What Goes on God's Altar? — Five Offerings for a Holy People

Leader copy · Jail Ministry (men's or women's side) · a 15-minute lesson · Pleasant Springs Church

Read this lesson online: https://ps-church.com/discipleship/jail-ministry/what-goes-on-the-altar

Before you start — notes for the teacher *(not read aloud)*

Timing. About **15 minutes** at a steady pace. The bracketed times are cumulative. The **designated cut is "What does NOT go on the altar"** at [11:45]. It saves about a minute. If you are *very* short, read only the first verse in each of the five offerings. **Never cut the sin offering, "A holy people today," or the prayer.** They are the point of the lesson.

Time of day. The script says "today," never "tonight" or "this morning," so it fits whenever you teach it.

The one sentence the whole lesson proves. *You can't bring a bull into a jail cell — but every offering God asked for in Leviticus, you can still bring from right here: your whole self, your work, your peace, your confession, and your making-it-right. Jesus already paid for sin, so you don't bring those to pay. You bring them because you belong to Him.* If you lose your place, say that and go to the next heading.

The memory hook — five hands. Each offering gets a hand motion. Teach it as you go and run all five again at the end: 1. **Burnt offering** — both hands up and open: *all of me.* 2. **Grain offering** — hands working, like kneading dough: *my work.* 3. **Peace offering** — a handshake: *peace with God and people.* 4. **Sin offering** — hand flat on your own heart: *I confess. Jesus paid.* 5. **Guilt offering** — one hand held out, giving something back: *I make it right.*

Who is in the room. Men or women, any age, most of them carrying guilt — some of it about the very thing they are charged with. Many have been told their whole lives that they are damaged goods. **That is the fear under this lesson:** *"God only takes perfect things. Look at me."* The script answers it head-on with Colossians 1:22. Do not rush that part.

What not to say. - **Never mention anyone's charges, case, victims, or court date** — not even as an example. - **Never say their jail time is "paying for their sin."** The court may give a sentence. Only Jesus pays for sin before God (Hebrews 10:12, 18). Keep those two things apart. - **The guilt offering is about making things right — but NEVER tell anyone to contact a person they hurt.** Many of them have no-contact orders, and breaking one is a new charge and new harm. Say

it the way the script says it: *make it right the right way — through your lawyer, the court, or the chaplain — and if you can't make it right yet, you can still be honest with God today*. If someone asks you privately, send them to their lawyer or the chaplain. - **Do not say "God won't accept you because you are blemished."** The "without blemish" rule is about the offering, and the offering is Jesus (1 Peter 1:19). In Christ, God calls *you* blameless (Colossians 1:22). - **No Greek or Hebrew on the board or in your mouth.** The word work is real and checked. It is said here in plain English.

Words to define the first time you use them (the script does this): *altar* — a raised table where gifts were given to God; *offering / sacrifice* — a gift given to God that costs you something; *holy* — set apart for God, belonging to Him; *atonement* — being made "at one" with God, the wrong covered; *confess* — to say out loud what is true about what you did; *restore* — to give back what you took.

The word work, in plain English (say these; they are checked): - **"Offering" means "bring near."** In Hebrew, the word for an offering in Leviticus 1:2 comes from the word for *coming near*. You didn't bring an offering to get rid of God. You brought it to get close to Him. - **"Burnt offering" means "it goes up."** Its Hebrew name means *the thing that goes up* — all of it went up in smoke. The old Greek Bible called it the *whole-burnt* offering. Nothing held back. - **"Without blemish."** Leviticus says the animal must be "without blemish" over **twenty times**. The **same word** in the Greek New Testament is used for **Jesus**, "a lamb without blemish" (1 Peter 1:19) — and for **you**: God will "present you holy and **blameless**" (Colossians 1:22). - **"A pleasing aroma."** The old Greek Bible uses the phrase *pleasing aroma* **eighteen times in Leviticus**. In the whole New Testament it shows up **only twice**: once for **Jesus giving himself** (Ephesians 5:2), and once for **a gift some church folks sent to Paul while he was locked up** (Philippians 4:18; he says "my imprisonment" in 1:13). God calls a gift to a prisoner the same sweet smell as the sacrifices. - **The peace offering's Greek name is "the sacrifice of salvation."** Its Hebrew name comes from *shalom*, peace. The thank-you kind (Leviticus 7:12) is called in Greek **"a sacrifice of praise"** (Leviticus 7:13, 15) — the **exact same words** as Hebrews 13:15. - **Isaiah 53:10 uses the guilt-offering word.** "When his soul makes **an offering for guilt**" — in Hebrew that is the very same word as the guilt offering of Leviticus 5 and 6. Isaiah is saying the Servant himself becomes the guilt offering. *(The old Greek Bible words that verse differently, so say "in Hebrew" if you mention it.)* - **"Royal priesthood."** Exodus 19:6 in our Bibles says "a kingdom of priests." The old Greek Bible, which the first Christians read, puts it **"a royal priesthood"** — and those are **the exact two words Peter uses** in 1 Peter 2:9. The word "priesthood" appears in the New Testament **only twice**, both in 1 Peter 2.

