

Holiness for Dummies

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, friends. Let us pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we come to you now to pray for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which we celebrate on this Pentecost morning.

May that ministry be reality for each one of us right now. May I speak wisdom in the Spirit. May we all be blessed with understanding in the Spirit. And so, Father, draw all of us closer to Christ, closer to yourself, and deeper into the things that really matter.

Grant it, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, brothers and sisters, let me say at once, I'm pinch-hitting because there was a space that opened up in Bill's schedule, and at rather short notice I was asked if I could fill it, and with perhaps rather too much chutzpah, I said, yes, sure.

And now here I am seeking to do that. My title, it's a sort of Pentecost title, actually, because it's going to direct us to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in a broad sense, all the way through.

[1 : 51] But my title is Holiness for Dummies, and I should tell you straight away that the title came from Bill. He suggested it to me as something about which I might speak, and as a title it grabbed me, probably much more than Bill realized.

That word, dummies, of course, it's a word that you hear quite often these days, because there's a whole large series of books for dummies on just about every topic you can think of.

A friend of mine actually wrote the book called The Bible for Dummies, and back at home, near the computer, which my wife, Kit, can handle, I can't.

There's the book titled Max for Dummies, and, well, the word dummies is actually, isn't it, a word which we are happy to use these days about others and about ourselves without feeling that condemnation is too, what shall I say, too drastic.

If we call each other goofs, and if we say sometimes, as perhaps we do, I am a goof, we are saying something much stronger, I mean stronger in its impact, than if we simply said, oh, we are all dummies these days, and I'm a dummy myself.

[3 : 46] I was grabbed, as I said, by this phrase which Bill gave me, because, deep down, it rang a bell which has been ringing within me from time to time for many years now.

I think that we evangelical Christians in the year of grace 2010, and indeed for quite a number of years before that, we have been held back spiritually by what I can only describe as spiritual stupidity, a quality to which the word dummies might well be applied.

What am I talking about? I'm talking about shallowness, actually. Shallowness of insight as the result of shallowness of thought.

Shallowness that reflects the speed speed with which we're expected to do everything these days, and the way in which a smattering of any number of topics is available for us, available through the media, and we go for the collection of smatterings, know a bit about this, know a bit about that, rather than going for depth of understanding anything, and the result is superficiality, and that's what I mean when I talk about spiritual stupidity.

It's not that we couldn't go deeper, but simply that we don't. Well, be that as it may, that's what started me on the line of thought that I'm going to share with you this morning.

[5 : 58] it isn't, how do I say this, it isn't a blueprint for holiness that I'm going to offer you, it isn't a formula or a set of rules or a technique, just to say those words, especially the word technique, is to get back, as it seems to me, onto the wrong track, I mean, to sideline ourselves into shallowness once again, because that's what techniques do, you know, you master the technique, using it becomes part of you, you use it without thinking about it, you can use it without much understanding of the field in which you're using it, so once again, you are living on the surface and missing the deep things.

So, what I'm offering you seeks to avoid coming into those categories. Technically, the word for what I'm attempting to share with you today is the word which you've often heard from me, I think, in recent months, the word catechesis, which you can use as a noun.

I didn't know that until I was handed, I believe, by one of you, actually, an off-print of something which John Paul had produced, sorry, not John Paul, Benedict XVI, the current Pope.

It was a survey of the doctrine of justification and he called it a catechesis on justification.

Incidentally, it was remarkably close in line, closely in line with what the reformers said about justification and what old showbacks like me are still saying about justification and what I hope that evangelicals will go on saying about justification until the Lord comes back because it's true.

Well, he called it a catechesis. And I borrow the word, I am offering you a catechesis on holiness.

[8 : 36] All right, you say, and what's that? Well, a catechesis, a catechetical statement, or you could call it a catechism statement if you like, catechism statement, is a survey, a practical survey, of the truths that Christians live by and the way to live by them.

Catechetical material has that double quality all the way through. I realize that I've been writing catechetical material for print for more than half a century now.

I never knew that catechetical was the word to apply to it, but that in fact is what I've been doing.

