

A background image featuring a mosaic of two figures, likely Mary and Joseph, rendered in a style reminiscent of stained glass or mosaic art. The figures are wearing robes with vibrant, multi-colored geometric patterns in shades of blue, red, yellow, and green. They are set against a dark, textured background that looks like straw or dry grass. The figure on the right is taller and appears to be holding a staff or a long object. The figure on the left is smaller and is looking towards the right.

# Today

Nov/Dec 2025

refresh, refocus, renew

## THE GREATEST STORY

ALSO: JOY IN LEVITICUS

Dear Friends:

The Old Testament book of Leviticus is filled with regulations about foods, fluids, rules for priests, and the offering of sacrifices. But how does Leviticus speak to us today? In November, Pastor Rob Toornstra leads us through passages in Leviticus showing that, in the light of Jesus Christ, the entire book comes alive. As we explore Leviticus, we discover the joy revealed in the greatest priest and most important offering of all: Jesus Christ, our Savior.



Do you enjoy the Christmas season? For many of us, the highlight of the year comes in December when we celebrate Christmas. Colorful decorations, family traditions, cheerful songs and hymns, good food, and gift-sharing spark our memories and delight our senses as we enjoy this time of the year. Sometimes, though, the delights of the season overshadow the real meaning of Christmas: the coming of Jesus Christ to set us free from sin and the power of death. In December, Pastor Joel VandeWerken digs into the important details of the Christmas story given to us in the Bible. As we study this story and consider many of the people in it, we'll gain a renewed understanding and refreshed wonder of the Word becoming flesh in this greatest story of all time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

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**"Joy in Leviticus"**  
**Rob Toornstra**



**"The Greatest Story"**  
**Joel Vande Werken**

TODAY (USPS 185-140), Volume 75, Number 6, published bimonthly by ReFrame Ministries, formerly Back to God Ministries International, at 300 East Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208. Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Today, 300 East Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208.

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**ReFrame**  
Ministries

is the new name of  
Back to God Ministries International

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# november

## Joy in Leviticus

**Rob Toornstra**

In our devotions this month we'll focus mainly on passages in the Bible book of Leviticus.

Leviticus can seem intimidating, even for seasoned readers of the Bible. With its many regulations about food, fluids, and flesh; instructions about slaughtering animals; guidelines for priests; and rules for making all kinds of offerings in worship to God—this book might not seem very relevant to us today. However, as we read Leviticus through the lens of Jesus' life and work, we find that an awe-inspiring picture of the Savior comes into focus.

Join us this month as we explore how Leviticus points God's people to the greatest priest and the most important offering of all—our Lord Jesus Christ!

Rob Toornstra has served as the pastor of Sunnyslope Christian Reformed Church in Salem, Oregon, since 2005. In addition to his pastoral responsibilities, he serves with International Theological Education Ministries, teaching pastors around the globe how to be effective preachers. He and his wife, Amy, have three children, and they enjoy all that the Pacific Northwest has to offer.

## LONGING FOR BEAUTY, FILLED BY GOD

... The glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

—Exodus 40:34

I realize that you might be thinking, “Leviticus? Uh-oh.” In the book of Leviticus we find rules about skin infections, bodily fluids, religious festivals, and animal sacrifices. Is the book of Leviticus even relevant for us today?

To understand the purpose of Leviticus, we need to start with the scene in today’s reading. The tabernacle, a tent-like structure that served as a portable temple, was a beautifully designed space where God came to be present among his people. It became God’s dwelling place, where the beauty of God’s presence came to fill his people with joy and peace.

We are created with a longing for beauty deep in our souls. This longing stirs when we see a beautiful sunset, listen to uplifting music, make an exciting discovery, or taste food that delights our tastebuds. But our

longing for beauty cannot be satisfied until we realize that beauty always points us to its source: God himself!

Out in the desert long ago, God’s glory must have left the people awestruck. The author of all that is good and right came to live among his people even in the wilderness.

Many years later the presence of God returned when Jesus, God’s Son, came and “tabernacled among us” (John 1:14, literal translation). Jesus came to save us from sin and fill us with new life so that we can have joy and peace with God forever. By faith in Christ, we can have a relationship with God that fills the deepest longings of our heart.

Glorious God, thank you for the beauty of your love, salvation, and new life in Christ! Amen.

## THE DANGER OF BEAUTY

Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it. . . .  
—Exodus 40:35

I first approached the Grand Canyon while holding the hand of my two-year-old son, Derek. He was energetic and loved exploring the world around him with little concern for potential harm. As the south rim came into view, I experienced two emotions at the same time. I was stunned by the beauty before me. Creation reflects the glory of the Creator! At the same time, I felt genuine fear: one misstep, or one reckless move from my son, and the worst might happen! In a way, the very grandeur of the Grand Canyon made it dangerous.

The tabernacle was like that in some ways too. It filled the people with joy and awe in the majesty of God's presence. But as the cloud of God's presence descended, a danger emerged. God's glorious presence is so holy that nothing impure or imperfect can be there with

him. Even Moses had to be careful, for God had said, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:20).

We face a similar problem. We may long for God's presence, but because of our sinful nature we are imperfect. But, thankfully for us, God has provided a way for people to live in his presence. His Son, Jesus, came to stand in for us, even giving up his own life to pay the debt for our sin, so that we can be declared right with God (Romans 3-4)! And now, because of Jesus' finished work, we can be made new and enjoy life with God forever.

