

Lent is a time to follow the highway to Zion

By [Janet Edwards](#)

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I became aware of my trust in God when I was 13, during an overnight with the daughter of our church's minister. We weren't in the same school, but that year her dad taught our confirmation class and we became friends.

We had turned the lights out—her mother had asked us to—but, as usual, we continued talking. Eventually, the conversation took a turn when one of us asked, “What if God didn't exist?”

My memory is that two things happened pretty swiftly on top of each other. I remember feeling terribly afraid. In the darkness, I became aware of a profound silence, rich and full. I have never doubted for a moment since then that God simply is. God is as close as the silence that surrounds us and holds up all our busy noise.

When I look back, though, I realize that I trusted God long before this moment. I think this trust began when I sang time after time in Sunday school, “[Jesus Loves Me, This I Know](#).” I believed this. I accepted it. Perhaps the melody, the singing of it, helped me to learn it by heart and to let it sink into my soul as a rock-solid certainty that nothing has been able to shake.

I can't say I was aware of this as a child, but awareness wasn't necessary for this “highway to Zion” to be built (Psalm 84:5)—that is, the laying down of a path to God who loves me, available anytime. The path was there to calm my fear that teenage night with a deep, abiding sense of God in the silence and the dark, who is and who loves me.

I find it strange that “Jesus Loves Me” is the central message I absorbed in church as a child, because the Reformed tradition of my heritage is as severe as they come throughout Christian history. Despite my denomination's staunch rootedness in the Westminster Confession of 1649 and the early Puritan leader Jonathan Edwards being my direct ancestor, God as judge is far overshadowed in my faith experience by God as love in Christ.

I got the message that God loves not just me but everyone, and I am not to judge others but to love them as God does.

I have come to understand what a blessing this solid highway to Zion is in my heart. It is what has made the judgment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people so senseless to me from the time I first encountered it. This was all in place when I became aware, in middle age, of my own identity as bisexual. It simply never occurred to me that being bi would put God's love for me in any doubt.

I am haunted by the LGBT Christians whose faith formation built a very different path in their hearts: a highway to self-doubt, to years of effort to change who they are, or to a fear of eternal judgment from their church family and, way too often, from God. Too many times, LGBT Christians have shared with me their struggle to set foot on a highway to Zion that knows God's embracing love is the destination, nothing else. And then there are the LGBT believers who work to build and maintain this new way on their own without a helping hand or a listening ear.

Lent is the journey Christians make each year with Jesus to Jerusalem, to Zion. It is our annual opportunity to repair or improve the highways to God in our hearts.

I confess I am shy about sharing my faith formation. I am a little afraid it can seem too good to be true. I have offered my experience here with the hope that others, especially LGBT faithful, might be helped this Lent to build a highway to God, possibly founded upon "Jesus Loves Me This I Know" and honest questions followed by intense listening. It does seem simple, and I know this way can be slow and difficult, but this is how I see the highway to Zion in my heart being built.

What do you see?

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