

Holy priests offering spiritual sacrifices 1 Peter 2:4-5

Kath Wells

We find in the Scriptures many pictures of what it means for us to belong to God. He is our Father and we are his children. Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches. He is the Shepherd, and we are his flock.

In Peter's letter he says that we are a chosen people who belong to God. We have received his mercy, through the precious blood of Jesus. Now we belong to him.

'You are like living stones', he says, 'being built together into a spiritual house.'

We are not just individuals who know God, but he is building us together like stones – shaping us and joining us. He is making a house where God loves to live through his Spirit.

Then Peter says something more. 'You are holy priests, in this spiritual house.'

What does this mean?

In the Old Testament priests were anointed with oil and set apart to serve God.

This is what it means to be holy. To be set apart from other people and other things.

They were to serve God, and nothing else. It was an incredible privilege. It was a sacred honour.

Only priests could come into the inner courts to speak to God. Only priests could offer sacrifices before God.

But Peter says – Now, because of the death of Jesus – all who belong to God are priests.

He is not talking about being pastors or leaders or teachers. No. Scripture says SOME are pastors, some are apostles, some are leaders.

And he is not talking about only what we do here on a Sunday as we worship God together.

No – he is saying all who belong to God are priests 24/7 – every day of the week.

All of us are set apart to serve him all week.

All of us are anointed, not with oil, but with the Holy Spirit to do his work every day.

All of us can come into the holy place and meet with God and hear his voice at any time.

All of us can make sacrifices that give joy to God every day of the week.

This was a big surprise for the first readers of this letter. It was so different from their understanding of the work of a priest. This is an incredible honour – to be chosen to be a priest before God – all of the time.

1. We are set apart to serve him. 'You are not your own, you were bought with a price'. We belong to him, and must serve him each day. Our lives are not about pleasing ourselves, but pleasing him. This is the work of a priest.
2. We are anointed by the Spirit, to represent God and speak for him. God gives us his Spirit so we can do the work of Jesus. We must daily say 'Holy Spirit, flow in me as a river of life.' This is how we are a priest.
3. We are to come into his presence and meet with him and hear his voice and enjoy his favour.
Perhaps you are saying – but God is everywhere.... His presence is everywhere.

How can I do this in my week? Think about your parents, if they are still alive. If you go to their home and the door is open – you will walk in and call out hello! All around you are their things – furniture, clothes, pictures, books.... You can feel their presence in their home. But you cannot hear them or see them yet. Perhaps they are in the back garden. So you call again... and you listen... and you hear voices from the back of the house. So you walk towards the voices. Then you can hear them clearly. Their presence is much more real now. Then you walk through the kitchen, out into the garden, and you can now see them. Ah.... There they are... and they are smiling at you. Welcome! Welcome! Lovely to see you! Their presence is now warm and welcoming to you. You know they want to see you. Then you go closer and you reach out

and hug each other. You are touching. And their presence is more and more real and loving and giving. And your father steps back a little and holds your hands and looks in your eyes, and says 'I have been longing to see you. I miss you. I have a gift for you... You are very precious to me.' And his loving presence and loving words touch your heart... and tears come to your eyes... In the same way, there are different dimensions of God's presence – and as priests before God we are invited to come right into the presence of God. There is no barrier. The curtain was torn in two by Jesus sacrifice. We can come close, and receive mercy and grace, just when we need it. We let him touch us, and melt our hearts. We listen to his words of love. We hear his compassion for others, and we discover what he wants us to do in this world of his. Priests always seek the presence of God. And we must not wait until Sunday. We can do it anywhere, anytime. We must learn to enjoy his presence every day, and not let sinful things block his favour and joy in our hearts.

4. As priests we are to make spiritual sacrifices. What are these? They are not offerings for sin. Jesus has made the perfect sacrifice – once, for all sin, for all time.

Scripture tells us there are other offerings.