Lord Jesus, you took on our guilt and sin so that we can live in God's presence. Hallelujah! Deepen in us a longing to live for you each day. Amen.

## THE LORD CALLS AND INVITES

The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him. . . . He said, "Speak to the Israelites and say. . . ." —Leviticus 1:1-2

Yesterday we saw how God's perfect holiness meant that even Moses, whom God had specially chosen, had to be careful about approaching the Lord. How then could the people themselves have fellowship with God?

In the opening verses of Leviticus, we see that God speaks first, inviting the people into relationship with him. And God sets the terms.

Maybe we imagine that we can decide how to relate with God. For example, some people suppose that living a highly moral life earns God's acceptance. Others downplay the seriousness of sin. But these approaches are woefully inadequate, failing to take God and his holiness seriously—not to mention the fact that we are all sinful and cannot even approach God unless he makes a way possible for us.

God's presence will come into our lives, changing every part of us—our relationships, our work, our desires, our priorities, and our whole outlook on life. But we enter God's presence on *his* terms.

God appointed Moses to teach the people what was needed to live in God's presence at that time. Centuries later, God spoke his word again—and "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Jesus is God's Word to us, and he came to teach and save us so that when we look to him in faith, God's life-changing presence enters our lives!

Holy and awesome God, you are present with us always! We thank you for Jesus, who makes it possible for us to live each day in your presence. Amen.

## DEALING WITH OUR GUILT

“You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you.”  
—Leviticus 1:4

I'm not proud of this, but I'm a recovering guilt-denier. When confronted with something that I've done wrong, my first reaction is to deny, argue, or even blame others. Many of us do that. Others, however, absorb guilt and get stuck in shame and self-loathing. Still others take their cues from our feel-good culture and deny that there's anything wrong with us to begin with. But our conscience won't let us off so easily. Deep down, we all have a nagging awareness that we fall short, even of our own standards.

God offers a better alternative. In the opening chapters of Leviticus we find pictures of hope and forgiveness. Each offering of a type of animal or food served a different purpose, and each sacrifice could be different, depending on a family's income. The burnt

offering dealt with the people's fundamental problem of guilt. The person laid their hand on a bull, a sheep, or a bird, and the animal would be killed in place of its family. In this way the penalty for sin would be covered, and the offering would make “an aroma pleasing to the Lord,” signifying God's favor and blessing.

Of course, as Hebrews 10:4 explains, “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Those offerings illustrated that Jesus, the Lamb of God, would eventually become the ultimate sacrifice for us. Jesus' death was an offering pleasing to God, and now God's favor shines on us!

Merciful God, we rejoice in the forgiveness you extend to us in Christ, our Savior! Amen.



## NO TUBE STEAK

“If your offering is a fellowship offering . . . you are to present . . . an animal without defect.” —Leviticus 3:1

When I was growing up, our family would often grill meat for our meals in the summer. My parents enjoyed grilled steak, but it didn't seem sensible to use choice meat for four young kids who didn't appreciate a sirloin. So instead they put “tube steak” on the barbecue just for us. We were satisfied until we learned that tube steaks were just hot dogs!

It's one thing to use a lesser kind of meat when feeding a large family, but it's quite another to try to pass off less than our best to God. In Leviticus 3 God spells out the requirements for fellowship offerings. These sound similar to the rules for burnt offerings (Leviticus 1), but the fellowship offering illustrated the joy of living in a peaceful relationship with God. God's desire was to draw his people into relationship with himself. So, as the holy and true God, he called

for receiving animals without blemish or defect. In addition, with these offerings the people had to separate and offer all of the fat portions to the Lord. Why? Because the fat was considered the choicest part of the animal, and that was to be dedicated to God.

Romans 12 expands on this idea, noting that our response to God's mercy is to offer the best that we have: our very selves! Do we offer God our very best? When we give of our time, talents, and treasure, do we give God our best, or the leftovers? In view of God's mercy, let's offer God the very best of all we have!

O Lord, you have made us your sons and daughters! May we honor you by joyfully giving our best to you! In Jesus, Amen.

## SITTING DOWN TO DINNER

“And from it he shall offer one loaf from each offering, as a gift to the LORD.”  
—Leviticus 7:14

When my daughter graduated from basic training for the U.S. Army, our family traveled to South Carolina to celebrate with her. Having eaten only Army food for three months, she was eager to try some of the famous local barbecue options. Friends who lived nearby recommended a restaurant, and when we opened the door, we took in the mouth-watering aromas of pork and beef, slow-cooked for hours.

I think the Lord's tabernacle must have smelled like that. Bulls, sheep, and birds were constantly being offered and burned on the altar. And when a family brought an offering with thanks, they were also to bring loaves of bread and oil. The food was shared with the priests so that they could eat too, and everyone was mindful that God himself was enjoying the same meal! In ancient Israel, sharing a meal was a way

to nurture relationships with one another. And in South Carolina we talked and laughed as friends and family enjoyed pulled pork, ribs, and smoked brisket.

