

6/15/25

What if You Are a Priest?

1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10

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Happy Father's Day to all fathers. My dad and I shared a love of baseball. We went to Red Sox Fantasy Camp several times, and those weeks were special. In 2018, my team was 1-3, and we won our fifth game, in extra innings, just to make the playoffs. In the first round of the playoffs, we faced the only undefeated team in camp. They beat us 10-5 the day before. They were coached by Frank Viola, who had been my coach at the previous camp I attended. I learned, after the game, that our opponents were talking about which team they preferred to face in the Division Final — after they beat us. Frank Viola, attempting to get them to focus, told them, “Yeah, but they’ve got the pastor going today.” When I went to the mound to warm up in the bottom of the first inning, Jeff Reardon, Frank Viola’s third base coach, was walking out, and he looked at me and said, “Are you a priest?” I said, “No, but I am a pastor.” He said, “A pastor?” I replied, “I lead a church, but it’s not a Roman Catholic Church, and I’m married, and we have two sons.” He said, “So you’re a priest.” I just laughed, and then he pointed to the sky and added, “That’s not fair. You have more help.” He may have been right. I pitched a complete game, struck out six, walked only one batter, and we crushed them 14-3, shocking them and the whole camp.

When you hear the word “priest”, what comes to mind? For many folks, including Jeff Reardon, it might be someone in long robes with a collar. Someone standing at an altar, reading Scripture, or leading in prayer. For some, a priest may seem holy, set apart, maybe unapproachable. For others, it’s a role associated with formality and hierarchy. In many Christian traditions, especially liturgical ones, the priest is a central figure — a mediator of God’s grace. But **What if you are a priest?**

What if **you**, sitting where you are, in ordinary clothes, with ordinary struggles and questions and hopes — what if **you** are a priest? That’s what’s proclaimed to scattered, persecuted believers in **1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10**.

*“Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, **let yourselves be built** into a spiritual house, to **be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy***

nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter wasn't written to professional clergy. It was for men and women trying to hold on to their faith in a hostile world. It says: *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people..."* This promise is for **all believers** — Jew and Gentile, young and old, male and female. Everyone in Christ shares in this royal priesthood. Jesus didn't save us to sit in pews. He saved us to **serve** — to be priests. In *Revelation 5*, we see and hear a vision of heavenly worship. The elders and creatures fall before the Lamb, singing: *"by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests..."* Did you hear that? **"You have made them..."** Not "you will" or "you might", but "you have". Past tense. Done. Accomplished.

So, **What if you are a priest?** What would that change in your life? What would that change in how you see yourself, your purpose, your place in this world? Too many believers walk around spiritually disempowered, thinking ministry is for someone else. But 1 Peter dismantles that idea. It doesn't say *some* of you are a royal priesthood. It says *you all* are. Maybe this idea is new to you. Maybe you've been taught that only ordained clergy are "ministers", that regular believers just attend, receive, and support, but the New Testament paints a different picture. In the Reformation of the 16th century, one of the great rediscoveries of the Church was the doctrine of **the priesthood of all believers, which is a key Baptist principle**. Martin Luther wrote that every Christian is a priest, with direct access to God, called to minister in the world.

This doctrine doesn't eliminate leadership or structure — but it gives dignity and purpose to every member of the body of Christ. Because being a priest isn't about status. It's about **service**. It's about interceding, representing, worshiping, and living a life that shines with the light of the gospel. Let's look again at what Peter says — and let it shape how we see ourselves.

The Priesthood Reimagined

Peter calls Jesus the **Living Stone** — the cornerstone, the one upon whom everything else is built. Then he says: “*like living stones, **let yourselves be built into a spiritual house...***” Peter is reshaping how we understand our identity, community, and calling as followers of Jesus. He’s telling us we’re not spectators in God’s work — we’re **part of the structure**. Christ is the cornerstone, but you and I are being set in place beside him, forming a *spiritual house*.

A. You Are Being Built Together

Hear the language: “***let yourselves be built...***” This isn’t just about individual piety. Peter is describing something communal. We’re not random stones lying around — we’re being joined together into something sacred: **a temple**, a dwelling place for God. In the Old Testament, the temple was the center of God’s presence and worship. Only priests could enter the holy places, and only the high priest, once a year, could step into the Most Holy Place. Access was restricted and limited. But now *you* are that temple. *You* are the priest. God’s Spirit isn’t locked away behind a curtain — it dwells within you. Paul says the same thing in **1 Corinthians 3:16**: “*Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?*” Often, we live with spiritual amnesia. We forget who we are. We forget what we’ve been called to do.

