



# **LIFE GROUP STUDIES**

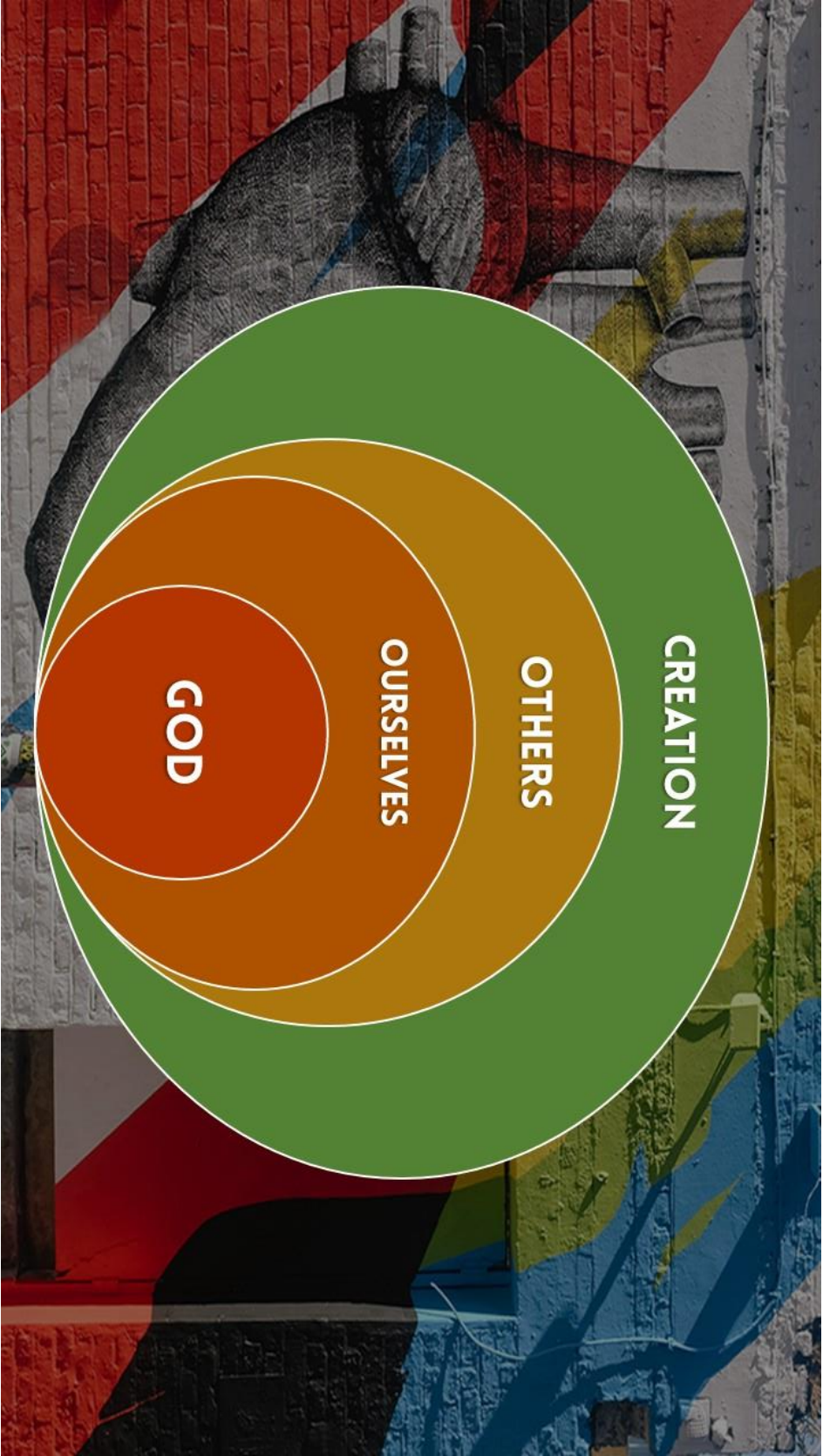
## INTRODUCTION

This year at St. John's one of the things we are focussing on is how we can help each other to grow intentionally as followers of Jesus. As part of that it is helpful to become more clear on what the **goal** of our Christian life is, and how we can **move closer** to that goal. At our Training Day in February we introduced the idea of a 'Rule of Life', which is an intentional structure and rhythm of life that allows us to pay attention to God in everything that we do.

