

HEBREWS

HPUMC BIBLE READING PLAN

GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 3

CONVERSATION STARTER

What's the one food or snack you could never go without?

CLEANING OUT THE GARBAGE

Animal sacrifices. Blood. Reading Hebrews doesn't exactly settle the stomach. For Western readers living thousands of years after the time of Jesus, it's difficult to wrap our heads around these ancient practices that seem barbaric. But before you judge them, it's important to pause and approach with curiosity.



To understand the point of animal sacrifices, we must first understand the reality of what our sin does to the world. When we rebel, when we turn away from God, or worship idols, it's like throwing trash into clean water—it defiles it and infects it with something that's not supposed to be there. Now, think about how much sin (trash) has been tossed into the river throughout millennia of human

existence. The best image we can point to is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a collection of trash in the middle of the ocean the size of Texas!

The task of cleaning all this junk up feels overwhelming, though there are certainly those trying to do just that. For ancient Israel, this was the primary job of the High Priest and the sacrificial system. The High Priests used the blood of animals to remove all the *junk* from God's good world and from His people.

When they watched these animals die, as they witnessed their blood pour out on the altar, the ancient Israelites were reminded of the harsh reality of sin and its consequences on the world and in their communities. As the [Bible Project writers](#)

[explain](#), “Sin released into the world compounds and begins a downward spiral that we’ve seen before in the biblical story. So the animal’s symbolic death is a physical symbol of what’s really at stake—the life or death of the community.”

These sacrifices also reminded Israel of God’s love for them. The animal’s blood was a substitute for their own. Because of their sin, they deserved death, but God provided a means through which the people could be forgiven without their *own* blood being spilled.

The problem, as Hebrews will unpack in this week’s reading, is that these sacrifices weren’t permanent. The priests needed to offer sacrifices daily, and yearly, to atone for the people’s sins. It’s like taking a boat to the Great Garbage Patch every day and hoping to make a dent, but finding more trash each time you venture out.

How will God clean up this problem once and for all? That’s where Jesus comes in!

Through the new covenant, Jesus’ own blood is poured out in a way that deals with more than the outward effects of sin. He gets to the heart of the issue, transforming God’s people from the inside out and inviting us into new life. Jesus makes it possible for all the junk inside of us to get cleaned out. He makes it possible for us to be in God’s presence with a fully clean conscience. Because of Jesus, we can stand before God without feeling dirty or shameful, without a shred of guilt.

Jesus died so we could experience the fullness of God’s love for us without our mess getting in the way. And that, Hebrews will argue, is what makes him the better High Priest, the mediator of a better Covenant.

Spend a moment discussing this idea with your group. Why do you think God used the image of animal sacrifice when forming His people as a community? What can we learn from these ideas today, especially in light of Jesus?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. What does it look like for the Church to be part of bringing heaven to earth? How can you participate in that endeavor as individuals?
3. Hebrews 10:23-25 says, “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the

Day approaching.” What does it look like for your group to spur one another on toward love and good deeds?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Jesus’ death ushers us into the presence of God. Because of Jesus, we can approach the throne with confidence, knowing that God loves us and willingly pours out his grace and mercy on us. Since we can boldly meet with God in this way, we ought to do so! Prayer is a powerful way to stay connected with God. This week, begin and end each day by physically getting on your knees to pray if you are able. This is a great practice to do with your family or on your own. At the end of the week, reflect on your experience: *Did changing your posture during prayer change the way you prayed?*