



# Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action  
in the community of Cornton

# Through the Bible

Exodus  
Nehemiah  
2Chronicles Luke  
Acts 2Timothy 2Peter  
Zephaniah  
Ecclesiastes  
1Timothy Joshua  
Psalms James  
Isaiah  
Titus  
Daniel  
Hebrews  
Zechariah  
1Samuel 2Corinthians  
Malachi  
Philemon  
Job  
1Kings  
Ruth  
Jonah  
Jeremiah  
Romans  
1Chronicles  
2Thessalonians  
1Thessalonians  
Deuteronomy  
Ephesians  
Numbers  
Mark  
1Corinthians  
Judges  
Leviticus  
Jude  
3John  
Hosea  
Haggai  
Genesis  
Colossians  
Micah  
Amos  
2John  
Joel  
Nahum  
SongsofSongs  
Lamentations  
Ezekiel  
1Peter  
John  
Ezra  
2Samuel  
Matthew  
Habakkuk  
Revelation  
Philippians  
Esther  
Obadiah  
Proverbs  
1John  
Ezra  
Leviticus  
1Corinthians  
Judges  
Deuteronomy  
Ephesians  
Numbers  
Mark  
1Peter  
John  
Ezra  
2Samuel  
Matthew  
Habakkuk  
Revelation  
Philippians  
1John  
Proverbs  
Obadiah  
Esther  
Haggai  
Hosea  
3John  
Jude  
Genesis  
Colossians  
Micah  
Amos  
2John  
Joel  
Nahum  
SongsofSongs  
Lamentations  
Ezekiel  
1Peter  
John  
Ezra  
2Samuel  
Matthew  
Habakkuk  
Revelation  
Philippians  
1John  
Proverbs  
Obadiah  
Esther

April 2011

*He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. (v.4)*

At first reading, this 27 chapter book can seem a bit tedious. Truth be told, at face value, it is merely an instruction book for the Levite priests on how to perform their duties, and to be educated regarding God's sacrifices, laws, etc. As a matter of fact, the word "Leviticus" means "that which pertains to the Levites." It is a book that speaks of the manner in which the people are to worship and obey God. The first 16 chapters explain how to have personal access to God through appropriate worship whilst the latter 11 detail how to be spiritually acceptable to God through an obedient walk. We are still to be concerned with worshipping God in an appropriate manner and walking obediently before him. And of course Leviticus also gives us a picture through the sacrificial features of the ultimate one-time only sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sin.

The main theme of chapter 1 is the burnt offering. And it is interesting how details are given for both rich and poor with the idea being that each brings the best they can – the best bull, sheep, goat, dove or pigeon. And we too are called to give the best we can – even if it is simply the widows mite. We bring it voluntarily as well. There was no compulsion made for the people but they were to make this burnt offering whenever they wanted. The animal brought was to be a male without defect.

The other interesting part of the act is the laying on of hands on the head of the burnt offering. Laying on of hands in the Bible normally speaks of transference. And here is no different. This act signifies the transference of the sacrificer's sin to the sacrificial animal. This was a substitutionary sacrifice that points us to the ultimate substitute – Jesus.

**Pray:** thanking God for Jesus dying in your place – making that substitutionary atonement for you.

**Reflect:** do I worship God appropriately? Am I walking obediently before him? Do I offer my best to God?

*Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings. (v.13)*

The second offering mentioned is the grain offering. Again this is a voluntary offering which the people are to bring and there are no times mentioned. Later in Numbers 28 we find that the grain offering was to be made at the same time as the burnt offering. The grain offering is the only one of the offerings that does not involve animals. This shows that there was a place for offering from the fruit of the soil. The grain offering signifies homage and thanksgiving to God. We are reminded of God's goodness and the need to be thankful.

The Old Testament meal offering often began with this simple act - baking bread. The ingredients were important. This bread could not have any yeast, which reminded the Israelites of the unleavened bread they baked when God delivered them from Egypt in the Exodus (Exodus 12:15). But this bread should have salt, symbolising the covenant relationship between God and His people.

Salt today has many uses and is relatively cheap. We think on the fact that salt preserves, purifies, pleases, poisons and promotes. We use it in our food and on our paths. The salt industry boasts 14,000 different uses for salt! Salt in the days of Moses was costly. It was also primarily used as a preservative. This would remind the people of Israel of God's covenant – its value and its permanence.

Salt was required but yeast and honey were to be excluded. They are both edible but they do induce fermentation which speaks of sin. The grain offering's main purpose was to show thankfulness for God's provision. It also showed faith for tomorrow's food, especially since the Israelites were receiving daily manna at the time this sacrifice was instituted.

**Pray:** thanking God for his provision of all our needs.

**Reflect:** on the many ways God provides for you. Write them down and then spend time praising and thanking him.

*Then Aaron's sons are to burn it on the altar...an aroma pleasing to the Lord. (v.5)*

One winter's day, a woodsman saw a snake lying nearly dead in the snow. He picked it up, put it inside his shirt to keep it warm, and hurried home. He lay the snake in front of the fire, where it gradually warmed up and revived. One of the woodsman's children reached down to pet it, but the snake reared back to strike. The woodsman seized his axe and chopped off the snake's head. "Ah," said he. "There's no gratitude from the wicked."

Unlike the ungrateful snake, thankfulness is an essential part of worship for the righteous. That's the basic meaning of the fellowship offering, the next type of sacrifice covered in Leviticus. The Israelites offered it voluntarily to show gratitude, to fulfil a vow, or as a freewill expression of love for God. We discover these purposes of the offering in Leviticus 7 when we receive the priests' instructions for the offering.

As well as the voluntary offerings recognising substitutionary atonement and gratefulness for God's provision, and the compulsory offerings (which we will come to) for sin and guilt, there is always room for genuine and voluntary acts of thanksgiving and praise.

After the animals were sacrificed (and they were given according to wealth again – cattle, sheep, goat) the worshippers and the priests sat down and ate together. In effect, this was a meal with the Lord Himself, and it showed the intimacy and close fellowship He intended between Himself and His covenant people.

