

# God's People

1 Peter 2:9-12

Go ahead and turn to 1 Peter 2 in your Bibles. We're continuing in our study of what it means to be a Sojourner in this world according to the inspired writings of Peter. While chapter one largely dealt with spiritual realities for individual believers, chapter two has thus far described the nature of the Church, namely how this corporate entity is founded on Christ (vv. 4-8). Tonight, we'll see how we have amazing, new IDENTITY in Christ (vv. 9-10), and how we're to FUNCTION as representatives of Christ (vv. 11-12). Peter makes it clear that this new identity is meant first and foremost for glorifying the Lord in this world. We live for God and others, and tonight we'll see how our new identity facilitates that function as PRIESTS to (1) God and (2) one another within the Church, and as (3) witnesses for the onlooking, lost world.

Now, I'll go ahead and warn you ahead of time that it may feel like I'm jumping around a bit tonight due to the nature of the writing. Truly, Peter's writing is eloquent and among the most beautiful and encouraging of scripture, but as we study it, we'll see how this passage sort of spider-webs. Each section touches on all the other sections in multiple ways resulting in a non-linear yet fully integrated look at life as God's People. So, if you've found your place, we'll pick up in verse nine...

## **1 Peter 2:9-12**

**9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 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.**

**11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.**

When you go to Lowe's Hardware, sometimes you're looking for supplies, but SOMETIMES you're looking for a little insight too, right? You may be like me and just not know that much about a given repair or construction project, or you may have a good idea of what you need to do, and you just want to sound your idea off of someone. Who do you look for??? A RED VEST, RIGHT?



If we don't spot one immediately, we begin searching the nearby aisles in order to find one. If anyone knows the specific bay where an item is located, or if anyone has an idea of how I should go about a certain job, it's a man or a woman in a red vest, right? They're there to HELP.

Now, you may be sitting here thinking, *"Not every 'red vest' is created equal. Some of those guys don't have a clue."* I get it. We can get down on such folks pretty easily, but you know what? We as believers can drop the ball too. Instead of being easily identifiable as a follower of Jesus through our words and actions and things we pursue in this life, we can sometimes blend in with the world around us, and they can have trouble spotting our "red vest." Aren't you glad, though, that Jesus isn't so quick to get irritated with us when we fail? He knows what we're like. He became like us and was tempted in every respect even as we are (yet without sin), so He gets us, and He doesn't turn up His nose or get short with us. He keeps drawing us closer to Himself, seeking to restore us and build us up like He did with Peter by that campfire on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

That said, I'm convinced of more with you here tonight. So, whether you're a new believer who needs to grow or someone who's believed for a while but has perhaps been stunted in your growth, or if you're a mature believer who sees your need to grow yet still, tonight's word is going to be a hopeful message from the Apostle of Hope. Peter always pointed his readers, BELOVED by him and the Father, beyond their current trials to their future HOPE, but I also see Peter as the Apostle of hope because of who he was and who the Lord was able to cause him to become. IF GOD CAN CHANGE PETER, THEN THERE'S HOPE FOR ME! And there's hope for you. So, picking up in verse nine, we read...

**1 Peter 2:9**

**But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

Peter grounds his teaching in the IDENTITY of the believer. There is nothing more personal than your IDENTITY, and this is perhaps no more powerfully illustrated than in the Name of God: "YAH," or "I AM." When God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, He made him IN HIS OWN IMAGE. While Adam was created with a unique personality—like every single person who has ever lived, he was his own person—his IDENTITY was BESTOWED upon him. It's our identity that gives our lives VALUE and PURPOSE. If our lives amount to nothing more than a cosmic accident, as the doctrine of evolution purports, then we are truly WORTHLESS and WITHOUT PURPOSE; we're left in a mad scramble to pleasure ourselves, and if possible, do something that will cause others to remember us for a little while after our lives have ended. HOWEVER, if we're CREATED by a PERSONAL GOD who BESTOWED upon us His supremely excellent IMAGE and IDENTITY, then our lives are ENDOWED with PRICELESS VALUE and ETERNALLY SIGNIFICANT PURPOSE.

