

*Leviticus 11:44-45 (NRSV)*

<sup>44</sup>For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves on the earth. <sup>45</sup>For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy.

*1 Peter 1:13-25 (NRSV)*

<sup>13</sup>Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. <sup>14</sup>Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. <sup>15</sup>Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; <sup>16</sup>for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

<sup>17</sup>If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. <sup>18</sup>You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, <sup>19</sup>but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. <sup>20</sup>He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. <sup>21</sup>Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

<sup>22</sup>Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. <sup>23</sup>You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. <sup>24</sup>For

“All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,

<sup>25</sup>but the word of the Lord endures forever.”

That word is the good news that was announced to you.

*Restoring hope in tough times begins with the knowledge that our hope rests in Jesus.*

*But how we live our lives day-to-day is where our hope is transformed into the life-sustaining holiness of a life lived in God's way.*

Last week, when we began this series, *Restoring Hope in Tough Times*, we learned that 1 Peter is a letter written by the apostle to Christians suffering in diverse ways for their allegiance to Jesus. Not surprisingly, Peter begins the letter by reminding these believers that their anchor is Jesus, he is their “living hope.” In Jesus, Peter writes, the suffering believers have “an inheritance that is imperishable . . . [and] are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1:4-5). This beginning, focusing on the hope that is Jesus, makes sense. As Charles Stokes titled his sermon last week, “Jesus Lives: So Does Hope.”

But then, Peter takes a turn that isn't nearly so obvious. He is writing to encourage and comfort suffering believers and, yet, turns immediately from the hope that is Jesus to a call for discipline and holy living. We wonder, how exactly is that comforting or encouraging? Why does Peter put hope and holiness together?

## Holy?

In her commentary on 1 Peter, Pheme Perkins acknowledges many Christians' discomfort when we begin talking about holiness:

### The Holiness of God

*Holy* is one of those Bible/church words that I suspect most of us use without ever being sure exactly what we mean. The truth is that even theologians struggle to convey the breadth and depth of its meaning.

In the simplest sense, holiness is what makes God, God – and makes us not God! Gerhard Vos writes, “He is holy in everything that characterizes Him and reveals Him, holy in His goodness and grace, no less in His righteousness and wrath.” Aulen writes, “Holiness is the foundation on which the whole conception of God rests. . . Every statement about God, whether in reference to his love, power, righteousness . . . ceases to be an affirmation about God when it is not projected against the background of his holiness.”

In other words, God's righteousness is his *holy* righteousness. His mercy is *holy* mercy. God's wrath is his *holy* wrath. But even this still doesn't get us very close to what we mean by *holy*.

Allen Coppedge helps us to see that just as it takes many differing portraits to adequately portray God (say, Good Shepherd and Loving Father, to name two), so it takes several ideas to try to capture what we mean by God's holiness.

Coppedge suggests that holiness has six major components: separation, brilliance, righteousness, love, power, and goodness. I find this to be as good a working list as any. For example, the biblical portrait of God as creator tends to emphasize the separateness of God as a key aspect of his holiness, while the portrait of God as a shepherd emphasizes holiness as goodness.

Through it all, we need to remember that God is holy (Lev 11:45; 1 Peter 1:15-16) and the holiness of any creature, such as you or me, or any place, or any building is derived from God. Our own holiness (in which we are to grow!) has meaning only in relationship to God!

“Many Christians find the injunction to ‘be holy as God is holy’ objectionable. After all, we are fragile human beings in need of God's forgiveness, not saints. Matthew's version [in the Sermon on the Mount: ‘be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect’], which uses the word ‘perfection,’ is even more offensive to those who have grown up with a sense of being unable to fulfill the expectations of a demanding parent. When asked why they felt so angry that such statements were in the Bible, a group of adult parishioners quickly identified the tensions they could not resolve in their lives: (a) mothers who have to work, struggling to meet all the claims on their time; (b) fathers whose careers have been sidetracked in the economic downturn; (c) parents whose adult children are in various sorts of difficulty, and the like. Life is just too tough to have God requiring perfection, they insisted. No doubt 1 Peter's audience could come up with a list of hardships to justify such a conclusion. The letter seeks to encourage them not to slide away from the new life they had adopted as Christians. In today's terms, when the list of obligations and demands on our time seems impossible to manage, God is often the first to go.<sup>1</sup>”

### *The first to go*

I think that Dr. Perkins may help us to answer our question: What does holiness have to do with hope?

