

CONTENTS

BROKENNESS

Foreword by Henry T. Blackaby	13
Acknowledgments	17
Introduction	21
1. The Heart of the Matter	29
2. What Is Brokenness?	39
3. Biblical Portraits: Broken and Unbroken	51
4. Am I a Proud or a Broken Person?	63
5. The Blessing of Brokenness	73
6. Journey into Brokenness	89
Afterword: A Personal Testimony	103
Brokenness Discussion Guide	109

SURRENDER

Foreword by Pastor Jim Cymbala	133
Acknowledgments	137
Introduction	141
1. The Battle for Control: <i>Kingdoms at War</i>	149
2. The Terms of Christian Surrender: <i>Unconditional and Lifetime</i>	161
3. A Hole in the Ear: <i>Bondslaves Forever</i>	173
4. The Whole of Our Lives: <i>A Living Sacrifice</i>	183

5. Facing Our Fears:	195
<i>Finding Him Faithful</i>	
6. Living the Surrendered Life:	207
<i>Making It Practical</i>	
7. The Pattern:	219
<i>The Surrendered Savior</i>	
8. Yes, Lord!	229
<i>Bowing the Knee</i>	
 Surrender Discussion Guide	 237

HOLINESS

Foreword by Randy Alcorn	265
Acknowledgments	269
Introduction	273
 1. The Splendor of Holiness	 279
2. The Motivation for Holiness	291
3. The Enemy of Holiness	305
4. The Face of Holiness	317
5. The Pathway to Holiness:	327
<i>“Put Off”—Say “No” to Corruption</i>	
6. The Pathway to Holiness:	339
<i>“Put On”—Say “Yes” to Grace</i>	
7. The Heart of Holiness	353
8. The Passion for Holiness	363
 Epilogue: Here Comes the Bride!	 377
Holiness Discussion Guide	381

THE HEART *of the* MATTER

IF YOU WERE TO MEET Wayne and Gwyn Stanford today, you would find a tenderhearted, warm, compassionate, humble couple. If you conversed with them for any length of time, they would undoubtedly tell you something fresh that God was teaching them or doing in their lives.

It wasn't always that way. When I first met this couple more than twenty years ago, they were in their early fifties. By the world's standards, they had it made. Wayne was a successful businessman; he and Gwyn had a lovely home in the Midwest and a vacation home in Florida. They were respected leaders in their community and were active in their local church and their denomination. But, as they later said publicly, they were both afflicted with a deadly heart condition that they didn't realize they had—a malady known as *pride*.

Today they are able to see what they were blind to at the time. Gwyn admits,

I was proud of my reputation and my position. I was known at the country club where I was an officer, known among the elite of the

community, and known as a leader at my church. I was at the church every time the doors were open. It was important to me to have everyone notice me and what I was doing. I was extremely self-righteous and thought I was more spiritual than others. Others had needs, but not Gwyn Stanford. Others needed revival, but not I!

Though they both appeared to be spiritually prosperous, the truth was that their hearts were hollow, hard, and spiritually starved. “Right in the middle of religion, I was so very far away from God,” Gwyn says with regret.

Though Wayne was oblivious to his own spiritual need, it was readily apparent to those around him. His pastor at the time remembers the Wayne Stanford of those days as “a cold, calculating, highly opinionated man. He almost demanded that I follow his ideas for leading the church. He was extremely judgmental and critical. Our attempted fellowships together generally ended in frustrated anger. There was a deep chasm between us.”

Gwyn’s heart condition manifested itself in more subtle ways:

I was unteachable; although I was a leader, I wasn’t in the Word; I lived, acted, and operated based on the world’s way of thinking. I didn’t know what it meant to be honest, open, and transparent before God and others. The one thing I did know was how to play church—I knew how to pretend.

Wayne and Gwyn might well have lived the rest of their lives in that condition—spiritually deceived, hardened, and unusable—had not the Lord graciously intervened to show them their need and rescue them from their pride.

In 1982 I was part of a team that was invited to minister in Wayne and Gwyn’s church for a concentrated two-week period of seeking the Lord.¹ During that time, church members were challenged to face the reality of their spiritual condition. The Stanfords’ lives would never be the same again as a result of that honest look.

