



**A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL
BY THE PEOPLE OF
EASTBROOK CHURCH**

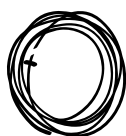


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introduction

Lent traces Jesus' journey to the Cross, providing an opportunity for us as followers of Jesus to bring greater focus to Jesus' crucifixion and what that means for us in all its multifaceted glory. When we think of biblical backgrounds for this season, we may most readily turn toward the gospel accounts or perhaps Isaiah's prophecies about the suffering Messiah or the Exodus story of freedom from Egyptian enslavement. But there is another place we might want to turn when considering Jesus as the perfect sacrifice, the one-of-a-kind high priest, or the bringer of a new covenant. That place is found at the very center of the Torah, the first five books in our English Bibles: *Leviticus*.

But *Leviticus* does not have the best reputation for contemporary Bible readers. Often seen as a catalog of outdated guidelines, many followers of Jesus skip *Leviticus* in their regular reading of the Bible. One scholar begins a book-length commentary on *Leviticus* this way: "*Leviticus* used to be the first book that Jewish children studied in the synagogue. In the modern Church it tends to be the last part of the Bible anyone looks at seriously."¹

Perhaps we need to turn our attention to *Leviticus* again. For in that book, we find innumerable treasures that help us comprehend what God has done in Jesus Christ. Throughout this Lenten devotional and preaching series, we will explore many of those themes encountered in Jesus: the Holy God who dwells with broken humanity, the perfect offering, the perfect high priest, holy obedience, atonement, the jubilee, and more. The New Testament epistle to the Hebrews echoes many of *Leviticus* themes, gathering them together in powerful statements about Jesus like this:

"For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." (Hebrews 2:17)²

This forty-day journey of Lent offers an opportunity for us to give focused attention to this Jesus, seeing in His life, death, and resurrection the unique, one-of-a-kind Messiah given for us who is simultaneously our Holy God. We focus on Jesus and also give attention to how we might intentionally grow with God through Christ. This Lenten devotional guide written by people within the Eastbrook Church family aims to help us draw near to Jesus Christ through *Leviticus*.

I pray this journey together as a church draws us into a transforming encounter with Jesus—His life, His death, and His resurrection.

+ The peace of the Lord,



Matt Erickson

Senior Pastor, Eastbrook Church

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL:

Each week of this devotional begins with a Sunday reading written by our Pastoral staff for older students and adults. There is also a version called “Family Talk” written by a member of our NextGen team, intended for families with young children. Each day Monday-Friday has a short devotional thought written by one of our Eastbrookers with questions at the end for deeper reflection.

On Saturdays, there is a page that will guide you through a different spiritual practice or discipline for the week. You will also find a web link you can visit to watch one of our pastors, church leaders, or staff members leading you through this particular practice. Even as we guide you through these practices, remember that the spiritual disciplines in and of themselves are not the goal. Rather, they are tools we use on our journey of sanctification as we aim to become more like Jesus Christ.

Finally, you can also interact with the digital version of this devotional in a variety of ways: on the Eastbrook App, on Instagram, via daily emails, blog, or PDF. Find these options and links on our website at eastbrook.org/LeviticusDevo.

about leviticus

Leviticus is the third book of five in the Pentateuch, or books of Moses. The immediate context of Leviticus is the book Exodus and the deliverance of God for His people from enslavement in Egypt. God calls the people to Himself and to freedom in Exodus and Leviticus then describes what it means for them to live in relationship to God both individually and corporately.

Some scholars describe Leviticus as the center point of the Pentateuch not only in terms of arrangement but in terms of significance. They propose a chiastic structure of the Pentateuch where themes in Genesis are echoed in Deuteronomy, themes in Exodus are echoed in Numbers, and Leviticus stands at the narrative center, describing how to live in fellowship with a holy God.³ L. Michael Morales writes, "The primary theme and theology of Leviticus (and of the Pentateuch as a whole) is YHWH's opening a way for humanity to dwell in the divine presence."⁴

OUTLINE OF LEVITICUS

1. Ritual/sacrifices (chapters 1-7)
2. Priesthood and priest's ordination (chapters 8-10)
3. Purity laws/daily cleanliness (chapters 11-15)
4. Day of atonement/reconciliation (chapters 16-17)
5. Purity laws/daily cleanliness (chapters 18-20)
6. Priesthood/Priest's instructions (chapters 21-22)
7. Ritual/sacrifices and feasts (chapters 23-26, 27)

THEMES IN LEVITICUS

Leviticus holds many things together, but largely emphasizes the following four themes: God's presence, holiness, purity, and sacrifice.

1. God's presence at the center of God's people is a theme that pervades Leviticus, following the Exodus narrative of the deliverance from Egypt. The very first words of the book make this clear: "*The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting*" (1:1).
2. Holiness, both God's holiness and the call to holiness for God's people, is a second theme of Leviticus. YHWH God is unlike any other being in all creation, let alone any other supposed god. Because of this, God's people are to be unlike other people groups of the earth. This dual theme is seen repetitively, but perhaps best expressed by this verse: "*I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy*" (11:45).

3. Purity is another theme of Leviticus, depicted in the setting apart of certain things as holy or devoted to the Lord. The distinction between things for common usage and holy usage is uniquely strong in Leviticus. At times, this is directed toward the priests, but it has implications for the entire people. *“Distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and so you can teach the Israelites all the decrees the LORD has given them through Moses”* (10:10-11).
4. A final theme in Leviticus is sacrifice. The first seven chapters of the book begin with five ritual offerings: burnt offering, grain offering, peace offering, sin offering, and trespass offering. At the center of the book is a description of the Day of Atonement which brings together all four themes of the book, making it clear how it can be that a holy God can dwell with humanity. This is made possible through a recognition of purity, our sin that hinders purity, and the offerings that enable restored fellowship with a holy God for a sinful people.

APPROACHES TO LAW

There is a threefold distinction often utilized by Christian theologians in relation to God’s law as seen in the Hebrew Bible: moral law (valid for all time and represented in, for example, the Ten Commandments), civil law (time-bound and only pertains to the people of God at the time it was written), and sacrificial/ritual law (these laws are fulfilled in Christ).

Sidney Greidanus suggests that a better way to approach Leviticus is to understand Torah as God’s instruction. There is grace within this teaching because it reveals God’s plan for the recently delivered people for their full flourishing. This also enables us to find meaning within the law, holding to Jesus’ word in the Sermon on the Mount, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”* (Matthew 5:17) and Paul’s words, *“Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law”* (Romans 3:31). There is both a freedom in Christ from the instructions of Leviticus but also, as seen in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, a call to surpass the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20).

NEW TESTAMENT AND LEVITICUS

There are many points of connection with Leviticus as we walk through the Gospels, Paul’s letters, the epistle to the Hebrews, and various other places. Jesus is “the perfect priest offering the perfect sacrifice in the heavenly Temple, once for all”⁵ in response to Leviticus’ emphasis on the repetition of morning and evening daily sacrifices.

And so, with that, let’s jump into this year’s Lenten devotional!

what's special about a torn heart?

READ JOEL 2:12-14A

Some titles for this passage in Joel are, "Rend Your Heart," "Change Your Life," and "A Call to Repentance." What could happen if the disobedient and rebellious Israelites were to rend their hearts, repent, or change their lives? Verse 14a states that they might receive the blessing or pity of God. That would be much preferable to the vast ferocious army that was coming to destroy them (see Joel 2:1-11).

But what is surprising is that Joel 2:11 says that God is leading this invading army. How can that be? Sometimes we focus solely on the love and mercy of God and downplay His righteousness, holiness, and purity. Our loving God is perfectly merciful and perfectly holy. And sin must be dealt with. Hebrews 10:31 tells us that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

One of my worst memories as a mother is hearing my son Josh's blood-curdling screams when he was maybe two. He had a finger of one hand caught in the gap of a cupboard door while he was closing the door with the other hand. He didn't realize one hand was inflicting hurt on the other. In our human frailty, we are often our own worst enemies and subject ourselves to untold grief and sorrow by our own actions—actions that hinder our relationship with God.

God is telling us to repent, to fast, and to weep—all expressions of great sorrow. He is not interested in outward expressions like the tearing of our clothes or sitting in sackcloth and ashes. What He wants is internal change—the transformation of our hearts. I Samuel 16:7 says the Lord looks at the heart not at outward appearances.

Lent is a good time to slow down and reflect. Am I more concerned about my inner spiritual life than what I wear or how others perceive me? Am I willing to investigate my heart and invite God in? Am I willing to turn away from anything that displeases Him and towards that which gives Him joy?

I hope our answer is a resounding "Yes!" because God is kind, gracious, and patient.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *If you need to repent of anything, ask God for His forgiveness. Romans 2:4 says, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?"*

*"Let me hear you say, 'Your sins are forgiven.'
That will bring me joy and gladness.
Let the body you have broken be glad.
Take away all my sins.
Wipe away all the evil things I've done."*

(Psalm 51:8-9 NIV)



Have you ever sat around a bonfire until all the wood is burned and the fire is out? What is left? Ashes! Gray, burnt-toast smelling ashes!

In Bible times, people spread cooled-off ashes on their skin when they were very sad. Just like ashes, sin is ugly and messy. Wearing ashes was a sign to everyone else that you were confessing your sin, praying for forgiveness, and asking God for a new start. So, hundreds of years ago, when people wanted to mark the beginning of Lent—this special season leading up to Easter—they used ashes.

Jesus died on the Cross to take on the punishment for everyone's sins, for all time. During Lent we focus our thoughts on Jesus' death—the high price He paid for our sins. Through the season of Lent, we confess our sin. We can also give up food or other things, so that we can give more attention to our lives with Jesus.

LET'S TALK!

- What is the connection between ashes and sin? Is there anything else that reminds you of how it feels to be separated from God?
- What is the good news that we remember throughout the season of Lent?

A STEP FURTHER: INTERACTIVE PRAYER.

Sometimes it's hard to think of all the ways we separate ourselves from God (sin). Here is one way to help you practice a time of confession. Read each question below. If you answer "yes" to any of them, tell God that you are sorry for that sin and draw a cross on a piece of paper. Maybe you can even use some ashes or soil mixed with water? It will make your hands messy—but that's a good reminder of sin!

- Have I treated others as I would like to be treated?
- Have I become angry when I don't get my way?
- Have I used my words to hurt others?
- Have I disobeyed my parents, teachers, or other grown-ups who care for me?
- Have I complained instead of being thankful for God's good gifts?

When you have finished, crumple the paper and throw it out to remind yourself that when God forgives us, He removes our sin (Psalm 103:12). Pray: *God, thank you for forgiving us when we confess our sin to you and for giving us a new start! Thank you that Jesus paid for my sins so I could live forever with You!*

the lenten road

READ HEBREWS 12:1-3

For many of us, today's passage is almost too well-known. If that's you, please slow down and read it a few more times, maybe even in some different translations. Then, just sit with it. After that, if you're willing, let's exercise our imaginations for a few minutes together. If you've read John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, then considering that story may help you set the scene.

Imagine that you are walking on a long and arduous road full of bumps, holes, and many other obstacles. After walking in and out of dark places, you begin to feel like turning around, but you've set your heart on a pilgrimage to a new and better city and must press on. It's getting harder to journey onward, however, when you realize that your weaknesses have become the very obstacles on the way. Now imagine that someone has joined you—a saint of past or present, someone who inspires your faith journey. Suddenly, the journey becomes a little clearer as you are encouraged and held accountable. You begin to notice: it's a little easier to rid yourself of the entangling darkness and see, instead, Jesus. That's when you hear His words: Watch me, my child, and don't lose heart.

Our passage today is an important signpost before we begin our Lenten journey, which is, for many of us, a little jaunt on a longer journey of faith. When I read this passage, it doesn't take me long to remember the sins that easily catch me up. Getting rid of the entanglement is hard, which is why this journey requires help from our fellow pilgrims, or this "*cloud of witnesses*." We also need the words of Jesus in front of us, through which the Spirit gives us clarity and conviction. He is our joy, and His joy is also ours: the glory of God, the kingdom come, and the spotless bride (Revelation 4-5, 21-22). So, as you walk the Lenten road, surround yourself with a community of saints who will keep pointing you to Jesus. Remember friend, you do not walk this journey alone because we are on the way together.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Read through Hebrews 11, and notice if there is someone in the "hall of faith" that stands out to you. Take some time to read about their imperfect journeys in the Old Testament. If you had a cup of tea with this person, what encouraging words might they have for you today? How might they also challenge you?*
- *Take some time to consider some other saints of the past who can encourage you on your journey, and read about their stories. Think, also, about someone you know now. Schedule a coffee meet-up or a phone call. Be bold and confess your sins to one another, then pray for and encourage each other in the Lord.*

leaving behind

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:7-14

“... because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...” (vs. 8)

I’ve lived a very nomadic life. During my childhood, my family lived in five different homes in Germany and the United States. After I left for college, I lived in six dorms and apartments during my seven years in college and graduate school. And then, I lived in nine different apartments and sublets during the six years I spent in New York City.

Often when moving we leave things behind. One time it was some beloved (but rather large!) furniture. Another time it was an internet router. During my last move back to Milwaukee, I had gathered a lot of books, so many had to be donated. But there are some things you just can’t take with you. As much as local coffee shops and restaurants were part of my life, I couldn’t take them with me. Nor could I pick up and move my friends with me.

I’ve heard it said, it’s not the place, it’s the people. Of all the places I’ve lived, I visit Germany, Wheaton, and NYC the most. These places still have a special hold on my heart. But what I enjoy most is reuniting with familiar faces there. At least, I don’t have any illusions that I’ll ever get my old furniture or books back.

