



NEWSLETTER
January 29, 2023

Why Must We Study *Leviticus*?

LAST WEEK, a Feaster came up to me and asked, “Bo, why are we studying *Leviticus* again? I tried reading it, but it felt like I was watching a Bollywood movie without subtitles. I didn’t understand a thing.”

I told her, “At the Feast, *we will give you the subtitles.*”

Here’s something that will blow you away. (If you notice, this is now my favorite phrase. :) The Bible is so fascinating, blowing your brains out, happens regularly.)

Ancient authors liked putting the most important part of their message at the center of their work. *Leviticus* is the third book of a five-book collection called the *Torah*. This was deliberate. *Leviticus* contains the core message of the *Torah*.

Jesus saw *Leviticus* as extra special. He referred to it many times. He even quoted the greatest commandment from it. That’s why we should study it—it contains treasure for our spiritual life.

Have a beautiful Feast today!

May your dreams come true,

Bo Sanchez





LETTERS

Come Closer...

THIS FEAST FAMILY January 29, 2023 issue is about *Light, Garden, Desert, Love, and Giving...*

Fr. Albert Garong, discussing the Gospel last Sunday, January 22, 2023, brought us to the dark days of Zebulun and Naphtali and how the Light illumined these places where we first heard the Good News, *page 3*.

Our founder, Bro. Bo Sanchez, brought us back to the Garden which now he calls the Surrendered Place, *page 14*.

Bro. Audee Villaraza brought us back to the Desert and tells us how we go out of there, *page 19*.

And Bro. Didoy Lubaton brought us back to Love and Giving, *page 9*.

They all brought us to the aspiration of this issue: Bringing all of us CLOSER to Jesus.

You want that?

Come closer...Read on...



All for God's Glory,

Randy Borromeo
Media Ministry
Executive Director





FLASHBACK!

JANUARY 22, 2023

Holy Mass

FR. ALBERT GARONG

on the Gospel: Matthew 4:23

Jesus Heals the Sick

Excerpts...



THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Today's readings give us a familiar, enduring image of faith. I'm sure you know this because you sing about it every time we have The Feast. Your builder raises the Bible and what do you sing?

*"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path."*

Light is the image of the faith we are being given today. I like to give you four aspects of light that are good to reflect on, especially when we talk about the Light that is a Person: Jesus Christ.

The Light of Christ Reaches Out Everywhere

Light, of course, spreads everywhere. Once you switch a light on, it's omnidirectional—it goes everywhere.

But because we are talking here about the Light that is a Person, that Light is also able to focus on particular parts, particular areas to reach out to, especially to those parts that need the Light the most.

Where Light Is Most Needed

In today's Gospel, we read about two places: Zebulun and Naphtali. And usually, you don't continue reading because the names are difficult to pronounce, and you can hardly understand the message. Why do these places matter?

Well, they are very important. Zebulun and Naphtali are the regions of Israel, the land of the chosen people of God that were ravished and destroyed by the Assyrians. They were in the northern part of Israel, bordering Assyria. So, when Assyria came to conquer Israel, those areas were the most hit, the most devastated, and the people were exiled—away from their homeland. And they were replaced by citizens of other kingdoms...

...When Jesus publicly started His ministry, He did not start at the center (of Israel).

Normally that's what you'll do, right? When you start something new, you start where you are secure, where you are strong, and known.

But no. Jesus started His ministry (in Zebulun and Naphtali) at the edge, at the places that had been most damaged, most destroyed, most left in the dark. Because (we can say) since the center is secure, we can forget about the border, we can forget about the edge.

But God being God says, "No. I have never forgotten you. I have always seen you, and because I promised you, the people who were in darkness will see a great light. So, therefore, allow me to go and start my ministry there, exactly where light is most needed."



Reading I: Isaiah 8:23-9:3

²³ First the Lord degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the end, he has glorified the seaward road, the land west of the Jordan, the District of the Gentiles.

¹ Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness: for there is no gloom where but now there was distress. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.² You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as people make merry when dividing spoils.³ For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.



The Light of Christ Reveals What's in the Dark

We all have our Zebuluns and Naphtalis, right? We all have those areas in our life that we think are left in the dark, that we think are best left forgotten. And we just move on. We cut our losses and we proceed with our life.

But the Lord says, “No. Once you receive My light, I will find the darkest pockets. I will find the most damaged parts and that’s exactly where I will go.”

That is true for our communities, for our nation, for the world. But it’s also true for us, inside of us—the things that you have kept in the dark, that you don’t want to touch, that you’re afraid to uncover...

Well, the Lord says, “My child, we have to go there. So, let Me guide you to that part, and let’s look into it. You and Me together. Let’s reveal what’s going on there that you have avoided for so long.”

And we’re complex as human beings—we’re so complex that it’s unimaginable how long that process would take.

Allow me to give you an example from my own experience. I realized this later in my life. I have a mannerism—I close doors very gently, *ayoko nung may tunog*—I don’t want to make a sound. But, of course, sometimes I accidentally slam a door. But if I can help it, I close doors gently.

It’s just my mannerism. I didn’t think much about it, I didn’t struggle to learn how to close doors gently.

But you know, as I progressed in life and gained a bit of maturity, and I looked into myself, I realized that this habit wasn’t there way back since my birth or even younger years. It started only when I was already in the seminary.

I was a member of the choir. One time, when we were about to practice, I had to get our music sheets from our Chapel. And I accidentally banged the door.

I just said to myself, “Oh, I’m sorry. *Naku, sorry po.*”

But, of course, it couldn’t be helped. It happened. I walked away.

But then when I was about ten feet away, a shout emanated from the Chapel, “Sino ‘yon?! Who’s there?”

He saw me walking away and said, “Come here!”