The second Sunday morning of that series of meetings is indelibly etched on Wayne's mind. The message was based on the Old Testament story of Naaman (2 Kings 5). As the respected, capable commander in chief of the Syrian army, Naaman appeared to have it all together—except for the fact that he had leprosy. Naaman wanted to be healed, but not at the expense of his pride. Wayne was stopped short as he saw himself in this proud general:

He did what I probably would have done: he loaded up six thousand shekels of gold and ten talents of silver, and he went down to buy his way out of his problem. Right in the middle of that message, God said to me, *You're just like Naaman! You've got spiritual leprosy and you need to be healed. You can be restored, but you're going to have to do it My way.*

That morning, in the middle of the service, Wayne made his way to a room that had been designated for those who needed prayer—that in itself was a big step of humility, as he had previously determined he would not go to that room. As he arrived at the prayer room, this respected leader fell on his knees and cried out to God to have mercy on him; he confessed his sin of pride and pretense, and surrendered himself to do whatever God wanted him to do.

That same week, Gwyn attended a special prayer meeting for the women of the church. It was there that she had a life-changing encounter with God. That morning the leader spoke three words that penetrated her heart: "God is alive!" That simple phrase wakened her from her spiritual sleep and transformed her life. She remembers thinking, *Gwyn, you're living as if God is dead.* For the first time, she saw herself as God saw her—and it wasn't the Gwyn who had it all put together. She saw herself as sinful and desperately needy of His grace.

The conviction of God's Spirit was intense. For the first time in her life, she responded to that conviction in humility. In fact, she realized that, in spite of her religious appearance and activity, she had never been truly born again. She cried out to God to save her and received assurance that He had given her a new, clean heart.

Issues of the Heart

What took place in Wayne’s and Gwyn’s lives more than two decades ago was nothing short of major heart surgery. In Gwyn’s case, she had been deceived for years into believing that she was a child of God, simply because she was a faithful, active church member. She needed—and received—a heart transplant. In Wayne’s case, his spiritual arteries had become hardened—clogged and crusted over with self, pride, religious works, and “keeping up appearances.”

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah understood that the heart was what mattered to God, and that if the heart were sick, the whole body would be in trouble. Relentlessly, persistently, he addressed the matter of the heart. There are more than seventy references to the heart in his writings. God gave him discernment to see beyond the impressive, external religious life of His people. Jeremiah penetrated and probed and held the people’s hearts up to the light; he pleaded with them to see what God saw.

From all appearances, the Jews—God’s chosen people—were deeply religious; but Jeremiah proclaimed that their hearts had turned away from the God who had redeemed them: “This people has a defiant and rebellious *heart*” (5:23, italics added, and so with all references in this chapter).

The Old Testament Jews dutifully performed countless rituals of ceremonial cleansing. But Jeremiah understood that all those physical washings were merely intended to be a picture of purity of heart, so he urged: “O Jerusalem, wash your *heart* from wickedness” (4:14).

—————
*If their
 hearts weren’t
 right, they
 weren’t right.*
 —————

Though God had revealed Himself and His law to the His people, their hearts were stubborn and they had become desensitized to His Word: “Each one follows the dictates [walks after the stubbornness; marginal reading NKJV] of his own evil *heart*, so that no one listens to Me” (16:12).

When we open the New Testament, we encounter the Lord Jesus, God’s final Prophet, picking up the same theme that reverberates throughout the pages of the Old Testament. During His earthly min-

istry, He upset the whole religious system of His day because He refused to be impressed with the things that men esteem most highly and insisted on exposing the hearts of people as what really mattered.

He looked the most religious men of His day in the face and confronted them with the fact that they were obsessed with putting on a good appearance and a good performance, while their hearts were empty and corrupt:

*Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:
 “These people draw near to Me with their mouth,
 And honor Me with their lips,
 But their heart is far from Me.
 And in vain they worship Me.”*

—Matthew 15:7–9

When the disciples asked Jesus to explain why He had been so hard on the Pharisees, He pointed out that they were fastidious about washing their hands before eating, so as not to become ceremonially defiled, but were oblivious to the corruption of their hearts: “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man” (Matthew 15:19–20).

