Choosing Holiness

Deuteronomy: Choose Life | Week Fifteen | Deuteronomy 14:1-21

THE BIG IDEA

God teaches us about holiness through how we understand and use our bodies. Israel's grief and Israel's grocery lists both became daily reminders of who they belonged to. Our bodies are not neutral, and they are not projects to perfect. They are gifts from the God who made us in his image, and in Jesus he has already made us clean.

01 Check in

Before you open the passage, take a few quiet minutes and answer these for yourself.

1. What was a high point and a low point from your week?
2. Where have you seen God at work recently, and where has it been hard to see him?
3. Last time you sat down with this, you named one step to take. How did it go, and what got in the way?

02 Setting the scene

We are in the Worship movement of Deuteronomy, where Moses shows Israel that loving God shapes their whole life together. Chapter 12 gathered their worship around the place God would choose, and chapter 13 warned them about voices that would pull them away. Now chapter 14 carries worship into the most ordinary parts of life: how they grieve and what they eat. The nations around Israel marked grief by cutting their bodies and shaving their heads, and every culture had its own rules about food. God gives his people a different way. The passage opens and closes with the same reason, "you are a holy people belonging to the LORD your God" (verses 2 and 21). Identity comes first, and the practices flow out of it.

03 Read the Word

Read the passage slowly. If you can, read it aloud to yourself, and read it twice.

DEUTERONOMY 14:1-21 CSB

Open your Bible and read Deuteronomy 14:1 through 21. Take it in four sections: 14:1-2, 14:3-8, 14:9-10, and 14:11-21.

First impressions

4. What word, phrase, or image stood out to you as you read?

5. What did you notice, or what surprised you, about the way God speaks into both grief and the dinner table?

04 Study the Scripture

This week's sermon walked through two ways God uses our bodies to teach us about holiness. First, our bodies speak hope when we grieve. Second, our daily need for food becomes a lesson in following God. Work through each one in order, and reread the verses as you go.

OUR BODIES SPEAK HOPE

Read verses 1 and 2 again.

In the world around Israel, people showed how deeply they loved someone by marking their grief on their own bodies. The greater the loss, the deeper the marks. God does not forbid mourning. Scripture says there is a time to weep and a time to grieve. What he forbids is harming the body that bears his image, and grieving as though death has the final word. Even in the Old Testament, God's people trusted him beyond the grave. Job could say that after his body had decayed, he would still see God. Now, because Jesus has died and risen, we grieve as people who have hope.

That same truth shapes how we see our bodies today. We live in a world obsessed with perfection, and many of us carry a hard relationship with the bodies God gave us. God calls us neither to worship our bodies nor to despise them, but to receive them as his good and intentional work. How we treat them says something about what we believe.

> *If this touches something painful for you, you do not have to carry it alone. Reach out to one of our pastors this week. We would love to walk with you.*

6. Verse 2 gives the reason before the rule: "you are a holy people belonging to the LORD." Why do you think God starts with identity before he gives instructions?

7. Think about a time you grieved or walked with someone who was grieving. What would it look like for you to grieve honestly and still with hope?

8. What messages do you tend to send yourself about your body? How might seeing it as God's gift change the way you speak about it and care for it?

GOD MEETS US AT THE TABLE

Read verses 3 to 21 again.

The food laws are sorted into three groups: animals of the land, the water, and the air. People have debated for thousands of years why some animals were clean and others were not. A health explanation does not fully hold up, since some clean animals carried just as much risk, and Jesus later declared all foods clean. The better reading is that God used food to teach holiness. Think about how much of a day revolves around food: planning it, buying it, cooking it, eating it, and cleaning up after it. God placed himself right in the middle of all of it. Every meal became a small, physical choice between my way and God's way.

Over time, God's people held on to the rules and lost the heart behind them. Jesus brought it back into focus. In Mark 7 he said food passes through the stomach, but what defiles a person comes from the heart. Then in Acts 10, God told Peter three times not to call unclean what God has made clean. The point was never the menu. It was a surrendered heart in the big and small decisions of everyday life.

Those ordinary choices are still visible. Israel's neighbors could see what they bought at the market and know who they followed. As God's people, we are his ambassadors. When we care for our own bodies and treat every person with dignity because they bear God's image, our everyday lives point others to Christ.

9. These laws put God in the middle of something Israel did every single day. What everyday routine in your life could become a place to remember who you belong to?

10. Jesus says the problem was never the food but the heart. Where are you tempted to focus on outward rules while your heart stays unchanged?

11. What do the ordinary patterns of your life say to the people around you about what you believe? Who is one person you can treat this week as someone made in God's image?

05 Back to Jesus

How does this passage point us back to Jesus?

Deuteronomy 14 draws lines between clean and unclean everywhere: at the graveside, at the market, at the table. Then Jesus steps across those lines. He touches a man with leprosy, takes a dead girl by the hand, and lays his hand on a funeral bier. Anyone else would have become unclean. Instead, the people he touched were made clean and whole. On the cross his own body was broken for us, and three days later it was raised, so death does not have the final word over our grief. At his table he still says, "This is my body, which is given for you." We do not pursue holiness to make ourselves clean. We pursue it because he already has.

12. Jesus did not just declare foods clean. He made people clean by giving his own body. How does knowing you have already been made clean change the way you pursue holiness this week?

APPLICATION

What is God telling me to do today? Write down one specific step you will take this week.

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06 Pray

Bring the step you wrote down to God, along with anything else on your heart, and ask him for help.

What I am bringing to God

A PRAYER TO CARRY WITH YOU

Father, you made me in your image, and you call me your own. Teach me to see my body as your gift, not my project and not my enemy. When I grieve, let me grieve with hope, because Jesus is risen. In the small choices of my ordinary days, at my table and in my words, let my life show who I belong to. Thank you that in Jesus I am already clean. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Through the week

Here are three ways to keep this week's passage with you.

- Read Deuteronomy 14:1–21 again and ask God what he is saying to you.
- Take the one step you named and tell someone about it.
- Reach out to the person God brought to mind, and come back to this page next week to see how it went.

07 Notes and reflections