And I got probably the worst scolding in my life

You see, the seminary was built in such a way that any sound creates echoes. So, the entire seminary heard me being scolded terribly by that person.

But you know, that’s done. I don’t have ill feelings about it, nor against that person. We’re in the same house so, no problem.

The Light of Christ Restores What Is Destroyed

For everything that the Lord reveals to you, the goal is not to torture you or to make you feel bad or to make you feel sinful. No. The intention is always, “*Let’s reveal this so we can restore it.*”

Note the word *restore*. Not *repair*, not make it into something different. No. It is to *restore*. Because that’s what the Light does. The Light reminds you of who you truly are, of who you’re meant to be as God designed you to be, to let go of those things that you think define you but actually belittle you, that actually diminish you.

And God says, “No. That (negative thought) is not true. You are so much more than that. Receive My light so I can restore you.”

Our Gospel says that the call of the Lord is to *repent*. When we repent, it’s essentially us rediscovering who we truly are.

And what’s important is being able to accept that what happened to you should not define you. And what wounded you should not always make you bleed out—instead your wound can be healed, and you can be restored completely.

Of course, that’s a long, difficult process that we have to endure. Bright lights can be harsh, can be scary. The lights can make us wince and so, we prefer not to go anymore in bright places.

Let’s not go there anymore, and say, “God, we’re okay here.”

But that’s the thing: Light does what light should do. It will *reveal*—but the hope is that it will *restore*.





The Light of Christ Reflects on Others

According to Physics, light moves only in a straight line. But how does it illuminate everything?

It bounces, it reflects everything. See, this is how it is. You have no choice about that. Once you receive the Light of Christ, automatically it bounces off from you to everyone else.

You can't say, "*Ako lang 'to Lord. Tayo lang 'to.— This is just for me, Lord. It's just for us.*"

No. It's automatic. If you let Christ shine unto your life, His Light bounces from you to others— to the people around you. You radiate Christ's light unto me right now, and I hope I am radiating Christ's light unto you. We are radiating the Light of Christ unto each other— it reflects, it bounces off.

But here's the thing: Sometimes, we get obsessed with the reflections. That's what happens in the Second Reading when Paul arrives at Corinth. People were divided. They were saying, "I am the son of Apollos." "I am the son of Peter." "I am the son of Paul."

They were gravitating toward their leaders, obsessing over them.

So, Paul reminded them, "No. You don't belong to Paul, nor to Peter, nor to Apollos. You belong to Christ— all of you."

That's the point: We walk under the Light of Christ, not some reflector or leader. But we do this a lot (we get obsessed with the reflections).

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17



¹⁰ I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you. ¹² I mean that each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.

The Light of Jesus Shines on You

I remember one time, last minute,
I helped a brother priest who could not go preside
Mass in someplace.

He said, “Please help me. Can you
be the one to celebrate the Mass?”

This priest was quite popular, so the church was
jam-packed.

I said to myself, “Naku nakakahiya naman ito... Pero sige.— This is embarrassing that
I take the place of the popular priest. But okay, I will do it.”

I went on. The Mass started, the Choir began to sing the entrance song,
Purihin ang Panginoon... And as I began to walk toward the altar, I could feel the air
of excitement as people anticipated the entrance of their beloved priest... But as the
Choir belted out *Umawit ng kagalakan...* you can feel the excitement fading into
disappointment — because the priest going to the altar, yours truly, was not the priest
they were expecting.

Oh, okay, don't go any further. How many of you attend The Feast because
of the builders? Not because of anything else— but because you obsess over the leaders,
the speakers, the singers, the soloists, the worship leaders. How many of us obsess over
the people whose only goal is to reflect the light? Once you're turning and getting the
light from the reflectors and not the real Source, you get lost — because that's not the
point. We, the servants here, the builders, I'm sure would all say, “We're not the point
here. We're not the message here. Everything is about Jesus Christ. We are here because
we want to walk in the Light of Christ.

Some would say, “Ay hindi na ako aabot sa Mass kasi talk lang naman talaga ‘yung
habol ko. Hindi na ‘ko magsisimba. ‘Dun na lang sa The Feast, kasi boring doon sa
simbahan namin.— Oh, I can't make it in the Mass at my parish church. It's all right.
Anyway, the Mass is boring there. I'd rather go to The Feast because all I want is to hear
the talk.”

Naku po! So, what light are you walking into? Whose light are you after?

My dear brothers and sisters, we are here because we need light. But there are so
many lights that distract us— including people who are just trying to bring you to the
Light. Sometimes, we get lost because we obsess over these things.

So, today, we remember that the Light of Christ has reached out to us, to every single
one of you. You don't have to depend on anyone else because that Light sees you— sees
you in all your darkness, sees you in all of your pains and woundedness, and is coming
on you, and is shining upon you. He wants to go to you because He wants to reveal His
presence, His goodness. But also to reveal your woundedness so He can restore you.

May we also reflect that light on each other and bring more people to face Jesus—
the Light of our Salvation. May God bless us all.