Over and over again, He kept coming back to the issue of the *heart*. It didn’t matter if they circumcised their bodies and tithed everything they owned, down to their herbs; it didn’t matter if they washed their hands every time they ate and could quote the Law from beginning to end; it didn’t matter if they scrupulously observed every feast day, every fast day, and every Sabbath day; it didn’t matter if everyone else respected them as devout believers—if their hearts weren’t right, *they* weren’t right.

The medical profession stresses the importance of regular physical checkups. Anyone with a family history of heart disease is encouraged to get his cholesterol tested. We don’t assume that because we look fine outwardly, we have nothing to worry about. If our heart is not functioning properly or there is blockage in our arteries, we want to know

THE BATTLE *for* CONTROL: KINGDOMS AT WAR

- ◆ **MINDY, A CHRISTIAN** college senior, can't believe she ended up in bed with her fiancé last night—again—after promising herself she wouldn't give in and praying about the matter with her accountability partner just last week. Mindy and Jeff are planning to get married after graduation and had hoped to serve as short-term missionaries before having children. But now . . . the whole idea seems hypocritical.
- ◆ Angie steps on the scales, sighs, and heads for the kitchen, where she opens the refrigerator. She starts to pick up a bag of carrots, then reaches instead for a piece of carrot cake that seems to be calling her name. Just then, the phone rings; her sister is calling to offer a ride to their weekly Bible class tomorrow morning.
- ◆ Something inside Dan knows he really shouldn't be going out for "business lunches" with his attractive young assistant—especially since their recent conversations have been less about business and more about the problems in her marriage. Dan is nervous

about being seen with Stacie by someone from the church where he is a respected elder. But some unseen force is drawing him to spend more time with her.

- ◆ Both Tamara and Rod would like for her to be able to quit her job so she can stay at home when their first child is born next month, but they just don't see how they can swing it financially. Their pastor recently preached a message from Matthew 6 about trusting God to provide for basic needs. But they are afraid to step out—and his parents have said she'd be crazy to quit her job.
- ◆ Reggie is still fuming as he flies down the freeway at eighty miles per hour. He knows he shouldn't have lost his temper with Carla—especially with their three-year-old son standing there watching the whole scene. But he can't believe she has overdrawn their checking account again. Why can't she exercise some self-control when it comes to spending? Reggie gets scared when he thinks about what he might do someday when he is in one of his fits of rage. Recently his anger has started coming out with the students at the Christian school where he coaches football.
- ◆ Corrie is troubled by the attitudes and language her children are picking up from other children in preschool and second grade. She wants her children to have a heart for God and really feels she should consider home-schooling them, but she can't handle the thought of being tied down with kids all day every day.

The Real War

These men and women are not alone in their struggles. Every day, in big or little ways, even as believers, you and I find ourselves engaged in a battle (Galatians 5:17).

The battle is real and dangerous. We are like a soldier in a foxhole, with bullets whizzing past his head, but our battle is actually part of a larger war that has been going on since the creation of the world.

In fact, one of the megathemes that emerges repeatedly in Scripture is that our battles here on earth are merely a reflection of a cosmic

war between the kingdom of God and all other kingdoms. That is true whether we are talking about kids squabbling on a playground, embattled parents and teens, estranged mates in a divorce court, warring desires within our own hearts, power struggles in the church, or nations at war.

This bigger war—the “real war”—begins in the opening pages of the Word of God and continues unabated, gaining in intensity, almost to the final page. It is, in essence, a battle for control.

In the first recorded act in time and space, God *exercised control*. He spoke with authority and power . . . bringing light, life, and order to the darkness and chaos of the universe. When He said, “Let there be light,” there was light. When He said, “Let the trees bring forth fruit,” the trees brought forth fruit. All creation, including—initially—the first man and woman, lived in glad, wholehearted surrender to the sovereign control and will of the Creator.

This surrender did not strip the creation of dignity or freedom; to the contrary, surrender was—and still is—the source and means of true freedom and fullness. The sovereign Creator God ruled over His creation with tender love, inviting His creatures to engage with Him in a divine dance-of-sorts, in which He led and they followed. They responded to His initiative with trust, love, and surrender. In turn, their needs were abundantly met, they fulfilled their created purpose, and they existed in harmony with God and with each other.