And now that I know what to call it, well, you'll understand why I keep on doing it and hope to continue doing it as long as my ministry lasts.

And with regard to the subject of holiness, well, for many years I have thought that here is something which, in wisdom, was a focus of concern for Christians in my youth, and it doesn't seem to be a focus of concern for Christians today in the same way.

And then I think of the first words of a poem by Rudyard Kipling, which I learned at school a long time ago, titled The Way Through the Woods.

[10 : 22] And the verse in my mind is this, I think I can recite it correctly. They shut the road through the woods seventy years ago, weather and rain have undone it again, and now you would never know there was once a road through the woods.

I feel rather that way about Christian holiness, frankly. Preoccupied with other things, we've drifted away from concern about holiness, and so we've cast ourselves to the role of dummies, people whose grasp of this matter is on the surface and not as deep as it needs to be.

Well, that's how I come at my topic, and I have four matters to discuss with you. I'll give you the headings right away.

We begin where you have to begin in all these matters, with God himself. So I'm going to talk a little about the holiness of God. Then, second, I'm going to talk about holiness in humanity, Christ's humanity, and then ours.

holiness. I'm going to talk thirdly about the necessity of holiness, on which the Bible is quite explicit, and where I think our shallowness has given us a blind spot, left us with a blind spot.

[12 : 12] And then finally, I'm going to talk about holiness and darkness. By darkness, I mean spiritual darkness. It's a quality of Christian experience which some people have to go through, and for some, on the grand scale.

We very rarely talk and think about it, and once again, here is a dimension of things from which we've drifted and which I want to see restored.

So that's where I'm going. There'll be quite a number of references to scripture, but I'm not expounding a single passage. I'm picking up a biblical theme, and seeking to spell it out in terms of what it is that Christians need to know about it, basic Christian knowledge, knowledge, and what it means to live in terms of that knowledge.

Again, basic Christian practice. So, in I plunge, heading number one, the holiness of God.

God, I use that phrase, and immediately I imagine we all of us think of the sixth chapter of the prophet Isaiah, where he's in the temple, and he sees a vision of God, a huge person on a throne, it fills the temple, and there are angels hovering around the throne, singing, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

[14 : 12] And that condemns Isaiah, straight away it leaves him feeling horrors, I am not in this, I am a sinner, I am a ruined sinner, I am outside it altogether, this is not my world.

Well, you know how the story ends, one of the angels brings a burning coal from the altar in the temple, touches Isaiah's lips, and brings the word, the cheering word, your guilt is forgiven, your sin is gone, and now your lips are consecrated to me, so for you to be my messenger, or God's

messenger.

Well, what have you got there? That word holy, which the angels used in their song, that is a word that at its heart carries the thought of separation, or separateness, perhaps I should say, apartness. God is holy, and that word is the label for everything that sets him apart from us, in contrast with us, everything that makes him awesome to us, his great power is contrasted with our weakness, everything that makes him fearsome to sinners who are convicted of their sin, as Isaiah was in the temple, there's purity being expressed by the use of the word holy, and Isaiah, as I said, is overwhelmed by the realization that he's very far from purity in God's sight, and yet everything that makes God adorable is also expressed by this word holy, so that it comes to be over and over again in Scripture, a word of celebration for the glory, that is, the gloriousness, the revealed excellence of God.

And in fact, if you check with a concordance, you will find that this word holy is used in the Psalms, where in general it always expresses the fact that God is praiseworthy and adorable, it is used again and again to celebrate the fact that he is merciful and faithful to his promises.

[17:17] So before we go further, I'm going to read you Psalm 99, in which you see this view of holiness expressed.

The Lord reigns, says the psalmist, let the peoples tremble, he sits enthroned upon the cherubim, let the earth quake.

The Lord is great in Zion, he is exalted over all the peoples, let them praise your great and awesome name, holy is he, holiness is the king of justice, you have established equity, you've executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

The king, of course, is the Lord God, you understand that. Exalt the Lord our God, worship at his footstool, holy is he.

See, word holiness is being used to pull together as matter for praise, all these qualities of God's action, which the psalmist is celebrating.

