



WHAT MATTERS?

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What Matters?

Week Four ~ The Family Business

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples . . . You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain
(John 15:8,16)

Day One: Abundant Life, A life bigger than me

“I came that they might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

Some of us might remember a “science” experiment from grade school years in which we placed several dried bean seeds around the inside edge of a jar, holding them in place with a dampened paper towel. After a few days we noticed the beans splitting open and new plants bursting out. Each bean’s outer skin (structure) was destroyed; its *integrity* as a single seed sacrificed. At the same time each bean became a new and more productive life. They now were plants that “lived abundantly.” It’s this understanding of *abundance* that Jesus had in mind when He said, *“I came that they might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).*

We often think that abundance in life is measured by the amount of our personal possessions. An abundant life is one free of want. We have all that we need materially and even more. I have plenty of food, a nice home, at least one car, a spouse, a family, etc. Notice that the focal point for all of these possessions is me. All of these things or people are here to make me happy. In so many words, the abundant life, as I too often understand it, is all about me. Is that what Jesus is offering to us when He promises us life and one that is abundant? I don’t think so. Elsewhere He said, *“One’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).*

According to these words the Abundant Life He promises has little or nothing to do with accumulating possessions. In fact in another place He tells us that focus on the “riches” of this world actually *“chokes”* (Matthew 13:22) the real life to which He restored us—a life that really matters.

The abundant life Jesus promises is not measured in the abundance of what’s been given to us, but in what we give to others. That is, how much is produced in others through our lives. Consider again the beans in the jar. While each bean’s skin remained intact, the bean remained the center of its tiny existence. It had its life—safe, protected by a thick skin, and all that it needed to exist. But it remained alone, one single seed. The number “One” is not the number for abundance. In order for each seed to become abundant it has to stop remaining a single seed. Instead, it needs to produce other

seeds, other fruit. It must invest in a life bigger than itself. That's the business of the Family Business—investing in something bigger than ourselves and by doing so we produce much fruit as Jesus likes to describe it. *“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”* Jesus tells us that using our lives to bear abundant fruit in others brings glory to His Father; we beautifully reflect our Father's heart and mind.

An abundant life—a life that bears fruit in others—lies at the heart of Christian discipleship. It's the life our Lord purposed for each of us when He made us His own. *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.”* We didn't choose Him; He chose us. He chose us to be His own and as His own to join Him in the business of investing our lives in others so that we bear much fruit.

During this week of devotions ask yourself, “In whom and how am I investing my life?”

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for choosing us. Make us fruitful in the family business to Your glory. Amen.

Week Four ~ The Family Business

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain (John 15:16)

Day Two: The secret to bearing much fruit

“Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am there will my servant be also.” (John 12:24)

Even as I write this devotion, the vineyard growers in the Napa Valley are celebrating. It’s harvest time with the reward of much fruit. Bearing much fruit suggests expansive vineyards with vines bent over from their heavy load of grapes. It affirms the rigors of labor, the long hours in the heat of the day and the aching muscles at night. The abundant fruit gives us the smell and feel of success.

Jesus had much to say about the business of bearing much fruit, especially when the fruit is people restored to a new life in God. The secret to the sweet smell of success, He tells us, is dying. *“Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”* Death has a very different aroma from the smell of success. So what is Jesus talking about? What success can be accomplished in death? From man’s perspective, none; from God’s perspective, much. The entire universe and all that is in it was redeemed *by His death*. You, and I, and billions of others across time and space have been made sons and daughters of the almighty God *by His death*. Indeed His “failure” (from a human point of view) bore and still bears much fruit.

The secret to our Lord’s ability to “bear much fruit” lay in His complete willingness to sacrifice Himself for the sake of His world. Notions or needs of self-survival, or of “what’s in it for me?” found no quarter in His heart and mind. If they had, He would not have planted Himself as a human Seed in the poisoned soil of our sinful world. He did not want us, or this planet, to perish but rather that we live and flourish. That was His single concern. Jesus knew that if He did not die all of us would. He was not willing to stand by and watch that happen so He gave up His need for and right to live. In short, He chose to die.