Growing in holiness is no less and no more than growing in Christlikeness, having the “mind of Christ” (Philippians 2:5), walking as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6) . . . simply loving God and loving neighbor everyday and in every way.

Ask yourself this: How well would Jesus be weathering these economic storms?

Would he be as anxious and fearful as I am over his 401k becoming a “201k” or worse. I think not. Jesus would never have become so attached to all the stuff and the money that buys it.

<sup>1</sup>Perkins, P. (1995). *First and Second Peter, James, and Jude*. Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (37). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.

What I'd like to be is more like Jesus! Yet, the pressures and anxieties that threaten to drive God from our lives, to squeeze out our commitments to holy habits, can only be

### Seven *Holy Habits*

The stated mission of St. Andrew, like all UMC churches, is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Since 2002, we've proclaimed that our vision for accomplishing that mission is centered upon God's call to be an inviting, worshiping, learning, loving, and serving people. As our church has grown, so has our vision of what God has placed us here to do. In keeping with this expanded vision, in 2008 we embraced seven *holy habits* that encompass our lives and commission as Jesus' disciples: *inviting, worshiping, learning, praying, caring, giving, and serving.*

Rev. Robert Hasley, our Senior Pastor, has challenged us all to embrace one or more of the seven holy habits that make up St. Andrew's vision statement. Note the "one or more." A resolution to completely remake my life around all seven habits would probably end up in my dustbin of unkept commitments. But resolving to genuinely move forward on a few of the seven, even one, that's doable. For example, in 2006, many of us resolved to read through the entire Bible and hundreds of us kept that resolution. The thrill and joy of Easter is still fresh in our hearts. Now is a good time to revisit our resolve and take some concrete and lasting steps toward a deeper, more authentic, life-changing relationship with God as revealed in Jesus Christ, for such a relationship is what we mean by "discipleship."

Last year I wrote a ten-part series on these holy habits. Those studies are available at [www.thebibleacademy.com](http://www.thebibleacademy.com). Just click on the "Weekly Bible Studies" button and then scroll down to January 2008.

pushed aside by as Peter puts it, disciplining ourselves and setting all our hope on the grace of Jesus Christ. The world wants to force us into its ways of excess and panic, but we are to not to allow ourselves to be conformed to such ways. Instead, we need to make a newly energized commitment to putting God first and learning the ways of disciples.

Peter helps us to remember who we are, into whom God has made us. We have been "born anew . . . through the loving and enduring word of God" (v. 23). Indeed, this will be a theme on which Peter expands in our passage for next week: 1 Peter 2:1-10.

The truth is that we do live as "exiles" (v. 17) in this world. We know that we are to be the light of the world, the city on the hill (Matthew 5:14), yet we are more than a bit like strangers in a strange land. Becoming more like Jesus necessarily means that we will fit less well into a world that does not know him.

Peter, like the rest of the New Testament writers, wants us to grasp the larger vision of God's work in this world and our place in his work. Disciplined and holy living are how we can live the glorious new life God has given us, how we can truly be evermore Christlike.

#### *In it together*

Of course, such living doesn't come naturally to us. The ways of the world are seductive. The heightened pressures of these times can actually, as Perkins

reminds, force us away from God. But Peter reminds us that in this, we are not alone. It is within a community of fellow believers that we strive to be holy as God is holy, knowing that the practice of our faith is a bulwark against despair and fear. Peter calls us to "genuine mutual love" in which we "love one another deeply from the heart" (v. 22) Tough times come and go. Our lives are a chaotic and sometimes bewildering combination of tragedies and joys, of enthusiasms and boredoms. But quoting from Isaiah, Peter writes: "The grass withers and flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever" (v. 24-25 from Isaiah 40:6-8).