[18:43] On he goes, Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name, they called to the Lord and he answered them, in the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them, they kept his testimonies and the statute that he gave them, O Lord our God, you answered them.

This is God's faithfulness, you see. You were forgiving God to them, that's God's mercy, but you were an avenger of their wrongdoings, that is God's purity, God cannot, as Habakkuk says, bear to look on iniquity, it disgusts him and induces a negative reaction from him, which is being expressed here in the phrase, an avenger of their wrongdoings, avenger means punisher.

And now again the chorus, exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy. Now, are you getting the wavelength?

This is the holiness of God. When one gets to the New Testament, where the truth of the Trinity is displayed, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are properly distinguished, well, then you find that the word holy is applied to all three.

In John chapter 17, we're allowed to overhear Jesus at prayer. Remember, we call it the high priestly prayer, where the Savior prays to his church, and he prays twice over to the one whom he calls Holy Father.

[20:41] In Mark chapter 1, verse 24, a demon says to Jesus, through the mouth of the demon possessed man, I know who you are, the Holy One of God.

Well, yes, and the demon was quite right there. Jesus is the Holy One of God. Holy Spirit. And he, of course, like the apostles also, refers regularly to the third person of the Trinity as the Holy Spirit. All three persons are holy. That is to say, the reality of the revelation of them covers the waterfront that we saw covered in Psalm 99.

A word holy brings all that to mind and is meant to. Okay, so, it's now second heading, Holiness in Humanity.

We are called to be holy. Humans were made to be holy. human human humanness, real human humanness, full scale humanness, involves holiness.

[22:12] If we aren't living holy lives, we are in a fundamental respect subhuman. I put it that way in order to make the point as strongly as I can.

you see this in the Lord Jesus, of course. He was the perfect man, we say that, and of course we are right to say it.

Well, one of the aspects of the full humanness of the Lord Jesus was the reality of his holiness, his full holiness, as we might say.

what does it mean to be human after all? Yes, okay, stand back and ask yourself, what does it mean for me to be human, for him, for her to be human?

Well, humanness, it seems to me, analyses into four basic realities. Thoughts, a human being thinks thoughts, and it's important that they be right, wise, and good thoughts.

[23 : 32] Desires, along with the thoughts, come desires, they may be good, they may be bad, but full humanness entails good desires, just as it entails good thoughts.

relationships. And then, third dimension of human life, relationships. I have a friend who constantly insists, life is relationships, to him, that's the one key thought that he's pushing through all the time, life is relationships, well, actually, he's right, life is relationships, just think, we're all of us living in relationships, and yes, that's what it means to be human.

There was on the television yesterday, on the classic films channel, the 1932 version of Tarzan of the Apes, you know.

Well, actually, insofar as there was a serious story there at all, it was about how Tarzan, through a relationship, began to become human, as distinct from being simply an animal.

But surely I'm talking through an open door. Everybody these days knows that life is essentially relationships. I don't need to hammer away at that any longer.

[25 : 10] And then, within that frame, thoughts, and desires, and relationships, there are activities, all sorts of activities, professional, hobby, creative, burdensome, joyful, but activities, doing things.

things. And you can see, life wouldn't be fully human without those four realities, thinking, desiring, relating, and doing.

Yes? Okay. Well, what you see in the Lord Jesus, reverting to him, is all these four dimensions of human life lived out to perfection.

his father was in all his thoughts. His father's glory was the focus of his desires. And out of that, a purpose of mercy and love towards needy human beings, which was the father's purpose, the son shares it.

The gospels never cease to amaze me by the wisdom and depth of the Lord's relationships with people. There are wonderful relational stories in the gospels.

[26 : 35] Yes, there are. And it only takes a moment's thought to realise, yes, of course. And the Saviour's activities, well, everything that he's reported as doing, and in many cases what he does is original and even startling, but everything that he does, in retrospect, you realise, reflects the glory of God and is done to the glory of God.

Yes, that's our Lord Jesus, really more human than any of us have yet succeeded in being. Well, the holiness which God desires to see in humanity and which you see to perfection in Jesus, that holiness depends on being, learning to be, God-focused at all four levels, all four dimensions of life, as the Saviour was.