Look at what fruit His death accomplished. Three days later He rose from the dead, the *first fruits of those who have fallen asleep*. Through our baptism into Him all of us have been added to His Father’s abundant harvest

of fruit. And that's only the beginning. In the end, all the earth will know the salvation of our God and the harvest of souls will be complete.

It's into this abundant harvest of souls that our Lord graciously invites us to follow Him. He's chosen us to be His own and as His own to join Him in the harvest, in the bearing of much fruit. It's an awesome call and at the same time a sobering one. In short, it's a call to die to ourselves so that others may also receive and enjoy the abundant life God has chosen for them. He calls each of us and our churches to die to our personal or institutional self-interests and with renewed minds invest ourselves and our churches in His Business and its single purpose to "seek and to save the lost."

Jesus tells us that the business of bearing much fruit is costly: "*Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If any man serves me, he must follow me.*" Following Jesus always leads to a cross, even as He said "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*" (Matthew 16:24). Jesus' price tag of discipleship: a cross. The way of the cross is a journey of personal suffering and profound loss. It cuts deeper than any human loss we can imagine. More than the loss of people or things that we love or need, the cross marks the loss of our very own life. But herein lies the secret to bearing much fruit. No one really loses his or her life in following Jesus; they invest it. When we speak about the "crosses we have to bear" we often refer to the various kinds of suffering *in this world* and losses we must endure. Jesus' reference to a cross is about our suffering *for the world* and the gain it brings. "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit*" (John 12).

The focus of Jesus' teaching was not on the seed dying, but on the abundant fruit it would produce. Such abundance was the source of the "joy set before Him." That joy enabled Him to "endure the cross, despising its shame." He concluded His conversation about "dying seeds" with these words, "*and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.*" You and I are among those many seeds, made forever alive, through the dying of the Seed from heaven.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, free us from notions of self survival so we take up our cross and invest ourselves in bearing much fruit. Amen.

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You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain (John 15:16)

Day Three: Chosen for this World

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood” (1 Peter 1:1-2)

What a difference a comma makes! Consider this opening sentence of St. Peter’s letter to the first century Christians scattered across the Roman Empire. The New International Version (NIV) Bible that many of us have enjoyed for years translates Peter’s words this way: *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God’s elect, strangers in this world, scattered throughout ...* The NIV placed a comma in between the words elect and strangers, signaling us to the fact that being elect, that is, chosen by God to be His children is essential to who we are; being strangers in this world and scattered all over is not. The latter conditions are simply unfortunate circumstances that we must endure for a season.

The English Standard Version (ESV), on the other hand, reads, *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion . . .”* The ESV forgot the comma and by doing so changed everything. By losing the comma it tells us that we are not only elect by God to be His own, He chose us to be His own in this world. Being strangers and scattered across the globe are not unfortunate circumstances. They are by His deliberate choice and for His Divine purposes. The ESV got it right. There is no comma in Peter’s opening words to the Christians and that is key to understanding the rest of his letter to them.

Peter’s letter was basically a “how to” manual for how God runs the family business on earth. But, as you can already tell from this week’s devotions, God runs His business on earth in ways that many people would call counterintuitive—running in the opposite direction from the normal patterns of life. Abundance is measured by what we give away, rather than by what we accumulate. We save our lives by losing them. Living as strangers in this world is by design. God’s ways are simply different from our own. Peter wrote this “how to” manual in order to instruct us in God’s way of doing business. For the next several days we will explore Peter’s letter with the intention of understanding who we are as His children, the different positions each of us holds in the business, and the roles each of us plays.

If you remember from last week, the Christians in St. Peter's day felt pretty small and insignificant in a world that did not know God and didn't seem to need Him. We might sympathize with how they felt. So Peter wrote to encourage them by helping them understand their part in what God is doing to reconnect this world and its people with Himself. Peter reminded them of their calling—they had been chosen by God to be His priests in and for this broken world.