Today’s passage reminds me of this process of leaving things behind when we move. Paul, the Jesus-follower, strains forward, forgetting the former things, not dwelling on the past because God is doing a new thing in Jesus. God is literally returning us to paradise in Jesus. Every suffering that we face on this side of eternity is a reminder that for all the goodness that remains of God’s creation, the world is deeply broken, corrupted, confused, and helpless without Him. The world needs Jesus. We can’t have paradise without Him. So, we strain toward our new home where our greatest reward is Jesus is at the center. This is the true home we long for.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Have you had experiences of moving or leaving things in your life? Why did you move? What motivated you to move forward?*
- *Pray and reflect with the Lord if there is anything you can do to prioritize Him and the fact that your treasure is in heaven (i.e. social media fast, making a special offering, having a garage sale, committing to starting tasks with prayer, etc.)*

PRACTICE: PILGRIMAGE^o

Each Saturday during Lent, we will take some time as a church family to practice a different spiritual exercise together. Today, we are practicing and learning about pilgrimage. You may want to begin by reading through the written form in this devotional, or by watching a video of Joanna Jotterand guiding you through this spiritual practice online at eastbrook.org/LeviticusDevo.

DEFINITION:

Pilgrimage is the practice of going on an outer journey that will lead you closer to God. It includes slowing down in order to take a reflective journey—a physical pilgrimage like a trip to the Holy Land or other holy site, intentional travel for the sake of knowing God better, or a metaphorical journey like the Lenten journey to the Cross and resurrection of Jesus at Easter (Psalm 84:5; John 2:13; Luke 2:41; Jeremiah 6:16; Genesis 12:1-3; Leviticus 23:7).

PILGRIMAGE IN THE BIBLE:

The heart of pilgrimage is making a journey with the intention to leave something behind to seek God. In the Bible, God's people often went on these kinds of journeys as an act of obedience and a way to become closer to God. Just one of these occasions was the annual Passover festival, where Old Testament Jews would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate God's goodness to them in freeing them from slavery. It was during one of these Passover pilgrimages that Jesus was crucified. We now celebrate Easter every year to celebrate God's goodness in freeing us from spiritual slavery through the sacrifice of Jesus. Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter, is a great time to practice pilgrimage and remember all that God has done.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How could thinking of yourself as a pilgrim introduce some reorientation to your life?
2. Have you ever made a journey that enlarged your view of God? What was it like for you?
3. What can you do today at the start of Lent to celebrate God's goodness?
4. What are you willing to leave behind in order to have a deeper life with God?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES:

- **Take a prayer walk today.** Invite God along on your prayer walk as you ask Him to meet with you in a fresh, new way as you go on the pilgrimage of Lent this year. Consider what God might be prompting you to leave behind during Lent this year as you journey towards the Cross (Good Friday) and resurrection (Easter) of Jesus Christ.
- **Intentionally take a pilgrimage with others.** Visit a beautiful church in your area, or travel to Holy Hill, or visit a part of creation that leads you to worship God. Intentionally leave something behind. Ask God to speak to you through your journey.
- **Slow down to reflect.** Spend time celebrating what God has done in your life. Ask Him where He might be leading you in the longer term than Lent. Commit your plans to Him and ask for His guidance as you take your next steps of faith—whether that be a new spiritual journey or a journey to a new physical call.

Jesus, holy God with us

READ LEVITICUS 1:1, ISAIAH 7:14, MATTHEW 1:23 & 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16

*"The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting."
(Leviticus 1:1)*

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16)

One of the central themes of Leviticus, and of the entire Bible, is that God is **holy**. For something to be holy means it is set apart from other things for a specific, uncontaminated purpose. While we do not use the word "holy" much in our everyday lives, we do understand the concept of, for example, medical equipment set apart as uncontaminated and clean for surgical purposes. When we say that God is holy, we remind ourselves that God is different from us, uncontaminated, and completely good.

This idea of God's holiness sometimes is paired with a sense of the **difference** or **distance** of God. We may think of God dwelling apart from the people of Israel on Mount Sinai when the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law were given to Moses and the people. We read how *"Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire"* (Exodus 19:17-18). Here we encounter God's holiness as **difference** or **distance**.

It is worth noting, however, that throughout Scripture we see God's desire to draw near to humanity. In fact, that episode on Mount Sinai is really all about God leading the people out of enslavement in Egypt to a new land of promise because God wants to know them and relate to them. This carries over into Leviticus, where holiness is described both as the **difference** or **distance** of God but also the **presence** or **closeness** of God with God's people. God delivers the people from enslavement in Egypt and now stands at the center of their identity and direction. God is with them.

So, too, in Jesus, God is with us. As the gospel writer John reflects: *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us"* (John 1:14). In fact, one of Jesus' most memorable titles is **Immanuel**, which means *"God with us."*

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Each Sunday we include discussion questions on the sermon insert that can be used for deeper reflection and/or small group discussions. Take time to read through those questions today. You can find a digital version online at eastbrook.org/Leviticus.*

Leviticus is kind of a hard book to read. It seems like it is full of rules and instructions about things like sacrifices and rituals. Things we really don't do today.

But what if I told you that what Leviticus was really about was God wanting to be able to be close to you? In the book before Leviticus, Exodus, we see the people of God building a very special tent, called the tabernacle. The idea was that God would descend into this tent and then His presence would be with His people. But even then, there was some separation.



Leviticus opens with this line: *“The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting”* (Leviticus 1:1). Notice, God speaks to Moses FROM the tent of meeting. Moses wasn't in the tent, God had to speak to him from inside the tabernacle, while Moses waited outside. God, who is perfectly holy, couldn't be face to face with people who weren't perfectly holy. In the tabernacle and eventually in the temple they built in Jerusalem, God was near His people, but there was always a curtain or walls separating God from His people.

So as near as God was, He still couldn't be with His people and this made Him sad.

But then God does something truly amazing! In John 1:14 we read, *“The Word [Jesus] became flesh and made His dwelling [tabernacled] among us.”* God decided that the only way He could truly live among us was if He did something special to make it happen—like becoming a man Himself. One of the names the Prophet Isaiah gave Jesus was “Immanuel,” God with us.

But think for a minute. If Jesus lived 2000 years ago in a land thousands of miles away—how could He be with all of us, all the time? Well, that's the Good News. See, Jesus lived, was crucified and then resurrected a long time ago, but He promised He would stay with His people for ever and always, in the form of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-17).

So, what the people in Leviticus wanted—God to be present with them—we get to experience every day, all day, as followers of Jesus.

LET'S TALK!

- For us to be made right with God, something has to die. And death is always sad. How can we show our thankfulness to Jesus for dying in our place so that we could be with God forever?
- If God is with YOU all the time, is He also with your friends or family all the time? What does it tell us about God—that He can be present with everyone all at the same time?

A STEP FURTHER: INTERACTIVE PRAYER.

God is present all the time—not just in the major events of our lives or the hard times. To remember this, have each member of the family write “God is here” on a sticky note. Walk around your house, garage, or car, and place one of the sticky notes where you can see it. Take a minute in each spot to thank God for being with us as we eat dinner, ride in the car, or sleep in our beds.

God with me

READ ISAIAH 7:14, 41:8-13

For years and years, I believed that God was a scary, malicious being, just waiting for me to mess up so that He could say, "GOTCHA!" and zap me with a lightning bolt. It sounds funny and usually when I share this with others, they giggle; but it's true. That's what I felt, deep down. The end result of that was intellectually pretty crazy: I would try to always be perfect, hoping that perfection would be acceptable to God, and at the same time presenting as someone who had it all together.

And, to make it even worse, unfortunately I expected others to be perfect. I could be pretty mean when they weren't: I would make fun of them behind their backs, stop being their friend, even stop doing business with them. If you can believe it, I was unaware of these characteristics of mine. Yuck.

By the miraculous working of God in my life, He's gently shown me that these are two sides of the same coin: believing that I'm not worth Him wanting to be with me on the one side; and pretending that I'm the best thing since sliced bread on the other. The problem with both of them was that they are rooted in a belief that God couldn't love the "real" me. I'm not worthy, therefore, I'm worthless.

What I've come to realize is that—newsflash!—I'm actually not worthy. None of us are. But that doesn't mean we're worthless. Isaiah implies this in today's readings: we actually *need* God with us. We need saving. And He is ready and willing to step alongside us to do it. The reality is, I'm not able to do it on my own (whatever "it" is).

The miracle God worked in me was the gift of finally, after years and years, actually believing that He is trustworthy and can and will love me. It was such a relief to stop hiding. To just be me and willingly show God all "the things." That evil malicious lightning bolt wielding god that I believed in before? That was some demon. Certainly it wasn't God, not the God of the Bible.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *What is your true image of God, the image you have of him in your heart?*
- *Trusting my Emmanuel, for me, means a daily reminder to trust that He loves me just the way I am, no matter what is going on, and that He's working in me to make me into the woman He wants me to be. What do you do to trust Emmanuel?*

choosing God's presence

READ EXODUS 33:7-14

How cool is that?! God meeting with Moses in a tent *"as one speaks to a friend."* And what did Joshua see and experience as he accompanied Moses and then stayed in the tent? Certainly these men chose well and their lives and future showed the impact of meeting with God. The people saw this process of meeting with God and treasured and respected it in their actions.

Exodus 33 begins though, with unpleasant prospects. God gives the promise of delivery to the abundant land but then expresses His displeasure stating: "But I will not go with you because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way." This is the state of life. The Israelite nation had seen and experienced God's presence and leading. They wanted to hold on to it but it seems they took His presence for granted and held on to old ways in their travels. They disobeyed quickly and were proud and resistant to God's will. The state of our creation.

I've had times when pride seems to overwhelm the presence of God and His fruit in my life. Those times bring me to crossroads where I need God. When I choose His presence at the crossroad, His presence is palpable. It changes my state.

Moses is the vehicle God uses to display His presence to the people and Moses is used through his friendship with God to argue a case for and remind God that the people were His chosen people. It changed their state.

With Jesus' incarnation, He is much more than Moses. Jesus is the mediator and presence of God for us. He brings us as family into God's presence. How often do we take this gift and His presence for granted and become wayward and stiff-necked. Let us be like Joshua and not leave the tent of His presence, so that God would teach us His ways through His word, prayer and worship. What comfort to know, *"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest"* (vs. 14). The state of the believer. How cool is that.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Are you experiencing the presence of God by meeting with Him in prayer and reading the Word? Does the work of Jesus resonate in your life and relationships? Is His presence changing the state of your life and the state of the lives of those around you?*

—your ever-present friend

READ JOHN 14:16-17

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." (John 14:16-17)

One of my favorite things to do is spend time with my friends. Through the years I've made a lot of friends through volleyball or school. Some have moved, some have changed schools, some play for different teams now. My cousin, who is one of my best friends, lives in Waukesha so we don't get to see each other every day, sometimes not for weeks. But because we both have iPhones, we can stay connected even if we can't be in the same place. Texting each other or sending videos on Instagram, we can keep up on what's happening in our lives and at school.

Now, imagine having a best friend who is always with you—someone who walks beside you through every moment, whether you're laughing with friends, struggling with school, or feeling lonely. You wouldn't ignore them or pretend they weren't there, right? Well, that's what the Holy Spirit is like—your ever-present friend.

The Bible is clear that God wants to be with His people.

From the Old Testament, where it says God's glory dwelled in the tabernacle, to the New Testament, where Jesus is called Emmanuel, "God with us," we see that God wants to be with His people. In John 14, Jesus assures His disciples that even as He prepares to leave them physically, He will not abandon them. Instead, He promises the Holy Spirit, who will dwell within them forever.

Living as if God is with you means talking to Him throughout the day, leaning on Him for help, and trusting that He is by your side, no matter what. So, take a moment to think: Do you live as if God is with you? Do your thoughts, actions, and words reflect the reality of His presence?

While keeping in touch with our friends is fun and encouraging, knowing that the Spirit of God is not only with us but in us, should encourage us to be strong for God no matter what comes our way.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *What can you do to remind yourself that God is with you all the time? How do you think this would help you throughout your day?*

He carries us

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16 & 1 JOHN 4:9-16

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16)

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world, so that we might live through him." (1 John 4:9)

A few months ago, my womb holding unexpected death, I knew God was inside of me as I pushed my child out too soon. God was tenderly carrying this baby out of me. His Spirit was there in my womb; this was certain despite the great grief and pain of unwanted labor. How is my body a temple of the Spirit, something that honors God, when a baby died inside of me as well? I am so stricken by how much our God associates with death and blood.

My 4-year-old asked me a few weeks later, "Mommy, how does Jesus get out of your tummy and into my heart?" I wonder if she had heard me talking about Him being in my womb when the baby died. After she mused about Him cutting little tiny holes in us to get in and out and then closing them back up, I answered, "Well He doesn't come out of me—it is like Jesus puts His breath into all of us—breathes into us so His Spirit is inside."

Sometimes the Spirit inside feels so non-intervening despite His power! And I ask "why?" and "how long?" and "why are you failing to do even simple things here with me?" Yet He is here...the man of sorrows living inside of us, the love of God manifest. Sometimes it is hard to trust a God who doesn't seem to pull through, and yet He hasn't failed. His tender presence is everything.

The Spirit that is inside our bodies/temples is the Spirit of a man who chose the Cross, died though He could have saved Himself, cried out that the Father had forsaken Him—that is His Spirit that our bodies hold and carry, even as He carries us.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Tragedies can often drive us towards God or can sometimes bring bitterness into our hearts against God. When and how have you learned to lean more into the presence of God with you in times of sorrow?*

—over and over

READ PSALM 118:1-7

Repetition helps our recall ability. “*His love endures forever*” is repeated four times in these seven verses and “*The Lord is with me*” repeats twice. The temptation to gloss over repeated verses can cause us to miss out as repetition often is a cue to something important and noteworthy.