B. A Holy and Royal Priesthood

¹ Peter uses two phrases: “**a holy priesthood**” (verse 5) and “**a royal priesthood**” (verse 9).

- **Holy** means set apart, consecrated, distinct. Your life is not ordinary — because God’s Spirit has made you sacred.
- **Royal** means connected to the King. You’re not just set apart; you’re dignified.

You carry the authority and blessing of the risen Christ.

This image draws directly from **Exodus 19:6**, where God said to Israel: “*You shall be to me **a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.***” Now that promise is fulfilled in the Church. In **all believers**. To be a royal priest means your life is no longer your own. It means you’ve been called and consecrated — not to withdraw from the world, but to

serve it. You're not just a recipient of grace; you're a **channel** of it. You don't just attend worship; you are a **worshiper** and a **witness**.

C. "That You May Proclaim..."

¹ Peter says **why** all this matters: "...in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." This is the mission of every believer-priest: **to proclaim**. Not to stay silent. Not to keep your faith to yourself. Not to reduce Christianity to a private relationship with God. But to **proclaim** — to speak, declare, sing, testify, and tell of what God has done. The priesthood of all believers doesn't just give us **access to God** — it gives us **a calling from God**. We're proclaiming the mighty acts of the one who called us out of darkness into light. This is your story. This is your testimony. You may not think you have much to say — but if you've been brought from death to life, you have a **message** others need to hear.

You don't have to preach from a pulpit to proclaim God's goodness. You proclaim it when you: Share your story of God's mercy with a friend over coffee. Offer a word of hope to someone in crisis. Read Scripture to your children or grandchildren. Pray for a coworker going through pain. Live a life marked by joy, peace, and courage in the face of fear. Every one of those acts is a **priestly act** — and God is honored in them.

D. A People of Mercy

This section ends with a summary of who we **were** — and who **we are** now: *"Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

That's the gospel. Once lost; now found. Once excluded; now adopted. Once guilty; now washed clean. The priesthood of believers is not a reward for the righteous. It's a gift of **mercy**. We don't deserve it because we're better than others. We've received undeserved grace — and we want to pass it on, and that's why we serve.

Do you see yourself as part of God's spiritual house? Do you believe you've been set apart as a royal priest? Are you proclaiming the mighty acts of the One who saved you? If not, could it be that you have room to grow in your calling? Our Adversary would love nothing more than to keep you passive, silent, and disengaged. He wants you to forget who you are. But the Holy Spirit won't let you forget. You're a priest — not in

some abstract, symbolic way, but in real, Spirit-empowered, Christ-centered truth. And we need to live like it.

What Do Priests Do?

If **every believer in Christ is a priest** — called, set apart, and empowered by God — **what do priests do?** We no longer live in the Old Testament era. We're not offering lambs or goats on an altar. We're not standing in a tabernacle with incense, burning offerings before the Ark of the Covenant. So, if we're priests, what are our duties? What do we offer? What do we represent? This is where the New Testament gives us a redefined, Christ-centered picture of the priesthood.

We Offer Spiritual Sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5)

1 Peter says: "*be a holy priesthood, **offer spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*" That's what priests do: **offer sacrifices**. But not physical, bloody sacrifices. Those are finished. Jesus, the true High Priest, offered himself once for all (*Hebrews 10:12*). We offer **spiritual sacrifices**. What are these?

Our Whole Lives (Romans 12:1)

Paul gives us a clear answer in **Romans 12:1**: "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, **to present your bodies as a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*" Do you hear the priestly language? Paul doesn't tell us to **bring** a sacrifice — he tells us **to be** the sacrifice. **Your whole life**, your thoughts, your speech, your actions, your relationships, your work, your rest — is the offering. Not just Sunday morning, not just the moments you feel "spiritual", but everything. **Your life is the altar. Your obedience is the incense. Your trust in God is the flame.**

When you choose kindness over cruelty — that's a sacrifice.

When you give generously to help someone in need — that's a sacrifice.