The Lord's adversary and ours understood the POWER and IMPORTANCE of IDENTITY, and he set out to attack that identity as soon as it was given to us. *"Why merely bear the image of God? Why worship a God who withholds the very best from you when YOU CAN BE GOD? Why be what He says you are? Establish your own identity."* Since we've become BROKEN IMAGE-BEARERS, the devil's task has only gotten easier. Since God's image in us has been shattered, or at least darkened, *"What use is there to continue attempting to reflect God's glory in this world,"* the devil chides.

Any time the devil has sought to sway someone's worldview, he always begins by attempting to saddle them with a new identity because it effectively separates them from the One who gave them their true identity. For a biblical example of this, check out Daniel and his exiled countrymen. King Nebuchadnezzar commanded his chief eunuch to bring smart, good looking Israelite youths back to Babylon specifically to be trained to serve in his court.

#### **Daniel 1:6-7**

**6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel** ("Elohim is my judge") **he called Belteshazzar** ("May Bel protect his life"), **Hananiah** ("Yah is gracious") **he called Shadrach** ("Aku," the Babylonian god of the moon, "is exalted"), **Mishael** ("Who is what Elohim is?") **he called Meshach** ("Who is what Aku is?"), **and Azariah** ("Yah is my helper") **he called Abednego** ("The servant of Nebo," the Babylonian god of wisdom and writing).

Do you see how the devil sought to use the Babylonians to strip these young men of the identity that tethered them to the God of their fathers? He plays a similar game today. Today's game is just motivated by sexual deviance and preys upon this generation's lust for attention. As MEN and WOMEN, BOYS and GIRLS plunge themselves further into the mire of immorality, deluding themselves into thinking that they're not who they were made to be just because they say so, or giving themselves over to strange affections, they only distance themselves from God, the One **"from [whom] and through [whom] and to [whom]"** they were meant to live (Romans 11:36). Truly, if we find our identity in anything other than the Lord, we will find ourselves UNTETHERED and ADRIFT from Him, searching for an identity that satisfies our heart more than the one He gives us and NEVER FINDING IT.

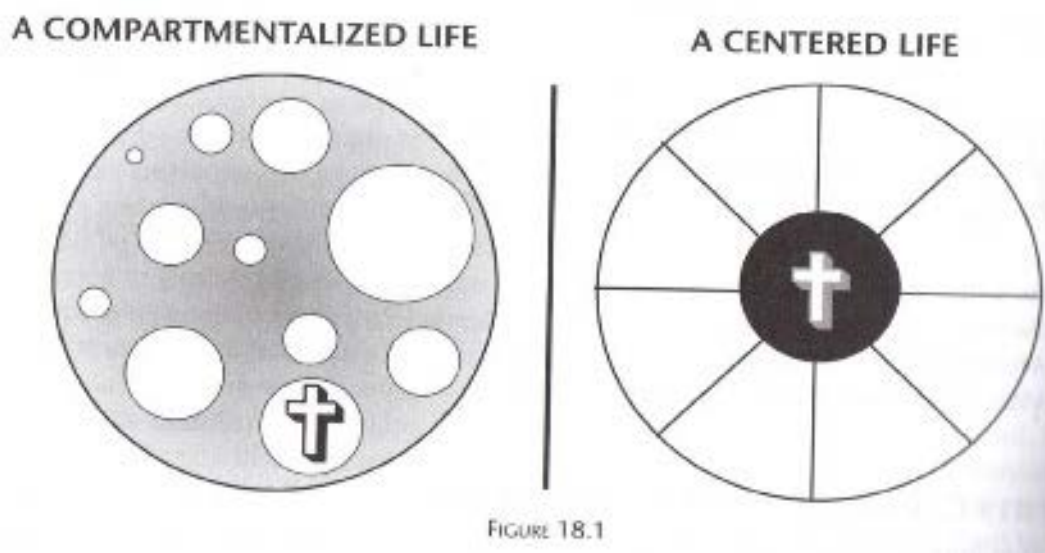
IDENTITY IS POWERFUL! It centers and directs our lives, so we must understand our identity accurately. We must understand WHO WE ARE IN THE EYES OF GOD, THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS A SAY, and Peter bolsters our understanding in this passage. I mean, just LOOK AT all the IDENTIFIERS that Peter uses in this passage: CHOSEN RACE, ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR HIS OWN POSSESSION, GOD'S PEOPLE, SOJOURNERS, and EXILES!