Is your relationship with Christ as personal and intimate as a shared meal with close friends? Some of us imagine God as being cold and aloof. But God invites us to the intimacy of a dinner table. One of the places we experience this most clearly is at the Lord's table, where Jesus himself feasts with us and deepens our relationship with him and his church. May we deepen the fellowship we enjoy with God, in Christ!

Lord God, thank you for inviting us to feast and enjoy fellowship with you! Nourish us in your grace and deepen our relationship with you. Amen.

**“BUT I DIDN’T KNOW!”**

“If any member of the community sins unintentionally . . . and they realize their guilt . . . the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven.”

—Leviticus 4:27, 31

Rachel pulled Jon into her office to address his work performance. “Some of our clients have complained that you have come across as cold and unfriendly lately,” she said. “If this doesn’t change, we may have to evaluate your future with our company.” She didn’t know that Jon was going through a divorce and caring for his ailing mother. If she had known those things, she may have taken a gentler approach.

Sometimes we can hurt our neighbor or grieve God without even realizing it. For example, we can make a comment that is racially insensitive. We can donate to a cause that we later learn is not worthy of support. We can hurt people with unkind remarks or act impatiently when we are frustrated and tired. And although we might like to plead ignorance,

that doesn’t mean we are not responsible for our actions.

Yet God graciously provides the remedy not only for our known sins but also for the ones we aren’t aware of. And today we have what Israel did not have: a better priest, who brings a better sacrifice! Jesus’ death on the cross pays for all our sins—once for all. All of our hurtful words, sinful thoughts, and insensitive actions that have not measured up to God’s standard are forgiven, even if we are not aware of them!

Lord, you see much more than we do, and yet your mercy is unfathomable! Thank you that in Jesus you remove our guilt so that we may be at peace with you. Amen.

## MAKING RESTITUTION

“When they . . . realize their guilt, they must . . . make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner. . . .”  
—Leviticus 6:4-5

Recently a jeweler in my city was sentenced to 20 years in prison for defrauding customers. When people brought in their rings for cleaning, he had swapped fake diamonds for their authentic ones, which he then sold. Over the years, he netted over a half-million dollars that way.

Perhaps you have been victimized by a scam like that.

Or maybe you have been dishonest. Maybe you sold a car without disclosing its problems. Or you found someone's wallet but made no effort to return it. Or maybe you dented a stranger's car and drove off without leaving your insurance information.

Defrauding or exploiting others tears at the fabric of society by damaging our ability to trust others. In addition, such acts are also sins against God: “If

anyone sins and is unfaithful to the LORD by deceiving a neighbor about something. . . .”

Thankfully, God provides a solution. Jesus' death atones for our guilt, ensuring that our fellowship with God is not broken. God also graciously points us to a way of reconciliation with people we have wronged. Restitution is a way to make things right with our neighbor. We are urged to repay what we have taken, plus an added amount to compensate for loss.

Is there a relationship with someone in your life that needs repair? What will you do to make things right?

Lord Jesus, thank you for paying the price to make us right with God; help us also to take steps to make things right with others. In your name, Amen.

## SOMEONE IN YOUR CORNER

[Moses] put the tunic on Aaron, tied the sash around him, clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him.

—Leviticus 8:7

A middle-school student asked why I was studying for eight years to be “ordained.” I explained that the church ordains ministers for special duties, like raising their hands to give the blessing in church. He wasn’t impressed. “That’s a long time to go to school just to be able to raise your hands,” he said.

In Leviticus 8 God gives instructions for ordaining Aaron and his sons to serve as priests. The priests’ clothing indicated the privilege and responsibility they bore. Priestly garments were purple and gold, matching the colors of the tabernacle, because the priests performed special duties for the Lord. The high priest’s turban was inscribed with the words “Holy to the LORD” (Exodus 28:36), indicating special service to God. On the ephod—a kind of vest—were 12 stones, one for each tribe of Israel.

God’s people would see these stones and remember that the high priest carried their tribe close to his heart and lifted them up in prayer to God.

It’s even better for us! Hebrews 7:23-28 assures us that Jesus, our ultimate High Priest, continually lifts us up before God and holds us near to his heart. When grief or sadness weigh us down, Jesus is lifting us up! When Satan nags us about repeated failures, Jesus’ Spirit reminds us that his righteousness covers all our sin. When we don’t know how or what to pray for, Jesus prays on our behalf before the Lord Almighty!

Lord Jesus, we thank and praise you for being our perfect priest. Thank you for representing us, O Savior and King! Amen.

## THE SMILE OF GOD

Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them.  
—Leviticus 9:22

Our culture is obsessed with happiness. We seek joy in wealth, in our careers, in sports and leisure, and in a host of other things. Books have been written; research conducted; podcasts, movies, and TV shows produced—all promising a way to contentment. Yet soul-satisfying joy remains out of reach. Worldly happiness is fleeting at best, and it fails to deliver on its lofty promises.

That's because we are created to find our deepest joy in a relationship with God. But our sin keeps us apart from God. How can we be restored to the joy of God's presence?

As a representative of the people to God, the high priest offered sacrifices for the people's sins. But today's reading shows that the priest also represented God to the people. After completing the sacrifices, Aaron the high priest raised his hands and

pronounced God's blessing on the people. God accepted the offerings and—through Aaron—spoke a word of grace and comfort to his people.