Psalm 104 describes this original, ideal state. In that passage, we see a definite, unquestioned hierarchy in which God—the gracious Sovereign—acts, initiates, directs, sets boundaries, supervises, and lovingly rules over His creation. The creation looks to Him, waits for Him, bows before Him, surrenders to His control, and simply does as He directs.

The oceans stay within the boundaries He has established for them. The grass and the trees grow according to God’s direction and provide nourishment for man and animals, also in surrender to God’s will. The sun and moon keep their appointed seasons; the animals get up when God tells them to get up and they lie down when God directs them to do so.

What is the result? “The earth is satisfied” (verse 13); “they are filled

with good” (verse 28). Did you catch that? To surrender to the Creator’s control is not onerous or burdensome; it is, in fact, the place of blessing, fullness, and peace. There is no evidence in this passage of any stress, struggle, or strain. Why? Because the creation is not vying with the Creator for control.

Don’t miss this picture. It is what the old gospel song describes as “perfect submission, perfect delight!”²

The Battle Begins

Let’s go back to the Genesis account. The first blip on this perfect screen came when one of God’s created beings—already a rebel himself—approached the happy couple and challenged God’s created order. Until that point, there had never been any question about who was in charge and who was taking direction. Now the suggestion was made that the man and woman could be in charge of their own lives, that they didn’t have to take direction from anyone else. *You don’t have to live a surrendered life; you can be in control*, the tempter implied.

So the man and the woman—created beings—tried to wrest control from the hands of their sovereign Creator. Control that didn’t belong to them. They resisted the will of God and insisted on sharing His throne. The battle had begun.

From that point to this, man has been engaged with his Creator in a battle for control—dueling wills, we might call it.

*God has opted
first to woo and
win the hearts of
His creatures.*

Mercifully, we are dealing with a Creator who is not only sovereign, but also compassionate. God knew that if we tried to run our own lives, we would reap misery and conflict, and that our drive to be in control would render us hopelessly enslaved and would ultimately destroy us. He knew that the only hope for man was through surrender.

From that very first skirmish, God set into motion a plan devised in eternity past to restore man back to a place of surrender to His control. Possessing absolute power, He could have chosen to bludgeon His rebellious creatures into submission. However, because He desires a loving, personal relationship with men and women,

created in His likeness, He has opted first to woo and win the hearts of His creatures. He wants their willing, volitional surrender.

We know that one day “every knee [will] bow” and “every tongue . . . confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10–11). Those who refuse His overtures of love and grace will do so under coercion. But those who love and trust Him will find ultimate, eternal joy in that glad-hearted surrender.

The King and His Kingdom

The very thought of God being bent on exercising control over His creation raises an obvious question. If you or I were to attempt to bring the whole planet under our control, we would rightly be labeled “control freaks.” So why is it acceptable for God to insist on “world domination”? Why is it considered selfish and rebellious for us to want control, but absolutely appropriate for God to assert control? The answer is simple:

He’s God—
and we’re not.

In that profound, unalterable, eternal reality lies the key to understanding and dealing with this cosmic war, as well as handling our personal, daily struggles for control.

No one would consider it unreasonable for a mother to insist on being in control of her minivan while her four children are seat-belted in place. That’s because she knows what she’s doing. She knows how to drive and her children don’t. She is the only one in the vehicle capable of keeping everyone safe. The fact that she doesn’t share the driving with her preschoolers doesn’t make her a control freak!

In the same way, God exercises His sovereign control over the universe because He is the only One capable of running the universe.

Inherent in His being is absolute sovereignty—the right to rule. He is the Creator—we are His creatures. He is eternal—we are finite. He

—————
*He is the
only One capable
of running
the universe.*
—————

is all-powerful—we have no power of our own. He is autonomous, independent, and self-existent, needing no one and nothing—we are dependent on Him for our next breath (Acts 17:24–25).

The God revealed in the Scripture is King—not a king on a level with other kings, each with their own sphere of control—but *the* King over all kings. This King has a kingdom. That kingdom—the realm over which He has lawful jurisdiction—includes every molecule of the planet on which we live; it includes the farthest-flung reaches of our galaxy and of every galaxy; it includes those regions that are inhabited by the angelic hosts (both fallen and holy).