One of the first things that stands out to me is the OVERLAPPING NATURE of these descriptions. I don't know about you, but as I read these, it would seem more appropriate to group the spiritual terms together, "holy priesthood," and the secular terms together, "royal nation." However, the Holy Spirit gave these descriptions to Moses in Exodus 19 and Peter here in his epistle in this format, DISSOLVING any perceived barriers between the spiritual and the secular. We can be quick to live with this dichotomy, compartmentalizing spiritual things over here (this is my church stuff, my Jesus stuff) and the rest of our lives over here (work, hobbies, the way I interact with others, the way I spend my evenings, the way I spend my money, etc.). It's the reason, I believe, that Paul was regularly inspired to write...

#### **Colossians 3:1-4**

**1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**

Our lives aren't so compartmentalized, nor were they ever meant to be...



Our entire lives are hidden in Christ—HE IS OUR LIFE—and as we seek Him in all areas, allowing Him to have dominion over everything, everything flowing out of Him, we truly find life. Before we can even

begin to carry out the magnificent, God-given calling on our lives, the false dichotomy of "the spiritual and the secular" must be eliminated. How else can we be HOLY in the truest sense of the word?! How else can we truly function as priests to God and others wherever we are?! We can't. We won't.

So, how do we eliminate this false dichotomy from our lives? Well, in both Paul's exhortation to the believers at Colossae and in Peter's letter to believers scattered throughout Asia Minor, we're given THE KEY and that's the cultivation of an ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE. Paul teaches us to set our minds, our AFFECTIONS, on things that are above, not on things that are on earth; the apostle John had something to say about NOT LOVING THE WORLD as well (1 John 2:15-17). Peter makes the instruction even more IMMEDIATE as he instills it into our very IDENTITY, calling us SOJOURNERS and EXILES. Our home is somewhere else. While the Bible gives us TINY glimpses of that future home, frankly, we can't even begin to grasp what it's like. What we know for certain is that THIS ISN'T IT, so we've got to stop letting our attention and affections get attached to this place. LOOK UP! SEE YOURSELF AS GOD SEES YOU, a SOJOURNER, BRIEFLY placed in this world for HIS PURPOSES.

Humanity was created and bestowed with unparalleled, invaluable IDENTITY in the Garden. Just as we were made in the image of God and purposed with multiplying and filling the earth, by grace through faith we have been saved, and the image of the divine is being restored in us as we come to Jesus as Tim talked about last week. We're CONFORMED INTO THE IMAGE OF THE SON, and out of that identity we once more lay hold of the task of MULTIPLYING AND FILLING THE EARTH, spiritually this time, God using us to bring about the NEW birth of many, and WE DO THAT AS ROYAL PRIESTS. Peter says...