Numbering note (if someone's Bible looks different). The guilt-offering verses we read as Leviticus 6:4–5 are numbered Leviticus 5:23–24 in Hebrew and Greek Bibles. Same words, different chapter break.

If someone asks (do not teach unless asked): - **Why no yeast or honey?** The Bible does not say why. Most likely because both make things rise or spoil, and Scripture often uses yeast as a picture

of something that spreads and puffs up (1 Corinthians 5:8). Say "most likely." - **Do we still do sacrifices?** No animals. Hebrews 10 says Jesus' one sacrifice finished that. What is left is what 1 Peter 2:5 calls "spiritual sacrifices." - **What was the "unauthorized fire"?** Leviticus 10 doesn't explain it fully. It says only that it was something God "had not commanded." The point: we come to God His way, not our own way.

Scripture. English, ESV — every quotation checked against Crossway's own text.

THE SCRIPT

[0:00] Open — empty hands

[Hold out both hands, palms up, empty.] Hold your hands out like this with me.

Let me ask you something. If you wanted to give God a gift **today** — right now, from in here — what would you give Him? *[Pause.]* You've got a blanket. Maybe some commissary. A Bible. That's about it.

A lot of people think, *"I've got nothing to give God. And even if I did, He wouldn't want it from somebody like me."*

Here's where we're going today: **God gave His people five kinds of offerings in the book of Leviticus. You can't bring a bull into a cell. But you can bring every one of those five offerings from right here. And God will take them.**

[1:00] Who wrote it, and who heard it first

Leviticus was written by **Moses** for the people of **Israel.** Think about who they were. They had just been **slaves in Egypt** for four hundred years. God broke them out. Now they're camped in the desert at a mountain called Sinai, and God says something amazing: *I'm going to move in. I'm going to live right in the middle of your camp.*

So they built God a tent. And right in front of it stood an **altar** — a raised table where gifts were given to God. Leviticus is the handbook for how to live next door to a **holy** God. **Holy** means set apart — belonging to God.

Here's something you can't see in English. The word for an **offering** in Leviticus comes from the word for **"bring near."**

> **Leviticus 1:2** — "When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD,"

You didn't bring an offering to push God away. **You brought it to get close to Him.**

[2:15] The rule for every gift — without blemish

There was one rule for almost every animal on that altar:

> **Leviticus 1:3** — "he shall offer a male without blemish."

Without blemish means no cuts, no limp, no sickness. Your best, not your leftovers. Leviticus says it over twenty times.

Now, some of you are thinking, *"Then that leaves me out. I'm nothing but blemishes." [Slow down.]* Hold that thought. We're coming back to it, and I promise you'll like the answer.

[3:00] 1. The burnt offering — all of me

[Both hands up, open.] Hand number one: **all of me.**

The first offering was the **burnt offering.** Its name means *"the thing that goes up."* The whole animal was burned. Nothing was kept back. Every bit of it went up in smoke to God.

> **Leviticus 1:9** — "the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD."

All of it. So what's the burnt offering for us today? Paul tells us:

> **Romans 12:1** — "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

A **living** sacrifice. Not dead on an altar — alive, every day, given to God. Your hands, your mouth, your eyes, your time. *[Smile.]* Somebody once said the problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar. That's why we give ourselves to Him again every morning.