**Pray:** praising God for who He is as well as for all He has done for you.

**Reflect:** When is the last time you made a "freewill offering" to the Lord? This is something beyond your usual giving, and your normal service in the church. It flows freely and joyfully from your worship, gratitude, and faith in Him.

*In this way the priest will make atonement for him for any of these sins he has committed, and he will be forgiven. (5:13)*

As we begin this next section we are introduced to the sin offering. This is the first of 2 compulsory offerings. In this passage we see the unintentional sins of commission and the unintentional sins of omission. Unintentional in the fact that the people stray into sinful situations and end up sinning – they didn't wilfully set out to sin. Mind you, they may not necessarily have been taken completely by surprise. This can be due to carelessness or weakness. And so we have to learn to guard ourselves carefully against sin.

Sins of commission are mentioned first and are related to unintentionally doing what is forbidden in the commands of the Lord. Sins of omission are then listed as we begin chapter 5. These are unintentionally not doing what one should – not speaking up for the truth, avoiding unclean things, thoughtlessly taking an oath.

When someone becomes aware of their sin they are to do 2 things: confess their sin and make a sacrificial offering. Confession and sacrifice: sin must be confessed and cleansed before worship and communion with God can be enjoyed. All of these principles are being spelled out to help us understand the basic realities of communion with God. All sin defiles. All sin. Every last bit of it has to be dealt with. Your Priest, your representative, His life, His behaviour, His character, impinges upon you. In the community you are accountable to one another, and your life, your behaviour, your actions, your choices have a corporate effect; and confession and sacrifice must be offered before communion can be enjoyed again. That's what the text says here.

Once a person became aware of such a sin, they demonstrated their penitent heart by bringing a sin offering. To offer it was to confess sin and seek forgiveness or purification, thus restoring fellowship with God.

**Pray:** asking God for forgiveness from sins committed in your life.

**Reflect:** examine your heart and confess any sin that is revealed.

*It is a guilt offering; he has been guilty of wrongdoing against the LORD.  
(5:19)*

Alexander Pope was one of the leading essayists, poets, and satirical writers of eighteenth-century England. Though he suffered from a disease that affected his spine, hunched him over, and caused him much suffering, he wrote voluminously and did landmark translations into English of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. In his famous work, An Essay on Criticism, he penned a line that has become an everyday proverb: "Good nature and good sense must ever join; To err is human, to forgive, divine." Indeed, the fact that humans sin and God forgives seems to sum up the entire Old Testament sacrificial system!

We come to the last of the offerings listed in the opening chapters of Leviticus. This is another mandatory offering like the sin offering. It is called the guilt offering or the trespass offering, sometimes even the compensation or reparation offering. This offering was made to atone for sins committed unknowingly where restitution was possible i.e. when something could be paid back or restored. Again we get the whole idea of sin being detestable to God and that when a person recognises sin in their life, even though it has been done unintentionally, they are to confess that sin and make a sacrifice so they can be cleansed and renew their fellowship with God.

The first sins mentioned are those against the Lord – this could be withholding the tithe, or eating the priest's share of the sacrifice. The second sins mentioned are those against people and property – this could be borrowing something and keeping it. When sin is noticed it has to be confessed and a sacrifice offered. As well as that restitution can be made – and so the sinner has to bring and offer to the priest or person the value of the trespass plus one fifth of the value. It is not enough to simply say sorry – an action must accompany the words of confession.

**Pray:** thanking God for his grace and mercy to forgive us our sin when we confess it before him.

**Reflect:** do I take sin seriously? What does it mean to view sin as God does?

*These, then, are the...which the LORD gave Moses on Mount Sinai on the day he commanded the Israelites to bring their offerings to the LORD, in the Desert of Sinai. (7:37-38)*

We have been looking at the sacrificial system of Israel in the days following the Exodus from Egypt. Today's reading sees the instructions now being given to the priests for these sacrifices. There are additional requirements placed upon them which we see as we go through. We are reminded at the end of chapter 7 that these are the instructions given to Moses for the people – and they are God's commands and instructions.

This is important for us for God is a holy and just God – he hates sin and he longs for his people to worship him properly and obey him fully. In these offerings – 3 voluntary and 2 compulsory – we get specific details of how God wants the worshipper to come and what they have to do. As we think on these offerings as a set we see some overarching principles.

First, blood is required for forgiveness or atonement. Second, out of respect for God, the animal sacrificed had to be perfect. Third, offering a sacrifice demonstrated a worshipful or repentant heart. By placing their hands on the sacrifice, the people both took responsibility for their sin and acknowledged the substitutionary nature of the animal's death.

Each of these principles foreshadowed Christ. His blood was shed to atone for our sins. He was the only person in history able to be the perfect and effectual sacrifice for sin – he was the perfect, sinless Lamb of God. He took our place, for we owed the penalty of death. And when He offered Himself, He made it possible for us to be forgiven and draw near to God. And importantly he paid the full price for redemption – his was a once and for all sacrifice. There is no other price to be paid.

**Pray:** thanking God for Jesus and his substitutionary atonement on the cross for us.

**Reflect:** on the price Jesus had to pay to be able to bring forgiveness for sinners like us.

*What has been done today was commanded by the Lord to make atonement for you. (v.34)*

The classic hymn, “Take My Life,” by Frances Havergal, begins: “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.” The following verses invite God to take every part of a person: “Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love...Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee...Take my voice and let me sing always, only, for my King...Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee.”

This idea of dedicating every part of our person to the Lord’s service finds a vivid parallel in today’s reading. During the ordination ceremony consecrating Aaron and his sons to ministry, Moses firstly anointed them with oil by pouring it on their head and then he anointed their right ears, thumbs, and toes with blood (v.12, 24). This likely signified that their whole persons were now specially dedicated to the Lord for service, and that in all they did from now on they should be mindful of their holy station.

In dedicating Aaron and his sons to ministry Moses actually offers the sacrifices he has just been speaking about in the first 7 chapters – he offers to the Israelites a firsthand demonstration of how to do it – he models it both for the priests and for the benefit of the nation.

We are reminded here of the need to offer all of our lives in service to God. Paul will later say in Romans 12:1 ‘*offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.*’ We are called to give our all, not simply parts that we want to offer, but all of ourselves to God.