Learning to honour and please God, in all our thoughts, in the desires that we accept and indulge and seek to fulfil, in the relationships that we form, and in the activities, the whole range of activities, in which we share.

holiness holiness for humans means something for which there's a Bible word that we all know, it means consecration.

It means deliberately giving ourselves to God, knowing that that's what we're doing, knowing why we're doing it, being perfectly self-aware and totally, what shall I say, totally sincere, or as totally sincere as we find ourselves able to be, in the commitment itself.

[28 : 59] it's a commitment that Francis Ridley Habergill expressed in the hymn that we sing, we all of us know it, I'm sure, take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee, take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise, and then she goes on through the various elements of human life, consecrating them all to God, and ending with the couplet, take myself and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

Well, that's holiness. She aspires after it, she's on the path that leads to it, as all Christians are. And Paul talks about it in a theological way in the letter to the Romans, and I'm just going to refer you to that, he does it twice over, in Romans 6, where he's confronting the question, are we to continue in sin, the grace, that is, the grace that forgives sin, may abound.

By no means, says the ESV translation, that's mild, actually, for the impact of the Greek phrase.

It would be better rendered for impact by something like, good heavens, no! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

and he goes on to remind his readers that when we turn to the Lord in repentance and faith, we are mysteriously, but really, truly, effectively, crucified with Christ.

[31 : 10] Paul says it in Galatians 2 20, I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, but life is different now. It's not I, but Christ who lives in me.

That is, the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. You know those words, I'm sure, it's a very familiar scripture. I have been crucified with Christ.

Well, yes, those who come to faith in Christ find that life is different.

This is half of the story as to why it's different. And the other half of the story is that I have been raised with Christ, that is, united to Christ in his resurrection life, so that now I'm a different person with different purposes in my heart and different powers in my being.

I can do things that I couldn't do before. I desire to do things that I didn't desire to do before. I really am, as Paul says in another place, a new creature or a new creation in Christ.

[32 : 41] Well, as a matter of fact, the world may laugh at the idea, but every Christian finds it to be so. I'm not the person I was. Now I desire, deep down, to please and honour and love my Lord.

Well, there was nothing like that in my heart before I became a Christian. And I find that my heart is set against self indulgence in sin.

If I do lapse, I feel bad about it at once. And I find it's my instinct to labour, not to lapse.

And Christians, Christians ordinarily, well, shall I say it this way, healthy Christians, are quite self-aware at this point.

I mean, they realise I'm different from what I was. And my business is to go on being different in the power of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

[33 : 53] I'm a new creature in Christ. Hallelujah. I give myself back to you, Lord. You're the one who renewed me. Well, now I consecrate myself to you to be your person, the person that is that you have made me by plugging me into the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus.

And that's the attitude and the spirit and the purpose and the focus with which a true Christian lives his or her life.

I'm not what I was. We had that thought presented to us in one particular way last week. I am not what I was. I've been made new in Christ.

Christ. Now my business is to be new and live out what the Lord has wrought in me. Which means learning from Christ.

You remember that the Great Commission is specific about that. Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to do all the things that I've commanded you.

[35 : 19] You learn from Christ as the disciples during those three years of Jesus' earthly ministry learned from him. It wasn't actually until Pentecost that they understood a lot of what they'd learned, but at least they remembered what Jesus had said, and with the help of the Spirit then learned it in their hearts.

You learn from Christ then. You obey Christ. Think, for instance, here of the Sermon on the Mount, which is a kind of charter for disciples.

It isn't strictly a code of laws. It's rather a survey of a spirit. A spirit and an attitude of consecration to God worked out in relation to this, that, and the other, all the different topics on which the Sermon on the Mount touches.

The Sermon on the Mount has been expounded very skillfully by a particular teacher who picked up the word beatitudes, you know, the words that we apply to those statements at the beginning of the sermon on the blessedness of the blessed man, blessed are the poor in spirit and so forth, and he broke that word beatitudes down into two.

He says the Sermon on the Mount, first to last, is concerned with B attitudes, that is to say, concerned with being a certain sort of person, who just because you are that sort of person, lives out a life of faith and obedience and faithfulness and persistence.