This word of grace is for us too! After his resurrection, Jesus turned to his disciples, "lifted up his hands and blessed them" (Luke 24:50). God had accepted the sacrifice of Jesus' life and death, so, as our great High Priest, Jesus could speak on God's behalf and pronounce favor on us. Because of Jesus, God turns his face toward us, and the light of his smile shines on us and gives us peace (see Numbers 6:22-26). There is no greater happiness!

Father, when your people saw your glory, they fell facedown and worshiped you. As you smile on us, may we too offer ourselves in worship. Amen.

## THE ANGER OF GOD

“[God] said: ‘Among those who approach me I will be proved holy; . . . I will be honored.’” —Leviticus 10:3

On my first day of work at a McDonald's restaurant, my cash drawer was short 10 dollars, and my manager wrote me up, leaving me worried about keeping my job. But I was not afraid of being struck dead. We've all made mistakes and had some rough days at work, so we might wonder why Nadab and Abihu were struck dead when they began to work as priests. What went wrong?

Nadab and Abihu's sin was not just a minor oversight or a misstep. After God had given detailed instructions about the priests' responsibilities, Aaron's sons ignored God's rules in favor of their own. This is a pattern as old as the human race; sin begins when we decide we know better than God does. But God is holy, and we are not free to improvise our own ways of approaching or relating to God. Tragically, just as

“fire came out” and consumed the offering brought by Aaron (Leviticus 9), fire came out against Nadab and Abihu and consumed them. Even Aaron was silent in response, likely indicating that he accepted God's judgment—though he must have felt deep sorrow.

Must we fear the same today? In all of history only one priest, Jesus, was flawless and worthy to enter God's presence. And when he did that for our sake, he took the wrath of God upon himself as it broke out against him—in our place. But this is good news for us! Jesus' sacrifice covered all our sin so that we never need to fear God's judgment.

Holy God, it's difficult for us to understand your holiness. Thank you for giving us Jesus so that we can be forgiven. Amen.

## FOODS, FLUIDS, AND FLESH

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"  
—Matthew 8:3

Rules in Leviticus about skin diseases and rashes may not make for the most comfortable reading—especially if we are reading this at mealtime. And there is a lot more here about things that made an Israelite “clean” or “unclean.” This section of Leviticus includes all kinds of requirements about foods, bodily fluids, and sacrifices. These commands describe whether a person was fit for participating in worship as a part of God’s people.

These laws didn’t necessarily say that a person had committed a sin, though. Rather, the person had come into contact with something that made them ritually unclean—usually a bodily fluid, a certain kind of animal, or a skin disease. When a person was “defiled,” steps were needed to restore purity—usually bathing, waiting for a period of time, and bringing an offering. An un-

clean person also had to take care not to touch other people because that would spread the uncleanness. These laws reminded the people that God desired holiness in all areas of life. From eating food to having children to taking care of one’s body, God’s call to holiness was always in view.

Yet people could not make themselves holy. Only a priest declared whether that was so.

And this is vitally good news for us. When Jesus healed people, their impurities flowed to him, and his purity flowed to them. In the great reversal that makes God’s salvation possible for us through Jesus, we are made pure once for all!

Lord Jesus, thank you that although we are not holy, you make us clean by taking our impurities away. Amen!



## WHAT DO YOU DO WITH YOUR GUILT?

“This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites.”

—Leviticus 16:34

When I was 12 years old, I told my father a lie—and I soon found that I had to tell more lies just to keep the first lie going. It felt like something ugly had taken over my soul, and I couldn't get rid of it. That was guilt, and most of us learn at a young age how destructive it can be. Guilt festers in our soul; it can wear us down, even physically; and it can erode our relationships. Guilt is related to a moral standard, and since we fall short of God's standard, we all live with guilt.

Leviticus 16 is the thematic center of God's law. The Day of Atonement illustrated how God would remove the guilt of all his people. Because sin contaminated the community and everyone in it, the priest made atonement for his own sin, his family's sin, and the sins of all the people; then he did the same for the tabernacle, since

it was contaminated by the people's uncleanness.

Two goats were chosen. One was killed, and its blood was poured out to signify that the penalty of death was paid. The other goat became the scapegoat and was sent out into the wilderness.

But the Day of Atonement ritual couldn't deal fully with our guilt. No sacrifice of animals could truly pay our debt. But when Jesus cried out on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30)—the price for our sin was paid once for all! When we confess our sin, we can be assured that Jesus has atoned for us and that our guilt no longer counts against us!

Gracious God, in Jesus' name we confess our sins and ask for your forgiveness. Thank you! Amen.

## WHAT DO YOU DO WITH YOUR SHAME?

"The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness."

—Leviticus 16:22

Limburger cheese has a smell that is sometimes compared to sweaty feet. Even worse, the smell can linger long after the cheese is gone!

Similarly, shame can linger long after our sin has been dealt with. Shame is a result of the voice of Satan whispering into our heart that we are not good enough. When we fail in a project at work or do poorly on an exam, shame makes us feel we are worthless. When we give in to temptation, or make a parenting mistake, or let our spouse down, shame implies that our failures define us. We try to work harder, chase status symbols, and make ourselves too busy, but nothing can cover the shame we feel.

In today's reading about the scapegoat, we see that this goat was not slaughtered. Instead

the people's sins were symbolically transferred to that goat, and it was released into the wilderness, never to be seen again. The message was clear. God not only covers the guilt of his people but also removes the effects of sin—including shame—from their lives.