**Pray:** thanking God for his goodness and asking his help in giving our all in return to serve and honour him.

**Reflect:** on the words of that great hymn “Take my life” and consider if you are willing to offer everything to God. Are there any bits you hold back on?



*When all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown. (v.24)*

The task of ministry is now upon Aaron and his sons. The ordination process has lasted seven days (a week) and now on the eighth day they begin to fulfil their duties. There is something significant about the fact it is the eighth day – it signifies the new beginning, a new day, a new week. The last week has gone and now the new one is before us.

Moses summons the priests to him and says prepare the sacrifices for today the Lord will appear. And so immediately Aaron and his sons get the opportunity to present the sacrifices – the sin offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering and the fellowship offering just as they had been given the instructions previously. We well know that the best way to show we have learned and indeed to cement our learning is to put it straight into practice. Aaron and his sons are taking up their great commission of spiritual leadership on this day and they are careful to do everything the Lord had commanded through Moses.

God had promised to appear, and everyone needed to prepare to meet Him. So the sacrifices were offered, a blessing was spoken, and the glory of God came down. His glory probably manifested (showed) itself in a form similar to the pillar of cloud and fire that had guided and protected the Israelites thus far, especially given the miraculous fire that consumed the burnt offering. The people responded with reverence and joy, which they expressed by shouting and falling facedown to worship the Lord.

We are called today to offer our bodies as living sacrifices – we have a responsibility of serving the Lord just as Aaron did. We are to give our all in service to him. And as we see the glory of God come down we ought to shout for joy as well in praise and worship.

**Pray:** thanking God for the opportunity to serve him.

**Reflect:** how can I serve Jesus today? In what ways can I share with others that they may see the glory of God?

*Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured. (v.3)*

A cartoon strip pictures God as a white-bearded old man seated at his computer. On the screen we see a hapless young man walking down the street. A piano is suspended by a rope over his head. God's finger is poised over a button labelled "Smite."

All too often, this caricature is how many people, even including some Christians, picture the judgment of God. But as we see in today's reading, the judgment of God is never arbitrary or cruel, but always just and holy. Aaron's two eldest sons dishonoured God and their priestly calling, and were punished by Him with instant death.

Why did Nadab and Abihu's action merit such an extreme penalty? It was not because they made a small mistake about some ritualistic detail, but because they did what they pleased how and when they pleased, publicly defiling the act of worship. Their blatant disobedience in the holiest of places and with the holiest of tasks called for swift and public justice: God had sworn to show Himself to be an utterly pure and holy God. Aaron's silence indicated sad agreement with His justice.

Doing what we please in life rather than living in accordance with God's ways is sin. It is a blatant disregard for God. And God hates sin. And he punishes sin. And all we can do when confronted with our sin is to remain silent – for we know the truth. Jesus took our sin upon his back as he died on the cross of Calvary. He gave his life as a sacrifice for us. Let us confess our sin before God and then enter into his presence in the right manner to worship him. Let nothing come between us and God.

**Pray:** Search me, O God, and know my heart today;  
Try me, O Saviour, know my thoughts, I pray.  
See if there be some wicked way in me;  
Cleanse me from every sin and set me free.

**Reflect:** Have you ever entered a worship service with your focus on self, your thoughts distracted, or something else at the top of your priority list? Do you think God was pleased with your worship on that day?

*I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. (v.44)*

Tea is the ubiquitous Chinese drink. In welcoming guests, chatting with friends, and celebrating special occasions, serving tea is a necessary social ritual. According to legend, tea was discovered when some leaves accidentally fell into an emperor's cup. Since then, tea-drinking has become embedded as part of China's cultural heritage. While Shanghai may have 25 Starbucks coffee stores, the city has 3,000 cafés specialising in tea! Recently, a museum and amusement park dedicated to tea were opened in Fujian Province, a region that grows China's famous oolong tea.

Just as drinking tea is quintessentially Chinese, so the food regulations in today's reading outline dietary distinctives for God's people, the Israelites. God wants his people to be holy – that is to be set apart from the world around them. Here he gives guidelines on what they can and cannot eat. It is wonderfully instructive that God was so involved with his people that he was concerned about every minute detail of their lives, even down to what they ate, what they wore, where they went, and what they did. All of this shows God's similar concern for us at the spiritual level.

Interestingly although a distinction is made between clean and unclean and the people are told what they can and cannot eat, they are not given any specific reasons for it. The 2 major points here are firstly that Israel was to obey God's standard, regardless of the reason for it, or the lack of understanding of it and secondly that such a unique diet would make it difficult for the people to eat with the idolatrous people around and among them.

The people are being taught to obey God in everything. We too are called to obey God in everything – even in the things we do not understand or are not told the reasons for. We are to set ourselves apart for him and be holy because he is holy.

**Pray:** asking God to help us honour him in everything we do.

**Reflect:** do I obey God in everything and walk in His ways always?

*He shall offer them before the Lord to make atonement for her. (v.7)*

A recent national survey found that most women are “terrified” of giving birth and find it “more painful than they ever imagined.” Sixty percent said their prenatal classes had failed to prepare them for the reality of childbirth, and 75 percent mentioned the pain was far worse than they had imagined it would be. Nearly half of the women surveyed said postnatal care was inadequate. Eighty-six percent added that they continued to experience pain for up to several weeks after the birth, and feelings from general sadness to depression were also common. Nonetheless, 99 percent of these women said that motherhood gave them more happiness than their careers!

Nothing in all the world is more delightful than the birth of a child. Nothing is more celebrated. A young lady looks forward to becoming a mother from her earliest days. Nothing gives her greater satisfaction and fulfilment as a woman than bearing her husband’s child. That is as it should be.

Yet, throughout the Scriptures, sin, defilement, and uncleanness are always associated with the birth of a child. We see this most clearly in Leviticus 12. We are reminded of the fact that we are sinful from birth. And in that sinfulness we are helpless – there is nothing we can do about it. We are all sinners. Yet God by His grace and mercy makes sinners clean. In Old Testament times this is seen by the provision of this act of purification for and sacrifice by a new mother. You will remember Mary and Joseph followed this after the birth of Jesus. We also see God meeting the woman at her point of need by the fact she comes to the Tent of Meeting to offer the sacrifice.