[37 : 26] Well, that's the way in which Jesus taught the Christian life, and that's the quality of life which constitutes obedience to Jesus.

A lot of people don't understand this, of course, that they think that obedience to Jesus is the same sort of thing that the Pharisees thought that obedience to God was.

You do this, you do that, you do the other, when you've done all these things, well, the rest of the time, so to speak, is your own. No, nothing like that. The consecrated life is a life of being a certain sort of person, obeying Christ in that sense.

Once or twice in the New Testament, this is nailed down in the thought of imitate Christ. Catch his spirit and his attitude and reproduce it in your spirit, your attitude and the things you do.

All of this will be the expression in life of the new heart that God gives you, as I said, when you come to faith and repentance in Christ, the new heart that is the heart of the new birth.

[38 : 51] It's a process that operates, as you can see, from the inside out. Again, a lot of people, believing that they're teaching Christianity, do make the mistake of trying to teach the faith and the life of obedience from the outside in.

drill yourself, or drill the person you're teaching, in the habit of doing this, doing that, doing the other, doing things that Christians will do, and the habit will impact the heart.

Really, that's backwards. Although, to be sure, when we're trying to bring up our children, we have to start where they are, and they'll only become conscious of the heart, as we teach them the right way to behave.

But, for an adult, the way to teach the faith is from the inside out, rather than from the outside in.

And, it's rather important that we realize that. And, when we're trying to help people spiritually, start always with the heart, with the purpose, with the goal of glorifying God, with the new desires of God-pleasing action which God has put in the heart, this is the way that holiness is developed and blossoms in our lives, holiness.

[40 : 40] And, this actually is the way that it's always put in the New Testament, where Christian life, the life of holiness, is always presented as being lived out of what God has already wrought in you.

So, it's so important to see that. I'm going to read just one passage which will focus some of this. I'm in 1 Thessalonians now, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. And, I'm going to read the whole passage, the first eight verses of the chapter, because there's a flow of thought here.

And, I want you to notice how the word holiness recurs in this paragraph. of. Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you receive from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you're doing, that you do so more and more.

For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. This is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, and so on.

[42 : 00] The Lord is an avenger of sexual immorality, we needn't read all about that. As we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you, for God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

Therefore, whoever disregards this disregards not man, but God, who gives his holy spirit to you. Well, there's Paul indicating that holiness starts with the holy spirit in the heart.

There's Paul indicating one area in which the old enemy makes sure that we shall be tempted to disregard what the Lord has written in our heart.

And the word holiness, you see, is used twice. And actually that in the sentence, this is the will of God, your sanctification, that word sanctification could have been translated holiness in the Greek, it's the same word.

good. So, says Paul, understand, God has given you his spirit, God has given you a holy heart, now express the desires of that holy heart in a holy life, and recognize desires that are no part of the holy life.

[43 : 38] have courage, brothers and sisters, to say no in order that you may be free to say yes.

I mean, to say no to the temptation in order to keep on saying yes to God, the God who's called us to holiness, consecration, observance of his standards, in everything.

And just one final thought about holiness in humanity. Holiness and humility are, you might say, brother and sister.

Holiness without humility is not holiness at all. Humility is the, shall I say, the set of the mind and spirit, which you have as you're seeking to live a life of repentance, may I say it that way, a life in which consciously and constantly you are setting yourself against impulses and urges and allurements of one kind and another, which you know, are not godly, but which nonetheless you find at surface level to be very attractive.

No? Well, as I said, you must have courage to say no, you are seeking to live the life of repentance and you're seeking to live the life of adoration in which you're constantly praising our praiseworthy God for the wonderfully gracious and merciful and glorious things that he's done for us, think of the cross and the resurrection of the Lord, that he's doing for us, think of the new birth and the new life and all that that means, and that he's going to do for us, one day we'll be freed from the presence of sin in our spiritual system altogether.

[45 : 54] we shall have new bodies and that will be part of the newness. Good news, I'd say so. Well, focus on those things and, as I say, practice repentance and practice praise and you grow spiritually but you grow down rather than up.

