

We rest so we can journey further.
We gather so we can connect deeper.

JUBILEE CHURCH RETREAT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

21st – 24th June 2019



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Living Instruments – Divine Purposes

Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. 2 Tim 2:21

JUNE 21, NIGHT

Passage: Leviticus 6:1-7

6:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses: **6:2** “When a person sins and commits a trespass against the Lord by deceiving his fellow citizen in regard to something held in trust, or a pledge, or something stolen, or by extorting something from his fellow citizen, **6:3** or has found something lost and denies it and swears falsely concerning any one of the things that someone might do to sin – **6:4** when it happens that he sins and he is found guilty, then he must return whatever he had stolen, or whatever he had extorted, or the thing that he had held in trust, or the lost thing that he had found, **6:5** or anything about which he swears falsely. He must restore it in full and add one fifth to it; he must give it to its owner when he is found guilty. **6:6** Then he must bring his guilt offering to the Lord, a flawless ram from the flock, convertible into silver shekels, for a guilt offering to the priest. **6:7** So the priest will make atonement on his behalf before the Lord and he will be forgiven for whatever he has done to become guilty.”

When we think about holiness, we should invariably associate it with forgiveness. Holiness without forgiveness is incomplete. God said that He is the Holy Lord, forgiving us time and time again. If we continue to wallow in sin, guilt, self-reproach or bitterness from being hurt, we will continue on a downward spiral that will result in hopelessness and destruction. But because God is holy, He forgives, as He does not want us to continue to dwell in sin, or to persist in a fallen state. Because He is holy, He wants to redeem, forgive and renew.

Forgiveness brings about healing, and allows for broken relationships to be restored. Forgiveness also brings about life, akin to a power which re-creates.

In the ancient days, God repaired relationships and restored them to what they ought to be through the sacrificial system of offering and priestly ministry. “The priest will make atonement on their behalf,” and “they will be forgiven,” these two phrases appeared repeatedly in Leviticus Chapter 4. This system that God established for the Israelites provided an avenue for them to atone for their sins, as they could continually go before God for forgiveness, thus maintaining a constant life of holiness, and intimate relationship with God.

Let us put ourselves in the shoes of an Israelite and think about how he/she must have felt. When you bring offerings to the tabernacle, and follow the instructions set forth in Leviticus, the priest takes what you brought to offer to God and thereafter returns to you and says: “You have been forgiven, now go in peace!” Tomorrow will again be a new day, and a new opportunity. God ensures that you can start afresh, does not perpetually condemn your sin nor say that you are beyond redemption.

The system of priesthood that God set up tells us that His holiness is to bring about His presence and forgiveness and to draw us closer to Him. It is not about pushing ourselves away from Him because we feel unworthy. Those close to Him will experience the power of a life of holiness from Him, and reign over sin. God has bestowed upon us a holy and unblemished life, one that will lead us into His holiness. In this way, we can then regard ourselves as holy. We have to respect and love ourselves, no longer impair ourselves, and move forward with zest and fervor.

God's holiness continues to attract, renew, motivate and forgive us. Only forgiveness allows us to be released from our hurts, and mend our broken relationships. This is what God has shown us. Thank you, Lord, for being a Holy God to us.

Reflection:

1. Please share your experience of forgiving someone, or being forgiven.
2. Why did God establish a system of offerings for the people in the Old Testament?
3. How can you help your fellow brothers and sisters to forgive one another?

JUNE 22, MORNING

Passage: Leviticus 8:5-13

8:5 Then Moses said to the congregation: “This is what the Lord has commanded to be done.” **8:6** So Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water. **8:7** Then he put the tunic on Aaron, wrapped the sash around him, and clothed him with the robe. Next he put the ephod on him and placed on him the decorated band of the ephod, and fastened the ephod closely to him with the band. **8:8** He then set the breastpiece on him and put the Urim and Thummim into the breastpiece. **8:9** Finally, he set the turban on his head and attached the gold plate, the holy diadem, to the front of the turban just as the Lord had commanded Moses. **8:10** Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and everything in it, and so consecrated them. **8:11** Next he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times and so anointed the altar, all its vessels, and the wash basin and its stand to consecrate them. **8:12** He then poured some of the anointing oil on the head of Aaron and anointed him to consecrate him. **8:13** Moses also brought forward Aaron’s sons, clothed them with tunics, wrapped sashes around them, and wrapped headbands on them just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

God has called us to be His priests in the world, to be His holy and precious instruments. However, the pursuit of holiness is not about pursuing high personal morals, nor about making no mistakes in life. Rather, the pursuit of holiness means getting close to the holy God, to join my life together with His, to maintain that close relationship every day, and to spend time to communicate with Him.