Although this act of purification is over, still we are born sinful yet God has poured out amazing grace in our lives – he has sent His Son to die on the cross to save us so we can meet with him again. What wonderful grace!

**Pray:** thanking God for his help in our helplessness.

**Reflect:** do I truly realise how much God has saved me from?

*As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp. (v.46)*

Of all diseases, leprosy is the only one singled out by the Law of Moses and linked with sin. It's not that having leprosy was sinful, nor was it the result of sin. Rather, the disease was seen as a graphic symbol of sin. If we could see sin, it would look something like leprosy.

This chapter deals with infectious skin diseases – these appear to be varied disorders but categorised under the term leprosy. It is clearly not the leprosy of our day which often cripples people and stops them from moving around. The lepers in these days were able to roam freely – having to call out ‘unclean, unclean’ as they saw people so no one came into contact with them. For the protection of the people, observation and isolation were demanded for all suspected cases of what could be a contagious disease.

Mildew is again something that can be seen and visualised. Mildew is general term, and can also refer to mould or fungus. We know what it is because we sometimes see it around the kitchen or bathroom. We are quick to clean it so that it does not spread and so that it does not affect our health in time to come.

The aim of these laws was to protect the people from disease. More importantly though they also served as vivid object lessons on how God desired purity, holiness and cleanness among the people. When we think of the disease in terms of sin we realise that God does not stand for sin and the sinner is kept from his presence. I am so glad God sent Jesus to deal with my sin so that I could be reconciled with God and enter back into His presence.

**Pray:** asking God to help us resist temptation and to avoid sin.

**Reflect:** do I let a little sin into my life thinking it will cause no harm? Any sin, like any small infection or mildew, can cause grave and unseen problems going forward. Confess any ‘little’ sin to God now.

*The priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed. (v.4)*

We come now to the cleansing of the person who has been healed of their infectious disease. Note this ritual is not for healing – God has miraculously dealt with the healing. This ritual is for the cleansing of the person so they can be welcomed back into the family. And the person themselves cannot do it – it has to be done by the priest which is seen by the fact that the priest goes out of the camp to the person. We are reminded here of the fact that our sin is so bad we could do nothing about it. God had to come to us and deal with it for us. He sent Jesus to the cross of Calvary. Just like every other thing we've seen in the offerings and rituals, this act is an amazing, prophetic picture of Jesus Christ. These things represent the cleansing work of Christ - cleansing us from our infection and affliction with leprosy - our sin.

Birds in the Bible are frequently referred to as “birds of the heavens.” These two birds in the ceremony represent Jesus Christ, Who has come from heaven. Although Jesus came from heaven, when He came to earth, He placed Himself in an earthen vessel - the form of a man. Just like the bird, He was slain at the hands of the priests. Just as the blood and water mixed in the vessel, so too, after Jesus had died on the cross, John 19:34 ‘*One of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.*’ The bird was fastened to the wood, just as Jesus, too, was fastened to the wood of the cross. In Joshua 2, the scarlet cord was an escape from death and a mark of deliverance. Jesus is our deliverer. Hyssop was the long-stemmed plant that the Israelites used to apply the slain Passover lamb’s blood to their doorposts at the points of the cross (Exodus 12). Jesus was also offered wine vinegar on the stalk of the hyssop plant on the cross. Then the live bird is released again to the heavens. Jesus, of course, rose from the dead, then ascended to heaven. Each and every one of these details points to the perfect work and Person of Jesus Christ.

**Pray:** thanking God for His plan of salvation.

**Reflect:** on God’s plan of salvation foretold in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New.

*Keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place. (v.31)*

Until recently, the Colombian army encouraged Marxist rebels to surrender by distributing photos of glamorous women. Since the rebels are not allowed to date without permission from the commanders, the implication was that as soon as they gave up fighting they could have their pick of the beautiful women in the photos. The new defence minister, a woman, put an end to that policy!

We live in confused times. The world has no idea what to do with issues of sexual morality and behaviour. By contrast, the Law provided clear guidelines for God's people. Today's reading focuses on standards for cleanness and uncleanness related to sexual hygiene.

What was at issue here? Leviticus 15:1–15 discusses abnormal male conditions, possibly the result of an illness or sexually transmitted disease. Verses 16-18 describe the appropriate procedures for male hygiene under normal circumstances. And verses 19-24 deal with a woman's menstrual period. Finally, verses 25-30 cover abnormal female symptoms in which a woman experiences a chronic haemorrhage. The woman Jesus healed in Mark 5 suffered from this condition.

The text here is pretty straightforward about the guidelines under normal circumstances, and only minimal times of purification were required. Disease-related complications, by contrast, were more serious. They contaminated all who came in contact with them, and required burnt and sin offerings to be made for purification. Here we have a reminder again of the purity God looks for in his people – he wants no one coming into his presence who is defiled. Sacrifice has to be made for sin. Jesus has paid the price.

**Pray:** thanking God for Jesus.

**Reflect:** on the need to avoid sin and to come before God in a worthy manner.

*Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites. (v.34)*

In modern usage, the idiom “scapegoat” is negative. If the boss is “looking for a scapegoat,” it means he wants someone to take the blame, no matter who deserves it. Perhaps the truth is too complex to understand or admit, or perhaps he himself is guilty of failure or wrongdoing and doesn’t want to acknowledge it.

A “scapegoat” is someone who takes undeserved blame, usually unwillingly. This person may be powerless in the situation and is innocent of what he or she is being “punished” for. Most people would sympathise with a “scapegoat,” but no one would want to be one. That term scapegoat comes from this passage in Leviticus. Two goats without blemish stood before the high priest in the bright Middle Eastern sun. Lots were cast, and the priest slowly led one to the altar to be killed as a sin offering for the people. Its blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. That goat was a sacrifice.

The other goat, known as the scapegoat, portrays another truth. The priest placed both his hands on its forehead and confessed the sins of Israel. Then the goat was led out into the desert and turned loose. As it wandered away, never to be seen again, it symbolically took Israel’s sins along with it. They were gone. The people were reconciled to God. That goat was a substitute.