Priests connect. They serve as bridges, connecting God with people who need Him. Their service divides into two functions. They connect people with God by praying, that is, speaking to God in their behalf, bringing to Him their needs and concerns. They also connect God with people by speaking to them in God's behalf, telling them of His goodness and unconditional love for all, especially for those who are lost, broken, and hurting. Peter informed his readers that they were "royal priests"—priests who serve by the appointment and in the employment of a king. In this case, their employer is the King of Kings Himself, the almighty God.

There is an old hymn that many Christians love to sing. Its opening stanza reads,

*I'm but a stranger here, Heav'n is my home;
Earth is a desert drear, Heav'n is my home.
Danger and sorrow stand Round me on ev'ry hand;
Heav'n, is my fatherland, Heav'n is my home.*

The poet, Thomas R. Taylor, correctly calls us strangers in a world that when compared to heaven is more desert than paradise. And he's right to point us to heaven, our true and permanent home where we will dwell with God in a world free from sin, brokenness, pain, and death. While that's home and we really look forward to living there, God has placed us at this time in this world. We're here because that's where broken people live and die. The King wants to connect with them, so He has us here to do that. That is not an unfortunate circumstance; it is the will of our God our Father, *who desires that all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

Prayer: Lord God, You have called us by the Gospel. Employ us as priests to a broken world. Amen.

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You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain (John 15:16)

Day Four: Set apart for service

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood (1 Peter 1:1-2)

Contrary to popular opinion, priests are not necessarily extraordinary people. More often than not they are very ordinary. Like any other person they sin; they also need a Savior. Priests are ordinary people; they've simply been set apart by God for extraordinary service. That's what St. Peter means when he tells us that we are "*elect exiles of the dispersion . . . in the sanctification of the Spirit*." "Sanctification" is the process by which the Holy Spirit sets us apart as God's priests for this world.

One of my favorite childhood memories is of my grandmother and grandfather coming to our home for Easter dinner. It was one of the few times we used my mother's beautiful China. She stored her China in large boxes with exotic red characters printed on the outside. The day before Easter mother would send my brother and me out to the garage to fetch the several pieces of China that she needed. She was very specific, "I need seven dinner plates, salad plates, soup bowls, cups, saucers. Bring them to the kitchen and be careful." So my brother and I would "set apart" the several pieces she requested from the rest of the China in the boxes.

Once in the kitchen mother would have us wash each piece thoroughly and dry it by hand. (Fine China could not go in the dishwasher.) Then she would hold each piece up to her face to inspect it. Each had to be spotless, reflecting my mother's face back to her. If any didn't, they were washed and dried again. After the inspection my brother, sisters, and I set the table in preparation for Easter dinner. My mother loved her mother very much and wanted everything at the table to be at its best.

The China did not stay spotless and pretty very long. While beautiful, they had not been set apart, washed, and dried simply to be stared at and admired. They were meant to be used for dinner. Soon they were filled with and "soiled by" the food my mother served.

That's "sanctification." The Holy Spirit set us Christians apart from the rest of the people of this world for God's service. We were washed clean in the

blood of Jesus, made spotless, able to reflect the face of our heavenly Father. Then, like fine China, we are put to work, serving all those He loves.

In the Old Testament God “sanctified” His priests through a particular ritual. They were set apart from the other people in the community. Then they were washed with water and dressed in robes, turbans, and caps specially made for their office. Special oil was poured on their heads to anoint them as priests. Finally, they were sprinkled with the blood of a ram that had been sacrificed for their sins. Blood was also sprinkled on the tent of meeting where God’s people worshiped and on every vessel and utensil used in worship. Everything had to be purified with blood. Through blood the priests, the tent, the vessels were separated from the ordinary and made ready for extraordinary service to God. What must be kept in mind is that while they were set apart *from* the other ordinary people through this ritual, they were set part *for* them. The priests now faced the people to serve them with God’s good gifts. God did not sanctify them as priests simply to serve themselves or Him. He sanctified them as priests to serve those from whom they had been set apart.