The sermon series that these studies are based on is called 'The Heart of Life'. We are looking at the book of **Leviticus**, a difficult and often confusing book of religious laws from the Old Testament. Many Christians have given up altogether on making sense of Leviticus or what it might mean for them. But what we see if we look more closely is that Leviticus is very relevant for us as Christians. Leviticus is a book about the rules for worship around the 'Tabernacle', the tent in the centre of the Israelite community where they encountered God. It outlined for the people of Israel that the goal of their life together was to have God's presence at the centre of everything they did, and provided them with practical ways that they could do that in their own cultural context. Along with the other books of the Law, it was their Rule of Life.

In the six studies in 'The Heart of Life' we will look at sections of Leviticus, and the letter to the Hebrews, which help us to consider our relationships **with God, with Ourselves, with Others, and with Creation** and what they

should be like as followers of Jesus. As the picture below shows, this takes us from the heart of our life with God into ever wider circles of relationships that include everything that we do. Leviticus will provide us with principles for going more deeply into these issues, and examples of how we might begin to make practical steps in our own spiritual growth.



## STUDY ONE: FINDING MY RELIGION

### HEBREWS 8

1. What does the word 'religion' mean to you?
2. Why do many people (including Christians) have problems with the idea of religion?
3. Why does Hebrews say that Jesus' ministry is superior to that of the old covenant established by Moses?
4. Verses 7-12 quote Jeremiah 31:31-34. What are the features of the 'new covenant' that God promised to make with his people?
5. What does it mean that God will 'put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts' (v10)?
6. Describe your vision for what you would like your experience of God to be like. Be creative, using words or pictures.
7. What are some of the concrete ways that you currently live out your faith? What do you do as a Christian in order to follow Jesus?

8. What might it look like for God to be at the centre of every part of your life? Think of feelings, actions, that would indicate that this was true.
  
9. What are some ways that you struggle in trying to grow as a Christian? What area of the Christian life would you like to learn more about?

## STUDY TWO: OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

### LEVITICUS 1

1. What does it mean to you to have a 'close relationship with God'?  
What kind of actions might bring someone closer to God?
2. Have you ever read Leviticus? If you have, how well did you understand it?
3. How does it affect you to read about the practice of animal sacrifices?  
Do you think that this kind of thing should be in the Bible?
4. Why do you think ancient people centred so much of their religion around animal sacrifice? Can you see any relevance of these particular ancient worship practices for us today?
5. Why do you think that the animals offered to God had to be 'without defect' (v3, 10)?
6. Why does God find these offerings to be 'an aroma pleasing' to Him? (v9, 13, 17).



7. What does the word 'atonement' mean?
  
8. There are two major types of offerings in Leviticus – offerings for sin (or purification), and offerings of thankfulness. Are there any similar 'offerings' that Christians make to God today?
  
9. Read Hebrews 10:1-10. What is the relationship between the sacrificial system described in Leviticus (especially chapter 16) and the death of Jesus on the cross?
  
10. What do you currently do in order to 'draw near' to God in your everyday life? Is there anything that you could do to make the experience of God's presence a stronger reality for you and those around you?



## **STUDY THREE: OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OURSELVES**

### **LEVITICUS 20:22-21:6**

1. What are some of the major ways that someone can be 'unhealthy'?
2. Leviticus places a great deal of emphasis on the ideas of 'uncleanness' and 'impurity'. Things that made the Israelites 'unclean' (unable to approach God in worship) were those things that were associated with death (eg. visible skin diseases, dead bodies). Why would it be significant for them to be 'purified' of contact with these things as part of their practice of worship?
3. What are some of the things in our own culture that might communicate a sense of 'impurity', contamination or death to those who come into contact with them?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Leviticus spends a lot of time on guidelines for sexual relationships. Why is it important for us to pay attention to what we do with our bodies?

5. The priests in the Tabernacle were set apart and given special instructions to live out a higher standard of ritual and moral purity. What would the point of that be?
  
6. Read 1 Peter 2:1-9. In what ways are Christians supposed to be like the priests of the Tabernacle in Leviticus? What might this look like in practice?
  