Both of these goats were pictures of what Christ would do for us. The cross became an upright altar, where the Lamb of God gave His life as a sacrifice for sin. And what the scapegoat symbolically portrayed for Israel - the removal of their sins - Jesus fulfilled in reality. He became our substitute. Because of our identification with Him as believers, our sins have been taken away completely. Two goats representing two truths: sacrifice and substitution. Both were fulfilled in Christ when He died on the cross and made full atonement for our sins.

**Pray:** thanking God for Jesus our substitute.

**Reflect:** on Jesus becoming our substitute and carrying our sins.



*It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. (v.11)*

The first 16 chapters of Leviticus have explained how to have personal access to God through appropriate worship now we come to the latter 11 chapters which detail how to be spiritually acceptable to God through an obedient walk. For the people of Israel this begins with blood here in chapter 17.

You have about five litres of blood inside you, pumped around your body by your heart. Blood carries oxygen from the lungs to the rest of your body, and returns with carbon dioxide for your lungs to exhale. Blood also transports vitamins and minerals, necessary hormones, and waste materials to their proper destinations in your body. New blood is continually being made inside your bones. Blood clots when you cut yourself, and white blood cells help fight various diseases. Our Creator designed blood to do all these amazing tasks!

The early Israelites knew that '*the life of a creature is in the blood*' (verse 11). That also helps explain the spiritual symbolism of blood and why the Old Testament required "blood sacrifice" for sin. Only blood could make atonement for sin. We have seen that already in our studies through Leviticus. It was the blood of the animals slain on the altar that was offered as a sacrifice and through which atonement was made. Of course we now know too through much of the New Testament teaching that it was the blood of Christ shed on the cross that truly makes atonement for our sin. And that atonement is a once and for all act. We no longer need to come regularly and sacrifice animals.

The recent chorus says it all 'It's Your blood that cleanses me, it's Your blood that gives me life, it's Your blood that took my place in redeeming sacrifice, and washes me whiter than the snow, than the snow. My Jesus, God's precious sacrifice.'

**Pray:** thanking God for the blood of Christ shed for us.

**Reflect:** on the cost Jesus' paid to atone for our sin.

*You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God. (v.4)*

Next to the preservation of life the most powerful human drive is sex. And we live in a sex-mad and sex-driven world. Pornography is rife. Since the beginning of the internet it has taken off – images are freely and readily available. You only have to look at many of the adverts on our televisions and on billboards to realise the power of sex and seduction. The message going around today is sleep with who you want, when you want and there will be no consequences. However we know that is not true. There has been a rise in sexually transmitted diseases, there have been unprecedented marriage break-ups, we have a major problem with child and sex trafficking. Sex and the desire for it and the money it generates has caused us major problems and driven a major wedge between people and God.

Back in Leviticus sex and sexual practices are a problem for the people of God. He warns them very clearly in verse 3 not to follow the practices of those in Egypt whom they have left behind or those in Canaan where they are headed. He reminds them '*I am the Lord your God.*' That phrase is used over 50 times in Leviticus asserting the uniqueness of the one true and living God who calls His people to holiness as He is holy. God wants nothing to defile His people. So the warning comes here about sex and sexual practices. Sex is an amazing gift of God for married couples to enjoy and for procreation purposes. He does not want the people to ruin that. There is no doubt that pornography and random sexual relations have and are causing many problems today.

Here instructions are given about incest, adultery, homosexuality and bestiality (sex with animals) and the people are warned not to practice these. Let's get back to having a right view of sex and watch that the many adverts around us do not tempt us to stray from God's way.

**Pray:** asking God to protect us from the prevailing culture around us specifically in regard to sex.

**Reflect:** what temptations are around me in regard to sex? How can I avoid them? Consider an accountability partner to support you.

*Be Holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. (v.2)*

Verse 2 of Leviticus 19 gives us the heart of this book. Here is the central theme of Leviticus. Israel had been called to be a holy nation and the perfectly holy character of God was the model after which the Israelites were to live. To be holy is to be sanctified, set apart. Holiness means not being like the world, but being like our God. Holiness means denying the temporary pleasures of sin and investing in eternity through righteous living. Holiness. Nobody talks much about it for fear of being called a legalist. But God requires holiness of His people.

Chapter 19 gives a number of very practical applications of holy conduct in society. We are given a reminder of much of the Ten Commandments through these verses. Respect for parents is high on the agenda as is observation of the Sabbath. In our world today children do not always respect their parents – to be fair not every parent earns that respect. If parents are bringing their children up well and living godly lives then children will be compelled to respect their parents. Many have forgotten the simple teaching of Sabbath – time of rest from work and daily routine and time for more relaxed reflection on God.

We also see God's welfare system brought in here. Land owners were not over glean their fields but to leave the final gleaning for the poor in the community so they could feel they were working to bring in some food to the house. Another important part of this is that the needy have to work in collecting the food for themselves otherwise they would starve – it wasn't to be handed to them on a plate.

Take time to consider the many other instructions given in this chapter and consider that they are all given so the people of Israel would live lives in a manner worthy of God – they would exercise holy living. May we too consider what it means to live holy lives in our day and culture.

**Pray:** asking God to help us live life His way.

**Reflect:** what does it mean to live a holy life today?

*I am the Lord, who makes you holy. (v.8)*

“Leviticus reminds me of visiting a factory without a guide,” said pastor Ray C. Stedman in a sermon. He described his own experience of going to a steel products factory. At first, he observed what looked like confusion, clamour, and chaos on the factory floor. When a friend gave him a guided tour, however, it all made sense. He understood the machinery’s purposes and how the workers were organised to produce the final product.

“This is what you may experience with the book of Leviticus,” Stedman continued. Dietary laws, miscellaneous regulations, long passages about disease and mildew - what does it all mean? He pointed his audience to this chapter in Leviticus and verses 7 and 8: God is holy, and His people must reflect that.

This perspective can keep us from getting bogged down. Portions of Leviticus might seem irrelevant to our contemporary walk with God, but it’s still all about the principle of holiness. It’s about being so committed to obedience that our light shines out for all to see!