You grow down into humility which means lowness, that's the literal meaning of the word. You grow down into lowness, that is to say, you come to think less and less of yourself and your powers and your potential and your importance and all those ego inflating things and instead you settle for saying what John Newton, remember John Newton, the converted slave trader, said right at the end of his life, only a few weeks before his death.

He said, I can't remember much these days but one thing I do remember, I am a great sinner and Jesus is a great savior.

well, as we walk with the Lord we get deeper and deeper into that thought and that sense of things and that's growing down into real spiritual health and that's humility, which is one ingredient, very basic ingredient in holiness.

third heading, the necessity of holiness. I had a very distressing letter a few months ago from a guy in jail, wonderfully full of himself.

[48 : 09] He wrote 12 pages in small handwriting telling me his life story. The one thing that was very obvious is that though from early on he'd been taught to trust in Jesus Christ as his sin bearer, savior, he had never been taught the need to repent of the sinful life he'd been living.

So again and again he went back to it and from time to time found himself in jail once more and the burden of his letter which came out of the blue was to ask me whether I thought he was a Christian and the honest answer is well until there's evidence of your repentance I daren't say that you are. Until there's evidence of your repentance you're turning from sin I'm afraid you're playing games. there are lots of people in fact around our churches who are playing games in just that way and God is not a God who is pleased when those who call themselves his servants play games.

what you have in scripture is a very firm insistence that holiness is required of us and if I may put it this way no messing in Leviticus chapter 11 and verse 44 you have words which are picked up actually by Peter in the first chapter of his letter let me read you Peter's words 1st Peter chapter 1 verse 14 14 through 16 as obedient children children of God don't be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance but as he who called you is holy you also be holy in all your conduct since it's written you shall be holy for I am holy those are the words from Leviticus 11 which Peter quotes God requires holiness in the letter to the Hebrews chapter 12 something along these lines that's even more startling is said follow yes that's right no sorry I read the wrong word strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord that's strong stuff if you like the necessity of holiness is affirmed here loud and clear isn't it and it's in the middle of a passage in which the writer has been encouraging his readers who are having a hard time for their faith it looks as if the situation was that the readers are converted

[51 : 41] Jews Jewish Christians now they've left the synagogue the people still in the synagogue resent this fact and want them back and have been giving them a hard time to try and persuade them to come back and to dissuade them from carrying on with their Christian faith it's that view of the situation that makes sense of everything that's said in Hebrews including the famous warning passages which cause so many people so much anxiety the writer is encouraging them by saying look God chastens his children that is he disciplines them he allows them to go through hard situations in order that they may be strengthened by the exercise of doing it and you mustn't suppose that there's anything strange about it when this happens to you indeed he says very bluntly if God wasn't from time to time treating you this way chastening you for discipline then he says I would wonder if you were his children at all that is rough isn't it but that's what he says it's for discipline that you have to endure

God is treating you as sons for what son is there whom his father doesn't discipline if you're left without discipline in which all have participated then you'd be illegitimate children and not sons well that puts it very strongly and very straight doesn't it yes discipline is a certainty in every Christian's

life because holiness holiness that's tried and tested in the fire of discipline and temptation and spiritual struggle that's what's required of us as Christians and that's one of the marks of authenticity in Christians that is that it actually happens to you and that by the grace of God you actually work your way through it that's what's being said in

Hebrews God disciplines us all in this way for our good for our blessing says the writer eventually for sorry that we may share God's holiness yeah God disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness and then he adds for the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who've been trained by it so it isn't going to be roses all the way brothers and sisters I don't imagine that anyone in this room is deluded enough to think so but there are people who call themselves Christians who still expect that it will be roses all the way well it won't be it can't be we mustn't expect it to be

God drills us and disciplines us trains us if you like so that we may partake of his holiness so strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord have you ever heard of Robert Murray McChain a Scottish minister of the early 19th century he died young but he had a very impactful ministry on one occasion he wrote in his journal my people's greatest need is my personal holiness I don't wonder how many ministers would think in those terms today and it isn't just for ministers to think in those terms all of us are the most use to other people whom we try to help spiritually when we are focusing on our personal holiness and making it our first concern to live in a way that pleases and glorifies