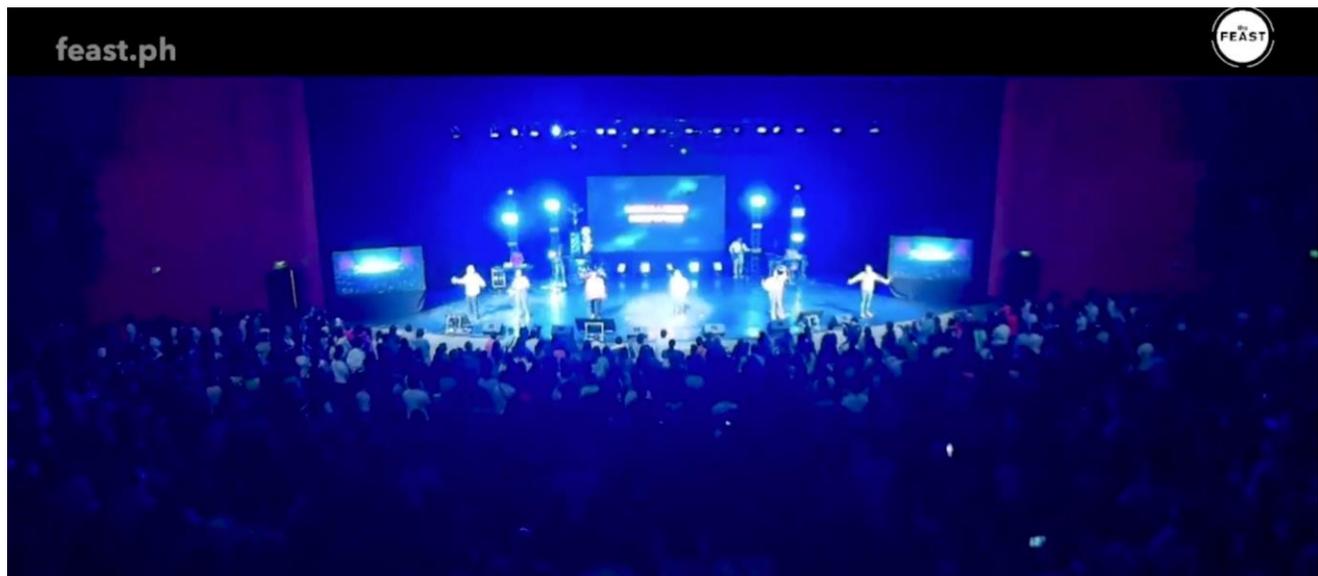
WELCOME HOME!

DIDOY LUBATON:

Welcome home to The Feast Bay Area where you are loved. Welcome home to the Family. This is our Community, The Feast Bay Area. We are part of a bigger Community, the Light of Jesus Family, and The Feast is our gathering. We're a Catholic Charismatic Community.

May I welcome, on behalf of everybody, all those attending for the first time? Welcome! Those who're watching online, if it is also your first, welcome home to the Family. Later on, as we end our session, we're going to pray for you. We want to welcome you personally, here in front of the stage, later. And I hope you would be with us as we go along.

A quick announcement: We always have our Sacrament of Confession, Reconciliation available. If God is calling you to that Reconciliation time with Him, our priests will be available at the side of the lobby. So, I hope that you would be one of us.



LOVE OFFERING

It's time for our giving. We have many ways to give — we can give in cash or online.

May I ask: Who among you wants to be rich? I want to be rich. How many here are rich and you want to be richer? I think that's the better question.

Here's an exhortation from St. Paul to Timothy 1 Timothy 6:17 NLT: *Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment.*



I believe that when God says, “Siksik, liglig at umaapaw,” it means overflowing not only with money. It also means overflowing with joy, peace, and beauty.

When you are generous, you will feel at peace despite all the things that are happening around you. You will feel that you are healing inside and out, despite the headache, the back pain.

I believe God does not need our money. God is the owner of everything. He has power over everything. But why does God ask us to give? Because it is good for us. We are in the Management Training Program of God. If God can give you P10,000, and you can manage to give 10% of that to God's work, to be generous to those who are in need, then you become part of His Plan. And if you can manage that P10,000 to become P100,000, or P500,000, or P1,000,000, it's up to you. Are you up for that Training Program?

You want to be rich? Start also with generosity. That is God's Plan for you and me.

Let's pray for our love offering. Guys, you're helping a lot of people, and thank you for helping build The Feast.

Altogether, say this prayer with me:

Dear Lord, thank you for blessing me, use my offering to bless a lot of people. And we pray, as a Family, bless us more, abundantly, and exceedingly. Because we want to love more, We want to bless more, and we want to give more. In Jesus' Name, we pray. Amen.

Worship!

EXHORTATION



KISHEY CASTRO:

The Word says God inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). He sits in the midst of our praises. So, let's worship Him for who He is and what He has done. Because He hears us. He hears every word of our prayers. He hears every shout of our praises. He hears even the smallest, tiniest voices in your heart.

So, today I invite you to just sing your praises, lift your heart to Jesus!

Lift your voices to Jesus! Come on!





There is a sound
I love to hear



It's the sound
of the Saviour's robe



Awake my soul and sing
Sing His praise aloud



As He walks into the room
where people pray



Where we hear praises
He hears faith



Where every promise
is amen



NOVENA TO GOD'S LOVE

BO SANCHEZ:

That was so good.
Let's pray our favorite prayer
at the Feast.
In the Name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, I receive all of God's love for me.
Today, I open myself to the unbounded, limitless,
overflowing abundance of God's universe.

Today, I open myself to God's blessings, healing, and miracles.
Today, I open myself to God's Word
so I become more like Jesus every day.

Today, I proclaim that I am God's beloved.
I am God's servant.
I am God's powerful champion.

And because I am blessed,
I am blessing the world.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

Talk



BO SANCHEZ: How many of you believe that God is here? How many believe that God created you great, and wonderful, and amazing? Because you are made in His image and likeness.

I know there's a group here from the Philippine Army. May we give them big, big hand? Thank you so much.

The message I'm going to preach and Audee Villaraza is going to preach in a while is: *Go back to the garden.*

You might be telling me what in the world does that mean? You'll find out. Okay, let's be seated. But the way you sit down is important to me. Do not slouch. When the Word of God is being preached, you want to like, sit up straight. Are you sitting up straight? Are you kind of leaning in a bit? Because you want to lean into the Word today.