7. How would having a healthy and 'pure' way of living benefit our ability to follow Jesus?
  
8. What are some practical ways that we might build a healthy way of living with regard how we take care of our bodies and our 'souls' (our thoughts and feelings)?

## STUDY FOUR: OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

### LEVITICUS 19:1-18

1. What are the 'top 5' most important relationships in your life? What is your 'role' (eg. husband, mother, etc.) in these relationships?
2. What are some of the ways that relationships can go wrong for us?
3. What are the different types of relationships we find in the reading from Leviticus 19?
4. Why should the people of Israel not reap the harvest right to the very edge of the land, or go over their vineyard a second time when they pick the grapes (vv9-10)?
5. What is wrong with 'holding back the wages of a hired worker overnight' (13)?
6. In what ways might we in our own lives participate in 'injustice' towards other people?
7. Leviticus 25 lays out two big social practices related to community life – the Sabbath and the Jubilee. The Sabbath is a weekly day of rest,

and a seven-yearly pattern of even greater rest. How might the practice of Sabbath contribute to healthy relationships?

8. The Jubilee was an event every fifty years when all debts were to be forgiven and everyone was to be set free from slavery. What does this tell us about how God's people should behave?
9. Leviticus 19 lays out obligations to our 'neighbour' (vv13, 15-18). Who are our neighbours? If you have time, read Luke 10:25-37 (Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan).
10. What are some practical ways that you might take care of your important relationships, and be part of God's work of justice in the world?

## **STUDY 5: OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CREATION**

### **LEVITICUS 17:1-14**

1. Are there any environmental issues that you are particularly concerned about at the moment?
2. In Genesis 1:26-30, after the creation story, God gives human beings the job of caring for all the living things in the world. This idea is often called 'stewardship', because we are acting as God's servant in his place. What are some ways that the human race is currently failing to exercise good stewardship over the world?
3. Why, according to Leviticus 17:10-14, are Israelites not to consume the blood of an animal?
4. What does it mean to say that 'the life of a creature is in the blood'? What then is the significance of the rules in this chapter that say that all blood is to be offered to God?
5. Leviticus 11 has very detailed instructions about the kinds of animals that are to be considered 'unclean' for the Israelites. What would be

the effects on the Israelites' diet of having such tight limitations on the kinds of animals that they could eat without becoming impure?

6. Read Acts 10:9-16, Peter's vision after being called to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. What does this say about the purpose of the food laws in Leviticus? Why was this an appropriate vision for Peter at that time?
7. As we saw last week, according to Leviticus 25:1-7 the land itself is supposed to have a 'Sabbath' every 7 years, when it is not cultivated. Why would God command this? What effect would this have on the Israelites' ability to build economic prosperity?
8. How would it change our own lifestyle and economy if we lived as though the lives of animals and the land belonged to God and not to us?
9. What are some practical ways that you could exercise more responsible stewardship in your relationship to creation?

## STUDY 6: OUR PATTERN OF LIFE

### LEVITICUS 26:1-13

1. In *Study One* we asked the question of what you want your life as a Christian to be like, your vision for your life with God. Answer that question again, and discuss whether your answer would be different after doing this series.
2. Why is God so strongly against his people setting up 'idols' and worshipping them (v1-2)? What might be the 'idols' in our own lives that take the place of God?
3. God gives strong promises in this reading of blessing and peace for those who obey his commandments. Does this always happen, in your experience? Why or why not?
4. What is the main promise that God makes here (see vv11-13)? Describe what your own life would look like if that was the case.
5. Which of the four types of relationship in previous studies (with God, with yourself, with others, or with creation) do you think that God might be calling you to give attention to at the moment?



6. Are there any particular practices or spiritual disciplines that you would like to build into your life from now on?
  
7. Look at the 'Pattern of Life' template on the next page. This is the basis for what a 'Rule of Life' might look like. It gives space for each of the four types of relationships, and what you might do to grow in those areas each day, week, and season of your life. How much of this could you fill out at the moment? Pick a section as a group and discuss the kind of things that could go in it.
  
8. Read Hebrews 10:19-25. How could your group 'spur each other on to love and good deeds', and encourage each other to grow intentionally as disciples of Christ?

Relationship with Others

Relationship with God

Seasonally

Weekly

Daily

Relationship with Creation

Relationship with Self