2 Timothy 2:21 “useful for the Master, prepared for every good work”.

Holiness means that we are “useful for the Master”, while being “prepared for every good work” means we should build up others such that their lives will transform. It is about helping people to escape the darkness of their lives and receive God’s grace.

Priests in the Old Testament reflected such a way of living. They lived their lives carefully before God, so that they could be holy. As a priest, one had to light the lamp in the tabernacle daily to worship God, pray before God, and carry out various tasks in the tabernacle according to God’s instructions. In this way, the priest could continue to serve as a priest for others, and be a mediator between God and the people. The people could come before God through the priest, and through him God could be gracious to the people. The priests carried out their duties daily, so that the people always had a clear path to God. Thus all of us should be such a priest, channelling God’s gift of life, for this is worthy and precious. We persistently hold fast to God’s holy life, which is the obligation of a priest. We continue to be closely linked with a life of holiness for this is expected of a priest.

We are able to partake and serve as priests in this way through Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews tells us that the Old Testament role of the priest and the function of the sacrifices have been substituted by

Jesus Christ. Therefore, today, we come before God in the name of Jesus Christ the High Priest. Jesus Christ is seated at the right side of God, serving as our High Priest every day. We gather and worship in the name of Jesus Christ. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, to signify that the prayer does not go directly to God, but to Him in the name of Jesus Christ. Hence, we also serve in our priestly roles in the name of Jesus Christ the High Priest.

John 17: 19 “I set myself apart on their behalf, so that they too may be truly set apart.”

Jesus came and brought with Him holiness; He also sanctified Himself and manifested a holy life, so that the disciples who believed were also sanctified. We are the disciples of Jesus. The holiness of Jesus Christ is inviting and approachable. His holiness is filled with love, compassion, courage, integrity and righteousness, attracting people to Him. We want to be disciples like this.

May each and every one we are in contact with every day witness God’s grace through us, so that they might realize that they too can get close to the Holy God. That they can triumph over and escape from darkness, and be renewed, because the priests who serve in the name of Jesus Christ are in their midst.

Reflection:

1. What is the role of the priest?
2. What is the meaning of holiness?
3. Please discuss the vision of “priesthood of all believers”.

JUNE 22, NIGHT

Passage: Leviticus 11:44-47

11:44 for I am the Lord your God and you are to sanctify yourselves and be holy because I am holy. You must not defile yourselves by any of the swarming things that creep on the ground, **11:45** for I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, and you are to be holy because I am holy. **11:46** This is the law of the land animals, the birds, all the living creatures that move in the water, and all the creatures that swarm on the land, **11:47** to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between the living creatures that may be eaten and the living creatures that must not be eaten.’”

God said: “you are to sanctify yourselves and be holy because I am holy”. “Holy” here refers to being set apart. We need some discipline in our lives to have a strong consciousness of our identity of belonging to God, so that we will not unknowingly forget who we are. God used His Law to remind the Israelites that they were different from other people, and belonged to God. Through constant daily reminders and practices, the Israelites understood their own identities.

During that period of time when the Israelites were brought out of Egypt and into a new land, there were many other religions and cultures around them that impacted and influenced them. God wanted to preserve His people’s identities, and wanted to ensure they had understood that their lives were marked. Hence, God gave them regulations so that they might protect themselves.

During the New Testament time, Jesus came and God no longer imposed these regulations. Thus, today we no longer keep these regulations. With Jesus’ incarnation, a life of holiness is manifested through the union of life with Jesus, because Jesus has already fulfilled the Law. Therefore, we no longer need to keep the Law, we only need to follow Jesus: our lives in union with Him, and be like Him, in order to fulfil the Law.

