

# Selected Passages "Being Holy"

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Date: 12 January 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Thanks, DJ, for helping to lead us before God's throne. I want to stay there this morning. We're going to get back in just a little bit to our study of John's gospel.

Lord willing, we will finish this spring. I know some of you don't believe that, but we will. But today, I wanted to get back to basics.

At the beginning of a new year, I want us to talk a little bit about why we are here. What's our why, so to speak?

What motivates and drives us personally and as a church together? What's your why? Some of you, especially business people, like to ask that question a lot.

[ 1 : 06 ] What the question's about is, what's your purpose? What gets you out of bed in the morning? What gets you through the afternoon when you're starting to get weary? For many of us, at its core, our answer to that question is basically to be happy.

Whether that means being comfortable, you know, making enough money to retire early and do whatever I want. Or, you know, being respected.

Having others recognize me. Having my parents see me as successful and made something of myself. Maybe it's making a difference or an impact in the world.

Giving my kids a better life than I had. Or seeing justice advanced in my community. And many of those are very noble goals as far as they go.

But if at the end of the day my why is really about myself. About my being fulfilled. My being happy.

[ 2 : 13 ] The Bible says it actually has a higher purpose for us. A grander mission if we're willing to accept it. It's the why without which we will never be fulfilled.

We've articulated the mission here at Southwood as to experience and express grace. In relationships that impact eternity.

You've heard me say before that that's a big statement. And it's synonymous with other things like knowing God and making Him known. Like tasting God's love and sharing God's love.

As Libby said, like loving God and loving neighbor. It's why we exist. And notice that in all of those things, no matter what words we use to say it, it's all about who?

God. All of them. My purpose begins with Him. Grace. Jesus. That comes from God. That is Him.

[ 3 : 23 ] It's the same idea saying the main thing is about my relationship with God. Out of which flow my relationships with other people. An eternal impact.

Because He's eternal. It's what our every breath should be about as we breathe in God's grace.

And then, moment by moment, breathing out God's grace over and over.

And I want you to remember this morning that that's not merely for Southwood as a church.

Because it's easy to think that and think, well, when I show up in this building, I'll be about that.

Okay? Today? No.

It's for each of us individually, too. That's our why. Life with God. And today, I want us to see that primary purpose that you may already think about through a fresh lens.

I want to play word association with you this morning, which I know is risky, like asking a question during a children's moment. You know, you don't know what you're going to get. But word association means I'm going to say a word.

[ 4 : 29 ] And some of you are going to need to talk. And say the first thing that comes to mind. We don't do this often. So, if you're visiting, we're trying something new. Okay? The word for this morning is holy.

Whoa. Okay. Now you're going to have to slow down. It was too many at once. Holy. Set apart. God's. Weak.

Weighty. Thank you. Better than weak, I think. Other things? Yeah. Halo. Yeah. So, a lot of times we think of holy and we think of something churchy, right?

And super spiritual with a halo. And I understand that. You may think about a lot of things when that word is thrown out there.

What if I said to you this morning, you are holy? You don't have to respond. But how would you feel if I said that to you?

[ 5 : 40 ] I've tried this on a few people. And so, I know some of the answers. Would you be too ashamed to agree? Apparently, pastor, you don't know how I talk.

You don't know what I've done. Whatever it is that you'd fill in that blank. I'm not super spiritual. What are you talking about? Would you be embarrassed to think of yourself that way?

Because of the negative connotation that word has for many of us. I'm not stuffy, stuck up, thinking I'm better than everybody else, holier than thou.

Would you maybe accept it? You've been in church long enough. You're like, yeah, I think that's probably true. But kind of begrudgingly, like, I mean, maybe I am. But I'm really not excited because holy means no fun.

I know that much. I hope to start changing the script on holy this morning. What it means for you to be holy. So that you'd be excited about being holy in 2025 or any other time.

[ 6 : 51 ] What a great why that is. What a great purpose. What adventure is in that. What fun even. Yeah, some of you don't believe that's going to be convincing.

But let me back up for a minute before we go there. Your instincts were right, a couple of you, in word association. You can't talk about holiness without talking about God first.

It is all about God. Holiness is sort of, it's his godness. What sets him apart from everyone and everything else as the one true God.