When I reflect on the value of repetition in my own life recently, I’m reminded of a hard season. After experiencing my second miscarriage, after years of infertility and fertility treatment, my heart was grieving and devastated; I was exhausted. At this time, my husband and I put together a playlist of less than 10 worship songs. Hearing Scripture and God’s Word sung over us began our healing.

The healing came from listening to those songs daily, over and over, almost exclusively, for a period of four months. The repetition of those songs (one was based on Psalm 42, another on Psalm 23) continually drew our hearts and minds back to the sole Satisfier of our souls.

The repetition made it easy to recall the lyrics and scriptures they are based on. I noticed over time praise came more easily to my lips. No matter the circumstances in that moment, singing truths about who God is, and who He will always be (holy, worthy of praise, etc), was a life-line. The repetition anchored my soul whenever I started to drift or panic at the waves, it was the tether back to what matters most, the Greatest Treasure of our lives.

When life feels “*hard pressed*” around me and I cry out to God, singing praise to God brings me into a “*spacious place*” (vs. 5) where I am able to rest in God’s presence, trusting His promise that He is with me (vss. 6-7).

Over time this repetition imprints on our minds and we recall it easier and easier.

His love endures forever.

God is with us.

These are promises we can cling to when hard pressed by repeating them over and over.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Choose one verse or worship song you will repeat to yourself throughout today. Make it a goal to repeat it at least once an hour. How do you think this reminder of God’s presence and promises impact you today?*

PRACTICE: THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Each Saturday during Lent, we will take some time as a church family to practice a different spiritual exercise together. Today, we are practicing and learning about the presence of God. You may want to begin by reading through the written form in this devotional, or by watching a video of Kelly Erickson guiding you through this spiritual practice online at eastbrook.org/LeviticusDevo.

DEFINITION:

Practicing the presence of God is an invitation to see and experience every moment as a gift of God. It is a way of living in deeper awareness of God's activity in our lives. Through many small pauses we begin a habit of turning our heart toward God. (Colossians 3:3-4; Deuteronomy 30:14; John 5:39-40).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Where do your thoughts go when they aren't focused on work or diverted by amusement? What do these thoughts reveal about your concerns and priorities?
2. How aware are you of the possibility of meeting God during your work day?
3. What is it like for you when God shows up at an unexpected moment?
4. How easy is it for God to get your attention? When are you best able to hear God's still, small voice?
5. What would it look like for you to intentionally seek deeper intimacy with God?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES:

- **Dedicate some task you are doing to the Lord.** Talk to Him about the task before you begin and again when you are done. Do you become any more aware of God in the process? How?
- **Offer all of yourself to God for the day ahead.** Throughout the day, ask yourself if you are still living your intention to be in God's presence. Do not be discouraged when you stray from your intention to live in His presence; simply begin again. God loves for you to turn your heart back to Him.
- **Practice the presence in interruptions.** The intention to live in the presence of Christ is a way of saying, "I am here." Throughout your day—perhaps every time you are interrupted—tell God, "I am here." Remind yourself that you are in the presence of Jesus, who had time for people who questioned and interrupted. Remember that some of Jesus' most gracious miracles occurred when He was interrupted.
- **Decide to stop several times throughout your day to pay attention to God and practice His presence.** Set a clock to remind you. Spend five minutes reading Scripture, praying, or just being with Jesus. What is this like for you?

Jesus, the perfect offering

SUNDAY, MARCH 16

READ ALL OR PORTIONS OF LEVITICUS 1-7

The first seven chapters of Leviticus introduce five sacrifices. Each one represents ways our relationship with God is restored:

1. The burnt offering is about forgiveness for sins that compromise devotion to God.
2. The grain offering is about thanksgiving for God's provision and our work.
3. The fellowship offering is a voluntary offering that celebrates peace and fellowship between the worshiper and God.
4. The sin offering (finalized outside the camp) addressed unintentional sins and their consequences.
5. The guilt offering covered intentional or unintentional transgressions against God or neighbors, requiring the offender to make restitution for the wrong done.

Each offering was meant to cure the tragic separateness that exists between Israel and God, but not one of them could cure that separateness completely. Then Jesus appeared. His death and resurrection revealed that those sacrifices in Leviticus pointed to what Christ would accomplish once and for all, not just for Israel but for all humanity. Consider how Christ's sacrifice compares to the five offerings.

1. Christ's devotion to the Father led Him to take on the consequences of sin so that we didn't need to (2 Corinthians 5:19).
2. Jesus was the bread of life without sin (John 6:35).
3. He gave up peace and fellowship with His father in Heaven so that we would not need to (Colossians 1:20).
4. His blood was shed (outside of Jerusalem) so that sin and death would have no hold on us (Hebrews 13:11-12).
5. Christ paid our debt of sin completely (Colossians 2:13-14). He made full restitution for our wrongs.

The brokenness in and around our lives stems from the separateness that exists between us and God. We can try to be devoted enough, to be thankful enough, to stop sinning, to make restitution for wronging people, but we will never cure the gap that exists between us and our Creator.

We can't do it on our own. Admitting that is step one to receiving the ultimate hope that *"...we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"* (Hebrews 10:10).

Today we offer trust.

Have you ever seen a silhouette portrait? It's created by casting a shadow of a person's profile onto a black piece of paper, tracing the outline of the shadow and cutting it out. In a silhouette portrait, you can see the shape of a person's head, but you can't see the details, the color of their sparkling eyes, the curve of their laughing smile, the beauty of their skin. It's only a flat outline of the real thing.



With the tabernacle, God had come to live in the midst of His people, but there was a problem. You see, God is holy. He is perfect. I don't mean He gets perfect answers on tests or can play a piano song perfectly. I mean He is perfect in love, perfect in goodness, perfect in wisdom, perfect in justice and mercy, perfect in patience, perfect in selflessness, perfect in faithfulness. Our sinful selves cannot survive in the presence of this holiness. But, God loves us so He lovingly provided His people instructions about how to come into His presence safely through sacrifices. The burnt offering, the fellowship offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering in Leviticus were God's instructions to deal with that sin as He dwelt among the people of Israel.

But, as the author of Hebrews explains, this system was but a shadow of the perfect sacrifice God planned in Jesus. The sacrifices in Leviticus had to be done day after day. Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross only had to be done once. The sacrifices in Leviticus couldn't change people. Through Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, we are given new holy life and God's own presence in the Holy Spirit comes to grow that new life in us. Jesus' love for us through His death on the Cross was the beautiful, amazing truth that the sacrificial system pointed to.

LET'S TALK!

- What is better about Jesus' sacrifice?
- Is there a sin that you are sorry for today? Say you are sorry to God, and be confident that you are forgiven through Jesus' death on the Cross.

A STEP FURTHER: INTERACTIVE PRAYER.

Draw a crown on one piece of paper, and draw a cross on another. Place the crown in a room, and tape the cross on the door frame to that room. Standing outside of the room read this verse: *"By that one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy"* (Hebrews 10:14, NLT). Walk into the room together and pray, *"Thank you, God that because of Jesus' sacrifice we are forgiven and can live with you forever."*

something better

READ HEBREWS 9:23-28

MONDAY, MARCH 17

When I first moved out of home I was broke. I did the best I could with my limited resources to stock my kitchen with the essentials—a couple of plates, a mug, some thrifted silverware, and a frying pan. I knew that a good quality frying pan should last me almost forever, and that it would be a one-time investment, but I didn't have that option available to me on my student budget. Instead, what I could afford was a flimsy frying pan from ALDI. It did the job, but it was not long before I needed a new one! It was an effective imitation of the real thing, but not for long.

Our passage today begins with a lot of talk about copies. It says that the earthly things are copies of the heavenly things. The tabernacle was the place of worship for God's people in ancient Israel. It was a beautiful tent, decorated to be an imitation of heaven, a place that represented the wonder of humans being able to meet with God. The problem is—people are broken! They needed a way to be cleansed from their imperfection to be able to be in the presence of a perfect God. The blood of a sacrificed animal was able to do this, but only for a time. Animals are not able to fully cover this kind of task forever, so the people had to sacrifice over and over to be able to meet safely with God. In simple terms, just as I had to replace my sadly inadequate frying pan over and over, the people had to make new sacrifices, over and over. Something better was needed.

When Jesus was killed, His blood acted as the perfect sacrifice that cleansed God's people from their sin. His blood is the better sacrifice because He is better than a goat! Not only this, Jesus didn't carry this cleansing blood just into the tabernacle, the earthly copy of heaven, but He is now in heaven, the real deal, with God Himself. His sacrifice was the perfect offering, because He died once for all—He is now in heaven, advocating for our ability to meet with God. We can now meet with God with confidence, because the blood of Jesus cleanses us, once for all sin, for all time, and He is in heaven with God Himself. So we wait and pray joyfully for His return to unite us in God's presence in heaven.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Would you say there were other things you've tried in your lifetime to try and handle the debt of sin? If so, what has been different since you've accepted the once and forever forgiveness that Jesus' perfect sacrifice provides?*

hesitant about the Lord's supper?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

In the past, I've often been dismayed after finding out that a worship service would include communion. I knew that communion should involve serious self-examination, confession, and repentance—and the wrong approach could have significant consequences. However, I lost sight of the fact that communion commemorates the Lord's death on the Cross—and I should feel great joy and appreciation for what He did for me!

In today's passage, Paul reviews what Jesus said (and did) at the Last Supper. The bread and cup provide clear reminders of His incredible once-for-all sacrifice. Practiced correctly, communion helps strengthen individual believers and unifies a church body around the core of their faith.

In the surrounding verses, Paul describes how communion should not be done and warns of serious consequences (vs. 30). The preceding section (vss. 17-22) focuses on externals: church divisions, unequal food distribution, drunkenness. The later section (vss. 27-34) focuses on internals: unworthy manner, examine themselves, discerning the body of Christ.

The precise meaning of “*unworthy manner*” (vs. 27) is somewhat unclear, but it does not mean being an unworthy person—that would include everybody! Yet before we take the bread and cup, we are to “*examine ourselves*” (vs. 28). Paul doesn't say explicitly that we should also confess and repent, but it doesn't make sense to examine and then do nothing about it! This inward look could reveal specific instances of sin, an ongoing pattern, or a sinful situation. We may find sins of commission or omission. “*Discerning the body of Christ*” (vs. 29) probably refers to our relationships in the church. Are we treating others properly? Are we helping with unity?

When our *examining* and *discerning* uncovers sin, that should dismay us! But it also should lead us humbly to gratitude as we are reminded of Christ's perfect sacrifice that brings forgiveness. Thanks be to God for this beautiful reminder in communion of both our need for forgiveness and His provision for us.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *When should someone refrain from taking the bread and cup (to avoid “unworthy manner”)? If they refrain, what steps are needed to resume taking communion?*

—once for all time

READ HEBREWS 10:5-10

Hebrews has always been one of my favorite books in the New Testament. It makes the connection between the Old Testament sacrificial system and Jesus' sacrificial death in the New Testament very clear, helping me to see the entire Bible as one unified story.

Hebrews 9:22 tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. So, the priests had to offer the same sacrifices day after day, again and again. Here Christ tells God, *"You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings or burnt offerings or other offerings for sin, nor were you pleased with them"* (Hebrews 10:8 NLT). It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). So, Christ says, I have come to do Your will, my God. The Father's will was for Jesus to die in our place to pay for our sins.

In Hebrews, I learn that Jesus is my merciful and faithful high priest which is the second reason that I love the book of Hebrews. Jesus was totally human and he *"has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He did not sin"* (Hebrews 4:15). This is something that it is hard for us humans to imagine. Because Jesus was without sin, He could offer His body as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. *"For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, **once for all time.**"* (Hebrews 10:10 NLT).

Christ cancels the first covenant to establish a new covenant between us and God based on grace and faith. It is so reassuring to know that I can rest in this perfect sacrifice of Jesus for my sins. As a result, I am made holy and set apart for God's purposes.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Why was it necessary for Christ to come into this world as a human being?*
- *What difference has Jesus's sacrificial death on the Cross meant in your life?*

Christ died for us

READ ROMANS 5:6-11

"While we still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

Let me be frank: when I first put my life in Christ's hands, I was not looking for reconciliation with God. I was looking out for myself. I was 19, unhappy, lonely, out of control. I was failing life. Romans 7:15 described me perfectly: *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."* Then my girlfriend left me, and I lost the only hope I had. There at the end of my rope, trying to drive home while crying my eyes out, I made a deal with God. I would accept my friend Roy's persistent invitation to try out this Jesus stuff, if God would just get me through the semester. We aren't supposed to bargain with God, but God was merciful, and my life completely changed.

What does this have to do with Paul's profound words in Romans 5:8? Simply, it took years of walking with Christ before I began to truly appreciate that while my life was a train wreck, He died for me. In those early years, I was grateful for the Holy Spirit giving me the power to change my heart and my actions, but I had to be taught the value of Christ's death, and how it fit in with the rest of my Christian life.

"While we were still sinners..." meant even before I repented, before I was even born, Christ was dealing with it. Forgiveness, redemption, and new beginnings are baked into the structure of the creation! Knowing that I live in a field of mercy, I can begin to face my faults without fear, trusting the Lord's promise to deal with the damage and make all things new, including me.