- We know that Romans 12:1 tells us to “Because of the great mercy of God, offer yourselves as living sacrifices, set apart for God” Be constantly available, at whatever the cost! This is about our life style. It must be one of complete availability to God. We cannot say to God –‘Oh, I am too busy with my family to do things for you.’ ‘Oh, but I must spend more time earning money...’ No... we are living sacrifices – totally available to God.
- Hebr. 13:15-16 says ‘let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise.’ This means to keep speaking his name. Even when life is difficult – keep speaking his name. A sacrifice of praise – thanking him for who he is. ‘You are my Redeemer. You are my Deliverer. You are the Lord of all things.’ Speaking his name continually. This is a beautiful sacrifice to him. He loves it!
- Then the next verse says ‘Do good, and share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.’ We give God joy when we do good and we share with others. He smiles with pleasure! These are our sacrifices as a priest before God. When we help someone tidy up their garden – when we take food to someone who is sick – when we give someone a lift to the shops... These are sacrifices that please God.
- In Phil 4:18 Paul thanks the people for the generous giving of money by the people. ‘The gifts you sent are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.’ When we give to help others in need, this is a sacrifice that delights God. A fragrant offering he calls it. Every week we are asked to give to some charity, some good cause. When you write that cheque for Child Cancer, or Arthritis, or work with The Blind, or Save the Children, or World Vision.... God sniffs that cheque... and he says ‘Ah... that smells beautiful to me.’ Generous giving is a fragrant offering to God. When you do this you are a holy priest making a spiritual sacrifice. What a pleasure it is to give generously!

As holy priests we are to make these sacrifices, joyfully, every day, to Him. Our whole lives, our praise, good deeds, sharing with others, giving generously to those in need. It is an honour to do so and God is given great joy when we do.

4. But there is something more we must do as priests. That is to come into his holy presence as a priest for others. We are to pray for them, when they cannot pray for themselves. Perhaps it is someone in great need and they cannot find faith to believe God can help them. But you can have that faith. So you must be a priest for them – praying on their behalf before the throne of grace.

Perhaps it is a son or daughter or brother or mother who does not know God.

You stand before God and plead for them. You are an advocate... speaking on their behalf to the one person who can change their hearts.

When an Old Testament priest went before God, sometimes he wore a garment with the names of all the tribes of Israel on it. He took them into the Holy presence – to plead with God on their behalf.

We must do this also. All of us must do this, because we are all priests.

Perhaps you feel you are not good with words. You cannot pray like the pastor can....or that one can. God does not need lots of words. He needs your compassion. He needs your heart to ache for the person you are bringing to him. Perhaps you will groan, or sigh, or weep before God and say only a few words. That is enough.

“Father, heal my son.” “Jesus, call my daughter to you again.” “Saviour, be merciful to my Dad”

“Lord, open their eyes to see you.”

That is the prayer of a priest before a loving and merciful God.

He does not need lots of words. He needs willing hearts. He needs tender hearts. He needs your faith in his power to change lives.

What would change in your family if you as parents were praying like this?

What would change in our neighbourhoods if we prayed with our whole hearts for those who live around us?

What would change in our schools if young people became priests who prayed for their friends?

I believe God would begin to do miracles. Because this is how he works. Through the burdened and faith-filled hearts of his praying people. We are to stand in his presence anywhere, anytime, and take others to him in prayer. What an incredible privilege. What a sacred responsibility!

What would our lives be like if we accepted the honour God has given us of being holy priests – doing good, being generous, speaking his name in praise daily, being constantly available as a living sacrifice. Would our lives be different? Would they give God great joy? Would we see things change around us.

You are a chosen people, living stones being built into a spiritual house for him to dwell in.
You are chosen priests, set apart for him, bringing him joy with your sacrifices and offerings.
You are chosen to share his grace and mercy through your prayers for others.

Will you do this?

www.prayerchangeslives.org.nz