We sang it that there is none beside thee. Perfect in power. Perfect in love. Perfect in purity. God is holy, holy, holy.

Right? In fact, being holy is so associated with God in the Bible that whatever is associated with God, whatever gets close to him, becomes holy.

[ 8 : 01 ] That's how it happens. This is actually what got me thinking about this topic. We were reading toward the end of last year. If you were doing the Bible reading plan with us last year. And one of the last books we got to toward the end of the year was Leviticus.

I kept noticing things in Leviticus that were holy to the Lord over and over. Lots of things. And see, what happens in Exodus, it's right before Leviticus.

And at the end of Exodus, God's people finish building the tabernacle. It's the initial temple, the house for God to live in among them. And the book ends with Yahweh's presence coming down and filling the tabernacle, which is what makes it a holy place.

It's just a nice-looking tent before God shows up to live there, right? And so in Leviticus, I noticed all sorts of things being referred to as holy, being set apart for God.

The crazy things, a table, an altar, various utensils, a basin, a stand, every tenth animal, holy.

[ 9 : 15 ] And it's not that they were superior objects to all of the other objects. That's not what made them holy. What was it? It was that they were gods.

They were in His presence. They were used for the purposes of God. So they were holy. Otherwise, honestly, they're not a whole lot different from the next table or the next cow or the next utensil.

But holy, set apart to be gods. I just think about that. That's pretty cool for the average bowl, right? I mean, you're just a bowl, an ordinary, everyday bowl.

And all of a sudden, you get set apart. And what happens to you? This bowl is going to witness the sacrifices for sins, for thanksgiving to Yahweh Himself.

It's going to hear God's voice speaking to the priest. And most of the people of Israel don't ever get to hear it. It's going to be an instrument itself of cleansing and forgiveness as blood that is in the bowl is sprinkled on things.

[ 10 : 31 ] And on a daily basis, that's what it's going to be used for. How amazing for an average bowl, right? And it didn't even win a contest. It didn't perform the best or the longest as a bowl.

It just got placed in God's presence. Wow. You starting to track with me?

Being holy means being gods. It means an average person without having to perform to win a contest, without having to outdo someone else, can come in close contact with God Himself, can find oneself becoming an instrument of His healing in ordinary, everyday places, just by being placed in God's presence.

And here's the deal. It's not just that that could happen, theoretically. It's that the Bible says over and over to God's people, you are holy.

So many places. I'll just start with one. 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.

[ 11 : 58 ] For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. You are holy. You, not the super spiritual elite task force.

You are the tabernacle of the Most High God. His Holy Spirit dwells inside of you. So your why is to be His.

Your purpose, above all else, is to live with Him, through Him, and for Him in everything. Young or old, by the way, kids, don't you check out on this because holy sounds like a word for big people. Elsewhere in the Bible, our kids are specifically referred to as holy. And then throughout your life, once you're holy, you never cease to be. I want us to see that set apart for God reality in two ways this morning.

First, we were made for this. To be God's people. Yahweh is God. It is He who made us.

[ 13 : 18 ] And as a result, we are His. Psalm 100. In Isaiah, God gives us a glimpse of His heart in creating us. Everyone called by my name whom I created.

Why? For my glory, whom I formed and made. It's about me, God says. Jesus boils it down to this in John 17.

Remember, if you were here last year, this is His high priestly prayer. He's talking to His Father. And He says, where is life? It's in knowing and having relationship with the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent.

We were made for this. I mean, imagine that you owned a race car, okay? Some of you have driven some of these cars that are designed to go 200, even 300 miles an hour.

Imagine you owned one of those. That would be pretty cool. Imagine you took it out every day on the streets of your neighborhood here in Huntsville and drove it 20 to 30 miles an hour.

[ 14 : 25 ] There's a lot of things you could do with that race car. You could drop the kids off at school, although it might be a little tight squeeze for carpool in the back. You could coast down neighborhood roads to Lowe's and pick up a dozen bags of mulch, probably fit them in the back.

You may have some issues when you get home to the driveway. It may do some damage. It may ding up the race car trying to get in the driveway with the back dragging full of mulch. It's not made for that.

I mean, the race car could do some of those things, right? But the whole time, I think you'd be feeling something. I know the car would be. You'd be thinking, it could do so much more. This car was made for more.