I admit, I turned my life over to Christ for selfish motives—I wanted a better life, for me! But Christ paid the price for my sin, even for my selfishness in conversion. And His Spirit delivered all I had asked for, and much more that I didn't know I wanted or needed! In carefully devised installments, I received a heart of flesh, a heart that could begin to be others-centered, finding joy in generosity, hospitality, listening, encouraging and blessing and serving.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *What motives first drew you to Christ? How are those motives evolving in the course of your walk with the Lord?*
- *What does it mean for you that at the deepest level, we were born in, and live under, the umbrella of God's astonishing mercy? How does that influence the way you see your faults? Or your neighbor's faults?*

purple saxifrage

READ 1 PETER 1:17-21

The letters of the New Testament aren't just theology—they were lifelines for believers navigating a culture that often stood against them. Peter writes to early Christians who became outsiders, not by choice, but because following Jesus set them apart. Rejecting idols often meant rejecting the entire framework of their culture, making them targets of mockery, slander, and persecution.

Today, our culture isn't as hostile as first-century Rome, but if you follow Jesus, you've likely felt the tension between what the world celebrates and what God calls us to. It's tempting to retreat into Christian subcultures, avoiding certain spaces and conversations altogether. But Peter challenges us to step into the world, not withdraw from it. Our mission isn't to escape but to live with purpose in the midst of a culture often at odds with God.

Which brings me to purple saxifrage. This hardy little plant grows in the Arctic, its delicate petals seemingly too fragile to survive. Yet it thrives in harsh conditions, taking root in rocky crevices where its deep root system anchors it and even breaks down stone over time.

We're called to be purple saxifrage, church.

We don't change culture by avoiding its challenges but by living with reverence and purpose in the rocky crevices of our communities. Our resilience comes from standing together, offering shelter to one another, and bringing beauty, wisdom, and hope to the spaces we inhabit.

Peter reminds us that Jesus didn't come to create an isolated bubble of holy people—He came to redeem the world. We engage culture by reflecting His love, justice, and holiness in how we live—and because we were redeemed at the highest cost, the way we choose to live matters.

We don't ignore the mess around us—we step into it with reverence, hope, and confidence in God. When our lives reflect the eternal worth of Christ's sacrifice, we offer the world a different story—one of redemption, hope, and the power of the risen Christ. And that, friends, is how we change culture. Not by standing apart, but by engaging it with an eternal perspective.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *How can you live out your redemption in such a way that it impacts the culture around you for the better?*

PRACTICE: FASTING

Each Saturday during Lent, we will take some time as a church family to practice a different spiritual exercise together. Today, we are practicing and learning about fasting as a form of sacrifice. You may want to begin by reading through the written form in this devotional, or by watching a video of Pastor Femi Ibitoye guiding you through this spiritual practice online at eastbrook.org/LeviticusDevo.

DEFINITION:

A fast is the self-denial of normal necessities in order to intentionally attend to God in prayer. Bringing attachments and cravings to the surface opens a place for prayer. You may abstain from food, drink, shopping, media, habits, comforts, and so on to intentionally be with God. The physical awareness of emptiness or lack is the reminder to turn to Jesus who alone can satisfy. (Matthew 6:16-18; Isaiah 58:6-7). *Note: people with certain health issues should not fast from food. Don't fast from food if you are sick, traveling, pregnant, or nursing. Always stay hydrated, drinking plenty of water and fluids.*

WHAT TO DO IN THE TIME SET APART FOR FASTING:

- Bring your Bible and a glass of water during your fast.
- Relax and breathe deeply. Place yourself in the presence of God. Offer yourself and your time to God by repeating Samuel's words, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening." Or simply say, "Here I am."
- Spend some time worshiping God for His faithfulness. Thank Him for where He has come through for you. Psalm 103:1-5 may provide a starting point for praise.
- Bring your desires to God. Ask Him if this desire is in line with His will and His word for you and the church. Be still and listen. Offer your desires and praises to God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. When you feel empty or restless, what do you do to try to fill the emptiness? What does this tell you about your heart?
2. What is your attitude toward fasting or self-denial? In what ways do you currently deny yourself? When has self-denial brought you something good?
3. Where do you operate from an entitlement mentality? How can you wean yourself from this way of life?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES:

- **To deepen your understanding of how Jesus denied Himself and embraced suffering and death for you, practice fasting during Lent.** When fasting is difficult, share your thoughts and feelings with Jesus. What does Jesus say to you? Tell Jesus what it means to you to share and fellowship with Him in His sufferings.
- **Focus on Jesus and His temptation in the wilderness.** Enter the story in your imagination. What do you and Jesus talk about? How are you tempted to indulge yourself? How does it help you to talk to Jesus about this?

Jesus, the perfect high priest

READ ALL OR PORTIONS OF LEVITICUS 8-10, 18-20

“The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments... has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God. I am the Lord.”

(Leviticus 21:10, 12b)

It was in my 6th grade social studies class that one of my classmates nudged my arm and handed me the note. Unfolding the paper, I saw it was from a girl across the room, with words that would change my young life: “Do you like me?: yes or no (circle one).” It had slowly passed from one of her friends to another until it reached me. I circled “yes,” and passed it back through the intermediaries until she opened it, glanced my way, and smiled. My heart soared. The intermediaries, it seems, had accomplished their job and brokered a relationship.

We have intermediaries for many things, most of which are far more serious than a 6th grade crush. That concept of intermediary arises in Leviticus through the high priest, who is the leading figure of the priesthood, those dedicated for particular purposes and responsibilities as mediators between the divine and human realms. Because God is holy, the high priest stands between God and humanity, both representing and speaking on behalf of humanity to God and, likewise, on behalf of God to humanity. Leviticus contains many guidelines for the high priest’s life and actions, but the central idea is that as mediator the high priest brokers the relationship between God and humanity.

The New Testament speaks of Jesus serving as a high priest as well. As fully God yet fully man, Jesus can do what no high priest, who offered ongoing sacrifices, could do. Once for all, Jesus offers the perfect sacrifice as the final high priest. The writer of Hebrews describes it this way: *“For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people”* (Hebrews 2:17).

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Each Sunday we include discussion questions on the sermon insert that can be used for deeper reflection and/or small group discussions. Take time to read through those questions today. You can find a digital version online at eastbrook.org/Leviticus.*

Have you ever wanted to grab something that was waaaaaaay up high on the shelf, so high that you couldn't reach it? What do you do? Chances are, you look for someone taller, someone who can reach up high to grab the thing and bring it down to you.

God is so perfectly holy that we can't reach Him on our own. Our sin has caused a separation—a distance—between God and us. So, long ago, God created a system of priests—special men who would help people to reach up to God, and who could bring God and His ways down to the people.

In the Old Testament, we read about a man named Aaron who God chose to be a high priest. This was a serious job with many special rules. Aaron would wear special robes that represented the 12 tribes of God's people. He would offer sacrifices to pay for his own sins, and then offer more sacrifices to pay for the sins of the people. God would accept these sacrifices as payment for the peoples' sins. Other times, Aaron would stand outside the Tabernacle, and represent God to the people. He taught them what God was like and how to live God's way.

The Bible tells us that Jesus was also a high priest—but a far better high priest! He is able to do what we cannot do ourselves. He offered the best sacrifice—Himself—once for all people, for all time! Because Jesus never sinned, His death on the Cross was a perfect sacrifice. But, because Jesus was human, He knows what it's like to be tempted, and to feel hurt, fear, or stress. In the New Testament, we are told that we can come to Jesus with anything on our hearts (Hebrews 4:14-16). He will forgive us and give us the power to do the right thing.

Jesus has made a way for us, not just to see God from a distance, but to join God where He is.

LET'S TALK!

- When do you feel closest to God? Describe what it's like to feel far from God.
- Why is Jesus the best high priest?

A STEP FURTHER: INTERACTIVE PRAYER.

Print each letter of Jesus' name on a single piece of paper: J-E-S-U-S. Lay these on the floor, in order, like stepping stones. Gather everyone in front of the first paper, and pray: *"God, You are holy, and we are not. Please forgive our sins."* Allow a moment for silent confession. Then, as each person walks through the stepping-stone letters, let them repeat the letters or say the name of Jesus. When everyone has finished, pray together: *"Jesus, thank you for paying for our sin and helping us to reach God. Amen."*



He understands us

READ HEBREWS 4:14-16

Leviticus lists many requirements and instructions for high priests. They must be holy and set apart for God. They must not shave any part of their heads. They must not rip their clothes or share their sadness when mourning. They must not leave the sacred tent of the Lord to bury a body (Leviticus 21). All of these rules show a picture of high priests who were perhaps very removed from God's people.

Hebrews 4:14-16 tells a different story of our great high priest, Jesus. And the good news is this: He understands our struggles because He lived them too. When I think about how Jesus is a high priest who can sympathize with our weakness, I'm reminded of how my spiritual director often encourages me to invite Jesus into the hard things. I'm so quick to just ask Him to "fix it" in terms of a difficult situation or "fix me" in terms of a personal weakness, but sometimes that's not actually what I need. I just need Him. I simply need to remember that He is present with me. He understands the hard things because He experienced them too. He understands me. Those are the moments that I feel closest to Him.

Seeing Jesus as high priest reminded me of the word "Emmanuel." He is not a God "over there" but a God "in here" or with us. He is not a faraway, lofty high priest of Leviticus, but one who stands with us in our pain, temptations and weaknesses. He has lived, gone through the heavens, and now can be here with us when we invite Him in.

Because Jesus is our high priest and He gives us access to His Father through prayer, we don't have to fear the hard things. We know that He's experienced them. We know that He was tempted in every way, yet He didn't sin. We can trust Him to give us what we need to get through the hard things in life: mercy and grace and His presence.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Is there any area of your life in which you feel like no one understands? Talk to Jesus about this and invite Him into the hard things. As you talk to Him, become aware of His presence with you in this situation and receive the peace that comes from knowing that He understands.*

good news

READ JOHN 3:13-18

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

A footnote in my Bible says that John 3:16 is the most famous summary of the gospel. The good news in one sentence! The verse states what God did on our behalf and promises salvation and eternal life to anybody who believes in Jesus.

If you are a football fan you might be familiar with the following story. In 2009, quarterback Tim Tebow wrote the word John underneath his right eye and 3:16 underneath his left eye during a National Championship game. He shared that God had put it on his heart to do so. Tebow also shared how surprised he was when he was told that the verse (John 3:16) had been googled over 94 million times during that game.

Exactly three years later, in 2012, another miraculous occurrence happened. After Tebow's team, the Broncos, won the playoff game against the Steelers, his PR agent reported some amazing statistics. During that game Tim Tebow threw for 316 yards, the reported yards per completion and yards per rush were 31.6 and 3.16, the television ratings for the game were 31.6, and the time of possession was 31.06. The verse began to trend on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter and once again caused 90 million people to google the meaning of John 3:16. What a story!

Sometimes the thought of sharing the good news can be daunting and we may even struggle to know where to begin when we are talking with friends, family, neighbors, or strangers. However, as this story shows, John 3:16 is a great place to start. How might you share John 3:16 with others? Let's get creative and ask God in prayer for some fresh ideas.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *God sent Jesus as a way of introducing Himself to us in a fresh way. As you reflect on what these verses tell us Jesus came to do (and not do)—how does this impact your view of Him as our high priest sitting beside God interceding for us?*

showing up, speaking up, sticking up

READ ROMANS 8:31-39

Have you ever had a friend say to you during a difficult time, “I’m with you,” or “I’m on your side” or “I’m here to help in any way I can”? How comforting it is to know that someone is walking with us during difficult times we encounter.

To actually walk with someone requires time and intentionality; it’s more than simply saying so. Walking alongside another entails being physically present and being available to listen. Sometimes we think we must do or say something, but quite often, our presence is simply what is most needed. Not platitudes, not preaching, not Bible verses. Just being there.

Imagine now, the pain of not having someone to call upon during difficult times. Imagine not having deep friendships and close community. Yet this is the reality of lonely people in our society.

It’s not easy to know on the surface who is lonely when we run into folks at the grocery store, at church, work, school, or the neighborhood, but the truth is people all around us are feeling isolated and alone. At least one third to one half of us, according to some reports. Loneliness in our culture is something that concerns and affects all of us, even if we ourselves have a close community.

If we are feeling alone, we can find encouragement that we have a high priest in heaven who knows us, sees us, hears us, and intercedes on our behalf. There is nothing in this world that can separate us from that love. It isn’t merely Christ saying He loves us—He’s also actually sticking up for us. He’s speaking out for us on our behalf. We aren’t alone. We aren’t forgotten.

Yes, we need to address loneliness in our society. And maybe what we can do is be the kind of person that shows up, speaks up, and sticks up for someone else; someone who is alone, someone who is hurting, someone who is lonely, just as Christ is doing by speaking up and sticking up for us, interceding for us straight to God’s ears.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *How have you felt Christ’s presence interceding for you?*
- *Spend time in prayer asking God to lead you to someone who is feeling alone, and then reach out to that person with a phone call or visit.*

invitation

READ HEBREWS 2:17-3:6

“For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.”

(Hebrews 2:17)

“But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.”

(Hebrews 3:6)

When I was younger, I liked to believe that I was a math genius. I thought that I could be the substitute teacher, teach the class with no lesson plan whatsoever, and still have my classmates brag about how much better I was than our actual teacher. One day I took it upon myself to help a classmate who was struggling with the homework, refusing to admit to myself that I was struggling with it too. I failed that homework assignment, and I led my classmate underwater with me.