God and it would be spiritual stupidity to lose sight of that fact so holiness is indeed necessary love to neighbor which is stressed today in a way that holiness isn't love to neighbor must be holy love and life must be lived according to God's standards and not in disregard of them well so much about the necessity of holiness and I see that my time is gone this is a familiar experience but it's frustrating to me and I'm sorry about this I was going to talk about holiness and darkness well the darkness in question that I was going to talk about is the sense of abandonment by God that occasionally comes to persons who are wholeheartedly seeking to practice holiness and so please God and my poster child for this whose example

[58 : 05] I wanted to talk about at some length is Mother Teresa the late Mother Teresa who during all the years that she was leading the Sisters of Charity was experiencing abandonment or darkness the sense of God being at a distance and declining to come close that was the inside story of Mother Teresa's life for the best part of half a century she didn't let on to the people whom she led you may know that she was constantly encouraging them to take what God gives and keep a smile on your face as you do so she was great in talking about the need to keep smiling in Christ but inside she experienced darkness rather than the sense of God's closeness and the joy that comes from that well my survey of Mother

Teresa which actually I printed as an appendix in this book of mine titled Recovering Holiness diagnoses what she experienced as God giving her how do I say this giving her a taste a big taste of what the folk to whom she ministered were experiencing that is a sense of abandonment which invalid dying folk folk who had no home and who sat on the set at the street corners begging in Calcutta yes they do by the way if you've ever been in Calcutta you will have seen it Calcutta is a rather unnerving place from this standpoint so many folk in need and obviously so little being done by the authorities and the people who live there to relieve that need sort of indifference is the feeling that one gets and it's a nasty feeling well anyway

Mother Teresa's experience I believe was shall I say orchestrated for her by God to ensure that she would from her heart be sympathetic towards the folk to whom she ministered and when one looks at her life as a whole and the fact that she was a Roman Catholic and that we are evangelical Protestants shouldn't come into the equation here when you look at her life as a whole all you can do is praise God for the way that he disciplined his servant to make her a partaker of his holiness and then used his servant in ministry there in the barren lands of Calcutta but time doesn't allow me to talk about that so I simply close now having just said enough I hope to get you interested in Mother

Teresa's experience but I'm afraid I have to leave it there well I said this was a catechesis I've been laying before you as best I could basic perspectives in this matter of holiness in the belief that all of us are more or less spiritual dummies who need to be more alert to these realities than we are what does one say I can only say don't shoot the teacher he was doing his best and I hope that some of these thoughts are of some help to some of you thank you for listening anyway applause applause

applause applause applause discussion comments reactions your move yes to a certain extent yes though it's not a direct parallel the point which runs all the way through the cloud of unknowing is that

God is so much greater than we can grasp we have to understand in our communion with him that we shan't have all the answers and again and again we have to trust him now what do we say I don't think it's the temper of the cloud of unknowing to say that we we have to trust him as we walk through the dark I think the thing to say with that book is that we have to trust him as we walk through the fog there is yes there's a difference between the fog which keeps you from seeing but it doesn't banish the daylight and darkness in which the daylight is banished and you were made to feel well it's dark I don't want to go on so as I say the two the two reality the two presentations of Christian experience they are complementary

[64 : 28] I think rather than on exactly the same wavelength any more from any more Bill the fruits of holiness are things that other people see yes the only measure that we can well should we avoid measuring is what other people see what would you say is the awareness for the winning of this battle ganging up with God against ourselves in a sense in that whole process do you ever think it can be measured fundamentally I don't think that we can measure ourselves in this any more than a teenager who's growing can feel it happening they don't feel it happening they don't feel it happening quite a lot is happening what we can be aware of though is the specifics of

I'm not the person I was I am beginning to be a different person whose purposes desires whose attempt to serve the father matches Jesus my lord we can I think get quite a lot of mileage actually from constantly looking at him as the gospels present him and then noting well now here are specific points at which I haven't learned to match him yet but I think that's as far really as we can go and it can be I think very embarrassing and even misleading when people well meaning people how can