In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, twentieth-century Bible expositor G. Campbell Morgan suggests that the kingdom of God really means the *kingship of God*.

It means that God is King now, and always. The Kingdom of God is in existence. God has never been dethroned; and this is what Jesus preached. . . . He was proclaiming the Kingship of God, the rule of God, the fact that the Lord reigneth. . . .

What this age needs is the proclamation of the sovereignty of God, the Kingship of God, the Kingdom of God. . . . When a man yields himself up to that sovereignty, nobody can tyrannize over him.³

The concept of a Sovereign King who exercises absolute control over His subjects is one that our egalitarian, Western minds find difficult to embrace. We want to have a say in the matter—to vote for the leader of our choice. We don't want to bow before an all-powerful monarch. To the contrary, what we really want is to *be* the king—or at least to have a representative form of government.

But whether we buy into it or not, the sovereign rule of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ is a nonnegotiable reality that is as determinative and binding as the law of gravity—and more so. It is an irrefutable truth with which every human being must come to terms, sooner or later. And, as Morgan suggests, those who resist His sovereign Lordship set themselves up to be tyrannized by other lords.

One Woman's Control Crisis

“Lynda,” a forty-something mother of four, learned the hard way that to resist surrender to the perfect will of God is to become controlled by tyrants. I received a letter from Lynda in which she told her story. She has been married for twenty-five years to a man she calls “saintly.” However, she grew up in a home with an alcoholic father who was extremely controlling of her and her passive mother.

As she became an adult, she resolved that she would never submit to another human. She recalls, “I had a huge problem when it came time to say our wedding vows—‘to love and obey.’ Love? Yes, absolutely! *Obey?* I don’t think so!”

In retrospect, Lynda can see how her drive to be in control created numerous problems from the outset of her marriage and led to choices that ultimately caused her life to careen out of control. She admits that she began to turn to other men

to make me feel in control again, and to show my husband that I—and no one else—was in charge of my life. Little did I realize that I was “out of control” in many ways—including sexually and with alcohol abuse. And I was not ever in charge of my life or body.

You see, while I refused to submit to my husband, I *was* submitting to other men—but not in loving relationships. I was not in control of my body or my life—other men were. “Meet me here, Lynda.” “OK.” “You drive today, Lynda.” “OK.” “You check us in at the motel.” “OK.” “Wear this, do that, call me. . . .” “OK, OK, OK.”

Lynda’s experience poignantly illustrates that as long as we refuse to surrender our will to the will of God, we are never truly free. Rather, we find ourselves dominated by ungodly appetites and forces. When we throw off the restraints of our wise, loving God, we become slaves to terrible taskmasters that are intent on our destruction. That is exactly what happened to the Old Testament Israelites:

THE SPLENDOR *of* HOLINESS

HOLINESS ISN'T EXACTLY an easy subject to “sell.” It’s not one of the top ten topics people look for in a Christian bookstore; there aren’t a lot of hit songs about holiness; and I can count on two hands the number of messages I recall hearing on the theme.

“Holiness” is discussed in theology classes, but rarely in dinner table conversations. “Holy” is an adjective we apply to “Bible,” “Communion,” and “the night Christ was born.” But how many contemporary Christians are really interested in devoting serious thought or discussion to holiness?

We don’t mind talking about holiness as an abstract concept. But if that concept gets too personal or starts to interfere with our lifestyle, we can quickly become uncomfortable.

Part of the problem may be that the word *holiness* has picked up some baggage that most people—understandably—don’t find particularly desirable. Does “holiness” conjure up any of these images in your mind?

- ◆ Somber, straitlaced people with outdated hair and clothing styles
- ◆ An austere, joyless lifestyle based on a long list of rules and regulations
- ◆ A monklike existence—“holy” people talk in hushed tones, spend hours a day in prayer, always have their nose in the Bible or a spiritual book, fast frequently, hum hymns under their breath, and have no interest in “normal” life activities
- ◆ People with a judgmental attitude toward those who don’t accept their standards
- ◆ An unattainable ideal that has more to do with the sweet by-and-by than the real world, which is right here, right now

Holiness. When you put it that way . . . who wants it?! Sounds about as appealing as drinking saltwater.