By living out His word, we will bear the mark of Christians. This is how we are now set apart. In John 13:35, Jesus said: “Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples – if you have love for one another”. The rituals of holiness carried out in the Old Testament have become obsolete, but it does not mean that we do not have to bear a mark in the context of the New Testament. That **mark of Christians that is demanded of us by Jesus is to love one another**, so that **everyone will know that we are holy (set apart) and belong to**

Jesus. If we truly live our lives in accordance to the word of God, our lives will emanate power and vitality.

Jesus also calls us to forgive one another; this is in the same vein as loving one another. Forgiving can help to bring families and church communities into reconciliation and restore relationships. We are called to follow the word of God and not bear grudges. Forgiveness begins from oneself, and not in response to receiving apologies from those who have wronged us. We have to open our own hearts before we can learn to love one another.

Through our cell groups, let us get to know more people and learn to love them. Let our church be one that exudes vitality.

Reflection:

1. How do you express your mark of holiness?
2. What did Jesus say is the Christian's mark of holiness?
3. How do we exercise this mark of holiness?

JUNE 23, MORNING

Passage: Leviticus 19:9-18

19:9 “When you gather in the harvest of your land, you must not completely harvest the corner of your field, and you must not gather up the gleanings of your harvest. 19:10 You must not pick your vineyard bare, and you must not gather up the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You must leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God. 19:11 “You must not steal, you must not tell lies, and you must not deal falsely with your fellow citizen. 19:12 You must not swear falsely in my name, so that you do not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD. 19:13 You must not oppress your neighbour or commit robbery against him. You must not withhold the wages of the hired labourer overnight until morning. 19:14 You must not curse a deaf person or put a stumbling block in front of a blind person. You must fear your God; I am the LORD. 19:15 “You must not deal unjustly in judgment: you must neither show partiality to the poor nor honour the rich. You must judge your fellow citizen fairly. 19:16 You must not go about as a slanderer among your people. You must not stand idly by when your neighbour’s life is at stake. I am the LORD. 19:17 You must not hate your brother in your heart. You must surely re-prove your fellow citizen so that you do not incur sin on account of him. 19:18 You must not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the children of your people, but you must love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD.

God is a holy God, He does not wish to see justice perverted, and He wants to create order out of chaos. He does not want to see good being destroyed, but wants to transform bad into good, from a state of lacking to become fulfilled. God's holiness brings with it a positive energy. He wants to get close to people, and hopes that we can also get close to Him. Therefore, He provides counsel and guidance.

Micah 6:8 says: "to do justice, and to love kindness," is to be a living testimony of a life of holiness. A life of holiness is not about making no mistakes, it is about doing what one is supposed to do.

Therefore, our holiness has to begin with loving one another as Christians, and then extending it to doing justice and showing kindness in the larger community, especially towards the marginalised in society. Justice does not just refer to individual rights and interests, but also to societal righteousness and fairness.

We should handle matters and treat others based on two principles: one, for the good of others; and two, to ensure righteousness and fairness. As Christians, our testimonies should not be limited to the church; demonstrating Christian values at our workplace is also a testimony of holiness.

Our attitudes are especially important in the process of enforcing justice and administering kindness. Our faith tells us that people are not righteous, and we are only able to live righteous lives because we have been justified by faith. Therefore, we have nothing to be boastful of; on the contrary, we need to always be thankful to God that we are able to live out holiness. Let us not be self-righteous people who become more arrogant the more we pursue holiness. Instead, we need to be more humble as we do better, and pray for those who are weaker instead of judging them.

The way to maintain a correct and positive attitude is to first establish a deep relationship with God, with Jesus as our role model. Jesus was able to manifest a life of holiness because He never broke off His relationship with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. His daily prayer was a testimony to this. Prayer brought Him into a tightly-knit relationship with the Father. Such a close relationship enabled Him to do and say as His Father instructed.

From Jesus, we can once again see how to build a close relationship with God, and how such a relationship can help one live a life of holiness. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we willingly give ourselves up to God. In doing so, we realise that we can love those whom we could not love and forgive those whom we could not forgive. We also realise that we can give more.