Wouldn't you be thinking that? Some of us thinking, man, I was made to sing. I was made to make good grades.

I was made to play basketball. I was made to make money. And this year, I'm going to do that. Come what may, nothing's going to stop me.

[ 15 : 35 ] That's what I was made for. And you probably will. Although, if you do those things, you may get dinged up along the way. And at some point, you will almost certainly, if not this year, in a year soon, you'll feel, you know, I was made for more than studying and acing tests.

Amen, students? I was made for more than studying and taking tests. Have you felt that before? Some of you feel that a lot right now. Others of you remember feeling it when you were younger. You know why you'll say that at some point?

I just feel like I was made for more. It's because you were. You were made to be holy.

Among other things, to glimpse the glory of God's infinite holiness and study Him until you realize you're never going to ace that test.

There's always more to marvel at than you can comprehend. You were made to rest in an eternal security as the tightly held treasure of the king of the universe, even when the storms of life hit hard.

[ 16 : 59 ] You were made to share the wonder of a perfect creator who would grace a rebellious creation with mercy and life and hope.

And you were made to strategize how that wonderful message would reach every corner of the globe and every person in your life. Whoa. Kids.

God says if even one of your parents has this special relationship with Him, you are holy from birth. You were made to be His. So whatever else it is that you want to be, and I know there's a lot of things, firefighter, right?

Professional athlete, nurse, engineer, whatever it is, first, you are holy.

[18:00] You're God's. And as good as those other things are, there's a lot of good things for you to be. They'll never fulfill you. They will never make you deeply happy on their own if you skip living with God.

You'll always feel like that race car was made for more. And you were. 1,700 years ago, a man named Augustine tried out a bunch of these possibilities.

He looked for life for his why in money, in women, in fame, and he finally concluded, you have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee.

You have made us for what? For yourself. We are designed for God like a race car is designed for a speedway, like a fish is designed for water.

Are any of you feeling like a fish out of water in this world? Are any of you feeling you're doing some good things, but you're a bit dinged up and there must be something more than this?

[19:19] I can't just do this the rest of my life. Are any of you feeling restless? Would you be honest enough to admit, I know that restlessness he's talking about. You're on the road to being happy and fulfilled and comfortable and respected and all the things you've ever dreamed of, but you feel the restlessness.

Would you be willing to consider you may be feeling that because you were made for God. You were designed to live with Him.

You're destined for another world. You're shaped with a void at the center of your soul that only God can fill. Well, one of the reasons we know what that feels like, I think we all can relate to that, is because all the way since the Garden of Eden, we've been trying to make ourselves happy apart from God.

We prefer our own ways most of the time. The Bible says, although we were made for Him, we were separated from God by our sin.

So what did God do? God sent His Son to deal with that sin so that we could live with Him again, so that we could be in the holy place where He lives.

[20:39] So, Christian, you were redeemed for God, not only made to be holy, but redeemed, remade, if you will, to be holy.

Now, I just want you to marvel with me at this for a minute. It's amazing enough to think that God would make you once upon a time to be His, to be holy, set apart for Him.

You know how much He loves you? How precious you are to Him? That when you broke, when you didn't work right anymore, when you weren't really in that relationship with Him the way you were supposed to be, He came and remade you.

He came to find you broken and remake you and restore you in that relationship with Him, to make you holy, to set you apart for Himself forever.

That's how much He loves you. That's amazing. I hope that gives you joy. I hope it delights your soul to know that the God of the universe thinks of you that way and doesn't just think, but acts towards you in that way.

[21:52] I talked to John Foreman this week. John knows Leviticus. I've heard him teach it. That's how I knew. I asked him what he learned about holiness, spending so much time in Leviticus.

Most of us don't camp out in Leviticus for long periods of time. And John said the thing that struck him is how amazing it is that God keeps providing for us to be in His presence.

He keeps making provision for us to experience His holiness. It's why right after God's presence shows up in the tabernacle among His people, we get the book of Leviticus, which is mostly, if you read it on the surface, about what?

Sacrifices. All kinds of sacrifices. What's happening is that God is dealing with our sin to make us holy.

And He especially does that when He sends His Son to be the ultimate sacrifice. He's dealing with our sin to have us back holy to Him.