Jesus, serving as our scapegoat, has carried our sin away so that it is never seen again. This means that when we hear Satan's accusations, we need only to look to the Savior and remember that God, the one person who could actually accuse us, has declared that in Jesus our sins are gone forever!

Lord and God, thank you for removing not only our guilt but also our shame. Help us to know and trust that we are fully forgiven in Jesus' name. Amen.

## THE GIFT OF LIFE FROM A GRACIOUS KING

"The life of a creature is in the blood. . . ."

—Leviticus 17:11

We have about 30 trillion blood cells moving through about 60,000 miles of blood vessels in our bodies. And if we lose more than 40 percent of our blood, our life will be at serious risk. The words of Leviticus 17:11 are true: "The life of a creature is in the blood."

Many of our readings in Leviticus this month have mentioned something about blood. Leviticus 17 explains why. First, blood is treated with respect because it represents life, and life is a gift from God. Our culture may emphasize that we should do as we please in life. But because life is God's gift to us, God is the rightful authority over our lives. For this reason Israel was called to safeguard the well-being of God's creatures. We must value and protect all life against needless harm and death.

The shedding of blood also

symbolized how one life was given in exchange for another. Blood was God's gift for making atonement, showing that sin was serious and would lead to being cut off from God and his people.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus explained how his blood would be poured out, and his life given, for us (Luke 22:20). Though we are guilty, Jesus was cut off from his Father and his people so that we could be restored to the joy of God's presence. God not only requires a sacrifice as payment for our sin, but he also provides it through Jesus!

Lord Jesus, your blood was poured out so that we can have full, eternal life! Though we cannot repay you for this gift, help us to live in thankfulness to you. Amen.

## SANCTIFIED SEXUALITY

“You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you.” —Leviticus 18:3

Our culture today is immersed in sex. Many advertisements use suggestive messaging to promote fast food, clothing, video games, and more. Streaming services allow viewers to watch provocative scenes on demand. Sex is presented as bringing ultimate joy and fulfillment.

Leviticus teaches us how the Lord's presence transforms every part of our lives. God's presence shapes the boardroom, the family room, the classroom, and, yes, the bedroom.

While our culture's moral compass is set by individual desire, God calls his people to look to him and his Word. Since God liberated us from slavery to sin, we must not become enslaved again by sinful desires. Anyone who has struggled with sexual temptation or sin can testify to the way it can imprison us.

Instead of indulging in an “anything-goes” approach to sex, we are to honor God's design for sexuality by enjoying it in the context of marriage between a husband and wife.

While this message may seem outdated or restrictive, God's Word leads us to true enjoyment and flourishing. Sexual sin promises excitement but leaves us feeling empty and ashamed. Jesus has graciously paid the penalty for our sin and removed our shame so that we can live into the full enjoyment of all that God intends for us. May we live free from the slavery of sin and instead delight in living out all parts of our life in the joyful presence of God!

God, help us to live in the freedom you have won for us in Jesus. Amen.

## THE GIFT OF REST

"You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the LORD."  
—Leviticus 23:3

Our culture tends to wear busyness like a badge of honor. We work long hours; we juggle family, church, and school responsibilities; and we take our work with us when we go on vacation. When people ask us how we're doing, though exhausted, we take pride in sighing, "Busy!" We need to ask, "Are we doing all this just to be seen, valued, and affirmed?"

Leviticus 23 opens a section about feasts and festivals that God called his people to observe. These events created a sense of rhythm and structure for God's people, and the first of these was the weekly Sabbath. Every seven days, the people were to set their work aside and rest. As noted in Exodus 20:8-11, resting reminded Israel that God, not their labor, sustained the world, and Deuteronomy 5:12-15 made clear that God, not their labor, was their salvation.

Today most Christians observe Sunday as their day of rest and worship. Why? Because Jesus, who rose on the first day of the week, gives us a greater rest than the people of Israel had in the time of Leviticus. Jesus' death and resurrection mean that the work of perfect obedience has been completed; he has provided the rest that our souls long for. In Jesus we are free from the relentless work of trying to earn our worth and to live as if we bear the weight of the world on our shoulders.

Are you weary and burdened? Jesus invites you to find rest in him. Set aside time this week to enjoy the rest and worship that God graciously gives us.

Lord, you invite us to find in you the only true rest that can satisfy our souls. Help us to enjoy the rest you provide. Amen.

**SPARE ME!**

“Tell your son, ‘I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’” —Exodus 13:8

Many people would rather avoid talking or thinking much about death, but the Bible is straightforward about this problem—and about God’s promises and acts of deliverance. The feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread reminded God’s people about his care and salvation for them.

For the Passover feast, families chose a lamb that was free of defects, and it was slaughtered in memory of Israel’s rescue from slavery in Egypt. Many years earlier, the king of Egypt had refused to set the Israelites free, so the Lord sent a plague of death on the land. But in every Israelite house marked by lamb’s blood on the doorposts, the plague would not enter. The plague “passed over” those homes, but death came to the firstborn sons in all the other households in Egypt, and the king finally let the Israelites go free (Exodus 12).