Earlier in chapter 2 of Hebrews, verses 5 through 9 speak of how God made the Son lower than the angels. Being made lower meant being made exactly like humanity. The Son of God was sent to us, like us, so that He could obtain the greater victory. Jesus became flesh and blood so that through death, He could destroy the one with the power of death, Satan. Jesus couldn’t atone for our sins unless He was tempted to sin. Except of course He did not sin because one who sins cannot pay a debt for others like themselves. I couldn’t help, or “save” my classmate because I was in the same sinking boat as they were. How much sense did it make to aid them, when I was lost to a point where I couldn’t pull either of us from the trenches?

All who are in Christ and who believe in His sacrifice to deliver us, are a part of God’s household. There is no requirement to be at a certain spot in your life for Jesus to enter it. He’s always there, waiting for us, we just have to acknowledge Him. At that time, He’s preparing our seat at His table. And when we finally do acknowledge Him, He meets us where we are and invites us in His kingdom.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *How would you say Jesus was able to be a faithful and merciful high priest for us because He was made fully human? How does that change what you pray about to Him?*

anchored in Jesus

READ HEBREWS 9:11-15

On the morning of Saturday, July 27, when I was to be preparing for officiating a wedding, I found myself being carried up the stairs by firefighters and placed in an ambulance with a blood oxygen rating in the low 80's. A blood clot which formed in my left leg found its way into my lungs and without my wife's quick action I may not have made it. Four days in the hospital left me much time to reflect on my assurance of Jesus as my high priest, and so thankful it was by His blood, that I would share in the promised eternal inheritance.

The book of Hebrews beautifully unveils Jesus as our perfect high priest, the one who entered not an earthly temple, but the very presence of God on our behalf. Unlike the Old Testament priests, who offered repeated sacrifices for sin, Jesus offered Himself once for all. His sacrifice was not with the blood of animals, but with His own precious blood, securing eternal redemption.

This passage reminds us that Jesus is not only our savior but also our mediator. He stands between us and God, interceding for us continually (Romans 8:34). Through Him, we have direct access to the Father, no longer needing an earthly priest to represent us. His perfect sacrifice cleanses our consciences from dead works (v. 14), freeing us to serve the living God in joy and confidence.

What difference does this make?

Knowing that Christ is mediating for us before God brings deep assurance. When we fail, He is our advocate. When we feel unworthy, He reminds us that His blood has fully paid for our sins. When we struggle with guilt, He calls us to rest in His finished work.

This truth transforms our daily walk. We are no longer striving to earn God's favor—it has been secured in Christ. We can approach God with boldness (Hebrews 4:16), live in freedom from condemnation, and serve Him with gratitude and love.

Take heart today—your salvation is not fragile; it is anchored in Jesus, your perfect high priest.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for being my perfect mediator. Help me rest in Your finished work and live in joyful service to You. Amen.*

PRACTICE: SELF-EXAMINATION & CONFESSION

Each Saturday during Lent, we will take some time as a church family to practice a different spiritual exercise together. Today, we are practicing self-examination & confession. You may want to begin by reading through the written form in this devotional, or by watching a video of Joran Weitzer guiding you through this spiritual practice online at eastbrook.org/LeviticusDevo.

DEFINITION:

Self-examination is a process whereby the Holy Spirit opens my heart to what is true about me. It is a way of opening myself to God within the safety of divine love so that I can authentically seek transformation. Confession embraces Christ's gift of forgiveness and restoration while setting us on the path to renewal and change. (Psalm 139:23-24; Psalm 32:1-2; James 5:16).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Does your confession tend to be along the lines of "Forgive my sins, dear Lord" rather than specifically naming your sins one by one before the face of God? What does the lack of specific confession do to self-awareness?
2. What experiences have affected your ability to give and receive forgiveness? Talk to God about what this means.
3. When have you tasted the joy of a good confession? What was that like for you?
4. What is it like for you to confess your sins before a friend or confessor?
5. Which of your sins hurts those closest to you?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES:

- **Set aside some time for confession and self-examination.** In the presence of God ask for light to pierce your defenses. Then ask yourself: who have I injured recently through thoughtlessness, neglect, anger, and so on? As the Holy Spirit brings people to mind, confess your feelings about these people to God. Ask God to forgive you and if need be, to give you grace to forgive them. Write an apology, make a phone call, or confess out loud in an attempt to put the relationship back on track.
- **Turn to Psalm 32 or 51.** Use the psalm as a way of bringing your own sins before God. How does God meet you in these confessions of David?
- **Ask some of your family and close friends to help you see your blind spots.** Ask questions like, what do I do that hurts you? How could I better love you? What is it like to be with me? Do I show interest in others or mostly talk about myself? Let their answers guide you in a time of confession.
- **Imagine the kind of person you would like to become in your old age.** Then look at your life and assess whether or not the way you live now is preparing you to become this person. Confess where you need to change. Ask God and the community of faith for help.

Jesus, the holy obedient one

READ ALL OR PORTIONS OF LEVITICUS 11-15, 18-20

"Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.'" (Leviticus 19:2)

"For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:19)

One of the greatest criticisms of religion, Christianity included, is that it can sometimes feel like a list of dos and don'ts. Most people want something beyond just being told what they should and should not do. Another great critique of religion arises from the hypocrisy evident in those who fail to live in line with their faith's teachings. Most people long to see someone live in a way that reflects the deepest meaning of life and faith, which is why we admire someone like Mother Teresa who served those in need in Calcutta, India.

Some set aside the book of Leviticus because, just like that first critique, it can look like a sort of behavioral checklist. This is heightened by how some of the guidelines feel out of date or culturally distant. And yet, Leviticus is shot through with a sense of the high calling of God's people in everyday of life. Each aspect of life is seen as something potentially holy and, because of this, everything made by God can be lived for or given back to God meaningfully. In a sense, Leviticus describes what it looks like to live in a way that reflects the deepest meaning of life and faith in God. But at the same time, Leviticus admits the reality that we often falter. None of us lives perfectly, which is why so much space in Leviticus is given to offerings that atone for our sins.

In His incarnation, Jesus does something we cannot do. On the one hand, Jesus goes beyond mere moral checklists to show us every aspect of life can be lived in relationship with God. And at the same time, in a way we cannot do, Jesus displays a life lived perfectly obedient to God. In light of Leviticus we see Jesus as the only fully holy and completely obedient One.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Each Sunday we include discussion questions on the sermon insert that can be used for deeper reflection and/or small group discussions. Take time to read through those questions today. You can find a digital version online at eastbrook.org/Leviticus.*

Have you ever been playing outside having so much fun and didn't realize how dirty you got? You get home and your mom says she doesn't want you to come in and get her clean house dirty. Now, there is nothing wrong with playing hard and getting dirty, but a consequence of playing in a world of dirt is that you can easily get dirt on yourself without realizing it. She isn't going to keep you out of the house forever, it just means that you need to clean off before coming inside.



In Leviticus 11, God gave His people specific instructions for how they were to live. These laws covered everything from what animals they could eat to how they were to care for their bodies and relationships. The law revealed God's holiness and the need for His people to live in a way that reflected His purity. God's laws were not just rules; they were the path to holiness. While we no longer have these specific ceremonial laws, they reveal the character of God and His desire for His people to live holy, set-apart lives. Jesus, in His obedience to the law, showed us the importance of living a life that reflects God's holiness. We are called to honor God by living according to His principles, loving Him and others.

In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus tells us He came not to get rid of the law but to fulfill it. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law in a way no one else could. While we all fall short, Jesus' obedience to every command, from His birth to death, was flawless. Jesus' perfect obedience shows us that it is not just about following the law, but about a heart that desires to please God. Jesus teaches us that true obedience goes beyond following rules—it's about loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:34-40). Jesus perfectly modeled this love through His life and death. His obedience transformed the way we understand what it means to follow God's law. Loving God and loving others are the essence of the law. As followers of Jesus, our obedience is motivated by love, not just duty.

LET'S TALK!

- Why do you think God gave the Israelites so many rules in Leviticus? How did those rules help them live holy lives? Why is Jesus the best high priest?
- In what areas of your life do you need to rely more on Jesus' strength to live in obedience?

A STEP FURTHER: INTERACTIVE PRAYER.

This week, notice all the times you are wiping something away, like sweeping the floor, washing a cup, erasing your mistakes on homework. When you do this, pause for a moment, and thank God for wiping away your sin and giving you a fresh start.

missing the point

READ GALATIANS 5:1, 13-18

MONDAY, MARCH 31

Married less than a year and recently settled in Pittsburgh, PA, I was excited about hosting my parents for Thanksgiving in our new home. However, they would not arrive from Dayton, OH, until Friday. So, I invited friends over for Thanksgiving dinner that Thursday. My parents flew in the next day. I was thrilled to set the table with our wedding china and bring out all of my delicious Thanksgiving food from the day before. It still tasted so good! Except I'll never forget my mother looking down at her plate and saying, "leftovers."

Having had such a stable, predictable childhood, I had never heard of anyone celebrating Thanksgiving on any other day. I guess Mom and Dad assumed we'd wait until they arrived. It simply never occurred to me to wait until Friday to serve up the feast. While it was nice to host a Friendsgiving, I had missed the point of my family's traditional Thanksgiving. I guess that's what happens when our holidays and traditions and religions are so predictable that we get stuck in a rut. We could miss the point when we fail to accommodate others.

That's sort of what St. Paul was trying to tell his congregation in Galatia. Some folks there were adding Old Testament rules to their New Testament faith—maybe even mixing some of their pagan rituals in with their newfound faith in Christ. It caused division in their congregation. Worse, they were so focused on these rules and rituals, they were in danger of missing the point. It was distracting them from the basic command of loving each other as Christ had loved them.

Paul said that Christ has set us free to live a free life and to use that freedom to serve one another in love. We don't need to add fancy rituals or manufactured rules to live a simple life of loving service. The point is to love others as you love yourself. However, Paul did warn the Galatians against using their freedom in Christ as an excuse to do whatever they wanted; the book of Leviticus still has many common-sense guidelines for holy living.

Paul encourages the Galatians, and us, to use our freedom to serve one another in love. The point is to love others as you love yourself (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 5:43, 19:19, 22:39, Mark 12:31-33, Luke 10:27, Rom. 13:9).

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Are there any unwritten rules among your family and friends? What rituals and rules bog you down?*
- *Why is it so difficult to apply the simple law of love to our everyday lives?*

BY DIANA K. OTTERBACHER

winning with Christ

READ ROMANS 5:12-21

I love sports. Growing up my favorite sports to play were basketball and baseball. While I wanted to play both sports in high school, the expectations and reputations for the two teams could not have been more different.

LaPorte Basketball consistently finished near the bottom of our conference standings. When we entered the gym, we usually were just hoping not to get embarrassed.

LaPorte Baseball, on the other hand, had established itself as an elite program (8 state championships, 1 national championship). When we stepped onto the field, not only did we expect to win, the other team expected us to win.

Holiness is the call of God upon His people. In Leviticus, we see that to live holy is to live in a way that reflects the character of God. Jesus summarized this holy life with two commands: love God with all that we are and love our neighbors as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-39). Yet, as Romans reminds us, despite our best efforts we continually fall short. Sin has marked every human heart since Adam's disobedience, making it impossible to fully live out the holiness God requires. It became so common to give into sin that we almost expect to lose the battle of temptation before it even starts.

This is where the holiness of Jesus changes everything. Romans 5:12-21 reveals the contrast between Adam's failure and Jesus' victory. Through Adam, sin entered the world, spreading to all humanity like a sickness. But Jesus, the perfectly obedient One, did what we could not—He lived a holy life in complete obedience to the Father.

His obedience becomes our righteousness, and His Spirit empowers us to live the life God intended. As we abide in Him, we are transformed from the inside out, enabled to love God and love others in a way that reflects His presence and purity.

Today, rest in the holiness of Jesus. Let His righteousness be your foundation, and let His Spirit lead you in a life well-lived—one marked by love, obedience, and the presence of God.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *What does it mean to you that even before temptation erupts around you, because the Spirit lives in you and Jesus' righteousness surrounds you, you can declare victory?*

clean the house

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 6:16-7:1

Whether it is for a family birthday, a holiday, or a dear friend coming from out of town for a visit, I enjoy hosting. Before my family hosts, we clean. Hosting means dusting all surfaces, washing the windows, renting a carpet cleaner. Company is coming.

In today's passage, Paul is exhorting a church that exists in a city known for its debauchery. Temptation awaits in every idol temple right around the corner. Paul exhorts them to be live apart from this filth. Verse 17 tells them to *"be separate"* and *"touch no unclean thing."*

How difficult was it for the Corinthian church? How difficult is this for us? As prevalent as sin was for them, it is as available to us, if not more. All the defilement of the world is accessible in a computer we hold in the palm of our hand. We can bring whatever we desire into our homes without changing out of our pajamas.

These commands would seem hopeless if Paul didn't explain the motivation behind them. Whenever he gives a hard teaching in his letters, Paul always brackets with promises. Don't miss the second part of verse 16 and verse 18. Paul wants us to be separate because God, God Himself, wants to walk among us. He is adopting us as family.

The motivation for purifying ourselves is clear in 7:1. We perfect *"holiness out of reverence for God."* Would I want to host a party in a beat-up run-down shack? Do I want my Lord and Savior inhabiting a life that is filthy and unkempt?

For those of us who have trusted Christ, He is already walking with us. He is already in our "homes." There have been some rooms that I haven't wanted to clean, places where the garbage is stacked floor to ceiling. The great promise of Scripture is that Jesus will clean my life. I just need to point to the room, acknowledge that it needs a scrub down, and let Him start taking boxes to the curb.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Where are some areas in our lives where we need purification? Out of reverence, may we let Him have those areas?*

how is God holy?