[ 23 : 02 ] I could put passages about this up here all day. I'll just highlight a couple different ones. Ephesians 1 says, this has been on God's heart since before you were born.

That when the Father and the Son decided to rescue you, it was setting you apart for God that you would be holy with the goal, next verse says, of adopting you into His family, that you'd be His. Colossians 1 says that making you holy is the specific effect of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross for you.

That you are now holy before God. He bought you. You are His. In fact, 1 Peter 2 says it's not just you, but you're part of a group of people bigger than you can imagine that are a holy nation set apart for God that you might know Him and make His excellencies, His glory, His greatness known because we are God's people.

His treasured possession, instruments to serve His purpose in His kingdom, to battle. This is what He saved you into. Into a battle that's not a cage match against flesh and blood, but it's actually even more adventurous, even more daring than entering into something like that.

[ 24 : 36 ] It's a battle against the forces of evil, against powers and principalities, Satan and his minions, and it's a battle with the souls of men and women and boys and girls and the destiny of all creation at stake.

And He bought you back to be on His side in that great war. If being holy doesn't sound like fun to you, then you might need to get outside these walls for a little while.

You might need actually to get wounded in this battle and to watch King Jesus ride in and swoop you up and rescue you and heal you while He Himself is wounded in your place.

Pastor Jack Miller said of that last verse we just looked at, what is the fundamental nature of the church? To belong to God.

That's why we exist. Those who are the God-possessed by virtue of their new life and relationship to God are also holy. If we belong to a holy God, we are inherently involved in His holiness by virtue of that relationship.

[ 25 : 54 ] I share that with you to remind us how it happens. We didn't perform well to attract God's attention. Remember? That's not how holiness develops. We are ordinary people, often those that no one would choose, who become set apart for something extraordinary because God shows up in our lives, decides to take residence in our hearts, making us the tabernacle of the Most High God, vessels for His majesty.

I assure you that's more than you can contain and think about. But He dwells in you and the reality of that transforms everything about us. Everything. It makes you entirely different.

Friday morning I woke up early. I was excited and I went outside and the ground was wet. Merely wet. And muddy in a lot of places.

Messy. And I was very disappointed like some of you. But over the next few hours you watched what happened, didn't you? This pure white stuff started falling from heaven.

and it came in contact with the messy ground. And I was inside for a little while and I came back out and it was perfect, wasn't it?

[ 27 : 24 ] It was beautiful. That's how God's holiness works. You got a glimpse of it this weekend. God comes down from heaven in utter purity to land on messy people.

And there's still some mess underneath there. Right? But His perfect purity covers it. And we are as clean as the driven snow.

And you only get to see that every once in a while around here. But that's something we got to taste and see that's holiness. Child of God, you are holy.

Like it or not, and I hope the more we talk about it, the more you will like it. You are holy. Set apart to be gods.

Well, so what? There is another facet of holiness in the Bible where God calls us to become holy. To holy living.

[ 28 : 38 ] And we'll focus on that next week. But here's what we're going to remember then as well. I want to connect this one dot before we come to the table. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones says it well.

Holiness is not something we are called upon to do in order that we may become something. It is something we are to do because of what we already are.

it's a big difference. Something we do because of what we already are. Because God has shown up.

God has set us apart. God has made us holy. That's where I want to challenge all of us to start today. If it's all about Him, you are holy.

You are set apart for God. You are made to live in relationship with Him every moment of every day and every place to be holy, holy. The why behind every other why for you must come back to Him.

[ 29 : 41 ] And some of us recognize that. For many of you, that's not surprising to hear this morning, but what you're living in is the reality that life is coming at you so fast. It's work and school and parenting and dance and sports and God and family and friendships and finances and it just feels overwhelming and it feels like the best we can do is squeeze God in among all of those other important things.

Squeeze Him in when we get a minute to make it to church or to grace group or a few minutes of Bible reading. But I think God in His Word today is calling us to something a bit different.

different to start with Him as we approach all of those other things. He's not one among them.

We've been set apart for one of those specifically for Him.

There are a lot of ways to approach this. We'll talk more next week, but talk with your grace group. Challenge one another. It's what the Bible means when it says spur one another on.