### **1 Peter 2:9**

**But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

Now, before going any further, I'd be REMISS if I didn't briefly address the fact that, while Peter's use of descriptions that were previously applied to Israel (Exodus 19:6) have caused some to believe that he was claiming that the Church had REPLACED ISRAEL, HE WAS MAKING NO SUCH CLAIM. Peter didn't quote Old Testament passages over the Church, as if in fulfillment of prophecy, but rather, he BORROWED descriptions of God's people in the Old Testament (Israel) and used them to describe God's people in the New Testament (the Church). Peter neither claimed that the Church was a spiritual Israel, nor did he cheapen the literal promises of God to Israel by saying that they had been spiritually fulfilled in the Church. Just as the description of "**a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession**" accurately described the nation of Israel, it is equally applicable to the Church. Yes, for nearly 1,500 years, Israel was chosen to be God's witness, but when they ultimately rejected their Messiah, that administration was taken from them and given to "**a people producing its fruits,**" as Jesus said in Matthew 21:43, RIGHT AFTER APPLYING the previous passage about the CORNERSTONE to Himself no less. ALL THAT TO SAY, the Church has NOT replaced Israel; God is NOT done with Israel as any thorough study of end times prophecy will reveal. Instead, this description is meant to detail to us the NATURE of our IDENTITY and our associated CALLING in Him. In Christ, we are a KINGDOM OF PRIESTS.

What is a PRIEST? A priest is one who REPRESENTS God to the people and REPRESENTS the people God. Biblically, they were responsible for SERVICE in the Tabernacle and later on in the Temple, from which they proclaimed God's Word, interceded in prayer on behalf of others, and offered sacrifices pleasing to the Lord. In order not to be disqualified for such service, they were CALLED TO LEAD HOLY LIVES. We as individual believers are now the Temple (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and as such, our priestly calling to God and man is to be carried out wherever we go. [This is where we'll start jumping around a little bit, but as we'll see, all of these ROLES are detailed by Peter in this section.]

As priestly representatives of God, we are first called to be that "**holy nation...[abstaining] from the passions of the flesh**" and "**[keeping our] conduct among the Gentiles honorable.**" Such a life of holiness is what makes us clearly identifiable in the world (like the red vest), identifying us as God's people, but also QUALIFYING us to be His witnesses. It's through the witness of our lives as well as our verbal witness, "**[proclaiming] the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light,**" that the lost world around us "**may see [our] good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation**" because they have come to repentance and faith.

#### **Hebrews 13:15-16**

**15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name** [what we do when we **proclaim** His excellencies]. **16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.**

Peter has already said that, as "**a holy priesthood, [we're] to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**" (1 Peter 2:5). Again, jumping around a little, our holiness is tied to our sacrifice because, not only do we offer sacrifices, but WE ARE THE SACRIFICE! Paul wrote...

#### **Romans 12:1**

**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**

As priests, we're called to live holy lives ("holy nation") and thereby enjoy unhindered access to God. When Peter says in verse 11...

#### **1 Peter 2:11**

**Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.**

...THAT IS A SACRIFICE! It's denying yourself and taking up your cross daily and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23)! As Paul taught...

#### **Galatians 5:24**

**And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

...which, again, Jesus Himself says is a DAILY ACT. Simply put, a call to holiness, according to scripture, is a call to DIE. This is our PRIESTLY SACRIFICE, presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, which is our REASONABLE (logical, bare minimum, bottom rung) WORSHIP or SERVICE.

As priests of the New Covenant, we're called to live holy lives, serving as representatives of God to the people around us (the lost nations) in His new Temple, OUR BODIES, proclaiming His Word, interceding for them, and offering acceptable SACRIFICES (also our bodies). This priestly calling is SHARED BY ALL, and that understanding is backed up by the fact that each and every believer, according to Ephesians 4, has been gifted by God specifically for carrying out the work of ministry.

Sadly, however, probably three-quarters of the Church doesn't even care enough to learn what their spiritual gifting is—something that happens in those quiet times of prayer and personal Bible study—much less even apply it in service to the Lord and others. As such, the Body of Christ more resembles an amputee who's lost most of her limbs because THOSE MEMBERS ARE AWOL. The Church drags herself along by one arm, and we wonder why the Church is failing and the culture is overwhelming us!

