

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 26 July 2026

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 100:1-5

Opening Hymn: 254 Let All Things Now Living

Confession of Sin

O eternal God and merciful Father, we humble ourselves before your great majesty, against which we have frequently and grievously sinned. We acknowledge that we deserve nothing less than eternal death, that we are unclean before you and children of wrath. We continually transgress your commandments, failing to do what you have commanded, and doing that which you have expressly forbidden. We acknowledge our waywardness, and are heartily sorry for all our sins. We are not worthy to be called your children, nor to lift up our eyes heavenward to you in prayer. Nevertheless, O Lord God and gracious Father, we know that your mercy toward those who turn to you is infinite; and so we take courage to call upon you, trusting in our Mediator Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Forgive all our sins for Christ's sake. Cover us with his innocence and righteousness, for the glory of your name. Deliver our understanding from all blindness, and our hearts from all willfulness and rebellion, we pray through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. *Amen*

Assurance of Pardon: Romans 8:1-4

Hymn of Preparation: 524 Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

Old Covenant Reading: Exodus 13:17-22

New Covenant Reading: Hebrews 11:17-22

Sermon Title: *Life is Not the Shortest Distance Between Two Points*

Hymn of Response: 403 Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken

Confession of Faith: 1 Heidelberg Catechism (p. 872)

Doxology (Hymn 569)

Closing Psalm: 46A God Is Our Refuge and Our Strength

PM Worship

508 Jesus, Priceless Treasure

453 Just as I Am, without One Plea

488 May the Mind of Christ, My Savior

Old Covenant Reading: Psalm 49

New Covenant Reading: 2 Corinthians 11:22-29

Sermon Title: *A Fool for Christ*

Suggested Preparations

Monday (7/20) Read and discuss Exodus 13:17–22

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.” But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness

toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.” And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. (ESV)

Doug Stuart writes:

The first reason for an irregular exodus route was the presence of the Philistines on the Asian coast of the Mediterranean, that is, virtually on Egypt’s northern border. No definitive documentation of Philistine military strength at the time of the exodus has survived from the ancient world. We know, however, that the Philistines were so daunting a fighting force at the time of the conquest, forty years later and beyond, that even at Joshua’s death their territory remained unconquered. We also know that they were bold enough to attack Egypt proper in an effort to capture territory in the days of Ramses II, that is, about 1188 BC, suggesting that they considered themselves at that time – considerably after the Israelites had entered Canaan – potentially able to defeat even the Egyptians, depending on the circumstances. Accordingly, God did not want His people to try to enter Canaan directly by the well-established coastal road from Egypt, the Via Maris, even though that was by far the shortest and easiest route from the point of view of travel time and theoretical convenience. The Via Maris led right through the heart of Philistine territory. Based on their behavior as recorded in Judges and 1 Samuel, the Philistines were looking to expand their territorial control and would hardly have been willing to let the Israelites enter Canaan, on which they themselves had designs, without an all-out fight.

... Could God have destroyed the Philistines on behalf of the Israelites? Of course. But the Philistines had so far done nothing to the Israelites and so were not in the same category as the Egyptians, who well deserved the punishment they had already received and were about to receive more of (i.e., their defeat at the Red Sea). Moreover, the Philistines were latecomers to Palestine, as compared to the Amorites/Canaanites, and therefore did not fall under the blanket condemnation of the “sin of the Amorites” that God had announced to Abraham in Gen 15:16 as the basis for the conquest of Canaan.

Read or sing Hymn 254 Let All Things Now Living

Tuesday (7/21) Read and discuss Exodus 13:1–16

The LORD said to Moses, “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.”

Then Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the LORD brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year.