[4:30] 2. The grain offering — my work

[Hands working, like kneading dough.] Hand number two: **my work.**

The grain offering wasn't an animal. It was **flour** — something people made with their own hands. It came with three rules:

> **Leviticus 2:1** — "his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it"
>
> **Leviticus 2:11** — "you shall burn no leaven nor any honey as a food offering to the LORD."
>
> **Leviticus 2:13** — "with all your offerings you shall offer salt."

Fine flour — your best work. **No yeast and no honey** — nothing that puffs up or goes bad. **Always salt** — and the Bible calls it "the salt of the covenant," God's promise that keeps.

So what's the grain offering today? Listen to this. Paul was **locked up** when he wrote to the church at Philippi — he calls it "my imprisonment." And that church sent him a gift. Here's what Paul called that gift:

> **Philippians 4:18** — "the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."

A fragrant offering. In the old Greek Bible, that's **the same phrase** Leviticus uses for the sacrifices — "a pleasing aroma." It's in Leviticus eighteen times. In the whole New Testament it only shows up **twice.** Once for Jesus giving His life. And once for a gift to a man in jail.

So when you share your coffee, help somebody write a letter, or clean up what isn't yours to clean — that's a grain offering. And your words count too:

> **Colossians 4:6** — "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt,"

[6:30] 3. The peace offering — peace with God and people

[Reach out and shake hands with someone.] Hand number three: **peace.**

The peace offering was different. Part of it went to God, part to the priest — and **the person who brought it got to eat the rest.** It was a meal. A cookout with God. Its Hebrew name comes from *shalom,* **peace.** And the old Greek Bible calls it "the sacrifice of **salvation**" — a thank-you meal for being saved.

> **Leviticus 3:1** — "If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, … he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD."

One kind of peace offering was just to say **thank you:**

> **Leviticus 7:12** — "If he offers it for a thanksgiving,"

In the Greek Bible, that thank-you offering is called **"a sacrifice of praise."** And here are those exact words again, in the New Testament:

> **Hebrews 13:15–16** — "let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

Saying thank you to God out loud — that's a peace offering. You can do it on your bunk.

And Jesus added something:

> **Matthew 5:23–24** — "if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother,"

Peace with God and peace with the person in the next bunk go together.

[8:30] 4. The sin offering — I confess, Jesus paid

[Hand flat on your heart.] Hand number four: **I confess.**

The sin offering was for when you messed up. And notice who it was for:

> **Leviticus 4:27–29** — "If anyone of the common people sins … he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering"

Anyone of the common people. Not just priests. Regular folks like us. And look what the person did — **laid a hand on the animal's head.** It was like saying, *"This one is taking my place."*

Now here's the best news in this whole book. **We don't bring sin offerings anymore. Jesus was the last one.**

> **Hebrews 10:12** — "when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,"
>
> **Hebrews 10:18** — "Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin."

He **sat down.** The work is finished. *[Slow down.]* So hear me: **your time in here does not pay for your sin before God. Jesus already paid it all.**

So what do we bring? Not a goat. **The truth.**

> **1 John 1:9** — "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
>
> **Psalm 51:17** — "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

Confess means to say out loud what is true about what you did. A broken heart is a gift God will never turn down.

[10:15] 5. The guilt offering — I make it right

[Hold one hand out, palm up, giving.] Hand number five: **I make it right.**

The guilt offering was for when you hurt somebody — you stole, or lied, or took what wasn't yours. And God didn't just say "say sorry." Listen:

> **Leviticus 6:4–5** — "he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt."

Give it all back — **plus twenty percent extra.** That's how God's people made things right.

Here's the amazing part. Isaiah wrote about Jesus seven hundred years early:

> **Isaiah 53:10** — "when his soul makes an offering for guilt,"

In Hebrew, that's **the same word** as the guilt offering. **Jesus became our guilt offering.** So we don't make things right to pay God off. We make things right because He already made us right.

Remember Zacchaeus, the little tax man who cheated everybody? When Jesus came to his house, look what happened:

> **Luke 19:8** — "if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."

Nobody made him do that. Jesus changed him, and the giving back came out of him.

[Slow down.] Now listen carefully. **Make it right the right way.** Some of you can't contact certain people, and you must not. Go through your lawyer, the court, or the chaplain. And if you can't make something right yet, you can still be honest with God about it today. That counts.

[11:45] What does NOT go on the altar

[CUT HERE if short on time — skip to "A holy people today."]