This event pointed to Jesus’ sacrifice many years later as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Though Jesus was blameless and without sin, he gave his own life as a sacrifice so that all of God’s people, who believe in him, can be freed from their slavery to sin and the sentence of eternal death. Now anyone who takes shelter behind the shed blood of Jesus is spared—and freed to enjoy new life in him!

Thanks be to God for bringing us out of death into life, so that if we are in Christ, nothing but the shadow of death will fall on us, and we will be spared its full effect!

Jesus, thank you for taking on the judgment of death for our sake. May we live each day in gratitude to you! Amen.

## LEAVENED BREAD

Let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. —1 Corinthians 5:8

For one week some years ago, I owned all the bread in the Jewish community in Salem, Oregon, where I live. When local Jewish families celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread, they did so not by removing all the yeast from their homes (as their biblical ancestors did) but by signing a contract that gave ownership of all their leavened food to someone else.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was celebrated alongside the Feast of Passover, and it communicated how God had set his people apart as his own. Many years later, the apostle Paul explained to the Corinthians that since “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed,” we are to keep the festival by removing evil from within us and from our Christian communities. Like yeast (leaven), sin has a way of working into our lives until it

taints every part of who we are. An addiction will grip our behavior at home and at work, destroying both in the process. Gossip will erode trust in a community. Greed will poison ambition, turning it into something ruthless instead of productive. Like leaven, sin is pervasive. By removing the leaven from their homes, God’s people were to remember they were redeemed to be holy.

Is sin taking hold in an area of your life? What might it look like to remove that poison from your life? Jesus, our Passover lamb, was sacrificed so that we can be holy. Let’s resolve to live as God’s holy people!

Jesus, we confess that we often find sin alluring. Help us, by the power of your Spirit, to remove sin from our lives. Amen.

## THE BEST IS YET TO COME!

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. —1 Corinthians 15:20

A member of my church was diagnosed recently with terminal cancer. Another family close to me is watching as dementia robs their family member of memories, one at a time. A colleague recently died unexpectedly, leaving behind a dear wife and two children. Daily headlines announce war, disease, and natural disasters. In short, we live in a world marked by death.

The Feast of Firstfruits pointed to a glimmer of hope on the horizon. The people offered God a portion of the first crops of their barley harvest. The offerings were given in gratitude and as an act of trust that God would continue providing for his people. This feast signaled that the first of the crop would lead to more.

On the Sunday after Jesus' death, the sun rose bright on the Feast of Firstfruits. Jesus,

the firstfruits of resurrection, opened his eyes from the sleep of death and walked out of the grave, alive! He was the first, but he will not be the last. All who believe in him will also rise from the grave, brought out of death into life!

To know what we will be like after rising from the grave, we need only look to Jesus. A perfected body and mind. No more dementia, no more cancer, no more Parkinson's, no more depression, no more wearing out of bodies and minds!

The Feast of Firstfruits invites us to trust that Jesus' resurrection was just the beginning—and there is more to come!

Lord of life, comfort and sustain us with the hope that we will join you in resurrection! In your powerful name we pray. Amen.



## POWER TO OBEY

When the day of Pentecost came . . . they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.  
—Acts 2:1-3

Many of us view rules or laws negatively. Speed limits can seem to bog us down, and who wants to pay extra taxes? Even God's law can feel restrictive at times. But, of course, all of these things are important.

The Feast of Weeks—taking place seven weeks after the Feast of Firstfruits (see Nov. 20)—celebrated the wheat harvest, and it became an occasion to thank God for the gift of his law. Yes, that's right—as the Israelites lived in the presence of a holy God, his law taught them how to live in a way that was pleasing to the One who had redeemed them.

Of course, Israel's struggle was that obedience was not just difficult—it was impossible. And the same is true for us. Look back over the past day or so, for example. Have you kept from saying unkind words?

Have you resisted every bitter thought? Have you avoided the subtle sins of greed and impatience? Not one of us can obey God's law perfectly.

On the Feast of Weeks, God sent his Spirit to renew us in terms of celebrating the harvest as well as the law. The Spirit empowers us for the greater harvest that God has prepared, bringing people from every nation into his kingdom! And the Spirit transforms us to act with true obedience from renewed hearts. If you have received Jesus as your Savior, his Holy Spirit is shaping you for mission and obedience!

Father, help us to live with glad obedience to you, in gratitude for all that you have done for us in Jesus. Amen.

## AWAKENING TO GOD'S PRESENCE

"You are to have a day of sabbath rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts." —Leviticus 23:24

Do you ever feel distant from God? Sometimes busyness can crowd out so much of our lives that we forget to spend time with God in prayer or worship. The Feast of Trumpets was designed to reawaken God's people to the beauty of his presence among them.

The Feast of Trumpets occurred toward the end of the agricultural year. For months the people labored under a hot sun to grow food—tilling, planting, pruning, and finally harvesting. But through long days, heavy demands, and the uncertainties of their daily work, it could be easy to lose sight of the God who had come to live among his people. The Feast of Trumpets marked the beginning of the religious year. On this first day of a new year, trumpets blasted throughout the community of God's people, announcing the nearness of God. The unmistakable sound

of the ram's horn called Israel to revival and renewal.

One day we too will hear the unmistakable sound of a trumpet, announcing that Jesus is returning to make his kingdom complete! Amid the busyness of our work, our schooling, or the worries and cares of this world, we can lose sight of the certainty of Jesus' return.

