



Living Lent | February 27

Holy Neighbors

*“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them:
“Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy”.... “Do not steal.*

Do not lie.

Do not deceive one another.

*Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the
Lord.*

Do not defraud or rob your neighbor.

Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight.

*Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your
God. I am the Lord.*

*Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great,
but judge your neighbor fairly.*

Do not go about spreading slander among your people.

Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the Lord.

*Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will
not share in their guilt.*

*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love
your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”*

Leviticus 1-2, 11-18 (NIV)

Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:

We know Jesus instructed us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Fewer of us may be aware this core call of Christian living is birthed deep in the less glamorous Hebrew book of Leviticus. Our text today is just part of the Levitical code regarding the treatment of our neighbor. Codes written with abundant clarity and clear application thousands of years past their penning - do not steal; do not deal falsely with a

neighbor; do not lie to one another – straightforward.

But the text goes further beyond basic interactions, instructing us to reflect upon the systematic ways we engage daily life: for those in places of employment, do not withhold payment; do not make life more difficult for those with a disability; do not render an unjust judgment; do not underestimate the poor or overestimate the rich; do not profit at the expense of your neighbor; do not exact revenge.

Implicit in this list of codes, however, is also a profoundly positive and meaningful way of living: do find contentment in what is yours and joyfully let your neighbor have what is theirs; do act fairly and timely in your business dealings; do strive to understand your neighbor's struggles; do be honest and fair in your words about others; do value people equitably because of who they are instead of what they offer; do find ways to process anger that are not destructive to others or your character.

Why act like this? This set of codes begins by reminding the reader that you are Holy because God is Holy and ends with this radical notion to treat your neighbor as yourself. Meaning, love your neighbors because they are Holy too! Absorbing this biblical tenant of "holy neighbors" can be both immensely challenging and radically formative in our Christian walk. Thanks be to God for the people at Morningstar who faithfully recognize the holiness within each of the children they serve.

Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ

Rev. Dr. Tony Lankford serves as the Executive Pastor of First Baptist Church of Gainesville, GA. Pastor Lankford has also pastored churches in Atlanta and St. Simons Island, where he first connected to the work of Morningstar Children's Home, where the congregation alongside Dr. Lankford, maintained a relationship of "Holy Neighbors" to the Children at Morningstar.

*It takes a lot of everything to **create home and healing** for the foster children, our neighbors, served at Morningstar Children's Home.*

We invite you to join others in giving \$1 per day during Lent to help support the needs of the children.

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