Peter tells us that each of us was sprinkled with blood and thereby set apart as God’s priests. This sprinkling took place when we were baptized into Jesus. Better than the blood of a ram, we were sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Himself. His blood truly washed us spotless, fully prepared to serve. Indeed we are ordinary, but through the blood of the Lamb we have been sanctified for extraordinary service in and for this world.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we confess that we are sinful like all people. As You have washed us in baptism and set us apart may we serve others with Your gospel gifts. Amen.

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You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain (John 15:16)

Day Five: Living on Passport

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood (1 Peter 1:1-2)

Sometimes I get the feeling that I am back in a foreign country and I haven't left home. Granted the several languages and cultures with which we interact here in the California-Nevada-Hawaii District creates an international flavor reminiscent of Manila, Singapore, or Jakarta. However, the sense of "foreign" comes from something much less exotic, much more everyday.

I have shown a video in most of the circuits and congregations that I visit that features a young twenty-something woman. She's an Anglo, articulate, and speaks English without foreign accent. Yet the world she describes as her own is so different from mine it might as well be Mars or Jupiter, something other than earth. "We speak the same words," she begins, "but not the same language." The more she talks, the more I have to agree with her. Her twenty-something world is not informed in any significant way by our churches, our Faith, or the Hope that shaped my twenty-something world of the 1970's. Those days are gone and I miss them terribly. I understood that world so well. More than that, I knew my place as a Christian in that world. I knew how to serve in that world. Now I'm not so sure. And that puts me off balance.

The last time I was this "off balance" was when my wife, Priscilla and I, along with our two year old son arrived in the Philippines. Descending the stairs from a giant 747 to the tarmac below only to be directed by uniformed guards with automatic weapons, suggested that we weren't home. The exotic smells and sounds teamed up with the absence of orderly lines and personal space left us no doubt. I reached for my dark blue passport and clung to it tightly, the last reminder of who I was and to what country and people I belonged. My passport, however, also reminded me that I wasn't home. For the next several years I would identify myself with a passport, the mark of the foreigner.

Peter describes all of us Christians as exactly that: foreigners. "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to the elect exiles of the dispersion . . . grace and*

peace be multiplied to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.” We translate his words as strangers, exiles, or sojourners. But they all mean roughly the same: We’re not home; we’re living on the passport given to us in our baptisms. More than that, our “alien” condition is not by accident or coincidence. Peter says that we were *elect*, that is chosen by God to live our lives on passport, far from the place we call home.

No wonder we feel as if we are in a foreign country. We are. Like the great saints of old we have no permanent place here. We’re not home; we’re on assignment. That’s something else about which my passport reminded me. Priscilla and I had been issued our passports through the Board for Mission Services. We were foreigners for a reason. We had a very deliberate and specific purpose: to speak the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who still dwelled in darkness. With that in mind our foreignness wasn’t so foreign any longer. Our foreignness made sense.

It makes sense now as well. I hope it does for you, too. As our world becomes increasingly more foreign, it will do us well not to lament it but rather to understand and appreciate what God has done. He has called us by the Gospel, elected us to be His own, and made us co-heirs with His Son Jesus Christ. As such we live on passport. And as such we live with purpose, the same purpose for which He lived among us—to seek and to save the lost.

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, we are but pilgrims here. We thank You heaven is our home. In our pilgrimage let us live the good news before a watching world. Amen.

Week Four ~ The Family Business

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain (John 15:16)

Day Six: Seed sown

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood (1 Peter 1:1-2)

“Exiles of the Dispersion,” as St. Peter refers to them in his opening sentence, held no kind memories in the minds of his readers. Like the Holocaust of our own day, the Dispersion or Diaspora was the darkest period of Jewish history, filled with profound loss, suffering, and pain. The armies of the foreign and pagan King Nebuchadnezzar attacked God’s holy city of Jerusalem. They destroyed the sacred Temple that Solomon had built and reduced the rest of the city to rubble. They slaughtered most of the inhabitants, including women and children, and hauled the rest back to their country, Babylon, in chains. There they remained exiled for seventy years. They went almost over night from being God’s treasured people with a land and home of their own to being “not a people,” aliens, scattered across the Babylonian Empire. The Holy Spirit moved a Jewish poet to record the bitter events for all generations to remember,

*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.*

On the willows there we hung our lyres.