“When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD’s. Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. And when in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.” (ESV)

Kenneth Cherney writes:

The act of redemption is commemorated by observant Jews today in a ceremony known as “redemption of the son” in which a father discharges his obligation by making a payment to a *kohen* [priest] in the presence of witnesses, normally on the thirty-first day of the boy’s life. The ceremony communicates an underlying assumption that the boy would otherwise be turned over to the *kohen* (although this never actually happens), just as Samuel was given to Eli and the Levites were given to the descendants of Aaron in Numbers 3. The *kohen* asks the father, in either Aramaic or Hebrew, whether he wants to keep the boy or hand him over. The father

replies that he will keep the child, surrenders the money, and receives a blessing.

The point is that there seems to be a persistent notion that a firstborn son is uniquely God's, along with the motif of a beloved firstborn who is lost to his father in "death" and then restored. ... The reason is that these are an adumbration of what August Pieper called "the one, great thought of God": the redemption of the world through the death and resurrection of His beloved Son Jesus Christ.

Read or sing Hymn 524 Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

Wednesday (7/22) Read and discuss Hebrews 11:17–22

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones. (ESV)

Tom Schreiner writes:

The author highlights here that faith trusts in God for the future. Abraham left Ur even when he didn't know where God was calling him to live. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob died without seeing the promises realized in their fulness, but they didn't mock the promises of God or dismiss them as fantasies. They trusted that God had a heavenly homeland for them, a heavenly city. So too, when the LORD summoned Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, he didn't shrink back in unbelief. He continued to believe that God would fulfill His promises through Isaac and came to the conviction that God would raise him from the dead if need be. So too, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph on their deathbeds didn't see God's promises fulfilled; but they spoke about the future in confidence and faith, convinced God would do what He said. Faith trusts God for the future and believes, no matter how improbably it seems, that God will fulfill what He promised.

Read or sing Hymn 403 Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken

Thursday (7/23) Read and discuss Psalm 49

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.

Hear this, all peoples!

Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,
both low and high,
rich and poor together!
My mouth shall speak wisdom;
the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.
I will incline my ear to a proverb;
I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre.

Why should I fear in times of trouble,
when the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds me,
those who trust in their wealth
and boast of the abundance of their riches?
Truly no man can ransom another,
or give to God the price of his life,
for the ransom of their life is costly
and can never suffice,
that he should live on forever
and never see the pit.

For he sees that even the wise die;
the fool and the stupid alike must perish
and leave their wealth to others.
Their graves are their homes forever,
their dwelling places to all generations,
though they called lands by their own names.
Man in his pomp will not remain;
he is like the beasts that perish.

This is the path of those who have foolish confidence;
yet after them people approve of their boasts. Selah
Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol;
death shall be their shepherd,
and the upright shall rule over them in the morning.
Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell.
But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol,
for he will receive me. Selah

Be not afraid when a man becomes rich,
when the glory of his house increases.
For when he dies he will carry nothing away;

his glory will not go down after him.
For though, while he lives, he counts himself blessed—
and though you get praise when you do well for yourself—
his soul will go to the generation of his fathers,
who will never again see light.
Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish. (ESV)

Tim Keller writes:

All people share a common humanness, whatever their race, social class, or even beliefs. God created us, so there is a “fabric” or “grain” to the universe. It is foolish to go against the grain of how God made things. That is why to be greedy, unkind, unjust, and dishonest not only violates God’s law but also ruins you and all around you. To be wise is not just to comply with the rules but to perceive God’s will for human life. It means to change not just behavior but also attitudes, and to make wise choices in the many [areas] not specifically regulated by God’s Word. This psalm calls out especially the foolishness and futility of trusting in wealth.

The ordinary way to deal with the fear of failure is to “trust in ... wealth.” (verse 6). But that is to put your confidence in something that will fail. Neither wealth nor any kind of human ingenuity can save you from bereavement, ill health, financial reversals, or relational betrayals – and finally, it cannot hold off your mortality. There is no “ransom” that can buy you out of death (verses 7-12). It is coming, and it will strip you of everything dear to you. It is, then, utterly foolish to live your life as if economic prosperity could keep you truly safe, or as if you will never die. Only God can give you things of value that death cannot touch but only enhance.