READ LEVITICUS 19:1-2

"The LORD also said to Moses, 'Give the following instructions to the entire community of Israel. You must be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'" (Leviticus 19:1-2 NLT)

It's no mistake that today's verses are stuck right in the middle of a book full of extremely detailed laws for the people of Israel. Just looking at the immediate context, chapter 18 enumerates specific requirements for sexual purity, while chapter 19 has commands about honoring parents, offering sacrifices to God, loving our neighbor in practical ways by leaving food for the poor, and many other detailed requirements for holiness. God is showing us that our actions can reflect His holiness.

But just in case we should lose the forest for the trees, the Lord reminds us what is at the heart of all of these requirements, what is at the heart of holiness: love. How is God holy? He loves. In Leviticus 19:18, He tells us to love our own people, especially by forgiving their wrongs. They are our neighbors and we should love them as ourselves.

And there is more. Because of our hard hearts, God has to clearly spell out that our love cannot be limited to those who are like us. In verses 33-34, He tells us to treat the stranger or the foreigner among us as ourselves, to love them as ourselves. God reminds us that we too were once strangers; we too were once far from God (Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:12). Thank God that in Christ, we have been brought into the family of God and given all the power we need to be holy as He is holy. No matter how many times we fall short of His holiness, Jesus waits with open arms to pick us up and help us walk in love once again.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Spend some time today meditating on HOW the Lord Jesus is holy. Praise, worship and adore Him for these specific ways of holiness. Thank the Holy Spirit that He is making you more and more into the image of this Holy God. Then, repent for the ways you are not holy. Receive God's forgiveness and ask for His help to love as He loves.*
- *Take the Leviticus 19 Love Challenge, which has two parts:*
 1. *Love someone near to you (vss. 17-18): ask the Lord to help you forgive and bless someone close to you.*
 2. *Love someone "far" from you (vss. 33-34): ask the Lord for a specific way you can bless someone who is a foreigner to you, for example: a refugee or immigrant living in our city, a non-Christian neighbor or co-worker, someone on the opposite side of the political aisle, etc. Ask God for the grace to love that person as yourself.*

self-awareness

READ ROMANS 12:1-5

As my wife and I became members of Frontier Ventures in Pasadena, CA, we were required to go through an orientation called Kingdom Being/Living/Doing. There was a strong focus on self-awareness in this process. This wasn't always easy for me. I wasn't very self-aware. There were elements of my mindset (much of which came with my medical training) that affected my actions negatively. Which of course translated into hurting others. Not with intention but simply as fallout from not being self-aware.

This week's passage gets to this very fact. It reads, in part, *"Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment..."* (vs. 3). Sober judgment here (*sophroneo*) could be interpreted to mean to be in one's right mind! This may be one of the hardest and scariest things to do as a human: to think rightly about oneself. Or to be increasingly self-aware. This is supremely challenging for those who are not committed to a life following Jesus but even for those who are His disciples, as I have been for more than 40 years, it is hard.

In the first case, for non-believers, it is difficult because most of what is consumed through eyes and ears is telling one that you are fine just the way you are, that the world needs to acknowledge this fact, and let you pursue whatever it is you believe is right and good for you. In other words it conveys the thinking that you are your own god. What a recipe for a miserable life!

But even coming to faith in Christ doesn't mean we still won't bring along old ways of living, being and doing. It doesn't negate the need for ongoing renewal of our minds so that we can then offer our bodies as a living sacrifice as a form of true and proper worship, and that we can become a helpful member of the body of Christ. How many of the hardships being suffered by the Church these days are because her members don't follow these, dare we call them, mandates. Be self-aware, renew your mind constantly, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, become an active and contributing member of the body of Christ.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Does your daily life align with the admonitions of this passage? How are you renewing your mind regularly and how is it you are giving all of yourself, mind/body/spirit, to worshipping our Lord and serving His people?*

PRACTICE: SERVICE

Each Saturday during Lent, we will take some time as a church family to practice a different spiritual exercise together. Today, we are practicing and learning about service. You may want to begin by reading through the written form in this devotional, or by watching a video of JJ & Kari Stenitzer guiding you through this spiritual practice online at eastbrook.org/LeviticusDevo.

DEFINITION:

Service is a way of offering resources, time, treasure, influence, and expertise for the care, protection, justice, and nurture of others. Acts of service give hands to the second greatest commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Isaiah 58:6-7; John 12:26; Matthew 22:37-39).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What is it like to be loved by someone as he or she loves him- or herself?
2. Do you like to be served or to serve? How does this affect the way you live?
3. When do you live out of an entitlement mentality rather than love of neighbor?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES:

- **Serve someone daily.** Every morning for the next two weeks, ask your spouse, roommate, or a colleague: "What can I do for you today?" Then do it. Talk to God about what this is like for you. What do you see about yourself?
- **Develop an annual service rhythm.** Develop a yearly practice of involving yourself in one intentional service, mission, or relief project. Consider which type of project speaks to some of the longings of your own heart.
- **Discover your spiritual gifts.** Ask those who know you to give you their take on what your spiritual gifts are. Take the SHAPE Assessment found in the Eastbrook App under "myEBC" and learn how you are uniquely gifted to serve others. Plan a way of using your gifts to benefit others in the next week and month.
- **Serve your Milwaukee neighbors.** Get to know the Eastbrook local outreach ministries (Food Pantry, Bread of Healing Clinic, International Community Center, and Safe Families), or another faith-based organization here in Milwaukee. Find out what they need. Ask them how you could serve. Do something that helps them help others.
- **Learn from the good Samaritan.** Spend some time meditating on the story of the good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37. Become quiet and ask the Lord to speak to you. Give your imagination to God. Read the story slowly and aloud, savoring the words. What stood out to you? Read the passage a second time, imagining you are the Levite. What are your concerns? Why are you in a hurry? Then put yourself in the place of the priest. What are your concerns? Why do you pass by? Imagine you are the Samaritan. Why do you stop to help? How do you feel about incurring all the expenses for another's care? Who of these three characters do you tend to be like? Who in your life receives your care?

Jesus, the atoning one and scapegoat

READ ALL OR PART OF LEVITICUS 16-17

I have a close friend and neighbor who is Jewish, and I love getting her insights into her faith, especially her faith as a child. Her family of origin is in the Reform Jewish denomination, so they didn't follow kosher food laws or attend weekly services. But one religious holy day was always, always observed, and that was Yom Kippur. On that day, her family would go to "temple" (technically synagogue), followed all the prayers, and did absolutely no work. When I asked her what the significance of Yom Kippur was for her as a child, she said, "It's the day we got forgiven for all the bad things we had done that year." Yom Kippur, which falls on the tenth day of Rosh Hashanah in the fall, was non-negotiable for her family. She said that celebrating Yom Kippur was far more important for them than celebrating Hanukkah, which surprised me. The more I think about it, though, the more it makes sense.

When I talk to my friend, I realize how much our Christian faith is tied into the Jewish faith. We simply cannot understand Jesus Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross for us without delving into the strange world of animal sacrifice that is described in the book of Leviticus. Jews today do not sacrifice animals on Yom Kippur, but they make other sacrifices—of prayer, fasting, and refraining from work.

Perhaps we know Yom Kippur better by its English translation: The Day of Atonement. Today we will explore Leviticus chapter 16 where this holy day is laid out for the priests of the tabernacle in ancient Israel. The one and only God is holy, and human beings are not. God loves humanity, but He can't just draw near to human beings and live with them without severe intervening measures. The people of Israel knew they were doomed and helpless without God, and they were willing to do anything to have His presence live with them. Let's explore together what the Day of Atonement means—both then and now.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Each Sunday we include discussion questions on the sermon insert that can be used for deeper reflection and/or small group discussions. Take time to read through those questions today. You can find a digital version online at eastbrook.org/Leviticus.*

When was the last time you worked really hard to clean your room? When you finished, maybe you thought the room looked pretty good, but then Mom and Dad walked in! They looked under the bed, and behind the dresser, and in the closet! You didn't think about the dust bunnies, and you forgot all about the stray dirty socks, the random Lego bricks, and the sticky candy wrappers! Maybe your room wasn't quite as clean as you thought?



In the Old Testament, God required His people to set aside one day a year called “the Day of Atonement” to deal with all the sin they had forgotten about throughout the year. It was a kind of deep cleaning of sin for the whole community. The high priest did something really unusual on this day! After sacrificing an animal for his own sins, the high priest had two goats brought forward. He sacrificed one goat on the altar to pay for—or atone for—the sins of the people. But he took the other goat and stood before the people. He placed both of his hands on the goat’s head and began to confess all the sin and rebellion the people had done throughout the year. Placing his hands on the goat’s head was a way of showing that this goat was now carrying the weight of all their sin. Then, the goat was led outside the neighborhood of God’s people and allowed to wander into the wilderness. It was as though the goat was carrying away all the sin, far from God’s people.

This is a picture of what Jesus does. Like that second goat, the “scape goat”, all of our sin is placed on Jesus at the Cross. Just as the goat carried the sin far away from the people, so Jesus’ death paid for our sin and removes it far from us. Now, when God looks at us, believers in Jesus, He sees the sin on Jesus, and pardons us.

LET’S TALK!

- Describe what the priest did with the two goats. How were both alike? How were they different?
- Can you think of sin that you would like to “pack up” and send far away?

A STEP FURTHER: INTERACTIVE PRAYER.

If the weather permits, go outside with a jar of bubbles. Read: “He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12, NLT). Think of sins that you would like God to remove from your life. Imagine Him doing that as you watch the bubbles float away and pop. Pray: “Thank you, Jesus, for forgiving our sin and taking them far away from us. Amen.”

lean into His love

MONDAY, APRIL 7

READ ISAIAH 53:4-6

Have you ever showered anyone in your life with so much kindness and love, but all you've gotten in return is a bad attitude? I know I have, but I have also done the reverse. After school I can be so annoyed or just want to get home, so as I hop in the car I am not always the nicest to my mom. She'll ask questions about my day, but I don't want anything to do with the conversation she tries to start. As I've grown up and also in my faith I've realized that she is just there to help and try to be present in my life, but it's hard to see that in the moment.

In Isaiah 53:4-6, we can see how Jesus is our ultimate sacrifice. He died for people who treated Him terribly and brutally killed Him. Our sin brought that upon Him as He died for us and took our place by bearing all our sin because God wants to be present in our lives. He took our sins even though people treated Him like trash back then and He knew people would always treat Him badly. Verse 6 talks about how we are like sheep who go our own ways, but God comes after us because His love is so great. He personally cares about us, and sent His only son so that we can be with Him forever.

Not only did God send His son to be our sacrifice, but He goes the next step and wants to be present in our lives as well, which is clearly seen in Isaiah 53:4-6. My mom of course wants to be present in my life, but the fact that an all-loving and heavenly God wants to be present in all of our lives is super cool! He broke down the barriers that kept us separate with His son, Jesus. Jesus is the bridge for a relationship with God. God is holding out His hand and waiting for us to lean into His love!

FOR REFLECTION:

- *When read Isaiah 53, which part of the reading strikes your heart the hardest? Take time to prayerfully name the transgressions and iniquities in your life that were laid upon Jesus so that you might have peace with God.*

God's plan

READ HEBREWS 9:11-14

As a pastor's kid, I was taught salvation was a free gift through the death of Christ on the Cross. I did nothing to earn it, nor did I have to do anything to keep it. As the first-born child, I had the responsibility of watching out for my younger siblings when my parents were away: helping them with chores, keeping them safe, and setting an example of good behavior.

Growing up, I subconsciously applied the latter to the former. This, for a long time, permeated how I viewed my place in the world. For better or worse, I assumed the position of 'I can do it myself' or 'Let me handle it', combined with a twinge of 'I need to be good and right'. To be Christ-like is a goal, for sure, but being good and right as some sort of condition or measuring stick is a definite no-no. How ironic, in my effort to be good and right, I have failed to be 'good and right'.

Over the years, and as I have matured in my faith, I see how deeply flawed that sophomoric mindset really is. The human expectations to be in charge, watch over, set a good example, etc. were attainable because they were human expectations. The God-expectation to be holy, however, was never attainable. The depths of how powerless I am to fulfill this holy requirement cannot be overstated. Even in the sincerest desire of my heart, I cannot achieve true holiness. God's plan, to be honest, was never meant to be carried out by me. He intended all along to send Jesus, to send the Holy Spirit. Allowing this reality to settle into my daily practices and thought patterns frees my energy to fulfill His true intention for us all, which is to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love others as ourselves.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *How would you say that Jesus' perfectly paying the penalty for our sin frees us up to more fully love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength? How does it help us to love others as ourselves?*

the carrier of our sins

READ LEVITICUS 16:20-22

If you are anything like me, when reading the Old Testament there are a lot of confusing things. One of those things being all the festivals and days the Old Testament brings about. Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths. When I was a kid, I thought the Feast of Booths was a bunch of people sitting in restaurant booths eating food all day!

There may be a similar confusion to what is happening in our passage today. This is a chapter of Leviticus talking about the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement is the most solemn of all the Israelite festivals, and was marked by God instructing Aaron, the high priest, to come into this place called the Holy of Holies where God's spirit dwelled.