And the word of God is a word of love. Before all else, God *is* love. When we are struggling through difficulties of any sort, preparing our minds for action (1:13) means living God's future now, a future without fear or tragedy, a future in which we simply love God and love neighbor every day and in every way, for that is truly holy living.

## Appreciating Leviticus

Leviticus is one of the Old Testament books that Christians too often believe is irrelevant and even off-putting. Yet, I've found that the longer I've been immersed in the New Testament message, the more I've come to appreciate Leviticus. It helps to always remember that Jesus' commandment, "Love your neighbor" is a quote from Leviticus 19.

Rob Bell, one of America's most popular young preachers, tells the story of his 1999 church planting, which has since grown to be a "mega-church." For the entire first year, he preached through Leviticus, verse by verse. Why? He writes, "Leviticus cannot be tamed. Its imagery is too wild. We ventured into its lair and let it devour us, trusting that God would deliver us with a truer picture of his Son." That is one brave preacher.

Do we approach the book with such confidence? Perhaps the following brief observations will strengthen our resolve to be a people of *all* the Bible.

The theme of Leviticus is expressed in 20:26, "You are to be holy to me because, I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." To speak of God as holy is to refer to (1) God's *separation* from his creation and (2) God's *moral* character.

The first part of Leviticus (chapters 1-16) speaks to the gulf, the separation, between God and humanity. How can an unholy people approach a holy God? As Kaiser writes, "A holy God graciously provides these rituals to make it possible for mere mortals, who are also sinners, to walk in fellowship with one who is pure." The rituals are foreign to us. They seem distasteful and even bizarre. But it is important to appreciate that such rituals were commonplace among the religions of the ancient Near East. God taught them about holiness using words and rituals that they could understand.

The second half of Leviticus (chapters 17-26) focuses on moral character. Our character is to reflect God's character. Every thought, word, and deed that makes up our lives are to be grounded in mercy, kindness, and grace. It surprises people to discover that when Jesus says "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (see Matthew 22:34-40), he is quoting from Leviticus 19:18.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. In his call to holy living in the face of suffering, Peter urges the believers to contrast two ways of living: the ways of the world and the ways of God. The one is perishable; the other imperishable. How can living in the ways of God, this "holy living" be the path to hope and confidence and away from fear and anxiety. What does how we live really have to do with how we feel?
2. The Revised Common Lectionary is a calendared table of Scripture readings for a three-year cycle. In the first year, 1 Peter is placed for reading during weeks immediately after Easter. You might read back over the first chapter of Peter's letter and see if you can discern why the letter makes such good Easter reading. How many Easter words do you find . . . just look at verses 3-5 for instance. Where else can you find reflections of God's new thing.
3. The last verse of the chapter reads: "That word [the word of the Lord] is the good news that was announced to you." David Bartlett<sup>2</sup> rightly notes that the entire letter holds Christian proclamation, which is the essence of preaching, in "high esteem." Do you agree that the essence of Christian preaching is the announcement of the good news? What do you think constitutes good preaching? If you could give preachers three pieces of advice what would you say. Of course, you might be doing so on a regular basis already!

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<sup>2</sup>Bartlett's commentary on 1 Peter is in the *New Interpreters Bible*, a copy of which is in the St. Andrew library. Pheme Perkins' commentary is in the library as well.

## Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. In this week's readings we are taking a look at some passages that bear on this week's reading from 1 Peter.

<p><b>Monday, Leviticus 19</b> "Love your neighbor" is found in this chapter. What themes do you find when reading the whole chapter? Don't allow yourself to be put off by the foreignness of some of this. What messages are there for you here?</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, Isaiah 40</b> This prophet is certainly a bringer of good news to an exiled people. Again, what message do you hear for yourself in this ancient writing?</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, 2 Timothy 1:6-14</b> Paul too issues a call for holy living in the midst of his own suffering.</p>	<p><b>Thursday, 1 John 3:11-23</b> Living a life of love. More on what such a life looks like.</p>
<p><b>Friday, 2 Peter 1:5-8</b> More on disciplined living. Read all the first chapter and you'll probably agree that how we live really does matter!</p>	<p><b>Saturday, Psalm 24</b> Living a life of purity before the creator of the cosmos.</p>