And I'm not just talking about serving in the Church; the Lord knows we need servants to step up in local congregations here and everywhere else, but even more than that, we need believers to be the Church, to be PRIESTS OUT THERE! Just as there is no spiritual/secular dichotomy, there is no clergy/laity dichotomy, no secondary or lesser gifts or callings. The Body only grows up in every way into the Head when ALL PARTS are working together, all believers serving God and one another with their diverse and sundry gifts (Ephesians 4:11-16). WE ARE ALL CALLED! Peter continues...

### **1 Peter 2:10**

**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.**

These are quotes from the prophet HOSEA. It was an indictment against the nation of Israel when He said He would no longer show them mercy and that they were not His people. Why would God say such a thing? He was just stating the obvious: He was not their God. Like an unfaithful wife, Israel had pursued other lovers, other gods like the Baals, believing that those blind, deaf, dumb, carved images were the source of provision and protection in their lives. WHAT FOOLISHNESS! It's what they thought, though. It's what they wanted, and God gave them over to it. People still pursue security through idols today, they just aren't wooden or stone carved into images of people or animals; they pursue security through stuff, and that becomes apparent when they lose their stuff and their world falls apart.

As Israel pursued the gods of this world, nothing more than veiled underlings in Satan's army, they ceased to be God's people, becoming Satan's instead. Before a person comes to the place of repentance of sin and dead works and faith in Christ, he or she doesn't belong to God, but to Satan. Paul made it clear...

### **Ephesians 2:1-3**

**1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.**

The lost are “**not a people,**” but upon coming to God in repentance and faith, they assume the greatest designation possible, the IDENTITY they were always meant to have: GOD’S PEOPLE. As Paul wrote to Titus, “[**God**] saved us, **not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy**” (Titus 3:5), and so we have received mercy.

Darkness TO light, not a people TO God’s people, receiving no mercy TO receiving mercy. These descriptions represent a COMPLETE REVERSAL, a TOTAL TRANSFORMATION from UTTER LACK to OVER ABUNDANCE, from NOTHING to EVERYTHING! We’re NEW, and because of this miraculous, gracious reality, Peter TENDERLY says...

### **1 Peter 2:11-12**

**11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.**

One commentator asked, “*How do we live in this world in a way that shows we are waiting for the next?*” Peter answers: ABSTAIN. KEEP AWAY from these fleshly passions that wage war against your souls, and this is certainly a familiar battle for us. Paul described this frustrating fight, saying...

### **Romans 7:18-19**

**18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.**

### **Galatians 5:17**

**For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.**

Paul encouraged the Galatian believers to “**walk by the Spirit**” so that they would not gratify the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16), and in the same way, Peter returns to teaching this TANDEM RESPONSE to sin, INTENTIONALLY REPLACING wicked practices with holy ones by the power of the Spirit. Christianity is Christ, and He isn’t a list of DON’Ts made flesh, He is the highest plan for living, love and life incarnate.

The PASSIONS of our flesh WAGE WAR against our souls. Paul strongly emphasized this to the church at Ephesus. We aren’t going to go their right now; you can have a devotion in Ephesians 6 on your own, but PAUL ESSENTIALLY SAID, “WAKE UP! SEE THE BATTLE RAGING ALL AROUND YOU!” [That was the



focus of this year's VBS, in fact.] We have to recognize where we are situated. We're living BEHIND ENEMY LINES here in the world that is ruled over by Satan, who has organized the rest of the fallen angels to orchestrate EVERYTHING in this world to ERODE FAITH in God. We're IMMERSED IN SIN. Dane Ortlund, in his book Gentle and Lowly, wrote...