*For there our captors required of us songs,
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,*

“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?

(Psalm 137:1-4)

It made no sense to be called “Exiles of the Diaspora.” The word “Diaspora” was a curse word in their minds. It wished the worst harm on another. And then, to add insult to injury, Peter told them that it was by God’s choice. They were the *elect* exiles of the Diaspora. Maybe the NIV got it right after all. This idea was simply impossible to understand.

What they couldn’t understand was that while the Diaspora was not a good place in the minds of His people, it was a God place. God wanted to be there and to restore the broken sinners of those places to Himself. He used the

seventy years of Babylonian Captivity to carry His healing Word to the ends of the earth. Even the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar, the man responsible for bringing great harm to God's people, was won over by the Word and became a follower of Yahweh. He even testified of his new faith to the entire known world of that time. God's people never followed through on their promise to be His "priests for the nations" all the time they were safe and snug in their homes in Israel. But their service touched every, *"people, nation, and language of those who dwell in all the earth"* during their exile in the Diaspora.

The secret is in the Seed. The word Diaspora means "scattered." But tucked into its meaning is the tiny syllable "spor" from which we get our word spore or seed—Dia-Spora. The word scatter often carries a negative connotation, referring to the dislocation and destruction of something. But when scattering is associated with seed, it takes on an entirely different meaning. Scattering seed is better known as sowing or planting. It's productive. Taken together, then, the Diaspora was no mere scattering of people across the Babylonian Empire. It was the deliberate planting by God of His people, His chosen Seed, in the world. It is the method that God used to spread His Word to the ends of the earth and have it produce abundant fruit everywhere. Remember our theme verse for this week: *But I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain.*" Remember also how our Lord told us "much fruit" would be produced: *"Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* The seed must be scattered if it wants to be abundant. Once scattered by the farmer, it sinks into the soil, *dies to itself*, and gives birth to much fruit. What the Son of God chose for Himself, He has also chosen for us.

What would the Lord of the harvest do with the many seeds His death produced? Too often we harvest them (new Christians) only to store them in God's barn (our local congregation) to keep safe until His return. We may select a few people to plant in the foreign and non-Christian world to grow another plant or two. We might applaud the commitment and sacrifice of the few missionaries who are planted in the non-Christian soil of our communities, but it falls far short of what Jesus intended with His death. Seeds produce more seeds. Any seed that is harvested and then stored in a barn has been robbed of its purpose as a seed. It might be cozy and safe in the barn, free of the destructive elements of the cold hard ground of this sinful world, but it remains alone. It might be in the company of hundreds or even thousands of other seeds also stored in the barn, but it never grows (matures) to be more than a single seed. It produces no fruit, that is, nothing of its own

kind. That's not our Lord's intention. Discipleship as our Lord describes it results in a mature seed that produces much fruit, or at least dies trying. Thus, the final resting place for Christ's disciples is not a holy barn but the broken world. There they learn the true purpose of discipleship; there they experience the vitality their resurrected Lord died for them to own.

Peter tells us with these words "*elect exiles of the Dispersion*" where we live out our priestly service—the family business. For the most part it is not at the church or on Sunday morning. It is where we are scattered in life through our families, friends, workplace, school, and neighborhood. It is especially where God plants us among nonChristians. With God's business in mind, life in the Diaspora is good.

Prayer: Lord God, plant us in our world so we produce fruit for Your harvest. Amen.

Week Four ~ The Family Business

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain (John 15:16)

Day Seven: Vocation (Who we are and What we're about)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10)

What a contrast these words of St. Peter are with what he said earlier in the opening sentence of his letter to the scattered Christians, the “*elect exiles of the Dispersion.*” Here he tells his readers they are the very people of God. The Diaspora told them they were “*not a people*” at all. He tells his readers here that they are “*a holy nation.*” The Diaspora told them they were no nation, just individual captives of a defeated country, scattered across a foreign empire. Why the great difference? Peter's readers located their identity and purpose in a place. Peter located them in God. Change of location did not effect a change in vocation. Wherever God placed them they remained His Priests in Royal service to Him.