Aaron, or any other high priest could not come in whenever he wanted, but this was a day where he would enter and pray for the sins of the people. There were all these rituals that had to be done, including animal sacrifice, and God had specific directions for how this should be done. The Day of Atonement shows that the sacrifice of an animal's life could communicate the gravity of human evil. The high priest would put his hands on the goat's head and pray all the sins of the people and send it to the wilderness so that the sins were taken away. When Jesus sacrificed Himself for us on the Cross, He took the place of all these animals that were sacrificed, he became the scapegoat. He bore our sins, so that we can live with Him forever. As you go through your day today, take some time to thank Jesus that He bore our sins and we can be free in Him because of His sacrifice.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *If God knew that the goat couldn't really take away all the sins of the world (we clearly know that could only ultimately be accomplished by the sacrifice of Jesus), why do you think He established this practice here in Leviticus? What does that tell you about God and His love for His people?*

Jesus left us footprints

READ 1 PETER 2:21-25

We can feel separated from God when we suffer. My girlfriend, Joanie, recently listened to a sermon about Jesus healing the woman with long-term bleeding who had touched the edge of His garment. Joanie wondered what part of the garment she and her husband missed when they continually anguished in prayer for their little girl who died of cancer. They now live in a world of unexplained suffering and shudder at easy answers.

I saw another friend, Jerry, at the gym this week and asked him how he was. Jerry enjoys political argument and once told me that I was to blame for the problems in the world because I was evangelical!

"I'm full of dark thoughts," he told me.

"You need to cry out to Jesus, Jerry."

"I don't believe in him... And who would he have voted for anyway?"

Jerry's response wasn't as sarcastic as it sounds. Many are struggling with their faith today. They experience confusion, separation, and loneliness. They conclude, "There is no God."

In these tough times of misunderstanding, conflict, and personal suffering, we are called to follow in our Lord's footsteps.

Jesus is full of grace and truth. He didn't do wrong when He was wronged. When He suffered, it didn't affect the truth; He didn't manipulate or lie to make His way easier or more acceptable to others. Jesus was insulted, mocked, and disrespected but He didn't go out for vengeance. He was right, but he didn't push His way or make threats. In the midst of abuse, He entrusted Himself to God, who judges righteously. He did this to heal our wounds, make us right with God, and leave us an example to follow.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *What expressions of doubt, confusion, or fear are your friends expressing? How have you responded? Look at Jesus's example in this passage when you are tempted to argue or anger. Entrust yourself and your friend to God in prayer.*
- *Review your social media usage and recent conversations. Do others see Jesus's trusting response in you? Take time to confess and to allow the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul to lead you.*

what's in a name?

READ JOHN 1:29

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29)

I come from a family that is very fond of nicknames. Each of us has a few, attached to different stages or stories from our lives. Alongside several more embarrassing options, my parents and siblings have always been the only people to address me as "Rachie."

It is common to reserve certain monikers for those closest to us. My husband Bill has only ever been "Billy" to his mom; I call my oldest friend Meghan, "Meg," a privilege extended to select few outside her immediate family.

The names we call people symbolize our relationship to them. Similarly, the title with which John the Baptist addresses Jesus in this passage shows a lot about what He means to John—and tells those listening what He will come to mean to us.

Before this address appears, the Pharisees had interrogated John as he performed baptisms in the desert; he explained that he was simply present to point to the Messiah about which their prophets had foretold. The next day, Jesus arrives—and that's when John exclaims, he's here! This is the one I was telling you about!

John identifies Jesus using the image of the sacrificial lamb, a reference breadcrumbed throughout Old Testament prophecy. Jesus is the perfect representation of this image because He is the ultimate sacrifice; He was offered in our place on the Cross, a most gracious gift to mankind to cover our sin and restore our relationship with God. Jesus is the hope of the world, and John the Baptist knows this; with the words he chooses, he directs attention to the Messiah and the work He will ultimately do for everyone who hears the address.

Lent offers the opportunity to heed John's words. May we take time in this season to truly reflect on the gift we have been given!

FOR REFLECTION:

- *John's title for Jesus, "the Lamb of God" reflected Jesus' primary mission in this world. What would be a title you would give Him based on His place in your life?*

PRACTICE: WITNESS

Each Saturday during Lent, we will take some time as a church family to practice a different spiritual exercise together. Today, we are practicing and learning about witness. You may want to begin by reading through the written form in this devotional, or by watching a video of Victoria McAfee guiding you through this spiritual practice online at eastbrook.org/LeviticusDevo.

DEFINITION:

To witness means modeling and telling of the difference Jesus has made in your life; revealing the life-changing love of Jesus to others. One way we witness is by living in the presence of Christ in a way that the world finds compelling and desirable. Ultimately, testifying to the good news of God requires no strategy or program, it depends on responding to the Spirit's nudge to open your mouth and heart for the sake of others. (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19-20).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What is it like for you to share your faith with others?
2. What would make it easier and more comfortable for you to talk about what Christ has done for you?
3. What is it like for you to interact with people who have different beliefs than you?
4. If you feel your own "redemption story" is uneventful or uninteresting, how does that affect your ability to share the good news with others?
5. What things do you think someone needs to know about Jesus before they can become His follower?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES:

- **Write your God Story.** God changed the course of Israel's life when He rescued His people from slavery in Egypt. Their "God Story" is found in the book of Exodus. You also have a redemption story, a "God Story," about how God has found and rescued you. Write an account of your redemption story—how might God use this story to set others free? Share the story of your journey to freedom in Christ with a friend. Not sure where to start? Use the prompts found on the Eastbrook App under "Resources" to save your God Story to your phone and have it ready and accessible at all times.
- **Make a list of the people you are praying will respond to God.** Beside each name, list one intentional way you can be the face of God to them in the next month.
- **Write an account of how God has been at work in your life in the past six months.** Ask the Holy Spirit to make you sensitive and open to an opportunity to share your experience with a seeking friend.
- **Invite someone to join you this Holy Week.** Eastbrook has many Holy Week services planned: Maundy Thursday at 7 pm, Good Friday at 12 & 7 pm, and Easter Sunday at 8, 9:30 & 11 am. Invite a friend to join you at one of these services this year.

Jesus, the jubilee

READ ALL OR PORTIONS OF LEVITICUS 25 & 27

“Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you.” (Leviticus 25:10)

I remember from my youth the great joy of the final day of school when classes concluded and the fun of summer days could commence. There was nothing quite like being set free! That little taste of freedom is nothing compared to the more profound thrill of freedom for those set free from prison or released from oppression.

The book of Leviticus contains one of the most striking, if not downright shocking, guidelines from God about insuring freedom and rest. It is all wrapped up in a concept called the year of jubilee. Just like the sabbath day happened once every seven days for rest and renewal, every seven years there was to be a sabbath year for rest and renewal. Beyond both the weekly sabbath and sabbath year, the jubilee year happened once every fifty years (after seven sabbath years). It included dramatic guidelines for freedom and renewal: any land sold in the previous 49 years was to revert to the original family of ownership, all Israelite slaves were to be freed, all debts were to be canceled, and the land was to lie fallow from cultivation.

The loftiness of the year of jubilee may make it seem impractical. As one scholar writes, “As a social institution the jubilee year remained an ideal, which was rarely, if ever, realized.” We have no clear indication in Scripture of whether the year of Jubilee was ever put into practice or not.

But the ideal of the jubilee is echoed in the life and ministry of Jesus. When beginning His public ministry, Jesus declared: *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me...to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”* (Luke 4:18). In a sense, the jubilee year is made real in Jesus who brings true freedom and renewal. As Jesus Himself said, referring to Himself, *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”* (John 8:36).

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Each Sunday we include discussion questions on the sermon insert that can be used for deeper reflection and/or small group discussions. Take time to read through those questions today. You can find a digital version online at eastbrook.org/Leviticus.*

Picture this: in your favorite and best subject, your teacher gives you a project to do with three other people, and you'll all get the same grade. Are you the kid that tells the others that you've got it all covered? I was. Sometimes we show how little we trust others (and how much we trust in ourselves) through our actions. I would never have said that I didn't trust my classmates to do a good job, but I certainly made it clear by frequently doing group projects by myself. Sometimes we do this to God too. God wants us to trust Him, and there are promises He's made to us when we do.



In the Old Testament, God gave Moses some very important rules for His people to follow, and He even included rules about rest! They were supposed to take a full year of rest called a sabbath year every seven years—no farming allowed—and trust in God's promise that He would provide for them. Then, every 50 years, God also commanded them to forgive all the debts, free the slaves, and even give back the land and personal items that their poor neighbors had to sell just to survive—this was called the year of jubilee. It was like a giant do-over for everyone in Israel! Even though God promised to give His people all they needed to rest and recover, they had a hard time believing that God was really going to take care of them, so they often did things their own way. But by disobeying God, they lost so much.

The year of jubilee was designed to be a time when debts were forgiven, captives were freed, the poor were filled, the oppressed were lifted up, and goodness was restored with grace and mercy. If we trust in Jesus, there is forgiveness of sin, freedom from sin's power, access to God's presence, and the blessing of being an heir to God's kingdom. God's ancient people did not always trust Him, and there are many stories in the Bible about the consequences of that. In the same way, if we ignore God's directions and try to make ourselves happy on our own, we end up hurting ourselves and others. If we put our trust in Jesus and do what He says, He will give us the ultimate do-over. Even though all of us have a great debt of sin, Jesus forgives it all. And this gift isn't something we can only experience once every 50 years, we can ask Him for it right now!

LET'S TALK!

- Have you ever done something without following directions and it turned out badly? What did you learn from this experience?
- Remember our God is the God of sabbath and jubilee: He wants to provide for you, forgive you, and be gracious to you. How can you trust God more in your own life?

A STEP FURTHER: INTERACTIVE PRAYER.

On a blank piece of paper, write out words that come to mind when you read/hear about our God's design for the year of jubilee. Each person in your family should try to think of at least one word. What is a word that describes God here? What is a word that describes the jubilee itself? Then pray, thanking God for each of the characteristics you've identified, and asking Him to help your family live in a way that reflects God's heart for people. Keep the paper posted on your refrigerator this week as a reminder.

a super sabbath

READ LEVITICUS 25:8-13

Imagine if today's reading were written directly to you and me in 2025: Every 50 years would be declared a year of jubilee and debts would be forgiven—personal debts, credit card bills, student loans, medical debt, etc: a full economic reset. And not just that, but all of the land would get a reset as well—no tilling, planting, collecting—just a year of rest and healing for the land. All would be forgiven, enslaved people would be set free (yes, there are still enslaved people today), and everyone would experience a geographical reset as we would go back to our "family property." But wait—whose "property" is the land here in the US and how far back do I need to go in my 23 & Me results to find out which ancestral land I should return to?

Okay, so it's a bit confusing how this might work in 2025. But now imagine reading this passage as an ancient Israelite—this is good news! You could trust that at least once in your lifetime, you would experience a full reset. All would be made new. You could start over.

Studying up on Leviticus 25 and the year of jubilee in order to write this devotional has been inspiring. A few years ago I started practicing a weekly sabbath and I quickly found all of the rhythms of my life shifting in response. Sabbath gives me a little weekly foretaste of what human beings were created into on the 7th day of creation and what we have to look forward to in the future as we rest in the eternal presence of God.

What I've learned these past few weeks is that the year of jubilee is like a super sabbath. The rest, forgiveness, and redemption are super-sized. By allowing the land to rest, we are declaring divine ownership—it all belongs to God anyways. By pressing "reset" on our relationships, we are providing everyone an opportunity to start anew. The year of jubilee is a declaration of redemption and freedom. It's the opposite of exile. It is a whole year of Eden. It is a foretaste of the kingdom of God. It is a way of practicing in the present what we believe about the future—that all will be forgiven, relationships will be reset, that all will be made new.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *2025 has been officially declared a year of jubilee for Christians all around the world. How can you live out the call to jubilee in your life this year? How would your relationships change?*
- *Read the book of Philemon (it's short!). How does what you have learned about Jubilee impact your understanding of this book?*

freedom from ashes

READ ISAIAH 61:1-7

When Jesus entered human history, the Spirit of the sovereign Lord descended upon Him, identifying Him as the Messiah. Empowered by the Spirit, Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor, freedom for the hostages, and the release of those bound by sin and suffering. As God incarnate, Jesus spoke these realities into existence.

But Jesus also demonstrated these truths through His actions. He healed the brokenhearted, set captives free from darkness, and comforted those who mourned.

To those grieving in Zion, He promised a priestly or bridegroom's crown of beauty, an anointing perfume of joy, and a beautiful garment of praise. These gifts are remarkable because they were offered in exchange for the ashes of sorrow, mourning and despair.

In our time, many are overwhelmed by the weight of suffering. Symbolically and literally, ashes have become a defining feature of our world. We witness the devastation of the California wildfires, the ruins of wars, and the lingering effects of trauma. Like ashes, these experiences are pervasive, destructive, and leave behind a lasting mark.

Yet, hope remains. Jesus's promises endure. God is a God of action, and He calls us to participate in His redemptive work. While we may not be able to speak liberty with the authority of the Messiah, we can walk in His flow of freedom by advocating for the poor, the oppressed, and the imprisoned. We can follow Jesus' example by tending to the wounded, seeking to liberate those bound by various forms of captivity, and offering comfort to those who grieve. We can work to free those covered in ashes.

We can also be witnesses to God's ongoing work of restoration. The remarkable rebirth of Israel in its ancient homeland, as prophesied by Isaiah, serves as a powerful testament to God's ability to bring life from the ashes of destruction. The prophesied next steps are impressive as holy worship will be restored to the land, led by the priests and ministers to be a blessing for all the nations.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Can this same compassion be seen in my own life? In the way I spend my time? The way I budget my money? The way I treat my family or coworkers? Is my life marked by the generous compassion of jubilee, or by a practicality that doesn't want to disrupt the status quo?*

freedom fulfilled

READ LUKE 4:16-21

"...He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind." (Luke 4:18b)

Leading weekly Bible studies in Wisconsin prisons gives me time to study Scripture with men incarcerated for crimes often having occurred decades prior. These men live lives of isolation within the walls of prison. Occasionally a man will tell me he is in the process of seeking parole. The prison resident is pursuing a path that may eventually result in release from prison; it is a long ordeal often accompanied by the disappointment of parole denied. However, that does not stop men from hoping that one day, they will receive the State of Wisconsin's favor and be released, set free to become freed men—their debt to society atoned for.