In Leviticus 19, when God delivered his lessons, he ended with: “I am the LORD your God”. This indicates that whatever we do is for worshiping him, because He is such a God, and therefore we want to enforce justice and administer kindness to those around us.

Reflection:

1. As God’s holy people, the most important thing is to keep yourself pure. What are your views on this statement?
2. How does God want His people to manifest a life of holiness?
3. How do you enforce justice and show kindness so as to put into practice a life of holiness?

JUNE 23, NIGHT

Passage: Leviticus 23:23-32

23:23 The Lord spoke to Moses: **23:24** “Tell the Israelites, ‘In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you must have a complete rest, a memorial announced by loud horn blasts, a holy assembly. **23:25** You must not do any regular work, but you must present a gift to the Lord.’”

23:26 The Lord spoke to Moses: **23:27** “The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It is to be a holy assembly for you, and you must humble yourselves and present a gift to the Lord. **23:28** You must not do any work on this particular day, because it is a day of atonement to make atonement for yourselves before the Lord your God. **23:29** Indeed, any person who does not behave with humility on this particular day will be cut off from his people. **23:30** As for any person who does any work on this particular day, I will exterminate that person from the midst of his people! **23:31** You must not do any work. This is a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all the places where you live. **23:32** It is a Sabbath of complete rest for you, and you must humble yourselves on the ninth day of the month in the evening, from evening until evening you must observe your Sabbath.”

God instructed the Israelites to celebrate festivals as holy occasions, that is, to set aside a specific time as holy. This was done for their own benefit. God wanted to add a rhythm into their lives, so that they would not be like 24/7 machines that are still running after 30 years. But people are not machines, and our souls need rest. There are times when we encounter failures, get frustrated, and are hurt; there are also times when we experience success and joy. God did not want His people to become proud after tasting success, neither did He want His people to lose their spirit and feel demoralised after failures.

Therefore, God instructed His people to celebrate festivals so that there would be quiet and rest. Rest does not mean to do nothing, rather, rest is for worship. Worship and living are tightly coupled. By worshipping during festivals, God wanted the Israelites to bring their entire bodies and minds, and all they had endured in life to Him. In a celebration of harvest, it would be a reminder to them that, although they had worked hard, their achievements were given to them by God. This would prevent them from hankering after more, or think that their successes were due to their own toil and efforts. Having such thoughts might lead to a vicious cycle of pursuit of success and eventually forgetting God.

On the other hand, there were also people who were unsuccessful in life and had nothing to show for. But on a festive occasion, when everyone gathered together in worship, the Holy Spirit would remind them that God would watch over, guide them and provide their every need. Therefore, they need not be sad or lose heart, nor feel inferior or jealous of others who were more successful. There was also no need to harbour a grudge, get angry or feel unhappy about work.

When celebrating a festival, God's people were able to put aside all things and go before God to worship Him. There was no need to count personal gains or losses, but it became a time to remember that no

matter what happened, God would watch over them. Don't you think having such a healthy soul is good? In 23:22, the people were reminded not to reap to the very edges of their fields, so that the poor and the needy had a chance to glean the leftover crops. It was an opportunity to show kindness while celebrating success and harvest. When celebrating a festival, God's people were reminded of their identities and their goals in life. When they handled their time in such a manner, they were moulded by God into living entirely different lives, they were developed into becoming holy.

As for us, holiness encompasses every aspect of our lives, our whole being, our possessions, places around us, and things that we do daily. Therefore, time management is also an important lesson that we can learn from the book of Leviticus. Singaporeans today are extremely busy, yet we hardly ask ourselves if there is a need for us to be so busy. Does good time management mean that we have to accomplish the most in the least amount of time? We ought to manage our time in the same way that God manages time. It is important to first consider the meaningfulness and value of the things that we do, and we ought to also treat time and holidays in the same manner. Using the same principle that God used in getting the Israelites to celebrate festivals, we also need time to rest. It will be a period for us to reorganise our time, restore our spirits and reflect on our values.

Reflection:

1. "Every day is a gift from God, therefore there is nothing special about festivals." Share your point of view on such an opinion.
2. What is the relationship between a life of holiness that God requests of us and His appointed festivals?
3. How can you observe the Christian holy days in a more meaningful way?