When we think of priests, we generally locate their vocation in a church building. There they preach, teach and preside at the Lord's Supper. We tend to locate priestly activities in the sanctuary. So we restrict the priesthood in person and activity to what happens there. Peter tells us, however, that nothing else could be farther from the truth. All baptized Christians are God's priests in this world. All of them exercise their priesthood where God has located them in the world. Martin Luther called this idea the “*Doctrine of Vocation.*” Ingemar Öberg, in his book, *Luther and World Mission*, writes,

For Luther, the various ordinances, ranks, careers, and kinds of work are not merely sterile jobs. They are ordained and chosen by God and are ultimately parts of God's creative activity. They are an expression of God's love and care for creation and for life on earth. God takes people into his service by caring for and developing his world. Thus people become God's co-creators . . . whether they know God or not. In all this co-creation and work, the need of the neighbor is the aim. Human beings, God's co-creators, become the means and the channels for the giving and sustaining love of the Creator (Öberg, 2007:26).

The divine nature and purpose of every vocation is essential to

understanding our ministries as Royal Priests. For example, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, neighbors are vocations ordained by God. Men and women serve as priests in these vocations. Vocations were instituted by our Lord as the basic means through which He cares for His creation. He personally works through people to bless other people. Our Lord cares for little children through their mothers and fathers. God loves and supports men through faithful wives and vice-versa. God governs through governments, protects our homes and communities through police and firemen, brings health and healing through medical personal, etc. God uses you and me as His priests to accomplish the blessings that He promised to give us in this life. Serving our families, neighbors, and larger communities is as much a sacred activity in God's eyes as a "priest" leading worship on Sunday morning. That is the divine nature of human vocation.

The Royal Priests, however, have an additional responsibility that distinguishes them from the general population and its daily vocations. The priesthood has a particular function that arose not as a result of God's creation, but as a result of humankind's fall into sin. God created the Royal Priesthood with the deliberate purpose of serving the fallen world with the regenerating power of His forgiveness of sins. Through you and me, God's Royal Priests, God breaks into a broken world with His grace and forgiveness to restore people to Himself and to each other and to give them a new life and a new start. Restoring people in Christ is the holy ministry of Royal Priests; our daily vocations are the divine arenas in which Christ's grace and mercy are able to touch every facet of life in this world. So, while a mother serves in her divine vocation by nourishing, protecting, and raising her children, her unique role as God's priest is in the enabling grace and healing forgiveness she offers her children in Jesus' name.

How many families suffer and are being destroyed because the pain and injury caused by sin is left unattended in their homes? People languish under the crushing weight of guilt with no one to lighten their load with a forgiving word from Jesus. All of us are intimately familiar with the damaging effects of sin in our lives and relationships. But we feel helpless to do anything. We need God's intervention. But, because we do not often hear God's words of grace or forgiveness we wonder if He cares. Either He's too far away to hear us, or He's upset and giving us the silent treatment. In any case we do not hear the forgiving word we so desperately need in order to be healed.

God, however, does speak. That's the business of the Royal Priesthood. Our primary vocation as God's priests is to speak a healing and encouraging word from God to hurting and broken people. God's word heals and He

calls each of us to speak it to others, especially our loved ones. St. Paul wrote, *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has past away; behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation”* (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). The sins we forgive, God forgives. The Divine healing of broken and weary hearts lies at the heart of our priestly service, even as Peter instructed his readers, *“But you are . . . a royal priesthood [so]that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”* The excellencies of God are nothing less than His restoring and empowering grace and forgiveness. Through them we are all given new life and new beginnings. Consider just how awesome your service as a Royal Priest really is.

Prayer: Lord God, You make every day activity our Royal Priesthood. Let us never lose sight of the need of our neighbor to hear of Your love. Amen.