I start with my story.

May 2021. On my pointer finger, there is a tiny oximeter, pulse oximeter (to test breathing level during Coronavirus Disease infection). And you know what the reading was? 88 (normal level is 95). Doctors here will know that the moment the oximeter says 88 or below, you rush that person to the hospital Emergency Room (ER). You have to. You *must*. But during that time (COVID surge), there was not a single empty bed in any hospital around me. It was really insane that, you know, the line in the ER of hospitals was like the line for an *Avengers* movie.



Near-Death Surrender

When a person goes through a near-death experience, if one allows it, it will transform one's life. And that's what happened to me. I experienced a second conversion. So much so that I was able to write a book, *Finding Your Surrendered Place*, that has blessed thousands of people.

Because when I thought I heard the creaking sound of death's door opening in front of me, I had no resort but to surrender my entire life to God. And all I held dear — my wife, my kids, my sisters, my friends— I totally surrendered.

You had no choice.

I said, "Lord, God, I'm giving You everything. I'm ready to die."

And in that beautiful moment, I experienced profound peace, deep joy, that I had never experienced in recent years. It was just absolutely beautiful.

And then it took a whole month to recuperate—for 30 long days. But that was a good thing. Because it was like a 30-day retreat for me.

With a very weak body, every morning and every afternoon, I would walk to my little backyard. I would sit on a monoblock chair. I would remove my slippers, my sandals, and I would let my bare feet step on the grass. I would let the wind touch my face. And then I would close my eyes. And I would slip back into that Surrendered Place where I would surrender again everything to God.

Totally, completely, 100 percent: "Lord, I'm yours. I'm ready."

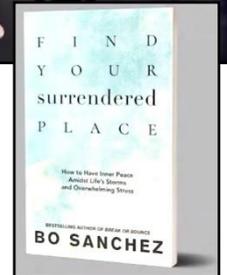
Every morning, every afternoon, was absolutely transformative for me.

When I got better, what I would do was take these pauses during the whole day. You know what? I would meditate. I would revisit my Surrendered Place at different times of the day.

But then the expected happened. My life got busy again. You know— traveling again, planning, meetings...

During that 30-day retreat, I realized what the Surrendered Place was—where is it exactly...

And then it dawned on me... O my God, I knew where I was. I realized, the Surrendered Place? It was God's heart. I was inside God's heart. And when I was inside God's heart, there was no more worry, no more fear, no more attachments— nothing. I did not feel any of those. Why? Because I felt I was totally, completely loved.



Surrendered Place = God's Heart



Two Reasons for Human Suffering

You know, in the Surrendered Place, it's like all my values were turned upside down. What I held dear, and those that were important to me were no longer important. I had zero desire to impress people. I had zero desire to prove my worth to people. Why? I repeat: I felt totally, completely, and perfectly loved.

So, this was what happened: I went back to work. My life began to be busy again. And then I noticed worry began to creep back into my heart.

I noticed that I began to want to impress people again. I began to desire to prove myself to the world again.

I asked myself, "Why?" And I knew why. Because I was spending too much time away from my Surrendered Place.

There are two reasons we get pushed away from our Surrendered Place. And these are the same two reasons for human suffering...

Moral Failure (Sin)

Moral failure is basically sin. When we sin against God, when we do not trust Him, when we take matters into our hands, when we want to define good and bad for ourselves apart from God, when we disobey God, what happens is we push ourselves away from our Surrendered Place.

I want you to know that many times we cause our own suffering—through our sin.

I remember one time, I was praying over a guy who had cirrhosis of the liver. So, I prayed for him.

Then, after I prayed for him, he looked at me and said, "Bro. Bo, I was asking God, *Why me?*"

I found that incredulous. Because I've known his wife—for a long time now. For the past 23 years, his wife has been asking me to pray for her alcoholic husband. He was a heavy drinker. And so for him to say, "Bro. Bo, *why?*" I could not understand it.

Then he saw my face. I did not hide my surprise. I could not.

So, he wanted to explain his question.

And he said, "Bro. Bo, all my friends are heavy drinkers but only *I* got sick."

It's really funny because we want to play Russian roulette — the loading of a six-shot revolver, right? Then you spin it, and then you cock it on your head and then pull the trigger— and when it explodes, you blame God.

But that's a very common problem. We *do*, at different times in our life, cause our own suffering.



Many times, because of sin, we push ourselves away from our Surrendered Place. But there's a second reason that pushes us away from our Surrendered Place.

Not all suffering comes from our sins. Many of our sufferings come from living in a broken world. We live in a universe where things go wrong

I am living a good life. I've got a wife to love, and I've got kids to raise, and I've got ministries to lead, and I've got businesses to run. These are all good.

But guess what: Good things come with problems. And so, even in my busyness — doing *good* things— it's very possible that I get distracted.

It is not sin. It's just that I'm living a life in this world.

We live in a universe where everyone dies. You will die. Everyone you know will die. Last time I checked, the mortality rate, the fatality rate of human beings is still 100 percent. The universe that we live in is broken.

Guess what: We live also in a universe where there are earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, and super typhoons, and floods that decimate thousands, maybe even millions of people.

Now, think with me: Why is that? Why do we live in a universe where a drunk driver can hit a four-year-old kid on the road? That kid had done nothing wrong. Because that's the kind of world we live in. And the earlier we embrace that life has a lot of sufferings — and we did not cause them— the earlier we realize that is part of the brokenness of our life.

So, what should we do?

Whether it be moral or whether it be material failure, the call, the solution, is still the same: Run back to your Surrendered Place.

You have to go back to the Garden.