JUNE 24, MORNING

Passage: Leviticus 25:1-13

25:1 The Lord spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai: **25:2** “Speak to the Israelites and tell them, ‘When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land must observe a Sabbath to the Lord. **25:3** Six years you may sow your field, and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather the produce, **25:4** but in the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath of complete rest – a Sabbath to the Lord. You must not sow your field or prune your vineyard. **25:5** You must not gather in the aftergrowth of your harvest and you must not pick the grapes of your unpruned vines; the land must have a year of complete rest. **25:6** You may have the Sabbath produce of the land to eat – you, your male servant, your female servant, your hired worker, the resident foreigner who stays with you, **25:7** your cattle, and the wild animals that are in your land – all its produce will be for you to eat.

25:8 ““You must count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, and the days of the seven weeks of years will amount to forty-nine years. **25:9** You must sound loud horn blasts – in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, on the Day of Atonement – you must sound the horn in your entire land. **25:10** So you must consecrate the fiftieth year, and you must proclaim a release in the land for all its inhabitants. That year will be your jubilee; each one of you must return to his property and each one of you must return to his clan. **25:11** That fiftieth year will be your jubilee; you must not sow the land, harvest its aftergrowth, or pick the grapes of its unpruned vines. **25:12** Because that year is a jubilee, it will be holy to you – you may eat its produce from the field.

25:13 ““In this year of jubilee you must each return to your property.

God had also established two special years, namely, the Sabbath year and the Jubilee year. Both were to be separated from normal years.

The Sabbath year occurred once every seven years, and in this year, all men, land and cattle needed to rest. In addition, items pledged by the poor had to be returned, slaves had to be freed and everything had to revert back to their original states. After seven rounds of seven years, the fiftieth year was known as the Jubilee year. It was a year of a complete turnover. Those who had sold off their lands due to poverty would have their lands returned to them in the year of Jubilee. Those who bought lands from the poor had to give them a chance to redeem the lands. If the previous owner was unable to redeem the land, his brothers or relatives had to help him redeem the land. If a person had sold himself off as a slave and was unable to redeem his own freedom, his brothers or relatives had to help him do so.

God did not allow the Israelites to perpetually hold on to their brothers' lands. In other words, the frustrations of the poor would not last for a lifetime and the successful would not be able to keep accumulating more. The year of Jubilee and the Sabbath year were opportunities for people to turn around their lives – this was love.

God wanted to ensure that His people's basic living needs were met, and they could try again after failing. This is what we need to learn, this is a value that the church should live out as a testimony to society. When the people of Israel did exactly what God had decreed, their community became more harmonious, more caring and the people were healthier in spirit.

Herein lies a fundamental theological truth, and an important value in our religion: the earth belongs to God, and we are merely stewards entrusted by God to take care of it. The Israelites identified themselves as the holy people of God, therefore their concept of land was different

from that of the Gentiles'. Because the Israelites understood that the land belonged to God, their attitudes and focus in life were different. Their values meant that when the Israelites realised that their brother needed to sell his land in order to get out of poverty, they would redeem the land for him; when they saw that their brother had no choice but to become a slave, they would help him regain his freedom. When they helped a brother redeem his land or regain his freedom, God pointed out that He was the one who first led them out of Egypt into the Promised Land and therefore, they themselves were redeemed by God.

When we come before God with open hearts, we will be able to uphold the principle and spirit of Leviticus. As a holy people who believe in a creating and redeeming God, He reminds us that everything that we have is entrusted to us for our stewardship. God as the redeemer means He wants to free our bodies, hearts and souls. When we say that we believe in such a holy God, He reminds us that we want to see people's lives being set free in this world, and the church has been entrusted with this responsibility. The church is to be light and salt to the world. This is not just about doing good deeds, it has to be a part of our lives, and it testifies to whom we believe in. Although there is no Jubilee or Sabbath year in our society today, we can still participate in the work of redemption of people around us.

Reflection:

1. It is said that "the practice of holiness in everyday life is a spiritual matter", do you agree?
2. How did God ensure that His people's basic needs in life were met?
3. How can you be involved in caring for the basic needs of brothers and sisters in our community?

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<http://bit.ly/jubilee19>