I say they lush one up verbally and tell you to your face that they think you're a saint and all that kind of thing none of you I suppose ever knew John Stott personally well John was made acutely uncomfortable every time anybody said anything like that to him I've never known a man who got so embarrassed by compliments of that kind it seems to me that with John well it was an example of his spiritual reality what you see of yourself is not qualities that call for compliments but grounds still waiting to be possessed yeah right at the back then I had a question on the darkness which you may well have covered if you had a little more time but do you feel that that stage or that darkness comes to every

Christian who is walking the spiritual path towards holy long or short is that darkness an essential part of that journey in light of what is said in Hebrews 12 I would expect that all Christians for longer or shorter periods of time will know something about this but I'm not making rules for God a sunny saint who has never known anything of this kind isn't an impossibility as far as I'm concerned it's God who decides those things not I and so ultimately I have to leave the question open I don't know but what I am sure of is that we all of us need to be ready for such an experience if it comes our way or the similar experience of what

Roman Catholics call the dark night of the soul darkness experiences do I think come to most quite certainly and well as I say Hebrews 12 as I was saying in the talk Hebrews 12 shows us that we've got to be ready for them when they come though they're not going to be how can I say it the standard they're going to be punctuations within the life of joy peace and the sense that the Lord is with us as he promised to be sorry yes I also think that what would be a dark experience for one person is different from the other like we might look at what someone considers their low point or their dark struggle and we might think it's nothing like we might think oh what do you complain to them but to that person that may be as low as they ever want to go that might be quite a shattering moment for them so on the surface we may not know we may not notice it but it doesn't mean they're not experiencing it that's a word of wisdom thank you for it so in Roger

[70 : 40] Steer's book on basic Christian which is the biography of John Stott's life and someone commented to him asked him how have you managed to be so humble his response was if you saw my heart you would spit in my face it's a quote I think from Augustine but he said that's my thought as well well as I said John whom I have been privileged to know over the years John has always found it very difficult to deal with spiritual compliments yes sir Dr.

Packer how would you encourage someone who's going to who is a genuine faithful Christian is going to God I would say remember the love of God remember the cross of Christ remember what

the Lord has done for you already and wait on God to relieve the darkness that you're going through there's a text in Isaiah chapter 50 it seems to me to say it all where are we it'll be easier if I look here I think Isaiah 50 verse where are you sorry about this I'm looking for something which I know is here and I can't see it here we oh yes here we are Isaiah 50 and verse 10 which reads who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant that's for us that means for us Christian fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God which was put into a hymn by Top Lady this is what I wanted to share with you now Top Lady you know was one of the 18th century evangelical pioneers and every now and then he produced wizard quality poetry which turns into wonderful hymns listen to this blessed is the man

O God that stays himself on thee who waits for thy salvation Lord shall thy salvation see when we in darkness walk nor feel the heavenly flame then is the time to trust our God and rest upon his name soon shall our doubts and fears subside at his control his loving kindness shall break through the midnight of the soul his grace will to the end stronger and brighter shine nor present things nor things to come shall quench the life divine so trust in God wait patiently for light to dawn again he is faithful a feeling of abandonment is from one standpoint delusive he hasn't abandoned you at all any more than he abandoned Job though Job felt abandoned you know for the first half and first three fifths of the book actually

Job is celebrating his if that's the word celebrating his sense of God's abandonment but he's wrong all the time God watches God rejoices and at the end God blesses Job for his basic faithfulness despite some of the wild things Job has said okay yes do you think that Christ experienced darkness in the time on the cross when he said oh God why abandon me oh yes I do yes I would suppose so on the cross well God sent the world a visual aid to help us understand that this was what was happening to him three hours of darkness and I say that I think that was a visual aid to help us understand what was happening it isn't that the father was really absent but the son for the first time ever had lost all sense of the togetherness with his father which he'd known eternally up to that moment and that was because he really was our substitute he really had taken our place under [76 : 25] God's judgment due to us for our sins and that's why Calvin it is who said he underwent the torments of a condemned and lost man well I think that is the case solemn thought on which to finish well God bless us all over to Yuga thank you very much applause thank you a study another terrain