May I invite you to stand up?
Reverence the Word:

*Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.*



We are going to read *Leviticus*. And for the next ten Sundays, *Leviticus*. Chapter 1, verse 1: *The Lord called to Moses from the. Tabernacle...*

We're going to continue reading that, and I pray the Lord will speak to you. And that Tabernacle— which is also a Garden (the Garden of Eden), which is also my personal invention, the Surrendered Place— that's where God wants us to go back to.



Put your hand over your chest, and Everybody, say:
Jesus, speak to me powerfully. You know what I need to hear. You know what I am going through— questions in my heart, the burdens I am carrying. Your Word I receive and I will be changed. In Jesus' Name. Amen. Are you ready for Leviticus?

Please welcome Audee Villaraza...



Back in the Desert

I want to welcome all of you to our brand-new Feast series titled *CLOSER*.

Bro. Bo already announced it. But I want to take you to a little recap. A few months ago, we studied the first book of the Bible, *Genesis*. And we said that *Genesis* is not a stand-alone book. It has a continuation, the sequel, which is *Exodus*.

And now we're opening the third part, the third book. We're back on the journey in the desert. We came from the Garden, went to Egypt, and now we're back in the wilderness.

A lot of people have not read *Leviticus*. Why?

Because it's weird. If you open the book, you'll read that it's got all these strange, ancient, archaic laws and rules that somehow do not make sense to us. I'll give you some examples...

In *Leviticus*, there is this rule that says you cannot enter the house of God, or you cannot be in God's Presence if you cut the side of your hair— your sideburn.



If we are still practicing that rule today, the only persons who will be able to enter into God's Presence will be persons like Elvis Presley, or John Lennon, or 12-year-old Justin Bieber, or our 20-month-old daughter Ellie.

That's just one of the laws that I find so strange.



Another law — I think women might cringe at this— prohibited people from sitting in the same spot where a menstruating woman sat or lay. That’s weird, right? In the modern context, how will you even know? Would you be carrying around a magnifying glass checking for blood? How does that even work?

And then, here’s one more that I found so weird. Check this out. *Leviticus* has seven chapters dedicated to animal sacrifices. I’m not kidding.

Question: If *Leviticus* cannot be directly applied in our life, why are we even going to study it? I like that word *directly*. Because while it is true that we cannot directly apply *Leviticus* laws in our life today, here’s the thing: When you start reading the book, you know what it will give you? It will give you a beautiful glimpse of God’s Heart.

Leviticus allows you to get a peek into God’s heart.

And here’s something I want you to hear: *Leviticus* reveals to you what God wants for you. You want to know what God wants for you?

Here: God wants you to come closer to Him.

Isn’t that beautiful?



Two Ways To Understand *Leviticus*

For us to understand this ancient text:
in two ways:

1. Ancient. The first one is *ancient*—*Leviticus* belongs to an ancient world, to an ancient culture, and if you read it with modern lenses, chances are, you're not going to get it. So, you've got to read this in the context of what was happening back then.

2. Not Stand-Alone. The second reason is this is not a stand-alone book. It is like one of those books that you decide to read one day and understand right away.

You read the Bible one day and then you think, "Okay I'm going to read *Leviticus*..."

And then you're going to understand it.

No. It's not going to work for you.

Because *Leviticus* is a book that's a journey. You start from *Genesis* to *Exodus*, to *Leviticus*, and then next time, we're going to study *Numbers*, and then *Deuteronomy*. The books are a part of a five-part series. So, you cannot read *Leviticus* like it's a stand-alone book. It's not like those Marvel cinematic universe movies where you watch one movie, you appreciate it for its entertainment value, and that's fine—you go home happy.

This one, *Leviticus*, you've got to read it as a journey. And that's beautiful. I needed to say that because that's what really the Bible stands for.

Think about this: The Bible is one gigantic jigsaw puzzle. And each book— from the Old Testament, all the way to the New Testament, is one jigsaw piece with one unified and powerful message: that there is a God who wants you to get closer to Him.

That's what we're going to talk about today.

The Bible is one unified story of how God is drawing you closer to Him.



Leviticus' ultimate question:
"How can we get back into the Garden?"

The Question

Leviticus is so interesting because it asks this ultimate question: How do we get closer to the Lord?

Remember in *Genesis* where it all started? Where did it all begin? In the Garden (of Eden).

But here's a follow-up question: Did it end in the Garden? No.

It ended in exile. It ended with the eviction of Adam and Eve from the house of Big Brother.

That's why, if you notice, if you realize, every event from the Old Testament all the way to the New Testament with Jesus, it's a God who's been trying to get His people back into the Garden.

Where's the Garden, by the way? Bro. Bo answered it already. It's a place of *surrender*. That's right. It's not so much of a place — it doesn't have a Post-Office Box, you can't Google it, you can't Waze it. It's not so much of a location, but it's more of a disposition. Like you can be in the Garden right now, sitting where you are, because that's a place where you feel closest to God. It can be any place where you are closest to the Lord. You dwell in God's heart. I love that. That's so beautiful.

That's why, when we study *Genesis*, we find out what life looked like inside the Garden— that place where God and Man were connected. They were *one*. It was beautiful a relationship. There was balance, there was abundance.

But then we saw in *Exodus* what life looked like outside of the Garden. We were introduced to the evil that was Egypt. Egypt was a representation of everything that the Garden was not. It was what life looked like outside of the Garden. And make no mistake: life outside of the Garden there was turmoil. There was torment. And there were trials and tribulations, hardships— beyond your wildest imagination.

That's why what did God do? God raised another man — a new Adam. What was his name? Moses. God raised Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, onto the mountain of God which by the way— think about this— was the new Garden of Eden. Because, you know, the Garden of Eden was up on a mountain. And the new Garden was up on Mount Sinai.



But here's the question: Were they successful in making Mount Sinai into a new Garden?