But we are called to be ready for that day! Let us live each day eagerly awaiting and preparing for the clear, triumphant note of the Lord's trumpet call.

Lord Jesus, we are easily distracted, and we can even become apathetic about your return. Wake us again today to the glory and greatness of your presence, while we await that day when you will return. Amen.

## OPEN HOUSE

“Outside the curtain that shields the ark of the covenant law in the tent of meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the LORD from evening to morning, continually.”

—Leviticus 24:3

The tabernacle was the place where God’s presence came to rest among his people, and our passage today brings us into that tentlike structure. Covered with several layers of fabric, the tabernacle was dark inside. So a large solid-gold candlestand was provided to give the priest enough light to perform his duties.

On a deeper level the candlestand communicated that God’s presence was a light amid the darkness of this world. The light of God’s presence shone clearly to draw people into the clarity and safety of his guidance and care.

Later God’s presence moved from the tabernacle (a tent) to the temple (a building)—and then when Jesus came, he declared, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:10), showing

that he, as Lord and God, was even better than the temple lighting! Jesus also said to his followers, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14), and he called them to share his light with everyone.

Today, in a morally and spiritually confused world, Jesus calls us to shine his light. In our work, schools, families, communities, and more, we can shine God’s light to others. But we can only do that by living in a right relationship with the Lord. How will you reflect the light of Jesus today?

Jesus, you are the light this world needs! Thank you for bringing us into the light of your presence, and help us to shine your light wherever we go. In your name, Amen.

## FOOD THAT SATISFIES

“Take the finest flour and bake twelve loaves of bread. . . . Arrange them . . . on the table of pure gold before the LORD.”  
—Leviticus 24:5-6

In the tabernacle there is a table stacked with 12 loaves of bread, representing all of God’s people. The table and the utensils on it are made of pure gold. Since the tabernacle was the place to enjoy fellowship with God, it made sense that there would be a place to sit and eat! But what would God feed his people?

In the *Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis uses food to show how we often hunger for things that cannot satisfy. Young Edmund is swayed to follow an evil witch who promises to give him Turkish delight—only to learn that candy cannot really satisfy him. Many of us hunger for “food” that cannot nourish our souls. We chase after wealth, career success, athletic trophies, and social status, hoping to satisfy the longing in our souls. But these are all just stale bites that leave us hungry.

The bread in the tabernacle is meant to remind us that, just as God nourished Israel with bread and meat in the wilderness (Exodus 16), he will continue to nourish us. The bread God gives us is himself! Jesus had this in mind when he declared, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35)! Looking to Jesus in faith is to feed on him, and he nourishes us in ways that no earthly “food” ever can. In Jesus, we are drawn into fellowship with the God who loves us more than anything, who promises never to leave us, and who removes our sin from us once and for all! That is food that can satisfy.

Father, thank you for filling us with the true bread that can satisfy the longing in our souls. Nourish us each day, we pray. In Christ, Amen.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"Anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD is to be put to death."  
—Leviticus 24:16

This is a difficult story. Two men get into a fight. Tempers flare, and shouting erupts. One of the men invokes God's name as a curse, clearly defying God's command not to blaspheme the Lord. What should be done?

God's name is not for our casual use to express shock or anger or amusement. It's not something we can invoke to support our favorite political or social causes. Of course, we also should be careful about flippantly saying "God told me this or that."

The way we handle God's name shapes the way we view God's character. If we treat God's name as a punchline, we will not take God seriously. If we invoke God's name to prop up our political or social positions, God becomes little more than a good luck charm. But when we use God's name with

reverence and awe, we will find that we honor God—as the Lord deserves. The man in this story failed to see that, and although it's difficult to imagine, he paid the ultimate penalty for his sin.

Many years later, Jesus was (wrongly) accused of blasphemy and was eventually put to death. But what good news for us! Jesus was condemned so that all of our misuse of God's name—every way in which we dishonor God by our words and actions—would be forgiven. Now God graciously entrusts his name to us so that we may call upon it for salvation!

Lord Jesus, help us to honor the sanctity of your name in the way we speak and live. May we only use your name to glorify you. Amen.

## AN EYE FOR AN EYE

"I tell you, do not resist an evil person."

—Matthew 5:39

Have you ever wanted revenge? Maybe a colleague stole credit for your hard work, or you were blamed for someone else's wrongdoing. Or if someone hurt you with their words or actions, it's natural to want to even the score. We rarely stop there, however; usually we want revenge plus interest. This can lead to a vicious cycle that can tear apart families, fracture communities, and even destroy nations.

Today's passage in Leviticus applies the law from the story we read yesterday, and it reminds us of two things. First, all who are part of God's covenant people are bound by the requirements of the covenant, whether they were born into God's people or not. Justice applies to everyone. And, second, God's law limits what we may seek from people who have wronged us: "an eye for an eye" (and no more). For

example, if you injure or kill your neighbor's animal, they may take one of your animals from you, but not two. Justice, properly practiced, has limits.

Jesus, however, challenges us further—to extend kindness even to people who have hurt us. In fact, that's what God has done for us! Rather than treat us as our sins deserve by demanding our life from us, the Lord extends mercy to us in Christ, who gave up his own life for our sake. When we see how God has gone the extra mile to show us mercy, we can "turn . . . the other cheek" to people who have wronged us.

