

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Peter 2:4-5, 9-10

What images come to mind when you think of a priest?

A little history of the priesthood under the Old Covenant:

- The Hebrew word for “priest,” kohen, always denotes one who offers sacrifices.
- At first, every man was his own priest and presented his own sacrifices before God. Afterward, that office was given to the head of the family, as in the cases of Noah (Genesis 8:20) and Abraham (Genesis 12:7).
- The word first occurs as applied to Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18.
- Under the Levitical arrangements, the office of the priesthood was limited to the tribe of Levi, and to only one family in that tribe, the family of Aaron.
- Their duties were manifold. Primarily, priests represented the people before God and offered the various sacrifices prescribed in the law.
- The high priest was the religious leader of the Israelites. The office of the high priest was hereditary and was traced from Aaron, Moses' brother. The high priest had to be without any physical defects and holy in his conduct. His most important duty was on the Day of Atonement when he entered the Most Holy Place behind the veil to stand before God. He would make a sacrifice for himself and for the people to make atonement for all their sins committed during the year that just ended.

Read Exodus 19:1-6. What did God say to the people of Israel as he led them out of Egypt? What was his purpose for them? Why do you think God later instituted the priesthood described above?

Peter says, as believers we're part of a “holy priesthood” and a “royal priesthood.” What are the implications of this?

Peter says that as part of this holy, royal priesthood, we're to “offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” What does this mean? How do we do this?

Reflect on these four truths, and what they mean regarding who you are in Christ:

- A chosen people
- A royal priesthood
- A holy nation
- God's special possession

Why do we declare God's praises?

The priesthood of all believers has enormous implications for how we live our lives. Consider four ways to unpack this truth in your life.

1. We all have direct access to God

What do these verses tell us is our privilege?

- Ephesians 3:12
- Hebrews 4:16
- Hebrews 10:19, 22

"The priesthood of all believers means we have direct access to God's grace and mercy, power and presence, through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ. We can "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16) and "we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:19). We don't have to go through an obstacle course of rites and rituals or appeal to a priest or prophet to intercede for us. Our God is just a prayer away." J. Lanier Burns

2. We all can offer spiritual sacrifices to God

Look up the following verses and explain what they say about this:

- Romans 12:1
- Philippians 2:17
- Philippians 4:18
- Hebrews 13:15-1

“Of the spiritual sacrifices, the first is the offering of ourselves, of which Paul speaks in Romans 12:1; for we can offer nothing, until we offer to him ourselves as a sacrifice; which is done by denying ourselves. Then, afterwards follow prayers, thanksgiving, almsdeeds, and all the duties of religion.” John Calvin

3. All our work is priestly work

Martin Luther wrote, “This word priest should become as common as the word ‘Christian’ because all Christians are priests.” When Luther referred to the priesthood of all believers, he maintained that the plowboy and the milkmaid could do priestly work. In fact, their plowing and milking was priestly work. There was no hierarchy where the priesthood was a calling and milking the cow was not. Both were tasks that God called his followers to do, each according to their gifts.

Is that how you view your vocation? Why or why not?

What are the implications of this for your life and how you see your work?

4. We are all agents of reconciliation

We’re all called to mediate Christ’s love into a dark and troubled world. Look up the following verses and explain what that might look like:

- 1 Timothy 2:1
- 2 Corinthians 5:20

Because of what God has done in Christ, we’re given a task. We now have a ministry of reconciliation. We are entrusted with the message of reconciliation, and we are ambassadors for Christ with the new message, “Be reconciled to God.” We have a new title as priest so that we might have the status to carry a message. We’re to use this status to minister to others in a way that leads people in the Church and in the world to be reconciled to God and each other. If we weren’t appointed, chosen, or ordained to this role of priest, we might be reluctant to take on this responsibility.

Discuss the following quote:

“Those who really can receive bread from a stranger and smile in gratitude, can feed many without even realizing it. Those who can sit in silence with their fellow man, not knowing what to say, but knowing that they should be there, can bring new life in a dying heart. Those who are not afraid to hold a hand in gratitude, to shed tears in grief, and to let a sigh of distress arise straight from the heart, can break through paralyzing boundaries and witness the birth of a new fellowship, the fellowship of the broken.” Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*