No. Because just like their ancestors—Adam and Eve who rejected God—the Israelites also rejected God. How?

By deciding not to go up the mountain. They stayed down the mountain.

That's why this is how God designed to get the people back to Him:

It says in Exodus 29:45: *Then I will live among the people of Israel and be their God...* — In Mount Sinai.

But it never happened. Why? Because the people chose not to be with their God. They did not want to go up the mountain...

So, you know what God did? Because the people did not want to go up the mountain, God came down the mountain.

Now, I don't know who this message is for— but this encourages me so much. You know, there are people here who might feel lonely, who might feel desolate, who might feel abandoned. But whoever you are, I want you to know that God will come— if you can't. In moments when you feel like you don't have the legs, you don't have the energy, you don't have the faith, God is going to be the one to come into your situation.

Does that encourage somebody here today? To know that there is a God who since Day 1 has been trying to get you back into the Garden?

God gave instructions to the people of Israel.

This sacred tent where God and Man would dwell together.

That was God's idea.



The Problem

The problem was this: God wanted His people, but the people didn't want their God.

The First Commandment that God gave to Moses while he was up on the mountain—written on the very first iPad, *that* Tablet:

You shall not have other gods before Me.

And precisely that moment, what were the Israelites doing? They were fashioning a golden calf out of their jewelry — gold earrings, gold necklaces.

Did you know that we still do this today?

That we would replace God with something that we think is so worthy of Him— but something that is completely worthless?

Let me say it this way: We trade God for gold. We trade God for the newest fad, or the newest trend, or the newest thing.

That's why— this is just on me— let me share something personal. I realized that at this time of my life... You know what I found out, I do not own a single expensive thing that I do not fully utilize. I own expensive stuff. I own a car, I own some gadgets. I own some properties. And I make use of all of them.

Why? Because once upon a time, in my life, I used to buy really expensive shoes— and if you still do that, that's on you, okay? But as for me, I don't buy expensive shoes anymore. Why? Because I realized that whenever I own expensive shoes, whenever it would get scratched, or get dirty, or sometimes even get lost, or misplaced, you know what would happen? I would feel discouraged.

I would be frustrated. And right now, I've got kids. Parents, don't you just hate it when your kids step on your very clean shoes? I hate it. That's why I no longer want to own expensive shoes. They're just going to be stepped on by my kids.



What God Does Not Want

What's my point? My point is this: I want to tell somebody here today that God is not against you owning things. God is against things owning you.

Sometimes, it's the very thing that you purchase that becomes your God. And whenever that thing gets lost, whenever that thing gets damaged, you cry. Like it's your God that's ruined.

That's the story of *Exodus*. God freed the Israelites from Egypt. They were out of Egypt. But you know what? All it took was just one week for some of them to wish they were back in Egypt.

Some of you have been returning to places where God already rescued you from. Come on, speak to me. Say Amen if you agree. *Amen*. Some of you are returning to prison that God already freed you from.

That's *Exodus*. Why? Because we treat things— sometimes, even people— like they're our God. This is why *Exodus* ended badly.

In *Exodus*, you know what happened? God said, "I want you to build a Tabernacle where you and I can dwell together."

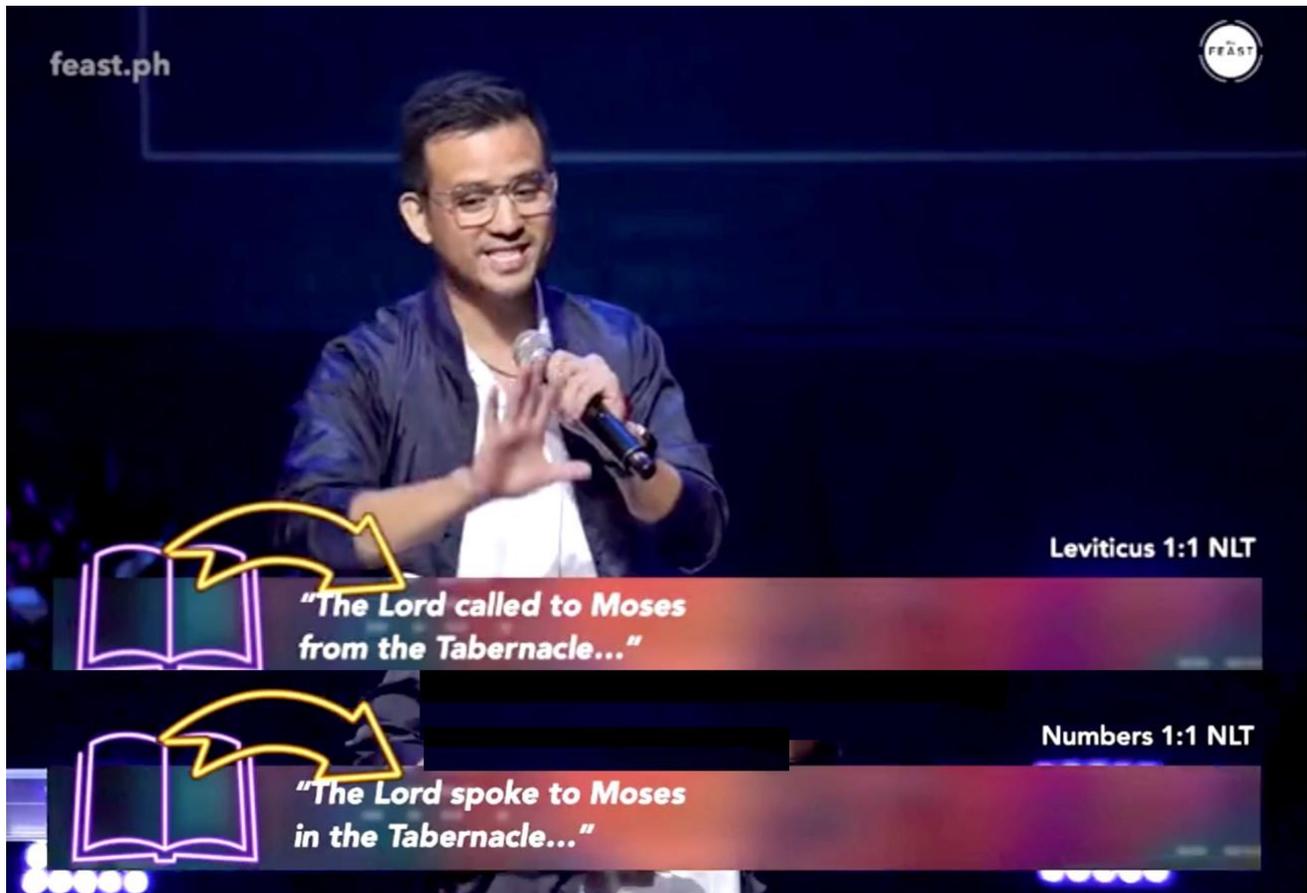
But you know what? When they built that Tabernacle, nobody could enter except the high priest. Not even Moses could enter the Tabernacle. Why? Because there were a lot of conditions.