What's it look like for you? One thing you can do is you could pick a verse of take my life and let it be. The song DJ just sang. And pray and reflect through it.

[ 31 : 01 ] I say just pick one because I'm still on the first verse. It's about time. You might want to skip it. Take my moments and my days, God.

You take them. That means my mornings. And my evenings. It means my meetings that I'm expecting and it means my free time. It means my weekends and it means my vacation weeks. God, they're yours. They're to be about you. They're to be with you. They're to be for you. God, all of them. Nothing else assumed.

Nothing else I know has to happen. And I've got to start on that now because I don't know about you, but I've already started dropping in on my calendar commitments for this year and ways I'm spending a lot of that time.

We need to start from being holy, set apart for God. That's the one thing. Believing what's best is actually being His.

[ 32 : 08 ] That's the best thing. That's a life of real purpose. Would you be more excited about this year if you actually believed that God was living in you, that you were a tabernacle of the Most High God, and that He was going to be using you for His purposes that will last for eternity this year?

Is that how you've thought about your year? Is that what you think He's going to do with the time that He's given you? I don't know how long it'll be. It may be just today. You may have a whole year ahead of you.

But how exciting if God was going to show up and use you for His purposes. If you're really brave, you can start with take my hands and feet, what I do, where I go, or take my money and my intellect, or take my words and my will, all of them consecrated, set apart, holy to the Lord, because they are.

Whatever you consider, I'm challenging you to wipe the slate clean. I've done this enough times to know that our first assumed priorities are often selfish.

Yes? Have you ever had a selfish priority? I think you have. If they're not selfish, they may well be culturally driven, just assumed priorities.

[ 33 : 30 ] I have to make this much. I have to wear this, work this long, live here, fit in there, reach that goal. I have to.

I want to reframe that for you. You are holy. You are set apart for God. You have to be His, period. Just stop there for now. No matter how old you are, this year is for knowing Him, living with Him, living for Him, not to become holy, but because you are holy.

He's made it that way. Remember that. He wants you to remember that you are holy. It's one of the things this table teaches us because as you come here, just ask yourself the question, how else could He sit and eat with you?

Right? The holy God comes here by His Holy Spirit to a holy table.

[ 34 : 39 ] Not holy because it's made of better wood than another table. Not holy because this bread is better bread than some other bread. Holy because He is here.

The only holy, holy, holy one. And He eats with holy people, doesn't He? That's the only way it can be. So we come here calling ourselves holy, not because we've outperformed anyone else.

Don't get the wrong idea, please. But because Jesus has outgraced our sin. Amen? He's taking care of everything that would make us unholy.

In fact, when we wandered away from God, that's what made us unholy, right? That distance from Him, Jesus chased after us to bring us back and He's done that for you even this week when your heart has wandered away from God and He's chased after you to bring you back, to make you holy as you turn back even now by faith to being His.

I'm His. That's where I rest. If that's you this morning, whether you're a member of this church or another church that preaches the good news that we are holy not because of our good efforts or our good performance but by grace through faith in Christ alone, then please come and eat and celebrate with us.

[ 36 : 18 ] If that is not your why, if you're not about wanting to be holy to the Lord or you're not sure, you're still kind of wondering about that because it seems like a big change for you, a big commitment to make, what a great thing to be considering.

I'm so glad you're here considering that and we would invite you not to come to this table to this bread and it's a bite of bread, a sip of wine.

We want more than that for you. We believe that you were made for more than that. You can come up and observe, you can come and let us pray with you but we would love to talk with you about a holy God who makes unholy people holy with him forever.

It is a big change for people like us. It is a big commitment but more than that, it is a big gift that he offers to you freely. Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, sat with his disciples, he took bread and he broke it.

As I ministering in his name, give this bread to you, he gave it to them and said, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

[ 37 : 40 ] In the same way after supper he took the cup and said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins, drink from it all of you.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death. until he comes. You declare that your holiness comes not from yourself but from one who would give himself for you.

Let's pray. Jesus, what an amazing gift. What a great celebration. Father, would you use a common table set with common food and drink for a holy purpose?

That you would meet very common people and by your spirit so work in their hearts that they would be all of us for a very uncommon purpose for you and for your kingdom and your glory.

Meet with us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [sapwa.org](http://sapwa.org).