Holiness may not be at the top of our list of things to talk about, but let me remind you that those in heaven never stop talking about it! I believe we need to “reclaim” true holiness—to see it in all its beauty, as it is revealed in the Word of God.

“*Holiness*” is discussed in theology classes, but rarely in dinner table conversations.

I was blessed to grow up in a home where holiness was emphasized and taken seriously, while being presented as something wonderfully desirable and attractive. From earliest childhood, I remember thinking that holiness and joy were inseparably bound to each other.

My dad longed to be “as pure as the driven snow” and challenged us to aspire to the same standard. He was deeply disturbed by sin—whether his own, ours, or others’. At the same time, my dad was a happy man; he actually *enjoyed* his life in Christ.

Prior to his conversion in his midtwenties, he had been a free-wheeling gambler in mad pursuit of happiness and thrills. When God reached down and redeemed him, his lifestyle changed dramatically—he no longer desired the earthly “treasures” with which he had been try-

ing to fill the empty places of his heart. Now he had found “the pearl of great price” he had been lacking for so many years. He loved God’s law and never considered holiness burdensome—he knew that sin was the real burden, and he never got over the wonder that God had mercifully relieved him of that burden through Christ.

The eighteenth-century theologian Jonathan Edwards was compelled by a similar vision of holiness. In his memoirs, written at the age of thirty-five, he spoke of the fascination and attractiveness that thoughts of holiness held for him.

It appeared to me, that there was nothing in it but what was ravishingly lovely; the highest beauty and amiableness—a *divine* beauty; far purer than any thing here upon earth; and that every thing else was like mire and defilement in comparison of it.²

Likewise, A. W. Tozer saw the need to challenge the misconceptions often associated with holiness.

What does this word *holiness* really mean? Is it a negative kind of piety from which so many people have shied away?

No, of course not! Holiness in the Bible means moral wholeness—a positive quality which actually includes kindness, mercy, purity, moral blamelessness and godliness. It is always to be thought of in a positive, white intensity of degree.³

The beauty of holiness, as it shines forth in the Scripture, is seen in two related but distinct facets.

Set Apart

The word *holy* comes from a root that means “to cut, to separate.” It means “to be set apart, to be distinct, to be different.”

Throughout the Scripture, we find that God set apart certain things and places and people for Himself; they were consecrated for His use. They were not to be used for common, ordinary, everyday purposes; they were *holy*. For example,

- ✦ God set apart one day out of the week and called it “a *holy Sabbath* to the Lord” (Exodus 16:23).
- ✦ The Israelites were required to set apart the first portion of their income as a *holy tithe* (Leviticus 27:30).
- ✦ God set apart a particular room where He would meet with His people; He called it “the *holy place*” (Exodus 26:33).

—————
The biblical concept of holiness carries with it a sense of belonging to God.
 —————

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was set apart by God to be a “holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). That didn’t mean their *conduct* was holy or that they were inherently more upright than others who were not set apart. God called them “holy” because He had set them apart from other nations, and with that distinction and privilege came the obligation to live holy lives.

Not only were the Israelites set apart *by* God—they were also set apart *for* God. “I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, *that you should be mine,*” God told His people (Leviticus 20:26). The biblical concept of holiness carries with it a sense of belonging to God, much as a mother might claim, “These children are *mine.*”

In the New Testament, God set apart a new body comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. He called it the *church*. The Greek term *ekklesia* means “a called-out assembly.” The church is not a building or merely an institution; it is a body of believers who have been called out of this world and set apart for God’s holy purposes.

I remember first discovering as a child something of what it meant to be “set apart” for and by God. Based on their understanding of the heart and ways of God, my parents established what they felt to be wise practices and limitations for our family. At times, we would complain, “*But everybody else . . . !*” My parents’ response was along these lines: “You don’t belong to ‘everybody else’—you belong to God!” They convinced us there was something really special about being set apart for

God rather than being squeezed into the world's mold.