And this is where *Leviticus* comes in. Now we get to the good part. Because *Leviticus* prescribes specific guidelines on how people can get back into the Garden. It prescribes a specific way for humanity to enter the Tabernacle.

But here's the question: Was it successful? You're going to find out in the book of *Numbers*. Next time, we read the book of *Numbers* you're going to find out.

But may I give you a spoiler alert?





Moses and the Tabernacle

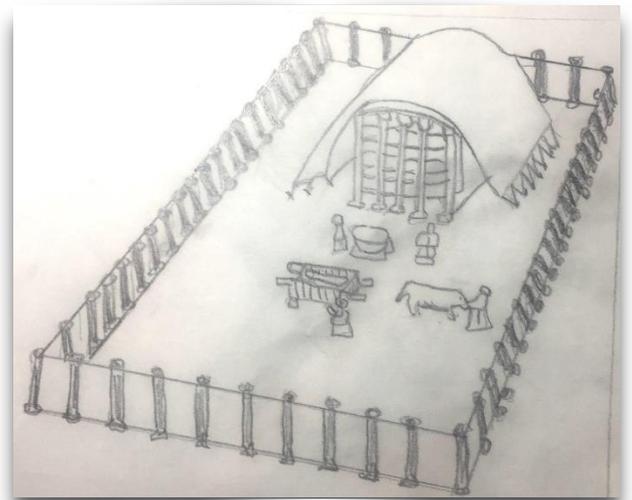
In Leviticus 1:1: *The Lord called to Moses **from** the Tabernacle...*

What does that mean? It means that Moses was outside. God was inside.

But check this out:

Numbers 1:1 says: *The Lord called to Moses **in** the Tabernacle.*

What does that mean? It means that Moses got in. He was in the Tabernacle.



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Question: How Do People Now Get into the Tabernacle?

THREE WAYS:

1. Ritual Sacrifices
2. Ritual Purity
3. Moral Purity



Moral Purity. Now among these three, the one that we can probably really understand would be Moral Purity. Because Moral Purity is really nothing but ethics. Everybody has basic ethics in one's DNA. Basic ethics is about being moral — like loving your spouse, loving your neighbor, being good to people, loving the poor, loving migrants, not practicing incest, not killing people.

But some of you might think, “Well, some people don't do that. Some people kill some people. Other people practice incest. Okay. Some people might not have pure morality, but this is the least that we can understand.

Because I'm telling you the other two will blow you away because you will not be able to relate...

Ritual Sacrifices. For instance, Ritual Sacrifices or animal sacrifices. When was the last time you killed a cow and then burned it up and offered it to the Lord? Which kind of makes me wonder, how does killing Billy the Goat or Clarabelle the Cow, or Danny the Dog make me worthy to be in God's Presence? Because I mean if anything, it's going to make me less liked by my vegan family.

And here's the other thing:

Ritual Purity is all about this: They had this rule that you cannot enter into the Tabernacle of God if you had skin impurities. Back then, they had leprosy, some really wild skin diseases. But nowadays, does bad acne count? You mean to tell me if I have pimples, if I have a breakout, I cannot be in the Presence of God? Not only do I feel insecure about myself but, you know, God is now rejecting me? Is that what it is?

And here's something for food lovers. They had this rule that you could not mussels, shellfish, crabs.

You know for foodies now, it's a bit different— you can have an eat-all-you-can buffet of crabs in Vikings and still worship the Lord after. That can happen because our ways have changed.



Why We Can't Understand *Leviticus*

I'll give you the reason we cannot understand *Leviticus*. Because we're looking at it from a different perspective.

The only way that you're going to understand *Leviticus* is this: If you go down to the meaning of each ancient symbol and get the context.

For instance, unclean people were not allowed to go inside the Tabernacle. Why? Because they believed that before you enter the Holy of Holies, you need to discard all ancient symbols of death—uncleanliness, menstruation, skin impurities, sin.

Because they believed in two aspects:

1. That life inside the House of God is clean. It's pure, it's holy. Life outside is broken. So, if you go inside broken, you are not worthy.

That's what they believed in.

2. They all believed everybody is meant to go into the Tabernacle—except that nobody could go in because everybody was full of sin, and dirty, and filth.

That's why it makes us realize this today, my friends:

Sometimes, we think that to be holy, you've got to do holy ways.