The flip side, however, is the consequences of disobedience, as seen graphically in today’s reading. Capital punishment or excommunication were the severest penalties, sentences given for sins including idolatry, witchcraft, and sexual immorality. The death penalty was usually carried out by stoning - the whole community participated as a symbolic demonstration that they were resolved to expunge sin. In addition, at least two crimes would be punished by God with childlessness (verses 20 & 21). But the most fearful punishment of all was God’s statement that He Himself would set His face against certain sinners (verse 5). Can any worse fate be imagined?

**Pray:** for each other that we would all shine for Jesus.

**Reflect:** on the areas of your life that you require to be more obedient in.

*They must be holy to their God, and must not profane the name of their God. Because they present the offerings made to the Lord by fire, the food of their God, they are to be holy. (v.6)*

God has been telling Moses about the people's requirements to be holy. Chapters 21 and 22 of Leviticus deal specifically with the priests of God. They were called to certain holy laws - an even higher calling and expectation because of their calling.

We might look at this and think "oh that's for pastors and those in full-time ministry" and it is but it is more – it is for all of us who are believers. God has called us a kingdom of priests. In 1 Peter 2:9 we are reminded that *'you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.'* To the churches, Revelation says, (Revelation 1:6) *'He has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father.'* Everyone in the church has such a high calling to holiness. Therefore we are all to seek to live the best we can before God. We are to obey all his commands and follow him closely.

For the priests of Israel this meant regulations on mourning, on marriage, on family, and on blemishes in their life. These blemishes mentioned are specifically physical defects. The calling of a priest was a high one indeed.

We are called a royal priesthood – so that same high calling is expected of us. There must not be any blemish in our lives. Now I don't think that is physical blemishes in our case now as much as the blemishes of wrong living and selfish living. We have many habits at times which in and of themselves do not stop us from worshipping God but they do have an effect on our walk with God. Things that hold us back from achieving all that God has planned for us. God desires the best from us.

**Pray:** asking God to reveal the bad habits in your life and for his help in dealing with them.

**Reflect:** on the habits in your life that stop you being all that God has called you to be. What can you do to stop them?

*I must be acknowledged as holy by the Israelites. I am the Lord, who makes you holy. (v.32)*

When people serve in the military, they are held to high standards of conduct and obedience. They are not living or acting as private persons, but as representatives of their country. Should they break the rules or disobey a superior, they can be charged with “conduct unbecoming” to a soldier. “Unbecoming” means something like “unsuitable” or “inappropriate.” So “conduct unbecoming” means their behaviour was inappropriate for someone wearing the uniform - their actions somehow brought shame to their unit, the armed forces, or even the country.

We can apply the idea of “conduct unbecoming” to worship and our identity as God’s children. In today’s reading, for example, the Israelites had proper or appropriate ways to offer the sacrifices. Just as those who served before the Lord had to do so in the right ways, so also those who worshipped had to present their sacrifices in the right ways. To worship carelessly or disobediently would dishonour God’s name!

Throughout Leviticus we have read that the people were to bring the best before God. The animals they brought to be sacrificed had to be perfect, without defect or blemish. Bringing the best animal before God showed a worshipper’s heart. Now the people are clearly warned here what would happen if they brought an imperfect animal before God. If they brought an animal with defect or blemish it would be unacceptable.

God has given His best for us – He gave us His one and only Son. Shouldn’t we give him our best in return – not just the leftovers? We ought to offer him the very best of ourselves – indeed as Isaac Watts puts it in his great hymn ‘Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all.’

**Pray:** thanking God for his most indescribable gift to us and offering him your all in return.

**Reflect:** do I give my best to God? If not, what needs to change in my life?

*These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the Lord. (v.2)*

Imagine in your mind Christmas at your house. You can smell the turkey with all its trimmings. No-one is working, nothing around the house needs fixed or done. It's a day of celebration and family. The only work is dinner being prepared, table set and games being played. Or imagine a wedding celebration – again no work that day – just sit back and enjoy the joy and happiness of the day.

That's a lot like the picture Moses is given for the people here in chapter 23. The Lord is giving the people instructions for feasts that they were to remember and celebrate during the year. And as we read the instructions we might get the picture of something staid and formal – particularly as we think on the sacrifices to be made – but these were actually times of joy and celebration.

In fact these feasts before us there were 3 similar characteristics that work their way through. Firstly the people were to rest. They were not to do any work particularly on the first day of the feast. They were to rest from their labours. The first feast mentioned is actually the Sabbath – the 1 day in 7 when the people were to down tools and rest. Of course not only were they to rest but they were to worship God. That is another part of the Sabbath and it is a part of all these feasts. The people were to stop and focus on God and praise and worship him. They were to worship him as they brought their sacrifices. They were to worship him with the best they had – remember yesterday's giving the perfect animal. And of course we see here that they were to bring the first of the harvest to God. A reminder here that God it is who gives them all good things. Lastly of course there is celebration. The people as a family are to celebrate God's goodness, faithfulness and love.

We may get the picture of the people coming all serious with their burnt offerings but they often joined this with the joy of celebration. There were many parties in the Old Testament.

**Pray:** thanking God for goodness, faithfulness and love.

**Reflect:** do I rest, worship and celebrate on the Sabbath?

*Anyone who blasphemes the Lord must be put to death. (v.16)*

When evangelist Franklin Graham prays “in the name of Jesus” at public events, he’s not surprised to receive criticism. When he and Houston pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell both prayed in Jesus’ name at the Presidential inauguration in 2001, it attracted a fair amount of media attention. Some commentators felt it violated “separation of church and state” and made people of other religious persuasions feel uncomfortable.

Graham isn’t worried about any of that. When he is invited to a public event, he feels it’s his duty and privilege, and the duty and privilege of every Christian, to honour the name of Christ.

God’s name should be spoken with honour - He is worthy of all worship. That’s why we find that speaking His name blasphemously is such a serious crime in today’s reading. You will recall that in the Ten Commandments we were instructed not to misuse the name of the Lord. Here the guilty party is to be taken from the town and stoned to death by those who have heard that person violate God’s name.

Sadly our world is full of people who use God’s name in a derogatory way or use it as a swear word. Walking around the supermarket the other day I heard Jesus’ name mentioned more often than I use it in a sermon on a Sunday – but for different reasons and in a different way. It saddens me. I’m forever having to tell kids at our clubs to stop using words that to them mean nothing but to me are offensive and to our Lord are hurtful and heartbreaking. I wonder what would happen if people were cast down today for blaspheming God?