*All our weakness—indeed, all of our life—is tainted with sin. If sin were the color blue, we do not occasionally say or do something blue; all that we say, do, and think has some taint of blue.*

YIKES! But it's true! This isn't to shame us. As I said, Jesus became like us, tempted in every respect, yet was NEVER TAINTED by sin, but He understands our struggle. I point this out for the same reason that I believe Peter points this out in order to MAKE US AWARE! The flesh can never get enough sin, and the forces of this world never take a day off. If anyone in this battle ever lets up, IT'S US, and then we LOSE. Peter says, "ABSTAIN" from those fleshly passions of your former ignorance; they never stop taking pot shots at your soul. Peter recounted Jesus' teaching on this very idea in the gospel account that he dictated to John Mark...

#### **Mark 7:20-23**

**20 And he [Jesus] said, What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.**

We mustn't buy the lie that we can think, say, or do anything we like without it taking a toll on our soul.

The instructions "**abstain from the passions of the flesh**" and "**keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable**" would've been very FAMILIAR TO PETER'S JEWISH AUDIENCE. Their ceremonial laws regarding uncleanness and detestable things were for the purpose of IDENTIFYING THEM as DISTINCT AMONG THE NATIONS. Again, we see the intentional focus on maintaining one's testimony before an onlooking, lost world.

Jews living among the Gentiles had to be concerned with their witness, how they were perceived by others, especially by antisemites who were happy to slander them. Given that Christians were initially perceived as a Jewish SECT, they had to be equally concerned and EVEN MORE INTENTIONAL with regard to LIVING OUT THEIR FAITH, and thereby demonstrating that they were not, for example, subverting public order and traditional family values (the VITAL yet MUNDANE areas of life that Peter speaks to in the next sections of his letter). By guarding their testimonies and living out the teachings of Jesus, even as the lost tried to slander them, they wouldn't be able to help but notice that the followers of Jesus led GOOD, UPRIGHT LIVES, and you know what?! THAT'S ATTRACTIVE!

#### **Matthew 5:16**

**In the same way** [as Peter says that our good deeds have a drawing effect on others, Jesus said], **let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

The Bible says that the GOODNESS or the KINDNESS of God brings us to repentance (Romans 2:4); have you ever considered the fact that people encounter the goodness and kindness of the Lord THROUGH US and the QUALITY OF OUR LIVES as we surrender our lives to Him?!

Just as God beautifully and graciously bestowed His image upon us when He first created us, He bestows POWERFUL IDENTITY, PRICELESS VALUE and ETERNALLY SIGNIFICANT PURPOSE upon us when He saves us, when we come to Him in repentance and faith. WHY??? **“That [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light”** with the hope that others **“may see [our] good deeds”** come to faith themselves, **“and glorify God on the day of visitation.”** The purpose of our lives is tethered to our IDENTITY in Christ, and our identity enables and empowers our PURPOSE.

We'll never fulfill our priestly purpose of a holy life and service to God and others wherever God has placed us if we continue to live with the false dichotomy of “the spiritual and the secular.” Kenneth Boa expressed it well when he said...

***“We live more of our lives in the realm of details and drudgery than in the territory of the impressive and inspirational. The life of discipleship to Jesus consists predominantly in obedience and faithfulness to him in the mundane and thankless routines of daily experience.”***

We are royal priests who enjoy unlimited access to the Father because of the shed blood of the Son, and PRIESTS DON'T PUNCH A CLOCK. It's my prayer that we will look at "EVERYTHING ELSE" as THE SPIRITUAL IMPERATIVE! Things like prayer, personal Bible study, and church attendance aren't the spiritual aspect of our lives but merely the ROUTINE that SPIRITUALLY NOURISHES US for the rest, just like EATING AND SLEEPING. It's the rest of our day that is the ACTUAL SPIRITUAL PORTION, our LIVING SACRIFICE, our REASONABLE WORSHIP, the time in which we are seen as GOD'S PEOPLE and carry out this awesome, magnificent, grace-filled, priestly calling. So, GO BE PRIESTS in “EVERYTHING ELSE.”