Today's passage also speaks of hope, favor, and release. Jesus strides into his hometown's synagogue speaking the favor of God on the assembled crowd. Reading the prophet Isaiah's Hebrew text (Isaiah 40:3-5, penned seven centuries prior), Jesus, speaking in Aramaic, proclaims freedom, recovery, release in saying, *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"* (vs. 21). What words! What remarkably good news announced by this rabbi, Jesus. Release from bondage. Freedom established. A future secured. A new kingdom.

We do not know what other words Jesus might have spoken in His sermon, but we do read that His listeners *"spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words"* (vs. 22). Jesus' proclamation of the good news was the announcement of a new kingdom coming. With that comes God's healing and release from bondage, disease, and marginalization.

Multiple times I have heard a man testify in a prison Bible study of his gratefulness for being incarcerated. Recently one man smiled and he said, "Pastor Paul, I've found true freedom and real healin' in this place. Ain't nothin' can take that from me! Nothin'. These walls can't stop me from followin' my Jesus." I don't know how long my friend will remain imprisoned, but I know he lives as a freed man encircled by concrete walls and razor wire. The good news of the risen Christ promises him and us recovery, release, and healing **within** life's often trying situations. We can celebrate that *"today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

FOR REFLECTION:

- *As we approach Resurrection Sunday, take time to list three "freedoms" you have received from Jesus in your walk with Him over the years.*

BY PAUL SINCLAIR

wash my feet

READ JOHN 13:1-17

I love the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. During times of pain and struggle in my life, I have been deeply blessed by those that have followed Jesus' example and have come alongside me, heard my raw pain, and lovingly held my hand and heart. These are the people who have been the hands and feet of Jesus and washed my feet. They have taken the broken pieces and have pointed me back to the healer—they have wiped the dirt off my spiritual feet and helped me to get clean. Sometimes they first had to gently point out the sin in my life that I have overlooked.

Because of Jesus' death on the Cross, He has already paid the penalty for my sin, and when I accepted the gift, I became completely clean from the past sin in my life. But when I, as we all do in this fallen world, give in to my sinful nature and need forgiveness, I need to have just "my feet" cleaned, for my body/soul has already been cleansed by the Holy Spirit when Jesus first asked me to follow Him.

Forgiveness can only be granted through Christ, but our beautiful freedom in Christ is that we do not have to be alone, hidden, or ashamed of the new dirt on our feet or our souls. As believers, we can know that we have been made clean by Christ's sacrifice for us, but we do need to continue to clean our feet as we walk through this broken world and wage our wars with our fleshly desires. Our feet will continue to get dirty, but we do not need to feel ashamed as we welcome in our brothers and sisters to help us wash our feet and share in our pain. This freedom to confess our sins to one another allows us to be real about our struggles and seek healing and victory (James 5:16). God did not intend us to fight this battle alone, but has given us His body here on earth, the church, where we may confess and grow together. While this can feel uncomfortable, as it did for Peter, Jesus says we must have our feet washed, and He calls us to wash each others' feet. Let us strive to be a community that steps into each others' pain and washes each other's feet, and let us embrace the freedom to authentically share our struggles and confess to each other, so that we may follow Christ's example.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *How have you served someone in a time of their pain or brokenness, even when they might not have "deserved" it? How did God use that to humble you and them?*

a gift of grace

READ JOHN 19:16-30

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

There are two movies I distinctly remember sitting in a theater watching in absolute silence, except for the sounds of people sobbing. One was *Saving Private Ryan*, the other was *The Passion of the Christ*. The similar themes of these two movies (someone sacrificing themselves for someone else) are contrasted by important differences.

At the end of *Saving Private Ryan*, Captain John Miller, mortally wounded, pulls Private James Ryan close and with his dying breath tells him, "Earn this." Miller and his squad sacrificed everything to save Ryan, and in that moment, Miller charges him to live a life worthy of that sacrifice. Decades later, an elderly Ryan stands at Captain Miller's grave, struggling with guilt and asking his wife, "Have I been a good man?" He wonders if his life was worthy of the sacrifice of many lives that was made for him, one man.

Contrast that with what Jesus did, as we read in the gospels and illustrated in *The Passion of the Christ*. Unlike Captain Miller's final words, Jesus does not say, "Earn this." Instead, His last words on the Cross were, "*It is finished*" (John 19:30). One man, completely taking the punishment of many.

The sacrifice of Jesus is not something we can earn; it is a gift of grace. While we should live in response to that grace, we do so not out of guilt or obligation, but out of gratitude and love.

At the Cross, justice and mercy met. Our sin demanded punishment, yet Jesus took our place. He bore the wrath we deserved so that we could receive grace. He was forsaken so that we could be forgiven. His suffering became our salvation.

Today, let us pause and remember. The Cross was not just an event in history—it is the very foundation of our faith. It reminds us that sin is serious, but God's love is greater.

FOR REFLECTION:

- *Take time to sit in silence and reflect on the reality of His suffering. Let the Cross stir your heart toward repentance, humility, and worship. And as we anticipate the joy of Easter morning, let us never forget the price that was paid for our redemption.*

"After Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, he died. At that moment the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook. The rocks split."

(Matthew 27:50-51 NIV)

When Jesus was growing up, His parents took Him to the temple, just as your parents take you to church. The temple building, though, was very different from our church building! Inside the temple, there was an inner room called the "Most Holy Place." Only the High Priest could enter this place because it was where God lived on earth—kind of like His throne room. The Most Holy Place was separated from the rest of the temple by a huge, heavy curtain. The curtain had pictures of cherubim—winged, angel-like creatures, woven from red, blue, and purple thread. These colors and pictures reminded the priests of heaven.

The Bible tells us that the moment Jesus died, the curtain was torn in two pieces—from top to bottom! This curtain would have been about 15 feet tall—that's probably twice as high as the ceiling in your home! No human could reach the top of the curtain to tear it apart—this was God's doing!

Later in the Bible we read that Jesus Himself was like the curtain! (See Hebrews 10:19-22.) His body was torn on the Cross, and since He paid for our sins, the way is now open for us to meet with God! We don't need to wait for special days, we don't need the help of a high priest. We can call out to God at any time, knowing that He will hear and answer. Jesus has cleared the path to friendship with our Father God!

LET'S TALK!

- Reread Matthew 27:50-51. If you had been there when Jesus died, how would you have felt seeing and hearing these things?
- What is so amazing about this torn curtain in the temple?

A STEP FURTHER: INTERACTIVE PRAYER.

Use purple, red, and blue crayons to draw a prayer.

- Praise: "I praise you Jesus because you are holy and good". Use the purple crayon to draw a crown, a throne or anything that reminds you of God.
- Confession: "I confess that I have walked away from you, Jesus. I have chosen wrong. I have sinned." Use the red crayon to draw a cross or heart.
- Thanksgiving: "Thank you Jesus for dying for me and making a way to be friends with God." Use the blue crayon to draw the sky or a smile.



PRACTICE: JUBILEE

Each Saturday during Lent, we will take some time as a church family to practice a different spiritual exercise together. Today, we are practicing and learning about jubilee. You may want to begin by reading through the written form in this devotional, or by watching a video of Pastor Nic guiding you through this spiritual practice online at eastbrook.org/LeviticusDevo.

DEFINITION:

As we have read this week, at its core, jubilee is a call to forgive, absolve debts, restore relationships, and give the land a rest as we live into what we anticipate in the future eschaton. Because of this anticipation, we can take pleasure in God and the radically generous nature of God's people, Word, world, and purposes. (Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 4:32; Zephaniah 3:17; Romans 8:20-21).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Where are you most prone to celebrate God? Alone? With others? In worship? In music? In nature? What does this tell you about how God made you and how you most naturally meet with Him?
2. Is there a heaviness about you, an overly serious side or an entrenched critical spirit? How might forgiving others and celebrating God affect these traits and move you into new areas of transformation?
3. When has it been hard for you to forgive someone? What is it like for you to receive forgiveness that mends a relationship? Where are you most longing for things to be made new in your life?
4. How does God view your use of natural resources and your due diligence in taking care of the world He created? Where have you taken for granted God's good gift of creation? What is He asking of you?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES:

- **Consider how God loves you.** Read Zephaniah 3:17, then be still and listen. How is God celebrating you? Celebrate the God who celebrates you. Intentionally ask for the gift of appreciating yourself the way God does.
- **Talk to someone who has lived the reality of forgiving those that hurt them.** Where did they get the courage, will, and power to forgive?
- **In your imagination, sit at the foot of the Cross as Jesus is dying.** Watch Him holding the abuse, rage, and sin of the whole world. Watch how He does not turn it back on those who deserve it. What does this mean to you in your relationships? What step do you need to take?
- **Take a walk in God's beautiful world.** What characteristics of God are revealed in His creation? Commit yourself to stewardship of some earthly resource.

following our king

READ LUKE 24:36-49

In the days leading up to my decision to follow Christ, I was exhausted by the world's empty promises. I had sought meaning, direction, and peace, but found none. In desperation, I prayed to the God I barely understood: "If Jesus is the answer, give me a sign."

I wasn't just looking for forgiveness; I craved clarity, leadership, and comfort. I longed for someone who understood me completely and would still walk with me. I wanted a compassionate king.

To understand Luke 24:36-49 more, read the whole chapter. It helps us step into the disciples' sandals at this moment of revelation. If you haven't already, go ahead and read it—I'll wait.

Now imagine: an empty tomb, whispered testimonies, the astonishment of Peter. Then suddenly—Boom!—Jesus appears in their midst.

Throughout Scripture, angels often preface their messages with, "*Do not be afraid.*" But Jesus greets them differently: "*Peace be with you.*" Shalom. There's a vast difference between fearlessness and peace. The Prince of Peace stood among them, offering a familiar greeting—a phrase they had heard from His lips countless times. Was it the sound of His voice, the way He said it, that made them truly recognize Him?

As they struggle to process this, Jesus does something incredibly mundane—He asks for food and eats in their presence. Remember, He instructed food be given to Jairus' daughter after raising her from the dead. Resurrection, it seems, is hungry work.

Jesus wasn't only proving He physically exists. He was normalizing the truth: His suffering, death, and resurrection weren't accidents or afterthoughts—they were exactly what Scripture foretold. His crucifixion was His coronation. The world mocked Him with a crown of thorns, but in God's plan, the last became first, and the suffering servant became the reigning King.

Now, as His followers, we are called to more than just forgiveness of our sins. The compassionate King is inviting us into His kingdom, to obey His commands, and to proclaim His gospel (Matthew 28:19-20). Easter means the kingdom of heaven is here, now, and the King invites you to join in!

FOR REFLECTION:

- *What does Jesus' resurrection mean for your daily life and faith journey?*
- *How is God calling you to proclaim His kingdom in light of all Jesus commanded us to do?*



AN EASTER STORY BASED ON MATTHEW 27.

“Sir,” the Temple leaders faced Pontius Pilate, “we remember what this liar Jesus told his followers—that after three days he would rise again. If you don’t secure his tomb, his followers will steal his body and claim that he has risen from the dead!”

Yesterday, my fellow soldiers and I were ordered to crucify three men, the most popular being this Jesus—a man who some believed to be the promised Savior. But, the Temple leaders—the ones who really know about these religious things—claimed that Jesus was just spreading dangerous lies. After he died, a man named Joseph took Jesus’ body and placed it in his own family tomb.

Pilate agreed with the Temple leaders, “You may be right. I’ll send over some guards, and they’ll do their best to secure the tomb.” With Pilate’s order, we chose a few more men, and marched to the tomb. We stretched tight cords around the stone closing the entrance to the tomb, and over those cords, we placed some soft clay. We pressed the governor’s signet ring, the stamp of the Roman empire, into the soft clay. This made it official. No one will dare to come near the tomb now!

Night fell, and we took turns standing guard over the tomb entrance. Hour after hour, waiting and watching. It was my turn when the light began to spread across the sky—sunrise. Then I felt it—a rumble underground. “Whoa!” I caught myself on the rocky tomb. The shaking grew stronger and louder.

“What’s happening?” “What’s going on!” The sleeping soldiers jolted awake. Everything began to shake! As rocks were falling from the hillside, I dropped my spear. A blinding light shone in front of me. “Who—who are you?” I sputtered. The man before me was bright like lightning. I shielded my eyes, but only for a second! I felt myself go cold and dizzy. My legs buckled underneath me and everything went dark!

Hours later. I blinked my eyes open. How long have I been lying here? Where is everyone? The tomb . . . Oh no! I scrambled to my feet and turned to look at the tomb. The stone entrance was rolled away, our cords and seal left in the dust. Empty! I peeked inside, and saw the grave-clothes lying where the body should have been.

“Just what we feared—someone has stolen the body!” I thought. Then, I heard a voice from outside: “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as He said.” I turned around to see a man in dazzling white talking to women – the same women I remembered seeing at the crucifixion. Could it be? Could this Jesus really be the Son of God? If he is, then everything has changed! I need to know more! I looked around. The women had gone, but I grabbed my things and followed their footsteps. I had to find Jesus myself!

Prayer: Jesus, You are risen indeed! And because You are, everything has changed! Death is not final. You make all the sad things untrue! And you make everything new again—even us! Praise you, Jesus! Amen.

special thanks

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