The next time you hear someone misuse God’s name challenge them and ask them not to.

**Pray:** thanking God for that wonderful name and that name which is above all other names.

**Reflect:** do I misuse God’s name or do I substitute it for something else but still mean the same thing? Repent and seek to change your word use.



*Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. Then the land will yield its fruit. (v.18)*

We are already familiar with the weekly Sabbath, with the fact that God had marked out 1 day in 7 to be observed by this people as a day of rest from labour. This Sabbath lies at the heart of everything God does, from creation on, because he is trying to drive home to human hearts an absolutely necessary truth, one which is fundamental to our humanity and that is that we must operate out of rest. Haven't you discovered that in your own life? It is so stressful when we are filled with anxiety and pressure, and when in all our frenetic activity we get restless and feverish and upset, and we press on thinking that it all depends upon us, that we've got to get everything done ourselves. We need to rest.

And rest was required for the land as well. Chapter 25 begins with the Sabbath year of rest – work the land for 6 years and leave it fallow on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Back then they must have wondered what all this meant. Today we know it makes sense to rest the field in order that it can produce good crops again and not run dry altogether. We are then introduced to the year of Jubilee – 7 times 7 and then a complete rest on the fiftieth year. Now for the quick and astute that means the people are to rest the land for 2 years in a row. How will they survive? Well any food that grows they are allowed to pick. And God promises them he will provide.

Verse 18 reminds us of a great promise – that when we obey God and walk in His ways, He will look after us. He will provide for our needs – not our greeds. We will have and we will be satisfied. Trust God. That can be so hard to do. In good times we store up so much and in needy times we are tempted to go on our own – to sow some seed. The lesson here is to trust God and depend on Him. That is faith.

**Pray:** thanking God for His faithfulness and for His provision.

**Reflect:** do I trust God for everything or do I store up treasures on earth? Do I take time to rest or do I keep rushing on and getting worried?

*If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will...walk among you and be your God. (v.3, 12)*

On February 7, 1904, the story goes, a man in the basement of a downtown Baltimore building discarded a lit cigarette. It was a small act of carelessness, but one with enormous consequences. The cigarette started a fire that the wind whipped into a larger fire. By evening, it raged out of control, burning for 31 hours and destroying eighty city blocks. About 2,500 buildings were destroyed or damaged, and property loss was estimated at \$100 million. Thankfully, no lives were lost.

Causes lead to effects - that's the order of life. We reap what we sow. And disobedience brings punishment. Here in Leviticus 26 we learn in much detail what will happen when the people of Israel are disobedient. God will turn from them and withhold his blessing and indeed punish them.

The truth of Scripture here is the truth of the world. We know that when we do wrong we will be punished. The reality in spiritual terms though is that our disobedience and sin will lead to the ultimate punishment – separation from God forever. Thankfully we know from our New Testament reading that God in his mercy has reached down to save us – he sent Jesus to take our place and pay the price. Disobedience brings punishment.

But it needn't be that way. The first part of chapter 26 speaks of the conditional blessings – if we will but follow God's ways he will bless us and walk with us. He will provide for us and care for us. He will keep his covenant. Surely we do not want to walk in sin and suffer the consequences. Would we not rather follow God's ways and enjoy his presence with us on the journey.

**Pray:** asking for God's help to remain faithful to Him and to walk in His ways.

**Reflect:** do I follow God's ways or do I try and walk on my own?

*Everything so devoted is most holy to the Lord. (v.28)*

Ray Stedman speaks of a young man who approached him after a service. He was rather nervous and very disturbed, and he said, "I want to tell you a story." So I sat down with him and he told me, "Two years ago I was in Vietnam. Our company was pinned down under an enemy barrage. I was in an exposed position, bullets were whistling over my head, shrapnel was exploding all around me, and I was scared stiff. I was sure I would not get out of there alive. I prayed and cried out to God [the young man was already a Christian], 'Lord, I know what you want: you want me to enter the ministry. If you'll get me back safely, I'll go to school and start training for it.' And God answered that prayer and brought me back safely."

Then he said that the minute he got out of the Army he went into business and started making money. He put the vow in the back of his mind. "But," he said, "you know, an amazing thing has happened. At first I made lots of money. I was a success. I almost forgot this promise I had made, and I thought God had forgotten it. But strange things have been happening recently. Despite the general success of my type of business, despite the favourable conditions for business, despite everything I can do, I've been gradually losing money. In very odd ways my business has been falling apart, and, just yesterday, I lost the whole thing. I know what God is saying to me. He has taken me at my word. He has taken my business away, and I know what I've got to do. I just wanted you to hear the story. I don't need any advice; I know what God wants me to do." The next day he enrolled in college and went on to be a pastor.

It is a dangerous thing to make a vow to God. We often do it in times of plenty and more often in times of danger and struggle. God never asks us to make a vow to him. But He does tell us in His Word that He will hold us to any vow we make. Leviticus 27 deals with those vows and what it means. A vow made is holy to God. If a person was to go back on that vow they would be due a premium on top. Watch what you promise!

**Pray:** thanking God for his gracious work in your life.

**Reflect:** what vows have I made to God? Am I keeping them?

*The Lord spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting in the Desert of Sinai. (v.1)*

Not much time passed for us in Leviticus and not much action takes place in regard to wandering through the wilderness. Leviticus was more interested in setting up the various laws and the sacrificial system for Israel to follow. Numbers is more of a storyline. It takes us on the journey with the Israelites from Sinai through the wilderness towards the Promised Land. Forty years will pass from beginning to end.

Numbers begins with the Lord speaking to Moses. We read these words at the beginning of the chapter and almost glance over them for they have become very familiar to us. Indeed we read that phrase many times in the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible). God spoke to his people. And he still speaks to his people. He speaks to us today through his Word which is why we are taking time to read it through from cover to cover. Saving history begins with God speaking.