Gracious God, though we have sinned, you have answered with mercy, and we are eternally thankful. Help us to live by your way of mercy toward everyone. In Jesus, Amen.

## FREEDOM!

“Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land.” —Leviticus 25:18

Homelessness is a growing problem in my city, and the causes are many: poverty, addiction, mental illness, poor personal choices, and more. All of these can be tied to the cosmic problem of sin—the effects of sin leech into every nook of society, wreaking social, psychological, and spiritual havoc everywhere.

This was also the case in ancient Israel. Generational debt could cripple a family, forcing them to sell long-held family land, or even forcing a family into a kind of slavery. But then every 50 years, the trumpet would sound, and social and economic burdens would be rolled back. During the year of Jubilee, land debts were erased, property was restored, and the people were to rest from their labors, trusting in God to provide everything they needed. Does this sound idealistic? In a way, it was.

There is no record in the Bible that Israel ever celebrated the Year of Jubilee. The law commanded it, and prophets proclaimed it, but the people may never have enjoyed the blessings of this great gift from God.

When Jesus began his ministry, he read from Isaiah 61 and declared a new Jubilee. His work on the cross would deal with the problems of our world at the deepest level—he would pay the penalty for sin and destroy the devil’s work in this world. Because of Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection, Jubilee is possible—and one day, when he returns, it will be realized fully for all who trust in him!

Lord Jesus, thank you for all you have done to free us from sin. Help us to live in the hope of your Jubilee. Amen.

## PAYING OFF A DEBT

“One of their relatives may redeem them: An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in their clan may redeem them.”  
—Leviticus 25:48-49

A friend asked, “Why can’t God just forgive our sins without the cross?” Why did Jesus have to suffer and give up his life for us? The answer is in today’s reading. When a family’s crop failed for years in a row, they might have to sell property, or even a family member, to satisfy debts that could pile up (Leviticus 25:23-55). Fortunately God’s law allowed other family members to pay off their debts, releasing them from their obligations.

These laws show how we can owe a debt that we cannot repay. If someone hurts me, either I will try to make *them* pay by inflicting harm on them, or else *I* will pay by absorbing the cost. Likewise, when we violate God’s law, we create a debt that someone must pay, and either we or God will have to pay it. Jesus explains this in Mark 10:45 when he says,

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus not only pays our ransom; he *becomes* the ransom. His suffering and death are the payment for our debt!

This means we are now free! Years ago, a young family was buried under crippling debt—medical bills, unexpected car repairs, a mortgage, and student loans. When a charitable organization paid off their debt, their entire present and future changed! In comparison, Jesus has done so much more—saving all who believe in him to live with him forever!

Lord Jesus, we are eternally thankful for all you have done for us. May we live faithfully in the freedom you have won for us. Amen.



## THE GOOD LIFE

"If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops. . . ." —Leviticus 26:3

When we are living in a right relationship with God, we can be assured of his blessing and favor. Our text in Leviticus today describes material, social, and economic favor that God gave his people as they lived in a right relationship with him.

Many of us experience similar blessings. Our cupboards are filled with plenty for us to eat. We enjoy success in our work and stability in our homes and families. But even when that isn't the case, we can count on God's spiritual care. God keeps his promises to us and is always with us (see Matthew 28:20).

We do well to remember always, though, that we are called to walk in obedience to God. While this cannot earn God's love for us or earn us salvation, we experience more fully our enjoyment of God when we strive to walk in his

ways. Walking with God fills us with joy and delight in his presence.

There is no greater blessing than to live each day with the Lord, who loves us more than we can imagine (Ephesians 3:16-21). In Leviticus, God reminds his people that he redeemed them in order to live among them. This is true for us today as well! At the cross, Jesus freed us from our slavery and guilt in sin so that we can walk with him, delighting in his presence and living with thankfulness each day for him.

Father, you have redeemed us to be your treasured possession. Help us to live in gratitude to you each day. Show us the joy of obedience to you! In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

## THE WAY HOME AGAIN

"For their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors. . . . I am the LORD."  
—Leviticus 26:45

In Jesus' parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11-24) we read of a young man who leaves home to seek adventures in wild living. Soon, however, his money runs out, and his life begins to unravel.

Leviticus pointed God's people to the joy of his presence in their lives. Yet in spite of all God had done to make it possible for them to live with him, God knew they would soon go looking for joy elsewhere. They would find his laws too burdensome, and they would spiral again into sin. The first part of our reading today warned the people that disobedience would lead to punishment and the withholding of God's blessings. God's aim in all this was not to inflict pain but to break down pride and stubbornness.

Thankfully, God does not give up on his wayward children.

God remembers his covenant promises, and he restores all who repent and ask for forgiveness. Perhaps you too have wandered away, and you have faced the consequences of sin in your own life. Perhaps your relationship with God is a long-past memory, and your present life is a mess.

The young man in Jesus' parable returns home, sorry for his wrongdoing, and he is surprised to be welcomed back with joy and grace by his loving father. Through faith in Jesus, we are guaranteed an even greater welcome home to our Father's love!

Lord and God, thank you that, because of Jesus, we may come home to our true home with you! We thank and praise you for your kind mercy to us in Christ. Amen.



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