When you choose holiness in a world of compromise — that's a sacrifice.

These may seem small, but they rise to heaven as a pleasing aroma to God.

Praise and Worship (*Hebrews 13:15*)

Hebrews 13:15 expands our understanding: “*Through him then let us continually offer up a **sacrifice of praise to God**, that is, **the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name**.*” This is priestly language. When you lift your voice in worship — whether in church, or in your car — you’re functioning as a priest. You’re offering spiritual sacrifices of **praise**. This is why singing is never just a warm-up before the sermon. It’s a central part of priestly ministry. It’s why prayer is never just filler. It’s communion. It’s intercession. It’s worship. Praise is not only corporate, it’s **continual**. We’re not just priests for one hour a week. We’re priests 24/7. In every moment, we’re to offer the “fruit of lips” that give thanks and glory to God. That means we watch our speech. We resist gossip. We choose gratitude over grumbling. We speak the truth in love and reject lies.

Doing Good and Sharing with Others (*Hebrews 13:16*)

The writer of Hebrews continues: “***Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.***” When you **do good** and **share what you have**, you’re acting like a priest.

- Giving to assist someone in need? That’s priestly.
- Making a meal for a struggling friend? That’s priestly.
- Supporting a missionary? That’s priestly.
- Opening your home to show hospitality? That’s priestly.

The radical nature of the priesthood of believers is that it turns the **ordinary** into the **sacred**.

Intercession and Reconciliation

Another key function of Old Testament priests was that **they interceded** for the people. We still **intercede**. We pray for others. We bear their burdens. We plead for mercy, healing, and restoration. Every time you pray for someone who’s hurting, or lost, or far from God — you’re acting as a priest. And just as priests helped reconcile people to God, now you and I are called to be **ministers of reconciliation** (*2 Corinthians 5:18*). We help people experience the love of God. We invite them to the table. We tell them the good news of Christ’s finished work.

Living Set Apart

Priests were called to live differently. Their lives pointed to the reality of God. In the same way, your priesthood is visible in your **daily choices. In:**

- The way you handle conflict.
- The way you manage money.
- The way you treat your spouse, your kids, your coworkers.
- The way you live when no one's watching.

You don't have to wear a robe or a collar to show the world you're set apart. Your integrity, your compassion, your humility — these are your vestments. And, just as the priests in Israel bore the names of the tribes on their garments when they went before God, we bear the burdens of others when we go before God in prayer.

So, What Do Priests Do?

- **We offer our lives** as living sacrifices.
- **We worship** through praise and thanksgiving.
- **We serve** through acts of goodness and generosity.
- **We intercede** for others, lifting them before God.
- **We proclaim** the gospel to the world around us.
- **We live set apart**, not as a show — but as a witness.

¹ Peter reminds us these sacrifices are “**acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**” Christ is our Great High Priest. He is our model, our mediator, our example. Because we're united with Him, we participate in His priestly ministry. Wherever you are, in your home, school, workplace, community, even a baseball field, you're a priest **on mission.** Let your worship be constant. Let your witness be bold. Let your love be real.

Blessing: Always remember, “*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. So that you may declare the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*” Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. *1 Peter 2:9* says, “You are a royal priesthood.” What does it mean to you, in terms of your identity and purpose, to be called a priest? How does this shift, or challenge, your understanding of your role as a follower of Jesus?
2. *1 Peter 2:5* and *Romans 12:1* speak of offering spiritual sacrifices. What might that look like in your everyday life — in your work, family, or church? What kind of “sacrifices” are hardest for you to offer?
3. *1 Peter 2:9* says we are made priests “that we may proclaim the mighty acts of God.” When, and how, have you recently proclaimed God’s work in your life to someone else? How did it go? What holds you back from doing it more?
4. As a priest, you have direct access to God (*Revelation 1:5-6*). How can you fully live into this access and responsibility through prayer? What does this mean for how you pray for others?
5. *1 Peter 2:10* declares, “Once you had not received mercy, but now you have.” How does remembering God’s mercy shape your sense of self, as well as your relationships with, and ministry to, others — as a priest, intercessor, or servant?
6. Old Testament priests were anointed with oil — a symbol of God’s presence and power. How do you experience the Holy Spirit empowering your priestly calling today? Where do you need the Holy Spirit’s strength most right now?