In ancient times a king might attack another country but be defeated, captured, and imprisoned. A ransom (verse 7) was owed for his release. Every human being owes God a death. Our sins mean we belong to death (verse 14). But God, instead of demanding a ransom from us, pays it Himself (verse 15). The psalmist doesn’t know how this can be done, but he is confident. The missing piece is Jesus, who by His death killed death and set us free. Only at the cross do we discover how much it cost God to redeem us “from the realm of the dead.” So don’t resent, fear, or envy the rich (verse 16). Pity those who have nothing more than their riches.

Friday (7/24) Read and discuss 2 Corinthians 11:22–29

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with

far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? (ESV)

David Garland writes:

Paul now enumerates how he eclipses his rivals. First, he has far greater labors. This statement recalls what he told the Corinthians earlier. He worked harder than the first disciples, but he qualified this statement by saying that it was not he but the grace of God that is with him. Here he simply asserts that his labors are greater. Paul leaves out, however, any mention of the number of churches he founded, converts made, persons healed, his superb training in Scripture, or the story of his amazing call by Christ and conversion.

Next, he claims that he has far greater hardships, more imprisonments, more beatings, more scrapes with death. His language reveals that these were typical, recurring situations. Acts reports only the Philippian imprisonment before the time this letter would have been written. Brown suggests that comparing Paul's account of his tribulations with what we read about him in Acts "shows that, if anything, Acts might lead us to underestimate the apostle's extraordinary career." Paul is not engaging in sanctified masochism, however. According to Epictetus, a true philosopher does not boast about the office that has been given him by Zeus; he proves it by his conduct. The proof of one's God-ordained training and education was not a diploma or the ability to compose and deliver rousing speeches following the rules of rhetoric but the worthy response to adversity.

Judge argues persuasively that Paul's "dreadful catalogues of personal disaster" would have had no impact if he were a lowly man who could expect no better. The list of hardships would have only hit home if he were recognized as a man of rank. These hardships were not his expected lot but something he accepted and overcame. Unlike the previous lists in 4:8-9 and 6:8-10, which are more general in character, the list of tribulations is now specific. Harvy believes that at this fleshly level of speech, Paul needed "to show his superiority by the sheer cumulative weight of his whole variety of sufferings" rather than in general terms.

Read or sing Psalm 46A God Is Our Refuge and Our Strength

Saturday (7/25) Read and discuss Exodus 13:17–22

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.” But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.” And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. (ESV)

Commenting on Joseph’s bones, Doug Stuart writes:

This verse might seem to a modern reader to introduce a side issue into the narrative, but the verse reminds the reader of an important hopeful practice in ancient Israel, relating to Israel’s very identity as the chosen people and the typical Israelite’s expectation of an afterlife. Joseph understood the promise of God to Abraham. He was well aware that someday the Israelites would leave Egypt and take their promised place “up” in the Promised Land. So important to him was his identification in faith with the people of God and their eternal destiny that he exacted a deathbed promise from his brothers to the effect that they would be sure that his remains were brought out of Egypt and buried in Canaan. Since Joseph had been embalmed (Gen 50:26), his remains probably were more substantial than mere bones, that is, more like mummified remains that are eviscerated but still contain a full skeleton and skin, as well as desiccated flesh and hair. These the Israelites called “bones” in the Old Testament, just as they also referred to mere skeletal remains as “bones.”

The Israelites believed in life after death and took great care with their remains, or “bones.” It was considered desirable for a whole family as of many generations as possible to be buried together in a common grave, no necessarily because grouped family burial made life after death more attainable but to show faith in the resurrection. The wording “gathered to one’s people/fathers” described an expectation of the intermediate state of the paradise, from which one would be resurrected, with bodily remains rejoined and transformed by God’s spirit into a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44) with which to inhabit heaven [and the new earth] forever. Burial in the same tomb with those who had gone on before symbolized faith in that outcome on the part of the deceased.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow's morning and evening worship services.