Instructions is given take a census and this of course is where the book gets its name. The census will show us how many men over 20 there were to be able to lead the invasion of the land promised to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). Another census will be taken nearer the end of the book. The number counted of course is only men over 20 years old. Most scholars reckon there would have been around 2 million people here. Imagine the population of Wales marching into London – that's roughly the number of Israelites wandering in the wilderness.

The Levites, those from the tribe of Levi, were not to be counted for they had a special role – they were to be in charge of the Tabernacle and deal with its taking down and its putting back up as the people wandered through the wilderness. The Tabernacle of course was God's dwelling place with his people in these days.

**Pray:** thanking God for His Word and asking Him to keep speaking to us through it

**Reflect:** what has God been saying to me through His Word recently? Am I listening and responding?

*Then the Tent of Meeting and the camp of the Levites will set out in the middle of the camps. (v.17)*

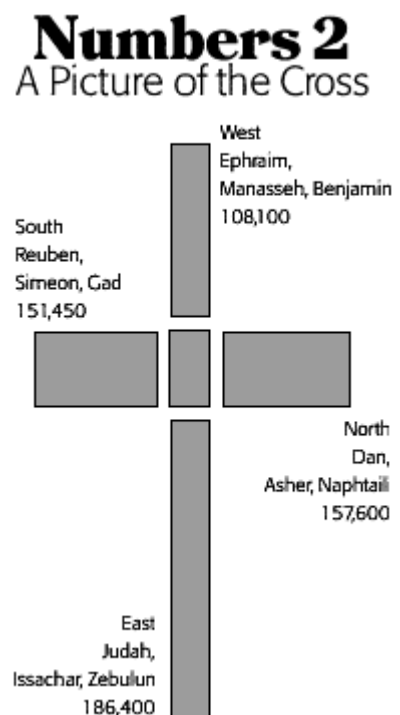
In this chapter, the Lord details how the Israelites are to camp around the Tabernacle: Judah was to set its standard up east of the tabernacle, and the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun would camp around it. This would be an army of 186,400 men. Reuben was to set its standard up south of the Tabernacle, and the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad would camp around it. This was an army of 151,450 men. Ephraim was to set its standard up west of the Tabernacle, and the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin would camp around it. This was an army of 108,100 men. Dan was to set its standard up north of the Tabernacle, and the tribes of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali would camp around it. This was an army of 157,600 men.

Why go to all this trouble to number these armies? Picture yourself on a high mountain looking down upon the Israelites as they camped. Spread out in four directions are four camps. North and south are nearly the same size, west is shorter than east. There, on the desert floor, is a gigantic cross! Even way back then God has the cross in view. How great and awesome is our God!

And of course as we think on the Tabernacle where do we find it located? Right at the centre. In military terms it is wise to have it there surrounded by the tribes on every side but spiritually it also gives us the picture that God at to be at the centre of our lives – everything should revolve around Him. Each tribe of Israel had equal access to God in this set up as well. Is God at the centre of our lives?

**Pray:** thanking God for the cross and asking Him to be at the centre of our lives.

**Reflect:** is God at the centre of my life?



*Then the Tent of Meeting and the camp of the Levites will set out in the middle of the camps. (v.17)*

Aaron the high priest, and his four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Ithamar and Eleazar were priests. But Nadab and Abihu you will remember were on fire for the Lord – well truth have it they sinned by making an offering with unauthorised fire and were smitten by fire from the Lord. So Aaron's two remaining sons were serving as priests. With only the three priests, God commanded the entire tribe of Levi to do the service of the tabernacle. The Lord says that the tribe of Levi is “wholly given to Aaron.” While Aaron is ministering to the Lord and His people, the Levites will be ministering to Aaron and the priests.

The priests were the only ones remember who were allowed to offer the sacrifices within the Tabernacle. They could not care for it all by themselves though so God appointed the entire tribe of Levi. That is why that tribe had been left out of the census and counting for war. Now they are counted and given specific tasks around the Tabernacle.

Back in Exodus 13, God had commanded that every first-born son of every family was to be sanctified - set apart and dedicated to God's service. But when Israel sinned with the whole golden calf nonsense back in Exodus 32, God chose the Levites to serve Him instead. The Levites were the only ones who set themselves apart with a heart for God, so God set them apart to serve him.

Because the Levites were basically standing in the place of the first-born by serving God, the Lord wanted them to make sure that He was getting a fair deal. A count was done of the first-born of Israel and of the Levites. Had the first-born been serving, God would've had 273 more people working for Him than He did with the Levites. So He says, “you guys owe Me.” There's going to be a 5-shekel ransom for each one of the 273, and it will be given to Aaron and his sons, because they've basically been short-changed 273 tabernacle workers.

**Pray:** asking God to take all of you in service to Him

**Reflect:** have I set myself apart with a heart for God?

*Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work in the Tent of Meeting. (v.3)*

Chapter 4 details some of the specific duties of branches within the tribe of Levi – different parts of the clan had different roles to perform. Interestingly they were to be thirty years old before they started these duties. Does that ring a bell? It ought to for that is when Jesus began his ministry too.

The duties detailed for the people here are for when the people moved from place to place. It was the responsibility of the priests to cover the items within the Tabernacle and then the various parts of the family were then to carry those pieces and be responsible for them as they journeyed. The priests were to go in to the Tabernacle first, and cover up all the objects with blue cloth, then a covering of porpoise skins. The blue cloth kept the objects out of sight of the average person, lest they die. The porpoise skins probably formed some kind of waterproof covering for travel purposes.

Other details are given but let us think on a principle that comes through here. Every member of the people of God has his or her part to play. Here in the wilderness the priests offered sacrifice, the Kohathites took care of the most holy things, the Gershonites were to carry the curtains, the Merarites carried the tent pegs in essence, and the rest of the Israelites were ready for battle. Each had a part to play. Each was indispensable to the smooth functioning of the whole body. Without full mutual cooperation the people would not have reached the Promised Land.

And the same is true of the church today. We are all gifted in different ways. And we are called to work together under Christ our head. When we work together everything goes well and we function as we are meant.

**Pray:** thanking God for the gift(s) He has given you and asking Him to help you keep using them well in the church.

**Reflect:** what gifts do I have and how well do I use them in the church? Speak to the pastor or deacons if you have something to offer and are not yet serving.