I learned early on that to be “set apart” is not a punishment; it is not an attempt on God's part to deprive us or to condemn us to a cheerless, joyless lifestyle. It is a priceless privilege—it is a call

—
*God is holy, and
 holiness is not a
 option for those
 who belong to Him.*
 —

- ◆ to belong, to be cherished, to enter into an intimate love relationship with God Himself, much as a groom declares his intent to set his bride apart from all other women to be his beloved wife
- ◆ to fit into the grand, eternal plan of our redeeming God for this universe
- ◆ to experience the exquisite joys and purposes for which we were created
- ◆ to be freed from all that destroys our true happiness

Morally Clean

The second facet of holiness has to do with being pure, clean, free from sin. In this sense, to be holy is to reflect the moral character of a holy God.

If you've ever tried to wade through the book of Leviticus, you may have found yourself wondering, *Why did God bother to give all those detailed instructions about cleansing and ceremonial purity?*

God intended those regulations to be an object lesson to the children of Israel—and to us. He wants us to understand that He is holy, and that holiness is not an option for those who belong to Him. He wants us to know that He is concerned with every detail and dimension of our lives. He wants us to understand the blessings of holiness and the consequences of unholy living.

When we come to the New Testament, we find that God's standard has not changed. Over and over again, Jesus and the New Testament authors call us to a life of absolute purity:

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
(Matthew 5:48).

Keep yourself pure. (1 Timothy 5:22)

Awake to righteousness, and do not sin. (1 Corinthians 15:34
NKJV)

Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.
(2 Timothy 2:19)

Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. (Romans 12:9)

Holiness is not just for some select few spiritual giants; it is not just for pious people who sit around all day with nothing to do but “be holy.”

Holiness is for moms who battle a sense of uselessness and discouragement and who are tempted to escape into self-pity, romance novels, or the arms of an attentive man. It is for students who are constantly bombarded with pressure to conform to the world and to indulge in ungodly forms of entertainment. It is for lonely widows, divorcees, and singles who are struggling to stay sexually abstinent. It is for

—————
*Grace gives us the
desire and the
power to be holy.*
—————

husbands and wives who wrestle with bitterness toward mates who have abused or abandoned them. It is for men who are tempted to cheat on their expense reports or their wives or to abdicate their spiritual leadership in the home.

“Everyone who names the name of the Lord” is called to live a holy life!

We’re going to explore *how* we can be holy, but it’s important to realize that God would not command us to do anything without also enabling us to do it. He knows we cannot possibly be holy apart from Him. That’s why He has made provision for us to overcome sin through the cross of Christ. That’s why He has sent His Spirit to live in our hearts. And that’s why He has given every believer a supernatural resource called *grace* that gives us the *desire* and the *power* to be holy.

The Fruit of Relationship

True holiness is cultivated in the context of a relationship with God. His love for us moves us to reject all lesser loves and all the fleeting delights sin can offer.

As our love for Him grows, we are motivated to aspire to holiness. The fact that He is our Father and we are His beloved children makes us long to be close to Him and compels us to avoid anything that could cause a breach in the relationship.

Yes, holiness involves adherence to a standard, but the obedience God asks of us is not cold, rigid, and dutiful. It is a warm, joyous, loving response to the God who loves us and created us to enjoy intimate fellowship with Him. It is the overflow of a heart that is deeply grateful to have been redeemed by God from sin. It is not something we manufacture by sheer grit, determination, and willpower. It is motivated and enabled by the Holy Spirit who lives within us to make us holy.

Extreme Holiness

The congregation of the Gustaf Adolph Evangelical Lutheran Church, located in a small town in northern Maine, learned just how dangerous a little bit of impurity can be. On Sunday, April 27, 2003, the church council gathered after services to discuss the installation of a new heater. Several in the group stopped by the kitchen to grab a cup of coffee on the way into the meeting. Within hours more than a dozen people were gravely ill, and within days one man had died.

Investigators discovered that a man with a vendetta had dropped a handful of powdered arsenic in the church's coffee urn. No one had noticed the small amount of poison—until its consequences became apparent. Like the bit of leaven that leavens a whole lump of dough, tolerating “just a little sin” in our lives can be deadly.

The makers of Ivory soap pride themselves on their product being “99 $\frac{44}{100}$ % pure.” When it comes to holiness, however, if it's only 99 $\frac{44}{100}$ % pure, it's not pure.

A commitment to be holy is a commitment to be clean through and through—to have no unholy part. True holiness starts on the inside—with our thoughts, attitudes, values, and motives—those innermost

parts of our hearts that only God can see. It also affects our outward and visible behavior: “Be holy in *all your conduct*” (1 Peter 1:15).

