# Pastor's Perspective: Teaching Toward Transformation
### November 2018

I am doubtful many of you recall my first sermon at CCAM almost 10 years ago as I candidated to be your future pastor, but the message I presented that morning is never far from my mind. Yes, it was a monumental point in my life but more importantly the message emerged from a deep place in my heart. I have grown a ton in these years as your pastor but this message remains core to my set of leadership values. The text was Romans 12:1-2 "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*"

A living sacrifice is somewhat of a mystery. It seems like a backwards thing to imagine. Paul would've been very familiar with the sacrificial process. He would have known every detail and with certainty, in each case, the sacrifice would die. I cannot be sure but I suspect Paul may have been alluding to the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac. In Genesis Chapter 22 we read that God called Abraham to the mountain to sacrifice his son; the son of promise. God was testing Abraham and Abraham was obedient. He rose early to make the journey to Moriah. Together father and son walked to make the sacrifice. Abraham carried the fire and knife while Isaac carried the wood. Isaac questioned his father about the lamb for the sacrifice and Abraham assured his son that God would provide. I cannot imagine how heavy the heart of Abraham must have been. They arrived at the place, Abraham bound his son to the altar. Often this story focuses on the faith and obedience of Abraham. But I believe there was great obedience and faith of Isaac as well. Isaac is a young boy but he is strong enough to carry the wood for the fire. Abraham is old. And yet there is no struggle; no mention of Isaac resisting the plan. Isaac must have been just as willing as Abraham to faithfully follow through with this plan trusting that God was worthy.
So with Isaac willingly bound to the altar, his father Abraham lifted the blade that would bring certain death. Just as he is about to plunge the blade into his own son the angel of the Lord called his name to stop him! God then provided a ram stuck in a thicket for the sacrifice. Abraham passed the test and Isaac was released from the altar as the first LIVING SACRIFICE.

I don't know how effective I am at it but I want my teaching to elicit this response in people. I want to point CCAMers to the altar of their own sacrifice where they can lay down their own agenda, their sense of control, their claim to independence and have God transform them more and more into the image of Christ. The patterns of this world; positions of power, wealth accumulation, self-centered desires, push us away from the altar of sacrifice. They lie to us that we can simply add Jesus to our lives without any transformation. Jesus said that we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. How can one enter through this death of self and resurrection to Christ unchanged? Every follower enters a path of transformation (metamorphosis) or they don't enter at all! This is what I want to call us to

through teaching and preaching; not just more information about Jesus, but transformation in Jesus by following Him. Until we perfectly reflect his image God's work in us is unfinished.

Transformation is what speaks to us and to others of God's awesome power at work. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk and those imprisoned are set free! This kind of transformation should be evident in our lives and it must be lived out among others who desire to connect with a God who can transform. The Akron-Newstead area is desperate for this kind of real change and the Church is God's agent. I'll explore that concept further in the next issue of *The Pastor's Perspective*.