We go to The Feast, we pray the Rosary, we do our Novena, be good to other people — to be holy.

But that's not true.

The way to be holy is by being close to the One who is holy. The answer is proximity. You become holy by being close to the One who is holy.

And not just proximity. Because I believe that proximity without intimacy is nothing. There are people who live in homes that have broken relationships, right?

So, sometimes, proximity is nothing because "I'm close to you" doesn't mean that we're intimate, that we're close, so we're personal.

When you're close to the Lord and when you're intimate with the Lord, that's when you become holy.

One Quick Story

I'd like to close this way: I want to give you one quick story.

When we were still single, I had a hard time courting Kristel.

And I know what some of you are thinking: "Really? But you're so handsome!"

The courtship was not easy. Because Kristel is the only girl in her family.

She has three brothers. *At right, standing*, that's Gian, that's Mark, and that's Neil. You know, they look like people who can easily beat me up because they're *huge*. But they're good people. It's just that when I met them for the first time, I was so intimidated by these brothers. See, I look like the youngest in the family.

So, you know what I did? I made a commitment early on—because I really wanted to get to know Kristel—that I was going to win not just Kristel. I was going to win her family. I was going to win her friends, her relatives. I made every effort to win them all.



Her family has an unspoken rule that when we go on a date, I was supposed to take her home not beyond 12 midnight. For three years, while we were dating, I took her home before 12 midnight. I think the latest we were ever out was 11:59. But it was technically before 12... And it was good because after some time, I finally won not just Kristel—but I won her family, I won her relatives, I won her friends. And it was beautiful.

Why am I sharing this? What's my point?

In the book of *Leviticus* there are 251 laws.

Some of you might think: "251 laws? Just for me to get close to God? That's a lot of effort!"

Every great relationship will always have a cost. It will cost you something. It will cost a bit of sacrifice. It will cost a bit of tears. It's going to cost you a bit of a headache. It's going to cost you a little heartache. It's going to cost you some resources. Every great relationship will have a bit of sacrifice.

Cost of a Good Relationship

What I learned the hard way through my wife Kristel is that things come at a cost. Because every worthwhile thing in this world usually requires a little waiting. And sometimes a little of working.

Because the truth is if God gave you the blessing right away without you even working for it, you know what's going to happen? You're not going to have faith, you are not going to have trust, you're going to think it's easy to get your way. You will turn out to be a spoiled child. And God doesn't want that.

That's why single ladies, may I give you a little dating tip? If a guy says he's interested in you, but he doesn't make every effort to get to know you, then you got to re-think that.

Every great relationship has to cost you a bit of something.

A total of 251 laws— that's a lot of laws.

But how many of you know that every relationship with God is worthwhile relationship? So, you have to work on the relationship. You have to seek Him every day. You have to lean in toward God as much as you can. Attend Mass regularly. Go to Confession regularly.

Yes, a good relationship will cost you some. But in the end, it will be worth it.

And the only way I can take this message home, of course, is I want to bring back that Man. The Name above every other name that knew what sacrifice is all about. Because He knew that coming down on Earth would have a cost. It would cost Him His life. It would cost Him pain. It would cost Him suffering.

But love does cost you.

Because the cost of not being with the Father was far too greater than feeling pain— bodily pain, emotional pain, spiritual pain.

The cost of not being with your God is so much greater than the suffering that you endure in this world.

Jesus, however, followed His father even though there was a cost to do so.

He said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." So when we follow Jesus, that's the *Way*.

But you know what? Following Jesus is not easy. Carrying your crosses every day is not a walk in the park. Forgiving people and turning the other cheek is not easy. It's not easy to wake up every day and say, "Lord, I will follow You. I will do the right thing. I will do the moral thing. I will be upright. I will be honest. I will have my integrity intact. I will not sell my soul to corruption."

Doing so is hard. But I'm telling you, in the end, it is worth it. It truly is. It will be worth it in the end.



Our Decision and Declaration

Let me just say this: You know the difference between winning Kristel's heart and winning God's heart?

I needed to win the heart of my wife. But when it comes to God, you don't have to do that. You already have His heart. You already have His love. All you have to do is run up to the Father.

And I hope and pray that someone here who is far away from the Lord—and you've walked away from His House, you've walked away from the Garden—I don't know who you are but you know exactly where you are and who you are. And you've walked away from the House just like the prodigal son.

The prodigal son realized—on the day he was suffering—that there's really nothing compared to the House of God. You know what He did? He walked back. And when the father saw the son, it didn't take much for the father to do what he did. As the son came walking to his father's house, the father went running to him.

I believe that when God sees you coming, He'll be the first one to go running—running, running, running to you with open arms.

I believe this place is the House of God. This is the place where you're going to turn your life around—today, this year. And you're going to come back to the House of God and turn to His Garden, to His beautiful place where you're meant to be.

May I ask you to lift both of your hands in the air...

Jesus, look at Your children, look at Your son, look at your daughter. God, we are all here for you. Even those online. We are raising our hands and declaring that You are our God. And today we make this bold declaration and decision. That we're going to go back to you. We're not going to walk. We're going to run. We're going, head down... We're going to enter Your Garden, into that beautiful place. We're not going to waste one minute, not even one second of our life here on Earth without going back to You and without having a life with You.

We love You, Jesus. We thank You that You are our Way. And You are the Truth. And You will be our Life from this day forward. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Jesus.

Let's sing to the Lord and make this our declaration: That today, we're going back to the Garden. You are going back to the Garden!





FAMILY

Thank You!

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The Feast Family online newsmagazine is produced by the Shepherd's Voice Radio and Television Foundation, which is also our partner beneficiary, with editorial services by the Light of Jesus Family Library Ministry.

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Go and make disciples of all men.
— Matthew 28:19

