in which people saw themselves in God's own light. The religious and political leaders were so appalled by what they saw in that mirror they smashed it. They smashed Him every way they could."

According to the Gospels, this 'smashing' included men: spitting in His face, striking Him with fists, slapping Him and mocking Him with prophecies, then stripping and flogging Him, followed by repeated head-bashings. The insults and mockery continued throughout His slow, agonizing death on the cross.

A thoughtful reflection upon Isaiah 53 adds clarity and pathos to what it meant "to smash Jesus every way they could."

Yet Jesus' rejection, abuse, and murder were not His greatest sorrow. It was His Father's abandonment of Him. Accursed, veiled by

the darkness of sin, the Son could no longer behold His Father, the One Voice, His One Consolation, His Sole Mirror vanished, and Jesus cried out into the void: 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?' (Matt. 27:46)

The weight of assuming sin's darkness cost the Son His communion with the Father. Having abandoned Himself to the Father's will, the Son found Himself abandoned. This was God's supreme suffering. Not the mocking abuse, the smashing of the mirror, but the veil of sin separating Father and Son. The Son lamented His fatherless ness, the Father His sonlessness.

The pathos of the cross involved at core the grief of a parent releasing a child unto death. For the Son, a descent into complete darkness. And for the father, the horror of knowing His Son would be consumed by that darkness, without consolation.

Simone Weill conveyed with unparalleled artistry the distance sin imposed upon Father and Son: "So that love may be as great as possible, the distance must be as great as possible. This infinite distance between God and

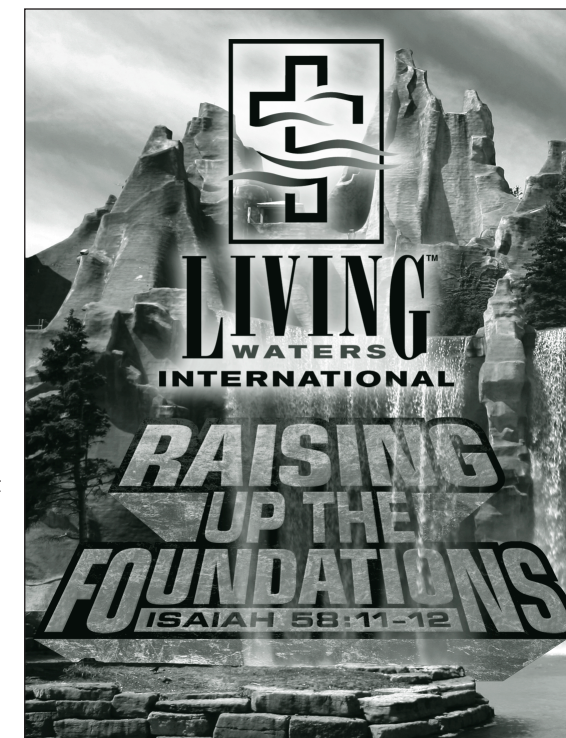
God [Father and Son], this supreme tearing apart, this agony beyond all others, this marvel of love, this is crucifixion...

This tearing apart, over which supreme love places the bond of supreme union, echoes perpetually across the universe, like two notes, separate yet melding into one, like pure and heartrending harmony. This is the Word of God. The whole creation is nothing but its vibration. When human music in its greatest purity pierces our soul, this is what we hear through it..."

Today is Good Friday, good and terrible, the day of crucifixion. Today we do not focus on what we can do. We are all reduced to the same impotence. Like Peter, all we can do is behold the Lamb who has turned toward us.

Behold the mirror, now smashed—the true Image wrenched from its Maker. Behold the agony of Love wrenched from Love. Behold our pretense and cowardice; behold the only Truth more powerful than our sin. Behold the crushing that cleanses, the fracturing that heals, the dying that makes all things new.

Today Another is doing the terrible work that gives life to the world. **DSM**



### LIVING WATERS GLOBAL CONFERENCE

August 2-4, 2007  
Kansas City, Missouri

As idolatry and brokenness rise on the face of the earth, the foundations of Living Waters must become foundational to the Church of Jesus Christ. We will explore these foundations together in this global gathering.

If you are a friend of Living Waters (or related group), please join us for a time of both receiving the living water and deepening our capacity to give it away well. Our gathering will be next to the International House of Prayer where we can drink from the deep well dug there through 24/7 worship and prayer.

For complete information  
and to register, go to:  
[conferences@desertstream.org](mailto:conferences@desertstream.org)

# Our New Home!

On March 7, a sign was hung on an office building in Main Street, Grandview, Missouri: Desert Stream Ministries! It was the culmination of 8 months of renovation and restoration of our new home. The Lord opened the door for us to purchase the building. He provided the vision (thank you architect Toni Dolfo-Smith), the funds and a wonderful contractor (thank you Andy Mullet).

To take a great liberty with Jeremiah 1:10— sometimes we need to pull down walls so that we can build and prepare for more growth. It was like that with this building: We tore down every wall until the building was reduced to bare bones— brick wall, cement floor, oak ceiling.

After the demolition we began the process of restoration. We brought back the building to reflect the original beauty and intent. The front window opening has been restored to its previous size to let in more light. The oak ceiling was treated and preserved. The brick walls were cleaned, both through rigorous sand blasting and with hand tools. The result: a beautiful ministry home.



Dean Greer and Andy Comiskey in front of our office building.

Just as we have been restored and called to serve, we believe the building will serve a purpose greater than being a pretty building. We believe part of the call to Missouri is—the heartland of the USA— to help restore the bride to receive her bridegroom.

She is a bride whose original beauty is often obscured by the wear and tear of sinful choices. A humbled bride crying out for restoration, entering a building that symbolizes God's renewal. And we are her wounded healers serving the community, locally and globally, proclaiming the healing authority of the Bridegroom King towards His Bride. **DSM**



The interior of our beautiful new offices!



## Spring 2007

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Art Direction—Immanuel Communications

### DESERT STREAM MINISTRIES PUBLISHES THE FOLLOWING:

Newsletter (Spring and Fall)  
Mid-Year Report (Summer)  
Year-End Report (Winter)

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*Based on the biblical foundations of compassion,  
integrity, and dependence on God,  
Desert Stream Ministries proclaims to the world  
the transforming power of Jesus Christ.  
We equip the body of Christ to minister  
healing to the sexually and relationally broken,  
through healing groups and leadership training  
for the local church.*

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