Some things God never wanted on His altar.

Leftovers. God asked His people:

> **Malachi 1:8** — "When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? … Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor?"

Doing it your own way. Two of the priest's sons tried it:

> **Leviticus 10:1** — "offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them."

A gift instead of obeying.

> **1 Samuel 15:22** — "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,"

God doesn't want a show. He wants **you.**

[12:45] A holy people today

Now, remember the "without blemish" rule? Remember thinking, *"That leaves me out"*? Here's the answer. First, Jesus is the perfect offering:

> **1 Peter 1:18–19** — "you were ransomed … with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

And because of Him, listen to what God says about **you:**

> **Colossians 1:21–22** — "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,"

That word **"blameless"** is the same word as **"without blemish."** *[Pause.]* The word for the perfect animal — God uses it for **you.** "Doing evil deeds" — and now "blameless." That's what Jesus does.

And God gave Israel a big job at Mount Sinai: *"you shall be to me a kingdom of priests."* The Greek Bible put it, *"a royal priesthood."* Now listen to Peter, writing to regular Christians:

> **1 Peter 2:9** — "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession,"

The exact same words. A priest is somebody who brings offerings to God. **That's you now.** And here's what you offer:

> **1 Peter 2:5** — "to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

You don't need a tent in the desert. **Your bunk can be an altar. Your pod can be a holy place.**

[13:45] Take it with you — five hands

Let's do the five hands one more time. *[Do each motion with them.]*

1. *[Hands up.]* **All of me** — I give God my whole self today.
2. *[Kneading.]* **My work** — I do something good for somebody, and I keep my words salty.
3. *[Handshake.]* **Peace** — I thank God out loud, and I make peace with somebody.

4. *[Hand on heart.]* **I confess** — I tell God the truth. Jesus already paid.
5. *[Hand out.]* **I make it right** — the right way.

Pick one hand to work on this week. Just one. Write it down.

[14:30] Closing prayer

Father, we come with empty hands. We don't have much to give. But You don't want our leftovers — You want us. So here we are. All of us.

Thank You that Jesus was the perfect offering, without blemish, and that He paid for our sin once and for all. Thank You that because of Him, You call us holy and blameless. Help us believe it.

Take our work, our words, and our thanks. Give us peace with You and with the people around us. Help us tell You the truth, and show us how to make things right the right way. Make us a holy people, right here.

In the name of Jesus, **Amen.**

If you only remember three things

1. **An offering means "bring near."** God gave five offerings so His people could come close to Him, not stay away.
2. **Jesus finished the sin offering and the guilt offering.** He sat down. Your time in here does not pay for your sin — He paid it all. We confess and make things right *because* we are forgiven, not to earn it.
3. **"Without blemish" became "blameless."** The word for the perfect offering is the word God uses for you in Christ (Colossians 1:22). You are a royal priesthood, and you bring five hands: all of me, my work, peace, I confess, I make it right.

The five offerings at a glance

Offering	Then — in Leviticus	Jesus	Now — a holy people brings
1. Burnt *(all of me)*	The whole animal goes up in smoke	Gave His whole self (Ephesians 5:2)	My whole self, every day (Romans 12:1)
2. Grain *(my work)*	Fine flour, oil, salt — no yeast or honey	—	My work, my gifts, my salty words (Philippians 4:18; Colossians 4:6)
3. Peace *(peace)*	A shared meal; the thank-you offering	Made peace for us	Praise out loud, and peace with people (Hebrews 13:15; Matthew 5:24)
4. Sin *(I confess)*	A hand on the animal's head	The one final sin offering (Hebrews 10:12)	Confession — no more payment (1 John 1:9)
5. Guilt *(I make it right)*	Give it back, plus a fifth	Our guilt offering (Isaiah 53:10)	Making things right, the right way (Luke 19:8)

Discussion starters — if you have time after

1. Before today, did you think you had anything to give God? What do you think now?
2. Which of the five hands is easiest for you? Which is hardest?
3. Why do you think God wanted the best — "without blemish" — and not the leftovers?
4. How does it feel to hear God call you "blameless"?
5. What is one grain offering — one good thing — you could do for somebody in here this week?

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The whole lesson is on the website, with the handouts. More jail ministry lessons are at **ps-church.com/discipleship/jail-ministry**.

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