This passion for purity is what I saw in my dad’s example that made holiness so compelling to me as a young person. Of course, he often failed (and was willing to admit it when he did); but he sought to live a life that was morally upright and completely above reproach: in the way he ran his business, used his time, conducted himself with members of the opposite sex, treated family members and employees, talked about other people, responded to his critics, spent his money, and honored the Lord’s Day; in his work habits, leisure activities, and entertainment choices—what he read and listened to and watched. He so loved God that he wanted holiness to characterize every area of his life.

He believed, as did Helen Roseveare, a missionary surgeon in (then) Congo, that “there must be nothing, absolutely nothing, in my daily conduct that, copied by another, could lead that one into unholiness.”⁴

I have a friend whose ninety- and ninety-two-year-old parents recently moved out of the house where they had lived for fifty years. My friend spent an entire month sorting through a lifetime of their accumulated “stuff”—correspondence, financial data, clippings, photos, and on and on. “It was a complete record of their lives,” my friend reflected.

After poring through the massive collection of memorabilia and paperwork, this son observed with a sense of wonder, “*There was not one single thing in my parents’ belongings that was inconsistent with their profession of their relationship with Christ!*”

How would you fare if someone were to go through the record of your life—all your possessions, the books and magazines you’ve read, your CD and DVD collections, checkbooks, tax returns, journals, daily planners, phone bills, correspondence, past e-mails, a record of all your Internet activity?

What if the person could also review a photographic replay of the choices you’ve made when you thought no one was watching? Add to that a script of your thought life . . . your attitudes . . . your secret motives.

How would you fare if someone were to go through the record of your life?

Does the thought of such “extreme holiness” seem burdensome to you? If so, you may never have considered that *holiness* and *joy* are inseparable companions.

The Joy of Holiness

What words do you associate with “holiness”?

Would *gladness* be one of those words?

Think about it the other way around. When you think of things that make you *glad*, do you think of *holiness*?

Surprising as it may seem, *holiness* and *gladness* really do go hand in hand.

In both the Old and New Testaments we find a wonderful description of the Lord Jesus that makes this connection:


You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

—Hebrews 1:9; see Psalm 45:7

We might picture someone who has a passionate love for holiness and an intense hatred for sin as being joyless, uptight, and rigid.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The result of Jesus’ holy life was overflowing gladness—gladness surpassing that of anyone else around Him. It was true of Jesus. And it will be true of anyone who, like Jesus, loves righteousness and hates evil.

I remember the first time I heard Calvin Hunt share his story. For years, this young man lived an irresponsible, destructive lifestyle as a crack cocaine addict. Then he encountered the irresistible, transforming grace of Christ. To this day, Calvin exudes irrepressible joy as he testifies of the purifying work of God in his life and then lifts up his powerful tenor voice and sings what has become his trademark song, “*I’m clean! I’m clean! I’m clean!*”



Holiness and joy
are inseparable
companions.

Why do we make holiness out to be some austere obligation or burden to be borne, when the fact is that to be holy is to be clean, to be free from the weight and the burden of sin? Why would we cling to our sin any more than a leper would refuse to part with his oozing sores, given the opportunity to be cleansed of his leprosy?

—————
*To be holy is to be
 clean, to be free
 from the weight and
 the burden of sin.*
 —————

To pursue holiness is to move toward joy—joy infinitely greater than any earthly delights can offer.

To resist holiness or to be halfhearted about its pursuit is to forfeit true joy and to settle for something less than that God-intoxication for which we were created.

Sooner or later, sin will strip and rob you of everything that is truly beautiful and desirable. If you are a child of God, you were redeemed to enjoy the sweet fruit of holiness—to walk in oneness with your heavenly Father, to relish His presence, to rejoice in His mercy, to know the joy of having clean hands, a pure heart, and a clear conscience, and, one day, to stand before Him unashamed.

Why settle for anything less?

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady*, ed. Clyde S. Kilby (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 19.
2. *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*, Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, rept. 1974), xiv.
3. A. W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1974), 63.
4. Helen Roseveare, *Living Holiness* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1986), 173.